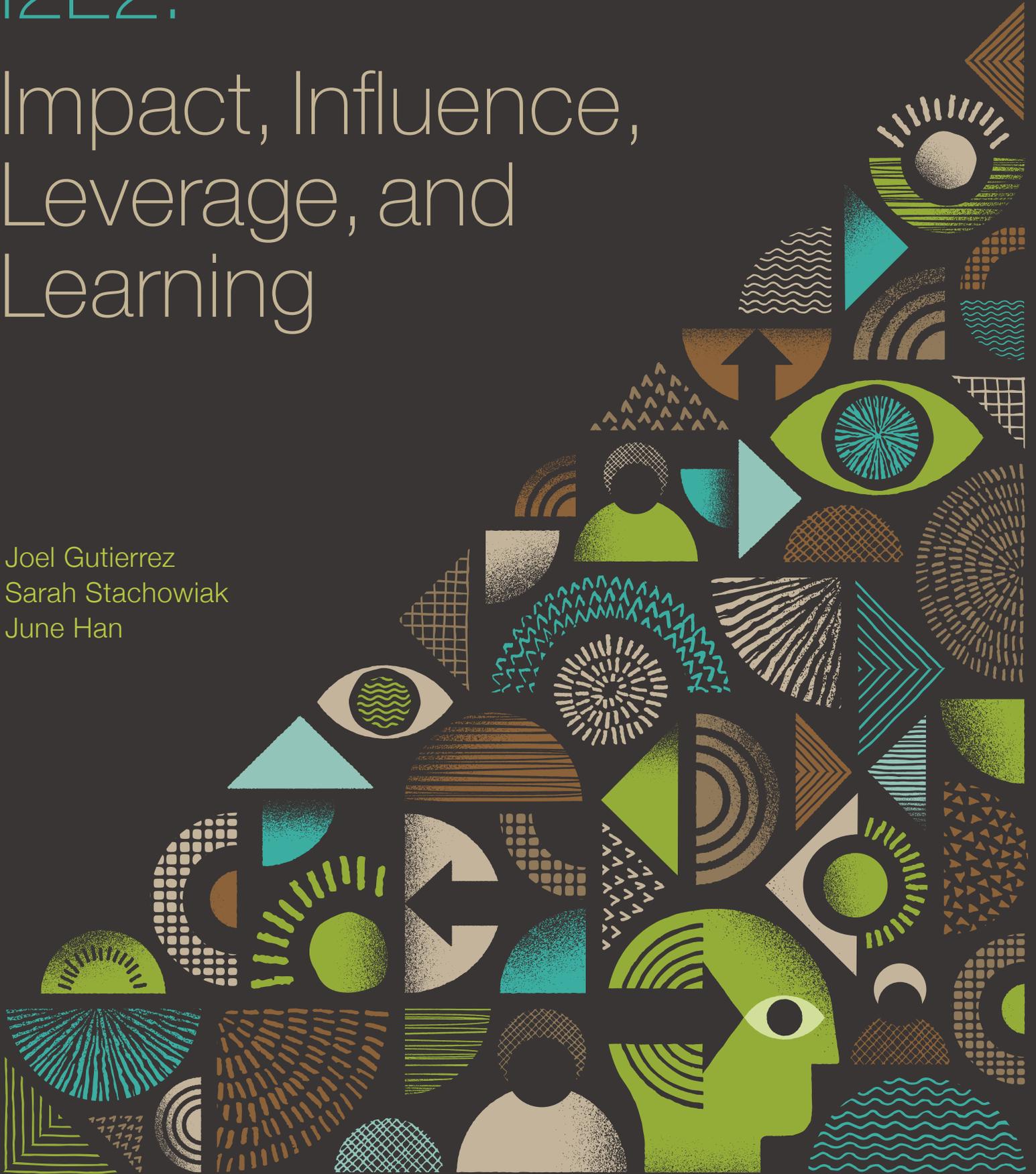# I2L2:

Impact, Influence, Leverage, and Learning

Joel Gutierrez
Sarah Stachowiak
June Han

ABOUT THIS REPORT

This update to I2L2 ideas and concepts builds upon the 2015 brief co-authored by Jane Reisman, Anne Gienapp, and Tom Kelly. It was written to help strategists, evaluators, and practitioners start to name, identify, and consider the types of outcomes at play in long-term systems-change strategies.

I2L2:
Impact, Influence, Leverage, and Learning

About ORS

ORS is a strategy and evaluation consulting firm based in Seattle, WA with staff across the country. Since 1989, ORS Impact has been on the cutting edges of measurement, evaluation and strategy, helping their clients be better-positioned to realize the change they seek. They make the complicated accessible, bringing new research and new approaches to meaningful work, delivering the insights their clients need to move from ideas to impact.

