

# Theories of change for campaigning

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June 2021

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# Foreword

Campaigning consists of actions that aim for broad changes in policies, populations, communities, institutions, or systems. This can also be described as influencing or advocacy work.

A theory of change describes how we think our activities will create the change we want to achieve. Traditional approaches to theory of change can be difficult to apply to campaigning because the route to change is convoluted and difficult to predict, the external environment is complex and changeable, and there is no exact precedent for what you are trying to achieve. However, our experience is that because there is less certainty and the issues involved are complex, it is essential to use theory of change to bring structure, clarity and focus to this work.

This resource builds on our [Theory of change in ten steps](#) guidance. It consists of two parts. **Part 1** explores the challenges that campaigning situations pose and how you can overcome these and apply theory of change to campaigning situations in a meaningful way. **Part 2** outlines an approach for developing theories of change and theories of action for campaigning.

# Introduction

## What is campaigning?

We define campaigning as actions that aim for broad changes in policies, populations, communities, institutions, or systems. This can also be described as influencing or advocacy work. Rather than helping people directly, campaigning seeks to create change in the external environment surrounding an issue. It is an opportunity to have a greater and longer-lasting impact than you could by working with those who are directly affected by the issue.

### Comparing ‘campaigns’ with ‘services’

Approaches to theory of change are usually developed with services in mind. To understand how theories of change can be applied to campaigning, it is helpful to consider the distinction between campaigns and services.

**Services** are activities supporting individuals or organisations directly. For example, providing advice or educational programmes. Characteristics typically include: responding to ongoing needs; providing an ongoing or regular activity; helping an individual or organisation directly; and having activities that are clearly defined.

**Campaigns** aim to achieve broader change in policies or across populations, communities, or systems. For example, changes to the law or greater awareness of an issue. Characteristics typically include: having a clear objective or end point; aimed at creating a change in the future; focusing on groups of stakeholders; and involving a range of activities that change over time.

In reality the distinction is rarely as clear cut as this. For example, a charity campaigning for policy change through lobbying might also provide advice to those affected by the policy.

This guidance draws from NPC’s [Thinking Big: How to use theory of change for systems change](#) because campaigning is often (but not always) aimed at tackling systemic issues—issues that are the product of complex and multi-layered factors.

## What is a theory of change?

A theory of change describes how we think our activities will create the change we want to achieve. Campaigns usually have a clear sense of what they deliver (the activities) and what they want to achieve (the impact) but the connections between the two are often tacit or ill-defined. Theory of change encourages people to think about the intermediate steps as well as the underlying thinking for a campaign. This leads to clearer goals and better plans for achieving them.

There are two distinct elements to a theory of change:

- The **process** is the discussions that go into developing the theory of change. This should involve consultation with staff, partners, and beneficiaries; reviewing the evidence base relating to your work; and being willing to challenge yourself.
- The **output** is the summary that you use for communicating your work and developing further plans.

When developing a theory of change, it can help to think about whether you are in a 'developmental' or 'descriptive' mode, or somewhere in between. This will help you design the right process.

- **Developmental theories of change** emphasise the process. They aim to take stock, reassess priorities or design new campaigns. It is important to take enough time, involve a wide range of people, and ask questions like 'what is the cause of this?', 'what is the best use of our resources?' and 'why do we think this?'.
- **Descriptive theories of change** emphasise the output and enable you to articulate your work clearly. This is about distilling what you are already doing, rather than reinventing your work. Even when you're in descriptive mode, campaigning remains complex and uncertain, so you still need to be agile and responsive and test your thinking regularly.

## Why develop a theory of change?

A theory of change has four main uses for campaigns:

- **Improving campaign design** by encouraging you to review the evidence and to think seriously about how change is achieved, taking into account the context for your work and other actors in the system.

- **Motivating staff and stakeholders** through dialogue and debate during the process, and through the sense of clarity and strength of purpose that the output can give you.
- **Improving monitoring and evaluation** by providing a blueprint for [what needs to be measured](#) and by creating a narrative about effectiveness and impact.
- **Improving communications** by helping partners, funders, and other external stakeholders, as well as staff, volunteers, and beneficiaries, to understand your aims and by demonstrating that the change process has been thought through.

A source of confusion can be mixing up a theory of change with other plans; for example, organisational strategies, operational plans, communications plans, and plans for impact measurement. All of these should follow on from your theory of change. The goal for your theory of change is to discuss and agree the essence of how you want to create change. This then gives you a foundation for planning how you will deliver your campaign, how much you plan to deliver, how you will monitor and evaluate your work, and so on.

# Part 1: Applying theory of change to campaigning

## Mindset trumps method

To develop a meaningful theory of change, an inquiring mindset is more important than anything else. It is crucial to reflect on how change happens and how your work can contribute to that.

Fundamental questions include:

- What change do we want to see?
- What is the context in which we work?
- What is our distinctive contribution to change?
- Who do we need to work with or influence to achieve this change?
- To what extent do our existing or planned activities make sense when seen against this picture?

Too often, these questions are not asked, or they are answered with easy platitudes. This leads to many common pitfalls and the criticism that theory of change is not applicable to campaigning.

## Tips for establishing a useful mindset

- **Recognise that you are part of a wider system.** Having a good understanding of your environment is essential for acting on it effectively. Avoid jumping too quickly into 'what we do' and spend time analysing the system, considering how change occurs at different levels and for different actors. Bring different stakeholders into the process to ensure their views are represented and there is a good level of challenge to your thinking.
- **Be realistic about the contribution your campaign can make.** This will require you to be clear on your strengths and weaknesses, and how these relate to the context you are in. This will involve identifying leverage points in the system and how you can target those. You'll need to identify who you need to work with to achieve your goals, including those beyond the 'usual suspects'. When your campaign is underway, the task shifts towards learning from evidence of the impact you're already having, the quality of your work, and engagement with your campaign.

