



Structured conceptualization of child policy research and advocacy

Funded by and designed for
The Center for Urban Child Policy,
The Urban Child Institute

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Project History (in brief)

- Started with the idea that we would take an “actionable message” from CUCP, visually and interactively “frame” and deploy it to a CUCP-appropriate target group, and then quantitatively and qualitatively evaluate the effectiveness of the approach.
- Along the way the focus broadened from a single action item-type message to a conceptualization of the structure from which many such messages might come—the CUCP and its subject matter expertise.


Objectives

- Conceive, design, and produce a structured conceptualization* of child policy research & advocacy specific to the identity and action-oriented goals of the Center for Urban Child Policy
- Develop the solution to be informative as well as experientially meaningful
- Design and execute an evaluation of the structured conceptualization



Structured Conceptualization

Helps stakeholders define the intervention, the target population, and the possible outcomes



Structured Conceptualization*

The act of making tangible—through image, word, and experience—dimensions of a problem space and ideas about how to improve conditions therein. This translation thereby generates an intellectually and emotionally meaningful representation of purpose and inspires the strategy and tactics needed to pursue desired outcomes.

(What you're going after and how you want to go after it.)

**Mike's definition*



Structured Conceptualization

- Intended to generate a shared conception re: the problem space and how, potentially, to intervene w/in it.
- Synthesizes the many ideas spread over continuous efforts and their attendant documents (vision, mission, objectives and aims)
- Inspires strategic thinking (upon which can be predicated the larger effort to create a program or initiative)
- It's the theory in the theory-based logic model
- Helps prevent premature focus on tactics

Tactics

- Problematically, where most people begin (this project, after all, began at a tactical level, too)
- understandable need to do something often supplants efforts to understand the foundational issues more deeply and in a fashion that can be coherently shared with others, affording their engagement and collaboration.
- Without prior formative steps, a tactical focus makes it difficult to know if the intended participants will find the intervention usable and meaningful.

Formative Evaluation

- Structured conceptualization
 - What is the definition and scope of the problem or issue?
- Needs Assessment
 - Where is the problem and how big or serious is it?
- Implementation Evaluation
 - How should the program be delivered to address the problem?
- Process Evaluation
 - How well is the program delivered?



Formative Evaluation

- Needs Assessment
 - UCD
- Implementation Evaluation

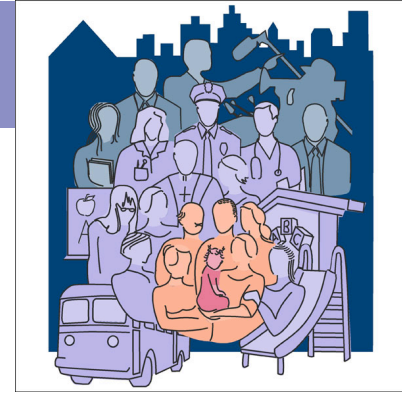


Key Benefits of Str. Conceptualization

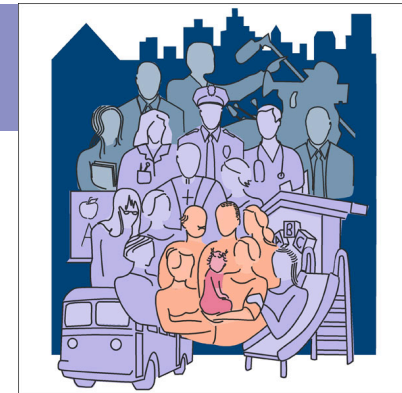
- Core component (often initiator) of formative evaluation
- Sets the initial groundwork for the crafting of specific messages that can then be deployed in/as websites, exhibits, other interactives, posters and ad media (radio, TV, newspaper) for a more strategic approach to distributed messaging
- Increased resources:
 - Human (shared concept is imperative—ICPC, 50+ people)
 - Financial (recently won a grant using an SC as a core component in the proposal)
 - How? By fueling outcomes & outcomes evaluations

Outcome Categories

- **Strengthening organizational capacity**
 - Strategic planning

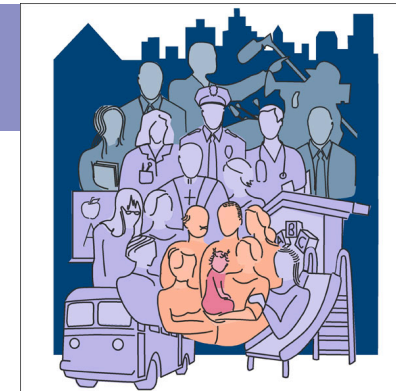


Outcome Categories



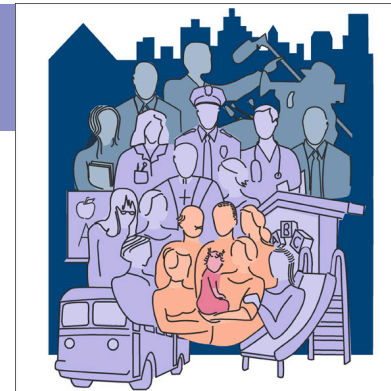
- **Strengthening alliances (among community and system partners)**
 - Coordination
 - Collaboration
 - Mission alignment
 - “These structural changes in community and institutional relationships and alliances have become essential forces in **presenting common messages, pursuing common goals,** enforcing policy changes and insuring the protection of policy ‘wins’ in the event that they are threatened.”

