



**Diffusion of Innovations and
Science-Based Practices to
Address Barriers to Learning
& Improve Schools:
A Series of Information Resources**

As calls for addressing barriers to student learning and improving schools increase, new directions are imperative. And, this involves more than tinkering with prevailing approaches. The need is for developing major innovations (e.g., comprehensive school-level prototypes) and taking them to scale throughout a school district.

The success of all this depends on stakeholders in public education becoming more knowledgeable about the complexities and strategies related to diffusion of innovations, making major systemic changes, and developing a *sophisticated* understanding of the role of empirically-based practices.

To these ends, the Center is producing a series of resources, such as this one, to provide informational aids for use as tools in policy and practice analyses, research, education, and school improvement planning.

About: *Pathways for Change: 10 Theories to Inform Advocacy and Policy Change Efforts*

See this 2013 brief by Sarah Stachowiak
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Online at:

<http://evaluationinnovation.us2.list-manage.com/track/click?u=6f186179e4754fb83d10b9538&id=88b4f5a788&e=92748aa793>

This document summarizes social science theories about how policy change happens. Each theory is accompanied by a visual outcome map that shows the connection between strategy activities and expected outcomes--really useful for designing advocacy evaluations. Theories are from political science, sociology, psychology, and communications. They include global theories that broadly explain the policy change process, and tactical theories for common advocacy activities that are part of broader policy change efforts.

The Matrix of Theories reproduced on the next page is from the original document.

Matrix of Theories

	THEORY (Key Authors)	DISCIPLINE	HOW CHANGE HAPPENS	WHEN THIS THEORY MAY BE USEFUL
GLOBAL THEORIES	Large Leaps or Punctuated Equilibrium theory (Baumgartner & Jones)	Political Science	Like seismic evolutionary shifts, significant changes in policy and institutions can occur when the right conditions are in place.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Large-scale policy change is the primary goal You have strong media-related capacity
	Policy Windows or Agenda-Setting theory (Kingdon)	Political Science	Policy can be changed during a window of opportunity when advocates can successfully connect two or more components of the policy process (e.g., the way a problem is defined, the policy solution to the problem, and/or the political climate of their issue).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You can address multiple streams simultaneously (e.g., problem definition, policy solutions, and/or political climate) You have internal capacity to create, identify, and act on policy windows
	Coalition Theory or Advocacy Coalition Framework (Sabatier, Jenkins-Smith)	Political Science	Policy change happens through coordinated activity among a range of individuals with the same core policy beliefs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A sympathetic administration is in office You have a strong group of allies with a common goal
	Power Politics or Power Elites theory (Mills, Domhoff)	Sociology	Policy change is made by working directly with those with power to make decisions or influence decision making.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You have one or more key allies in a position of power on the issue Focus may be on incremental administrative or rule changes
	Regime Theory (Stone)	Political Science	Policy change happens through the support and empowerment of policy makers by a close-knit body of influential individuals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You know or suspect that a coalition of non-politicians is deeply involved in policy making You have access to or can become part of this coalition or regime
TACTICAL THEORIES	Messaging and Frameworks or Prospect theory (Tversky & Kahneman)	Psychology	Individual's preferences will vary depending on how options are presented.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The issue needs to be redefined as part of a larger campaign or effort A key focus of the work is on increasing awareness, agreement on problem definition, or salience of an issue
	Media Influence or Agenda-Setting theory (McCombs & Shaw)	Communications	Political issues on the public's agenda will depend on the extent of coverage a given issue receives by mass news media.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You have strong media-related capacity You want to put the issue on the radar of the broader public
	Grassroots or Community Organizing theory (Alinsky, Bikelien)	Social Psychology	Policy change is made through collective action by members of the community who work on changing problems affecting their lives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A distinct group of individuals is directly affected by an issue Your organization's role in an issue is as a "convener" or "capacity-builder" rather than as a "driver"
	Group Formation or Self-Categorization theory (Turner, Taffel)	Social Psychology	Policy change can be achieved when individuals identify with groups and subsequently act in a way that is consistent with that social group or category membership.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You are looking to build or tighten your base of support Cohesion among your organization's members is a prerequisite for change
	Diffusion theory or Diffusion of Innovations (Rogers)	Sociology	Change happens when a new idea for a program or policy is communicated to a critical mass, who perceives it as superseding the current policy/program (or lack thereof) and thus, adopts the idea.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The focus is on a new idea for a program or policy You have trusted messengers and champions to model or communicate the innovation