- **Allow space to explore different perspectives and build shared understanding.** Theory of change can bring clarity to complex issues—but this complexity means that discussions can become unfocused and unproductive. It is important to identify and unpick areas of confusion or ambiguity, and to not shy away from difficult conversations. Allowing space to explore different perspectives will generate useful insights and help to build shared understanding.
- **Don't neglect the intermediate goals.** Campaigning often focuses on aims that are ambitious and far in the future. Exploring intermediate outcomes, as well as how outcomes are achieved through the ways that activities are delivered and experienced, will help you identify the pathways to change. This can help you be more realistic about what you can achieve with your resources and capabilities, and understand if you are making progress in the shorter term.
- **Embrace uncertainty and be open to learning.** Campaigning is about people—their values, attitudes, beliefs, and feelings—and the relationships and interactions between them. Your theory of change is not about perfectly describing 'the solution' for a problem. It is a 'best bet' given everything you know at that stage. Your theory of change should be treated as a living document that is tested and updated regularly as you learn, and as things change.

## Challenges that campaigning situations pose and recommendations for overcoming them

To avoid unproductive applications of theory of change, it is useful to understand the distinct challenges that campaigning poses. This table outlines typical characteristics of campaigns and how to address them when developing your theory of change.

Typical characteristics of campaigns	Recommendations for theory of change
<p><b>The route to change is convoluted.</b></p> <p>E.g. you might aim for changes in public opinion, which in-turn influence politicians, which in-turn changes policies, which in-turn affects institutional practices.</p>	<p>The complexity of campaigning makes it even more <b>important that your thinking takes into account the context of your work and all major stakeholders</b> in the system e.g. schools, politicians, and the media.</p> <p>Make your work more manageable by <b>breaking down the task to focus on specific aspects of your campaign</b>, such as how you engage and influence specific stakeholder groups (see p.20).</p>

	<p><b>Consider how different strands of your theory of change interact.</b> For example, change relating to a particular stakeholder may trigger change in another area or create a multiplier effect.</p> <p>You may need to <b>consider different activities at different stages of your theory of change.</b> For example, you may initially seek to influence opinion through a public awareness campaign before seeking to influence the behaviours of key policymakers through relationship building.</p>
<p><b>Change is dynamic and difficult to predict.</b></p> <p>E.g. if politicians start talking about a problem, this could result in changes in practice without policy changes.</p>	<p><b>Explore the underlying causes of issues</b> by asking ‘why?’ and ‘how does this lead to that?’. Identify possible interrelationships and consider if change in one area of your theory of change could influence another area.</p> <p>Don’t try to map or include everything in detail. <b>Challenge yourself to focus on what is most important.</b></p>
<p><b>The external environment is complex and changeable and there are many factors outside of your control that could create setbacks and opportunities.</b></p> <p>E.g. public attitudes may be affected by the popularity of a new product or technological developments, or by a change in government.</p>	<p>Spend as much time as possible <b>reflecting on the root causes of issues, the context of your work, and the stakeholders involved</b> (see p.13).</p> <p><b>See your theory of change as a ‘best bet’</b> given everything you know at that stage. <a href="#">Collect data and evidence</a> to monitor progress against the early stages of your theory of change and adapt it based on what you learn.</p> <p><b>Pay close attention to the internal and external factors</b> that could block or enable your work (see p.22).</p>
<p><b>There are many different actors to think about.</b></p> <p>E.g. a campaign to get people to stop smoking may involve smokers, friends and families, health professionals,</p>	<p>When thinking about the context for your work, <b>consider all the possible stakeholders</b>, not only the ones you seek to influence directly.</p> <p>Break down your theory of change to <b>consider how change occurs from the perspective of each stakeholder group individually.</b></p>

<p>policymakers, and tobacco companies.</p>	<p>If your campaign consists of a consortium of partners—for example a group of individuals, charities, and funders who have come together to lead a campaign—you will need to <b>reflect on how change occurs for the collective, as well as for individual actors within the consortium.</b></p>
<p><b>You are among several organisations working towards the same goals.</b></p> <p>E.g. a campaign to get people to exercise more may share goals with other health charities, local authority services, gyms, schools, and others.</p>	<p>Of the stakeholders identified in your situation analysis (see p.13), <b>consider what each stakeholder contributes to your goals and explore relationships and interdependencies.</b></p> <p><b>Focus on your distinct contribution to change</b> based on your strengths and weaknesses. Consider how your role compares with others, and who you could collaborate with and how.</p> <p><b>Consider developing shared theories of change with other actors</b> working towards the same goals. These can help build shared understanding to identify priorities and gaps and avoid duplication.</p>
<p><b>You have many different types of activity to consider.</b></p> <p>E.g. a campaign to increase voter participation may deliver educational workshops while also lobbying for policy change.</p>	<p>Challenge yourself to <b>focus on the most important things in your theory of change.</b> This is about communicating the essence of your plans, not everything you do.</p> <p><b>Break down your thinking into more manageable chunks.</b> For example, you could organise your work by level of detail, topic area, or stakeholder group.</p>
<p><b>There is no exact precedent for your work. The change you want is something new.</b></p> <p>E.g. a campaign to reverse a policy decision will be new even if a similar campaign has taken place before.</p>	<p>Campaigns work towards something that hasn't been achieved before in that context. Interventions will not work the same for everyone and learnings from similar projects will not apply perfectly. <b>Review the evidence base for models of change</b> rather than evidence about 'what works' and <b>pay close attention to the context.</b></p> <p><b>Take a 'test and learn' approach,</b> gathering evidence on the earlier stages of your theory of change and adapting in response.</p>

<p><b>You are trying to anticipate the future rather than articulating what you currently do.</b></p> <p>E.g. your campaign may seek a future change in policy.</p>	<p>You should <b>see your theory of change as provisional and aspirational, and review and update it regularly.</b></p> <p>When long-term outcomes are uncertain, <b>pay close attention to the earlier stages of your theory of change.</b></p> <p>Intermediate steps will help you understand if you are making progress towards your longer-term goals.</p>
<p><b>You may be working to prevent something from happening.</b></p> <p>E.g. your campaign may be against a change in the law.</p>	<p><b>Use your theory of change to make the pathways towards your goals more explicit.</b> This will also help you understand how to identify progress towards your long-term goals.</p> <p>For more information, this <a href="#">Democracy Fund blog</a> illustrates how campaigning may not be about achieving a 'positive impact' as it is traditionally defined.</p>

## Part 2: An approach to theory of change for campaigning

This section builds on Part 1 to outline an approach to theory of change for campaigning. This approach consists of three stages:

### 1. Situation analysis: Understanding the external environment (p.13)

Campaigning needs to be grounded in a detailed understanding of the issue you want to address, the stakeholders involved, and your role within the system. The process will involve consulting with a broad range of stakeholders and reviewing the evidence base to develop an informed view.