Outcome Categories



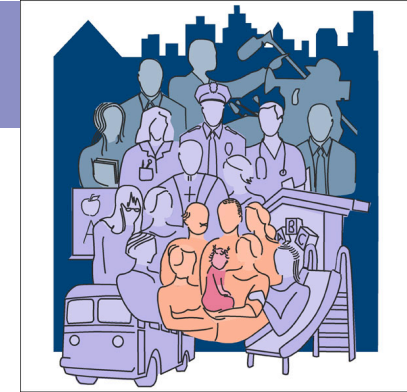
- **Strengthening base of support**
 - The grassroots, leadership and institutional support for particular policy changes.
 - “This outcome category spans many layers of culture and societal engagement, including increases in civic participation and activism, **‘allied voices’** among informal and formal groups, the **coalescence** of dissimilar interest groups, actions of opinion leader champions and positive media attention.”

Outcome Categories



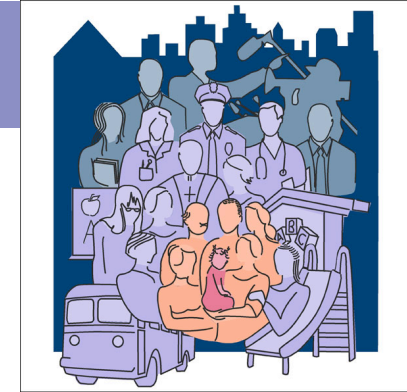
- **Improved Policies**
 - “The stages of policy change in the public policy arena. These stages include policy development, policy proposal, demonstration of support (e.g., cosponsorship), adoption, funding and implementation.”
 - “. . . rarely achieved without changes in the preconditions to policy change identified in the other outcome categories.”

Outcome Categories



- **Changes in Impact**
 - “. . . the ultimate changes in social and physical lives and conditions, .i.e., changes in individuals, populations and physical environments, that motivate policy change efforts.”
 - Describes why the work is happening. Validation.

Outcome Categories



- **Shift in Social Norms**
 - “. . . the knowledge, attitudes, values and behaviors that compose the normative structure of culture and society.”

But, all starts with a theory of change

- “. . . theory of change is a fundamental starting point for designing an appropriate evaluation.”
 - Specificity about **high level strategies** and outcomes; and
 - **Common agreement** about impact

But, all starts with a theory of change

- “Best practice in the development of a theory of change **calls for a group process** that will allow key stakeholders or partners to grapple with directions for change and come to **common agreement** about the impact of advocacy and policy work. Although various partners may have different individual and group agendas, the theory-of-change work will produce a **clear statement about what success will look like**—both in the short- and long-term.”

Structured Conceptualization, itself, as an outcome to be evaluated?

- Necessary or not?
 - Other formative stages will follow and invariably influence the direction of the initiative as well as indicate shortcomings in the initial conceptualization.
 - SC is not a final artifact but rather it's intended to evolve iteratively over the course of the project life cycle.

Structured Conceptualization, itself, as an outcome to be evaluated?

- Still, there are questions.
 - How successful have we been in generating a shared conception?
 - How meaningful is this conception to others?
 - Does its meaningfulness effect motivation, deeper empathy, thinking, discussion among participants?
 - Are increased resources indeed being generating (new partners, more motivated partners, better intra-institutional understanding, increased funding)

Structured Conceptualization, itself, as an outcome to be evaluated?

- Still, there are questions.
 - What type of evaluation would be feasible and helpful in answering one or more of the preceding questions?
 - Do we understand enough yet about advocacy evaluation, formative evaluation, participant centered methods, and structured conceptualization to even assign the success metrics we'd need before any evaluation could take place?

Structured Conceptualization, itself, as an outcome to be evaluated?

- Whether quantified, correlated, or observed—or not—structured conceptualization is a vital precondition for planning, facilitating collaboration around a shared vision, and strengthening an initiative's base of support.
- Perhaps most importantly, it brings intellectual clarity and emotional resonance to connections that may otherwise remain obfuscated by layers of prior process.



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