Acknowledgements

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Foreword

By Anne Gienapp, Tom Kelly, and Jane Reisman

It is amazing to consider the significant evolution of the social sector in the two decades since ORS Impact first wrote about the concepts of impact, influence, and leverage.[1] Twenty years ago, most funders and social actors assumed that impact was additive—if enough programs reached enough people, their investments in programmatic interventions could eventually add up to impact at scale. However, the strategic work of Annie E. Casey Foundation and many others involved in comprehensive change efforts, including place-based initiatives, initiated new ways of describing and planning interventions and ways to account for large-scale social impact. I2L2 emerged from these efforts; the model calls attention to influence, leverage, and learning as essential dimensions to creation of significant and durable change. For context about the emergence and evolution of I2L2, see a discussion paper by Gienapp, Kelly, and Reisman (forthcoming).

As a growing number of funders and social actors moved to systems-oriented efforts to achieve impact, the Aspen Institute's introduction of the concept of theory of change promoted the view that impact could reflect multiple causal chains, including system-level outcomes.[2] The attention to systems-oriented impact approaches brought interesting shifts, as foundations began to emphasize strategic and learning roles for evaluators in tandem with—and inextricable from—the design and implementation of measurement activities. No longer just external data and analysis technicians, evaluators were becoming thought partners with social actors, helping them to articulate their systems-focused initiatives and to name realistic and relevant outcomes for these efforts. As thought partners, we observed that important and hard-won systems-level outcomes were frequently being ignored, overlooked, or devalued in the context of strategy articulation and measurement; there was often greater emphasis on the desired impact for people, populations, or places.

The degree to which systemic and structural factors perpetuate racial disparity throughout societal institutions prompted ORS Impact to develop this updated version of their I2L2 publication. ORS Impact, along with many other impact actors, has worked to more explicitly center racial equity in systems change work. For ORS Impact, insights about what it takes to center racial equity have led to thoughtful and courageous evolutions of internal operations, evaluation approaches, and ways of working with clients. The I2L2 framework is compatible with and supportive of a racial equity lens, and in this update ORS Impact has more deeply articulated how race, equity, and power drive assumptions and choices about systems interventions as well as expectations about change. The update also more closely examines interrelationships between impact, influence, leverage, and learning, noting the complex ways that change can manifest and providing language and examples to help us have richer, more nuanced field-level conversations.

In two decades of developing stronger models for the measurement of systems-focused interventions, the evaluation field has come a long way. We continue to stretch our understanding and vocabulary to more intentionally question how systems affect large-scale impact initiatives. How and where are race, equity, and power present and operating in systems? How do these factors affect who benefits and who is harmed by system-focused interventions? How can we better recognize, account for, and intentionally center these factors in the design and measurement of systems-focused impact interventions? How will we know if/when systemic conditions are ripe for advancement of equity and justice? We appreciate how ORS Impact has unpacked these questions.

With this new update, ORS Impact issues a call to center racial equity in systems-focused impact initiatives. We look forward to rich conversations and further insights which we know will emerge from the field's ongoing application of the I2L2 model. Onward!

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[1] See: A Practical Guide to Documenting Influence and Leverage In Making Connections Communities - The Annie E. Casey Foundation (aecf.org). Prepared by ORS Impact, 2004.
[2] See: Anderson A. The Community Builder's Approach to Theory of Change Development: A Practical Guide. Aspen Institute. Available at: TOCI-final3.indd (aspeninstitute.org)

Setting the Stage and Clarifying Concepts

1.1
Introduction

1.2
Clarifying systems change and why it matters

Impact, influence, leverage, and learning (I2L2) have been a meaningful contribution to social change work for years, helping bring clarity and alignment to long-term systems change initiatives. Over time, our thinking and practices have evolved, and the world has shifted. It's a ripe time to share an update that captures and pushes forward our thinking. In the years since we last published about I2L2, the field has more broadly and explicitly acknowledged that systemic racism, inequality, discrimination, and exclusion have caused significant harm.

Many of us, including ORS Impact, are working to disrupt long-standing systems of oppression by implementing strategies, measuring, and learning from outcomes that target systems and policies.[3] Along the way, we have learned and improved our understanding of complex systems changes that advance equitable change for the long run. In this update of I2L2, we reflect what we've learned through others' experiences[4] and our own, including through our publications,[5] our internal equity journey,[6] and our company's principles and values. This update includes context for why I2L2 is informative, additional ingredients for thinking about systems-change strategies and outcomes, definitions of I2L2 outcomes and concepts, and examples of outcome statements to illustrate the components of I2L2. The primary audience for this update is people who have a role in designing, leading, measuring/evaluating, implementing, and investing in social change initiatives that span philanthropic, market-oriented, nonprofit, and governmental sectors as well as cross-sector partnerships. Our intention is for readers to walk away with reinforced knowledge that systems changes are interrelated, iterative, and are necessary and legitimate pieces to the impact puzzle. In doing so, we hope I2L2 concepts help social change actors maintain an equitable and balanced frame for considering strategies, outcomes, progress, and their relationship to complex social systems.