### 2. Developing theories of change and theories of action (p.15)

In this section we introduce a new term, 'theory of action'. We only make this distinction between theory of change and theory of action in application to campaigning. This is because in order to think about how your campaign achieves change, you need to first consider how change occurs in the wider system.

- **Theory of change:** Articulating the high-level changes that you want to see irrespective of your work. This clarifies your understanding of the issue you're working on.
- **Theory of action:** Articulating the aims of your campaign and how they will be achieved. Given your understanding of the context for your work, this is about how your campaign will unlock the impact you want to have.

We use these two terms together in this paper to encourage you to develop a foundational understanding of the issue you are working on (theory of change) before situating the work of your campaign within that (theory of action).

For both theories of change and theories of action, we refer to the following elements. For more guidance on these, see our [Theory of change in ten steps](#) guidance:

- **Impact:** The sustained change that you want to achieve.

- **Target groups:** The groups of people and/or organisations that need to be influenced for change to occur.
- **Outcomes:** The shorter-term changes in your target groups that you think will contribute to the long-term impact.
- **Activities:** The activities that you (or for a theory of change, others) will deliver.
- **Mechanisms:** How these activities should be experienced by target groups.
- **Quality:** How these activities should be delivered to target groups.
- **Diagram:** A summary diagram is optional but can help you organise your thinking, identify a logical narrative, and improve clarity.

### 3. Scrutinising your theories of action (p.22)

The final stage is to review and challenge the work you have done, and identify key enabling factors and assumptions in relation to your campaign.

## 1. Situation analysis: Understanding the external environment

### Defining the 'problem'

The first step for any theory of change is to define the need you are trying to address or the 'problem' you want to tackle.<sup>1</sup> This establishes the focal point for your theories of change and theories of action. If you come up with several 'problems', try to agree what the overall problem is, and which are sub-problems. For example, an overall problem could be: Many young people do not vote, which means their needs do not influence policymaking. We can ask ourselves 'why?' to come up with sub-problems and to gain a deeper understanding. For example, young people are not motivated to vote and young people do not see people like themselves in politics.

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<sup>1</sup> We are conscious that the word 'problem' has negative connotations. Campaigns exist to change things for the better. We say they are tackling 'problems' but this is not to say that people are problems or that they don't have strengths. For example, homelessness charities tackle the problem that not everyone has somewhere to live and life without a home has many negative consequences.

## **Exploring the external environment**

Campaigners need to understand the environment for their work before they can determine how to influence it. To do this, we suggest running through these questions for each of the problems you have identified:

- What are the consequences of the problem?
- Who is affected? What are their characteristics?
- What is the scale of the problem? How many people are affected and to what extent?
- What are the causes of the problem and the factors affecting it? For example, government policy or the behaviour of others.
- What other actors influence change, how do these actors interact and how has this changed over time?

## **Understanding stakeholders**

To explore the perspectives and priorities of different actors in the system, consider the following questions:

- What are their motivations, priorities, and beliefs? Who has the power to influence change?
- Who do we want to influence and engage with our work? How and why? Who might we want to collaborate with?
- Who will be affected by the change we want to achieve? What is important to them? What influences them? How can we bring their insights into our thinking?

It can help to think about different types of stakeholders, such as beneficiaries and/or the people around them; the people and organisations that might influence change on the issue; decision-makers; and systems themselves. At a later stage, you may want to develop theories of action for the most important stakeholders for your campaign—such as those who are most interested and influential in relation to your work—see p.20.

## **Identifying your role within the system**

After exploring the system, you can focus on your contribution to change. You should identify the answers to these questions:

- What is our mission, given what we know about the external environment?

- What assets and resources do we have and how can we best use them? For example, knowledge and experience, skills, relationships and networks, methods or approaches, reputation and brand, and data and evidence. What are our unique strengths and weaknesses? What evidence do we have for this?
- What is the most effective role we can play? Where do we fit in alongside other actors? What should we avoid?
- What would happen without us? In some cases—for example if the objective is to prevent or reduce the speed or scale of decline—a campaign may not seem like it will achieve positive outcomes if you don't also consider the counterfactual (what would happen without the campaign).

## 2. Developing theories of change and theories of action

As mentioned above, we are making the distinction between a **theory of change** (which clarifies your understanding of the issue you're working on) and a **theory of action** (which, given your understanding of the context of your work, clarifies how your campaign will unlock the impact you want to have). In the following sections, we have outlined two examples of each, using a fictional campaign named 'Youth Vote'.

There are a few things to keep in mind when developing your own theories of change and theories of action:

