Social Movement Theory of Change

Movement Capacity ➡ Movement Power ➡ Movement Vision
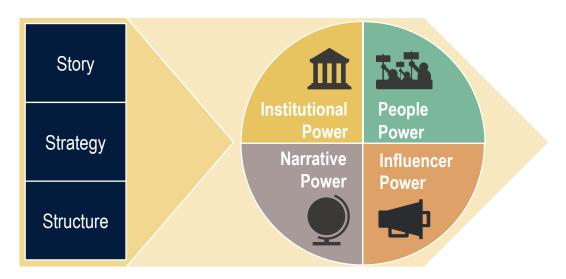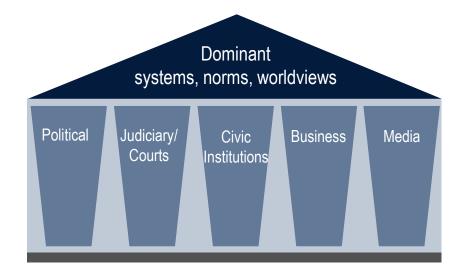
Laying the foundation of a healthy movement.

Building **four main types of overlapping power**.

Toppling, transforming, and/or **absorbing** the institutional, cultural, and social pillars that prop up the status quo.

Story

Strategy

Structure

Institutional Power

People Power

Narrative Power

Influencer Power

Dominant systems, norms, worldviews

Political | Judiciary/Courts | Civic Institutions | Business | Media

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Institutional Power
Power to influence the who, how, and what of visible decisionmaking.
1. Mutuality between movement actors and visible decisionmakers.
2. Decisionmaker decisions/actions are aligned with movement goals.
3. Movement actors and affected communities are authentically represented in decisionmaking processes, structures, tables.

People Power
Power to build, mobilize, and sustain large-scale public support.
4. Active public support: Members of the public participate in in-person and virtual movement actions.
5. Active public support: Members of the public contribute financially to movement actors and actions.
6. Passive public support: Members of the public are supportive of movement goals.

Influencer Power
Power to develop, maintain, and leverage relationships with people and institutions with influence over and access to critical social, cultural, or financial resources.
7. Influencers contribute and leverage cultural resources in support of the movement.
8. Influencers contribute and leverage social resources in support of the movement.
9. Influencers contribute and leverage financial resources in support of the movement.

Narrative Power
Power to transform and hold public narratives and ideologies and limit the influence of opposing narratives.
10. Issue coverage in mainstream, ethnic, and niche media sources *increasingly* reflects worldview, framing, and/or messaging aligned with the movement.
11. Issue coverage in mainstream, ethnic, and niche media sources *decreasingly* reflect worldview, framing, and/or messaging in opposition to the movement.
12. Influencers promote movement frames and messages.
13. Members of the public support worldview, framing and/or messaging aligned with movement goals.

The Evaluation Challenge

Too often, the success of social change initiatives is defined by the achievement of visible, concrete policies or reforms. However, social movements have long time horizons and pursue an indirect path to social change. Many movements spend years building power and capacity, before achieving any concrete reforms or policies.

Existing resources (see the Evaluation Resources sidebar) provide critical evaluation guidance for assessing the health and capacity of social movements. However, there is a need for complementary resources that provide insight and indicators to help funders and evaluators understand and assess whether movements are making progress and building power to achieve long-term, transformational change.

About the Social Movement Learning Project

Social Movement Learning Project (SMLP) is a field-building research and evaluation project by Innovation Network. SMLP seeks to **enhance philanthropic support of social movements** by creating practical evaluation tools and guidance to help funders better understand and assess movement power, progress, and impact.

Contact Us

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Evaluation Resources

These resources provide guidance for assessing the health and capacity of social movements.

American Jewish World Service. **Mapping Social Movements.**

Asian Communities for Reproductive Justice. 2009. **Movement Building Indicators.**

Engler, Paul, Sophie Lasoff, Carlos Saavedra. 2018. **Funding Social Movements.**

Global Fund for Women. 2018. **Measuring the Capacity of Social Movements.**

Management Assistance Group. 2018. **Tool for Mapping Successful Movements.**

Pastor, Manuel, Jennifer Ito, Rachel Rosner. 2011. **Metrics that Matter for Building, Scaling, and funding social movements.**

Innovation Network is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit evaluation, research, and consulting firm. We provide knowledge and expertise to help nonprofits and funders learn from their work to improve their results.