Successfully addressing vital social issues—like the movement[7] for racial justice and addressing climate crises—requires large-scale initiatives that address equity, intersectionality, complexity, and systems. And yet, it can be easy for social investment leaders to view success narrowly, in terms of achieving long-term, downstream impacts,[8] for people and places. However, funders and implementers often work to disrupt and change social systems or policies in support of those downstream impacts. These types of changes are sometimes discounted, can be challenging to articulate, and may not be measured, resulting in a lost opportunity for learning and strategy improvement.

More recently, big social change initiatives have focused on strategies that address the root cause of social problems—for instance, changing policy, practices, narratives, partnerships and networks, power structures, and broad societal norms. These types of changes are what we consider to be systems change—outcomes aimed at changing the rules of the game or how systems operate. They focus on shifting the way organizations, coalitions, institutions, funders, governments, programs, people, and society operate so that impacts (i.e., more downstream changes for people and the environment) can be achieved at scale, beyond the scope of what particular programs or investments can likely affect. Sometimes, a large social impact initiative will tackle inherently complex issues within multiple dynamic, deeply interrelated systems. Let's take, for example, a school district-wide strategy to improve educational outcomes for students. Think of all the systems-level changes this strategy could involve: professional development for teachers, tax and budget policies for school funding, district structures and practices for family and student engagement, partnerships with social service providers that support families and students experiencing poverty, etc.

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[3] The Lens of Systemic Oppression, accessed March 2023, https://www.nationalequity project.org/frameworks/lens-of-systemic-oppression

[4] See appendix A for a list of helpful resources.

[5] See appendix B for relevant ORS publications.

[6] "A Long Overdue Update on our Journey to Advance Equity," ORS Impact, accessed March 2023, https://orsimpact.com/blog/A-long-overdue-update-on-our-journey-to-advance-equity.htm.

[7] Movements are sustained groupings that develop a frame or narrative based on shared values, maintain a link with a real and broad base in the community, and build for a long-term transformation in power. "Not Always Movements: Multiple Approaches to Advance Large-3) Scale Social Change," ORS Impact, 2020.

[8] Downstream meaning long-term outcome achievement, e.g., population-level change.

1.3
Defining I2L2

Changes within these entrenched systems can be tough to identify and achieve, but are powerful and important, with the potential to create sustainable, long-term ripple effects. For example, a change in tax policy that funnels more money to underfunded schools could go a long way toward changing the experience for students in those schools through increased resources and investment. By specifically naming and understanding if and how systems changes are occurring (or not), social change actors can see the full spectrum of change that is possible and gain vital knowledge for strategic development and adaptation. Conversely, without considering the importance of systems change, decisions about strategies and judgments about progress can be profoundly limited.

There are potential risks within systems change efforts: thinking too narrowly, oversimplifying social issues, and designing strategy and evaluation approaches absent of systems-change outcomes and strategies. There could also be a mismatch of expectations and misalignment among funders, implementers/providers, evaluators, community members, or people who benefit regarding timelines, key strategies, outcome achievement, and signs of progress. This can lead to problematic strategy shifts, changes in funding, disgruntled organizations, damaged relationships, collapsed initiatives, and growing mistrust. We have observed that the actors who experience the most harm in these cases are typically those who hold the least power, including communities intended to benefit from change efforts and organizations responsible for implementing those efforts in communities.

Ultimately, we believe the benefits of systems change far outweigh the risks. We urge people who invest in, fund, design, evaluate, and implement social and environmental change initiatives to broaden their views of what is considered progress, and to understand and learn about the full set of outcomes that contribute toward equitable impact for people and the environment.

The terms impact, influence, leverage, and learning (I2L2) describe the building blocks of social change, making them accessible to those who are measuring and developing theories of change that ideally strengthen the likelihood of impact. I2L2 allows for a more holistic view of strategic entry points and related changes, opens up new pathways for innovation in theories of change, creates the space for adaptation through learning and reflection, and ultimately drives more powerful results. On the following four pages, we outline each component of I2L2.

Impact

Relates to changes in people—individuals, larger populations, and societies—as well as changes in eco-systems or the environment.

Impact is typically the main goal of large systems change initiatives and is the most commonly recognizable area of I2L2. It's helpful to think about it in terms of the scales of impact, meaning whether impact occurred or is intended to occur at a programmatic, population, or societal level.