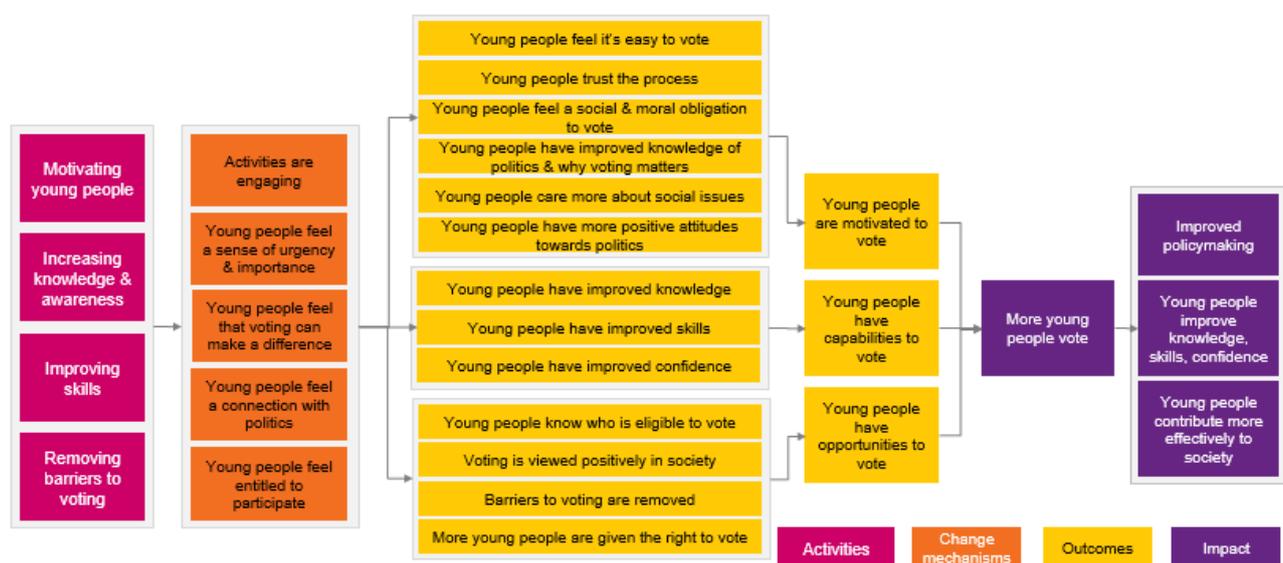
- **This approach can be adapted:** Campaigning situations vary and, as such, there are different ways to apply a theory of change. We found it useful to break down our thinking into two theories of change and two theories of action. You can adapt this approach to suit your work.
- **Theory of change or theory of action language is relative to its application:** Your ideas for elements will differ depending on which perspective you are taking. For example, the intended impact of 'Youth Vote' is 'more young people vote.' However, the theory of change for the system identifies further impacts such as 'young people have improved knowledge, skills and confidence' and 'young people contribute to society more effectively.' This is illustrated in the example diagrams on the next few pages.
- **Theories of change are a means to an end:** The aim of theories of change is to develop a foundational understanding for the issue you are working on—the people you wish to achieve

change for, and the system surrounding the issue. This enables you to develop theories of action that are grounded in a robust understanding of the context for your work.

## Theories of change

We recommend starting with a theory of change to explore the issue you are working on. There are different ways you could approach this, and it may be helpful to develop more than one theory of change. We have outlined two examples—a theory of change that focuses on change for **individuals**, and another that outlines change for a **system**.

### Example 1: Theory of change for individuals



[A PDF version of this diagram can be accessed here.](#)

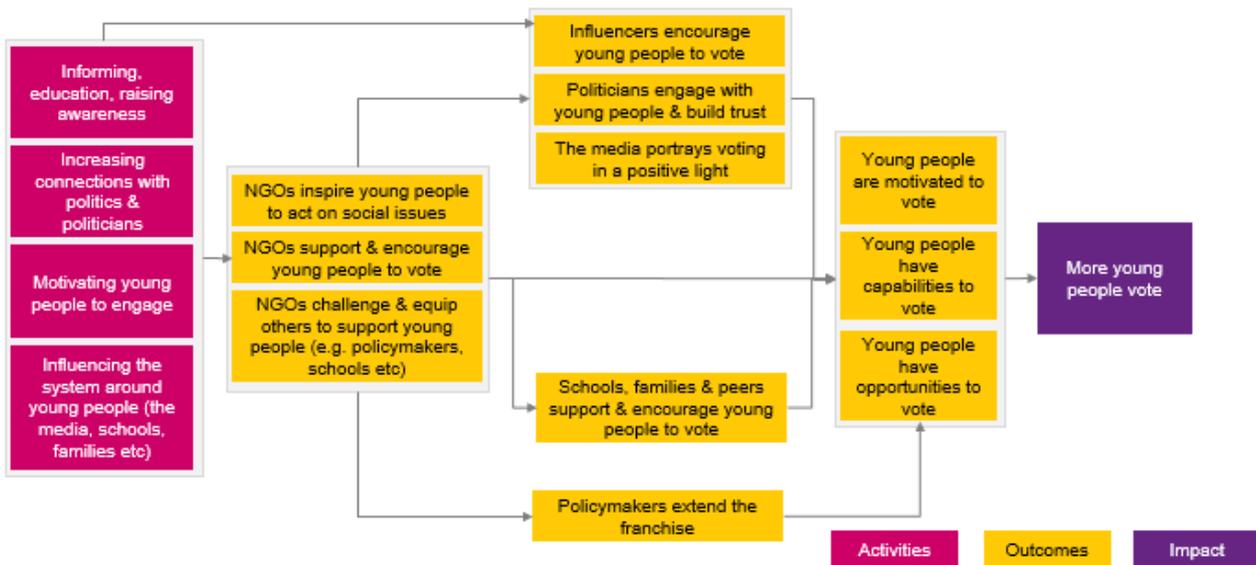
This type of theory of change is about distilling the main arguments for working on an issue and focusing on the changes you want to see **for individuals**. Developing this can help you:

- Make the argument for your work clearer and stronger.
- Organise the existing evidence and research and identify where further research is needed.
- Enable other campaigners to use the concepts to develop their own theories of change.

When thinking through the **elements** outlined on pp.12-13, remember that your thinking should be high-level and you should focus on the issue itself. You may identify several **impacts** to convey the benefits that are created by this work even if they are not the primary goals for your campaign.

Similarly, **activities** should summarise the interventions, campaigns or projects being delivered by stakeholders to address the issue.

## Example 2: Theory of change for a system



[A PDF version of this diagram can be accessed here.](#)

This is about how change occurs **within the system** surrounding the issue you wish to tackle. It is a high-level description of the activities and outcomes required by key actors who can influence change. The purposes of this are to:

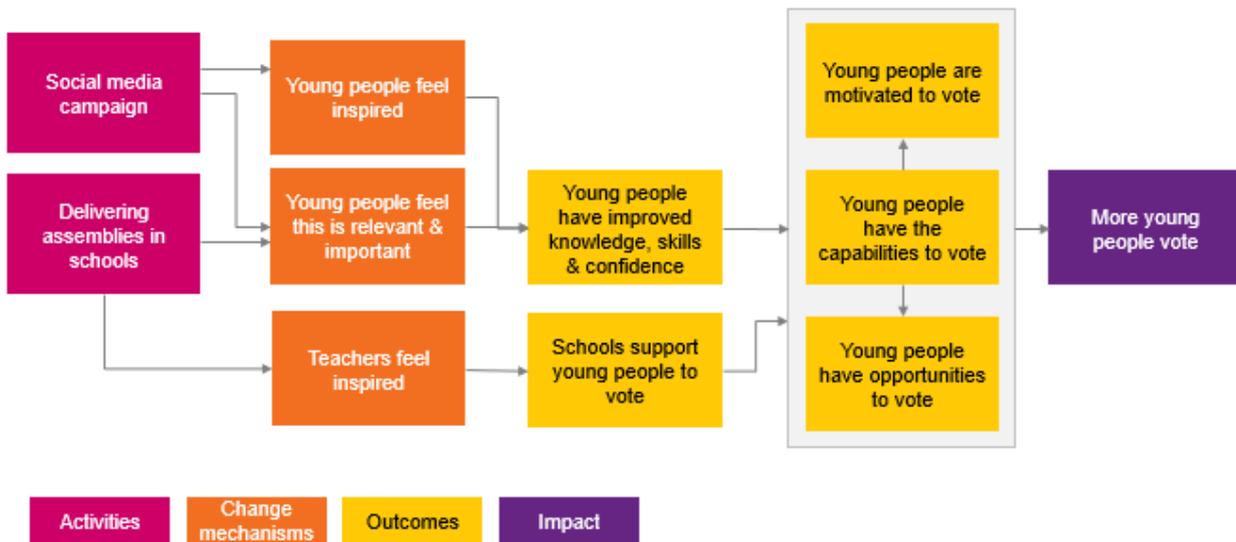
- Help people discuss and understand the changes they want to achieve and why.
- Organise your thinking by identifying the distinct areas of work you can look at with your theory of action. In the above example, there is a group of outcomes relating to how NGOs work directly with young people to influence their behaviours. However, there are also outcomes relating to work through influencers, politicians, and the media. Another area of work is enabling schools, families, and peers to support and encourage young people.

When thinking through the elements for this type of theory of change, you need to consider all actors in the system to understand the high-level **outcomes** you want to see. You may wish to organise ideas into thematic areas (for example, motivating young people to vote and creating opportunities for young people to vote). When it comes to **activities**, think about the types of activities that will be delivered, rather than listing every campaign, programme, or service.

### Theories of action

After exploring how change occurs for the issue itself, you should now turn your attention to how your campaign achieves its goals—your theory of action. We recommend you develop at least two types of theory of action—one for how your **campaign** will achieve change, and individual theories of action that explore routes to change for **individual stakeholder relationships**.

### Example 3: Theory of action for a campaign



[A PDF version of this diagram can be accessed here.](#)

A theory of action **for your campaign** will help you:

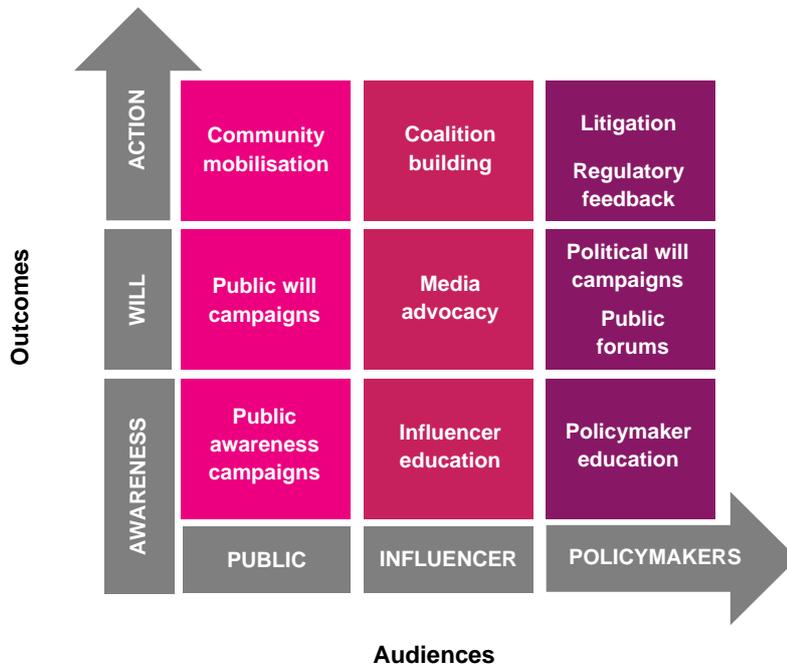
- Improve the design of your campaign by encouraging you to think about context, priorities, and plans.
- Motivate teams and stakeholders through dialogue, debate, and increased strength of purpose.
- Improve impact measurement by building a narrative about impact and by identifying what needs to be measured.
- Improve communications by helping people to understand your aims and plans.

As mentioned above, while theories of change serve to clarify your understanding of the issue you are working on, theories of action are where you explore how your work will unlock the impact you want to have. This therefore requires a deeper exploration of each of the following **elements**.

- **Outcomes:** For campaigns, outcomes usually fall into two categories, influencing the attitudes and behaviour of individuals; and changing systems, policies, and structures. It can be useful to draw on existing models and theories relating to behavioural and policy change (see Appendix 1), as these identify the main ways that change can occur. They can help you to think about how you might want to influence your target audiences, to achieve behaviour or policy change.
- **Activities:** A useful way of thinking about activities is to identify the ways that target audiences can be engaged or influenced (see Figure 1 below). Bear in mind that you may need to outline activities at different stages of your theory of action. For example, the Youth Vote theory of

action sets out activities at the start. However, it may be the case that young people still require further support even after they have improved their knowledge, skills, and confidence. The campaign could consider activities such as mentoring or connecting young people with politicians to motivate young people and give them the capabilities to vote.

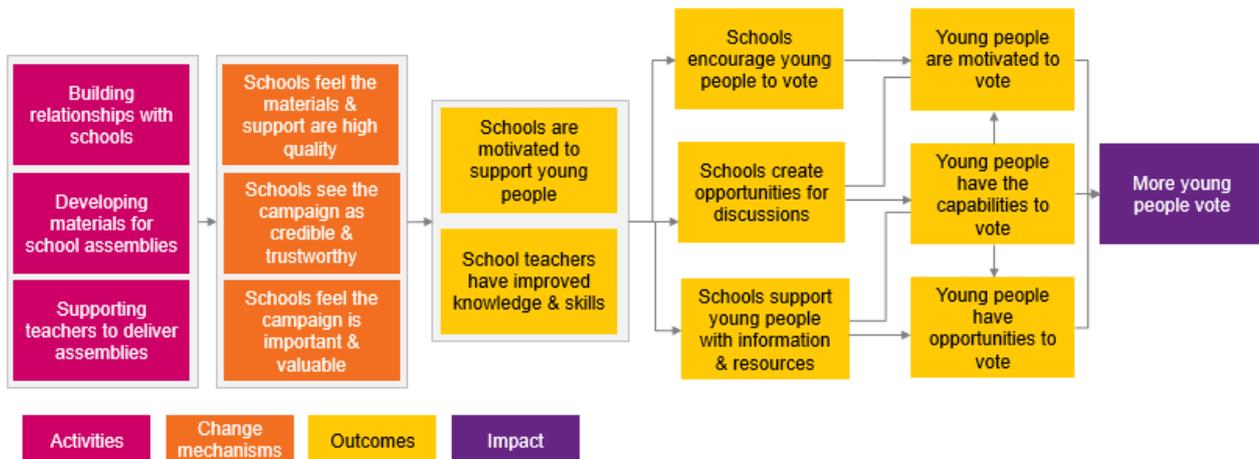
Figure 1: How campaigning activities can target different audiences—adapted from (Coffman, 2015).



- **Change mechanisms** define how activities should be experienced by target audiences. What initial feelings, thoughts and reactions do you want to elicit? For example, you may want event attendees to feel a sense of empowerment. **Quality** is about how you deliver activities to achieve change mechanisms and outcomes. How do you create a sense empowerment? Are there factors relating to how messages are delivered? To identify these, revisit your situation analysis to identify challenges and how you will overcome these. For example:

Challenge	Quality / change mechanism	Outcome
Those around young people don't encourage or support them to vote.	Teachers feel inspired to support young people to vote.	Young people are encouraged and supported to vote.

### Example 4: Theory of action for an individual stakeholder relationship



[A PDF version of this diagram can be accessed here.](#)

Once you have created a theory of action for your campaign, we recommend creating theories of action for **individual stakeholder relationships**. Recognising that each target group will be engaged in different ways, these theories of action enable you to explore in more detail and with greater specificity how you will influence or engage specific groups.

In Example 3, one aspect of Youth Vote's campaign theory of action relates to schools and teachers. Example 4 digs deeper into this relationship to identify how activities with schools and teachers will lead to outcomes that contribute to the campaign theory of action.

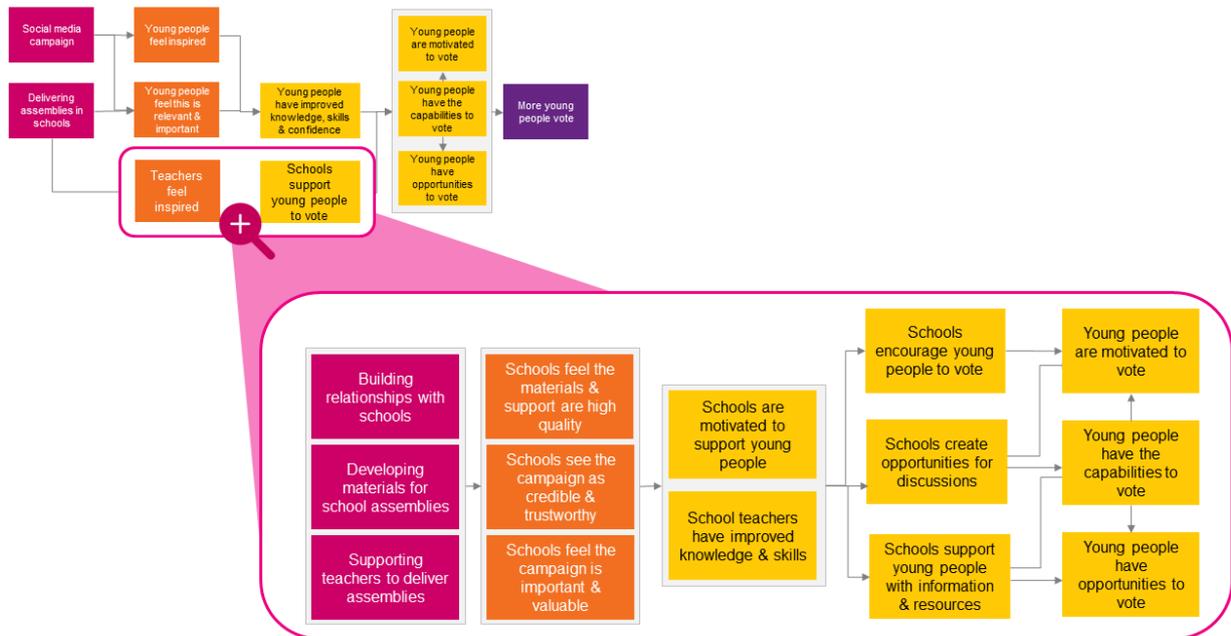
Developing these theories of action might sound like extra work, but remember:

- There is no need to prepare a diagram. This is about thinking through how you want individual relationships to work.
- You have foundations to build on. Your campaign theory of action will set out the key features of individual relationships. You will also have done much of this thinking in your situation analysis.
- You can decide how much effort or detail you put into these theories of action. Some will be easier to think through than others.

## Tools for improving clarity

**Nesting:** If developing diagrams, you can maintain clarity while exploring complex thinking by ‘nesting’ diagrams. These enable you to ‘zoom in’ on aspects of a high-level summary.

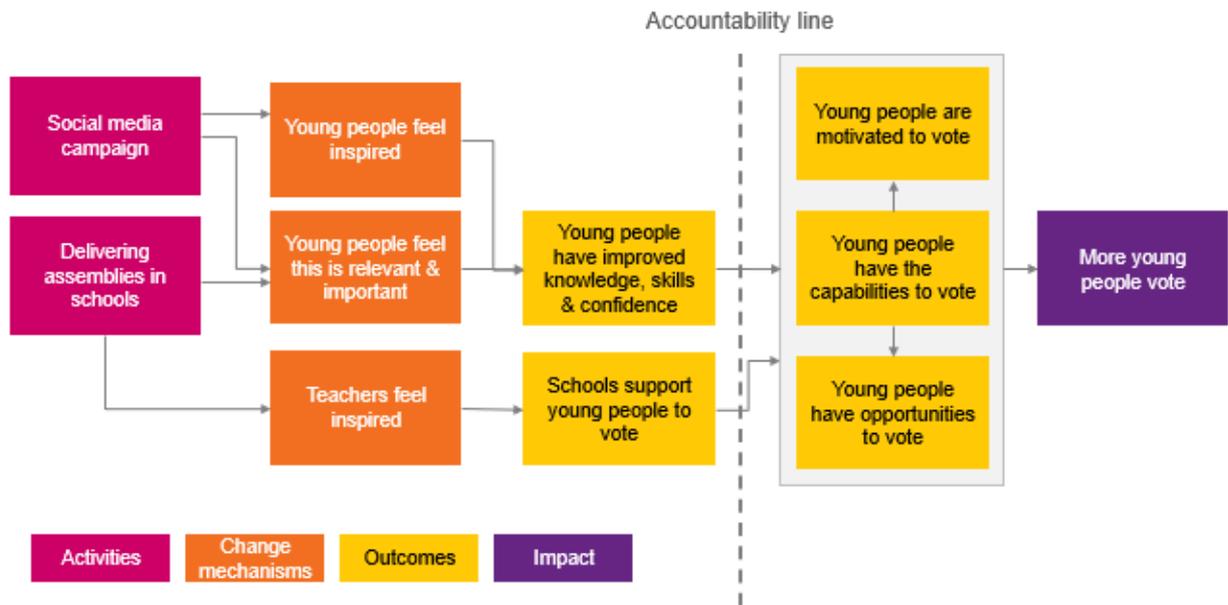
### Example 5: Nested theory of change



[A PDF version of this diagram can be accessed here.](#)

**Accountability line:** An accountability line in a theory of action can make the distinction between things that your campaign has direct influence over and the things that are influenced by your campaign but are also affected by other factors.

Particularly in campaigning, there are likely to be things that you cannot be held wholly accountable for but are still important for demonstrating how outcomes contribute to long-term goals.

**Example 6: Accountability line**

[A PDF version of this diagram can be accessed here.](#)

### 3. Scrutinising your theories of action

The final stage of creating your theories of action is to identify the enabling factors and assumptions that underpin your thinking. This is particularly important for campaigning because the external environment is constantly changing and your hypotheses will only hold true for a limited period of time. We recommend that you review your thinking regularly.

#### Enabling factors

Enabling factors are factors outside your control that might affect your work. You will have already considered these at the situation analysis stage. Having developed your theories of change and theories of action, revisit your thinking about how the external environment will affect your aims and plans as articulated in your theories of action. Specifically, what do you need others to do to support your work and what factors might help or hinder your success?

- **What do you need other stakeholders or institutions to do or not do?** Who could affect the delivery of your theories of action? How can you encourage them to take the actions you want?

- **What factors outside your control might help or hinder your work?** For example, government policies, the wider economic or social environment, public opinion, and the actions of institutions.
- **What other contextual conditions might affect your thinking?** What other factors in people's lives could affect their engagement with your campaign?

## Assumptions

Looking at assumptions involves identifying where your theories of action are weak, untested, or uncertain. Put yourself in the position of your fiercest critic. What would they question, doubt, or challenge? This may prompt you to do more work on your theories of action. It also highlights research questions to answer by examining the evidence base or conducting your own research. There are different types of assumptions to think through:

- **Delivery:** What aspects of your campaign are you worried about? For example, can you reach the people you need to reach? Can you deliver what you say you can? Do staff have the right skills, abilities, resources, and support?
- **Impact:** What aspects of your theories of action are questionable? For example, is it plausible that you will contribute to the outcomes you want in the way you have described? What are the biggest 'leaps of faith'? What types of people will this most likely work for? Who will it not work for? To what extent does the evidence support your thinking?
- **Unintended consequences:** What could go wrong? What could be unexpected?
- **Theory of change process:** Did the team and the process have enough resources? Have the views of beneficiaries been genuinely reflected? Who have you not heard from? How robust and comprehensive is the evidence you drew upon?

## Using your theory of action to learn and improve

Collecting data and evidence to understand the impact and effectiveness of your work will help you to identify how to improve. This will also help you make the case for your work to funders and stakeholders. Your theory of action is a useful tool because it sharpens your focus by highlighting what is relevant to collect data on and measure. However, avoid thinking that your only task is to test your theory of action. This limits your understanding because you cannot anticipate everything.

This table outlines the different types of data you could collect to build a well-rounded picture of your impact, using your theory of action as a guide:

Stage	Corresponding type of data
Situation analysis	<b>Background evidence:</b> Existing information on the problem and people's needs, such as evidence about the scale and causes of the problem, and possible solutions.
Target group	<b>User data:</b> Background information about the people you want to influence and engage, their characteristics and the issues they face or experience.
Activities	<b>Engagement data:</b> The extent to which people engage with your activities. <b>Output data:</b> The quantity of what you produce or deliver. <b>Quality data:</b> Your own assessment of how well you do things.
Mechanisms and quality	<b>Feedback data:</b> What people thought of your activities. Were activities experienced in the intended way? What did people like and dislike?
Outcomes	<b>Outcomes data:</b> Changes in your target groups (for example, in knowledge, attitudes and behaviour). Have people started to make the positive changes you intend? How else have people changed? Which activities have helped, for whom, and in what circumstances?
Impact	<b>Impact data:</b> Has any lasting or sustained change been achieved?

After identifying the different types of data you could collect and analyse, you can then prioritise what to measure:

- Identify the critical elements of your theory of change to evidence.
- Use your assumptions to highlight a list of research questions.
- Don't measure things you know already (with enough confidence), either from your own research or other people's.
- Consider what information will be most helpful for you and your stakeholders to make decisions.

For more guidance on developing your approach to impact measurement, read NPC's [Understanding Impact](#).

There are distinct challenges related to impact measurement for campaigning. For example, you may be seeking to prevent something from happening, or data on the opinions of policymakers can be hard to collect. The following resources will help you respond to these challenges:

- [Closing in on change: Measuring the effectiveness of your campaign](#) (NPC)
- [Shifting the dial: How to take an impact-focused approach to your policy change campaigns](#) (NPC)
- [No Royal Road: Finding and Following the Natural Pathways in Advocacy Evaluation](#) (Jim Coe, Rhonda Schlangen & Center for Evaluation Innovation)
- [Guidance for designing, monitoring and evaluating peacebuilding projects: using theories of change](#) (CARE International)
- [When the Best Offense is a Good Defense: Understanding and Measuring Advocacy on the Defense](#) (ORS Impact)

# Appendix 1: Models of behavioural and policy change

On p.18, we highlight how campaigning outcomes usually relate to influencing the attitudes and behaviour of individuals and changing systems, policies, and structures. It can be useful to draw upon models of behavioural and policy change, as these will help you to think about how you influence different stakeholders.

## Examples of behavioural change models

Behaviour change models can help you think about what you are going to do to encourage a behaviour change, as well as how and when to do these things.

**What:** Models such as [ISM tool \(Individual, Social, Material\)](#), [COM-B](#), and [MINDSPACE](#) can help you identify what to focus on. For example, if you want more young people to vote, these models could help you look at the different things that might affect a young person's behaviour—such as how easy it is to vote, or a person's belief about their ability to influence things.

**How:** Other models like [EAST](#), [social learning theory](#), and [The Transtheoretical Model \(States of Change\)](#) can help you think about what might be most effective for achieving your aims. For example, if you decided to focus on young people's attitudes, these frameworks might help you think about how you might achieve change (and therefore what intermediate outcomes you want to work towards).

## Examples of policy change theories

Theories for policy change are underpinned by different assumptions about how change is achieved, what conditions are required, and which tactics are most effective. This list summarises the ORS Impact guidance, [Pathways for Change](#).

- **The Large Leaps theory:** Significant changes can occur when the right conditions are in place, for example when the issue is defined differently, when new actors get involved, or when the issue receives more public attention.

- **The Policy Windows theory:** There is a 'window of opportunity' when advocates can connect two or more components of the process, for example the way a problem is defined, the policy solution, or the political climate.
- **Coalition theory:** Policy change happens through coordinated activity among individuals with the same beliefs.
- **The Power Politics theory:** Change is achieved by working with those with power to influence decision-making.
- **Regime theory:** Efforts should focus on the surrounding networks of individuals who influence policymakers.
- **The Grassroots theory:** Change occurs through collective action by members of the community, who create power for themselves by taking mutual action.
- **Diffusion theory:** Change happens when an idea for a policy is communicated to a critical mass, who perceives it as superseding the current policy (or lack thereof) and adopts the idea.
- **Messaging and Frameworks theory:** Rather than making rational decisions and choosing the options that will benefit them the most, individuals develop preferences based on the ways in which options are presented or framed.
- **Media Influence theory:** The media influences the public agenda and generally determines which issues are prioritised.
- **Group Formation theory:** Individuals identify with groups or social categories based on perceived similarities concerning attitudes, values, experiences, or a desire to collectively accomplish a goal.

## Further resources

### Theory of change

- [Theory of change in ten steps](#) (NPC): Our foundational guidance outlines a step-by-step approach to developing a theory of change. It provides more detail on the elements and approaches identified in this guidance.
- [Thinking Big: How to use theory of change for systems change](#) (NPC): Identifies five common pitfalls and five rules of thumb that will help organisations to use theory of change to tackle complex problems.
- [Theory of Change for advocacy and campaigns](#) (Bond)
- [Campaigning for change: Learning from the United States](#) (NCVO)
- [Making your campaign happen: How to use a theory of change or a future story for your campaigning](#) (Jonathan Ellis)
- [Theory of Change: Eight common mistakes](#) (TSIP)
- [Pathways for Change](#) (ORS Impact)
- [Six models for understanding impact](#) (Democracy Fund)
- [The Advocacy Strategy Framework: A tool for articulating an advocacy theory of change](#) (Center for Evaluation Innovation)

### User involvement

- [Make it count: Why impact matters in user involvement](#) (NPC): An overview of user involvement practices across the charity sector, with practical examples of how to improve practices.
- [Guidance for involving users](#) (NCVO): Focuses on strategy development but applies to theory of change as well.

## Systems thinking

- [Systems Thinking for Campaigning & Organizing and Systems Mapping Tools for Campaign Design](#) (MobLab and Blueprints for Change)
- [Systemic Campaigns Framework](#) (NEON)

## Impact measurement

- [Shifting the Dial: How to take an impact-focused approach to your policy change campaigns](#) (NPC): A practical guide to focusing on impact while planning, delivering and evaluating a campaign.
- [Closing in on change: Measuring the effectiveness of your campaign](#) (NPC): This report highlights evaluation resources and explains how NPC's four pillar approach can help you evaluate your campaign.
- [No Royal Road: Finding and Following the Natural Pathways in Advocacy Evaluation](#) (Jim Coe, Rhonda Schlangen & Center for Evaluation Innovation)
- [Guidance for designing, monitoring and evaluating peacebuilding projects: using theories of change](#) (CARE International)
- [When the Best Offense is a Good Defense: Understanding and Measuring Advocacy on the Defense](#) (ORS Impact)