When considering the expected or desired scale of impact, it also helps to think about the initiative's reach and make sure it is aligned with the scale of intervention. For example, if interventions are place-based within a neighborhood, we would not expect to see change occurring at a broader community or municipal level. All changes are not equal, and attention should be focused on who and where changes are occurring, specifically centering race equity in social and environmental change efforts.

Programmatic-level
Programmatic-level impact is concentrated in a small geographic area and/or an individual organization's programmatic intervention (e.g., more veterans who are homeless in a specific area of Seattle receive permanent affordable and supportive housing).

Population-level
Population-level impact is when many different organizations or partners work in collaboration, typically at a bigger scale and large geographic area (e.g., homelessness in Seattle proper has decreased substantially).

Societal-level
Societal-level impact is even deeper—usually at the level of mission and vision statements (e.g., all people have access to safe and affordable housing).

Influence
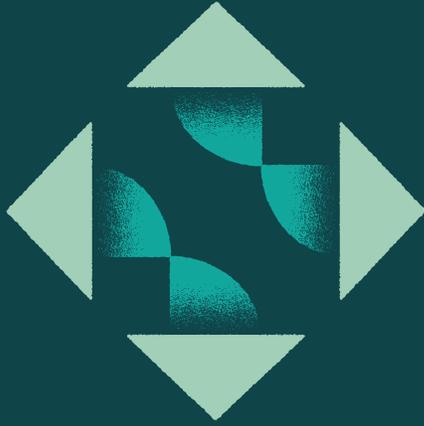
Reflects the many ways in which systems interact and can change.

Influence strategies and changes may relate to organizational and business practices, degree of alignment across organizations, public discourse or common narratives, political support, and shared norms. Influence strategies and outcomes are often more than an arm's lengths away from community and are not in the scope of direct service. For that reason, it can be challenging to connect the dots between influence strategies and outcomes, and they can be hard to see, (e.g., working to strengthen advocacy capacity, building new networks of advocacy organizations, and making incremental progress towards changes in policy). However, by being explicit and developing theories of change that are designed to influence systems, it's possible to identify different types of outcomes at different levels, and how they might interact or not. These levels might include changes that occur within a single organization, changes across a network of organizations, or larger system changes like changes in policy.

Regardless, the system is the unit of change, whether aimed at influence within organizations, institutions, partnerships or coalitions, sectors or fields, the media ecosystem, or policies. Not to be ignored in this category is ensuring that our long-term goals to advance social justice match the way we go about our work to change systems, centering equitable practices and processes.

Leverage
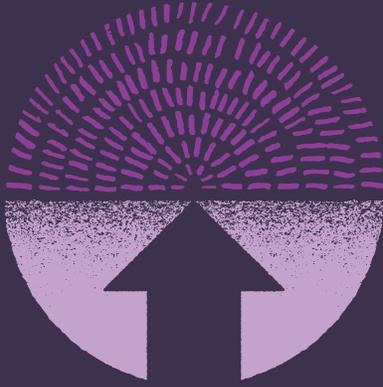
Refers to the way social change implementers can affect systems by garnering, matching, pooling, or (re)directing resources.

These actions may lead to changes in the amount or use of financial resources (e.g., funds to implement initiatives, policies, or mandates), or may result in an allocation of non-monetary resources (such as staffing dedicated to a particular issue or building infrastructure for a specific community). Leverage is a key building block, as large systems change initiatives require long-term commitments of resources. Social change actors should pay special attention to understand how much/many resources are allocated, for how long, who is being supported (or not), and what other resources are needed to be effective.

Learning

Refers to practices that create space and muscle for reflection and adaptation.

Learning can take place within the context of formal efforts like strategy development, evaluation, and strategic learning,[9] or informal (but intentional) efforts to reflect back, bring experience or data to bear, and improve. Regular learning activities are a critical and necessary part of any impact endeavor, helping to answer questions about how to design and implement social impact strategies in ways that advance equitable outcomes. Strong learning practices include the reflections and insights of many actors across the systems-change initiative, from funders to implementers to people with or proximate to lived experience. Engaging in learning together (e.g., leaning into the principles and practice of Emergent Learning[10]) can strengthen relationships and trust among evaluation users, unlock insights and knowledge to guide decisions about the selection and implementation of strategies, and ultimately lead to a greater likelihood of impact.

Learning practices also include regular and intentional habits to learn from data and lived experiences, for instance, co-creating theories of change and definitions of success with communities, convening advisory boards of community members, engaging organizations in collective sense-making, not being extractive[11] in communities, returning learning back to the community or implementers of initiatives, and centering learning on the communities that are intended to benefit.

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9 We strive to align with the Equitable Evaluation Initiative (EEI) framework and principles that encourage regular reflection, spur improvements to strategy, and returning knowledge for the broader field to benefit. "Equitable Evaluation Framework," Equitable Evaluation Initiative, accessed November 2022, https://www.equitableeval.org/framework.

10 Emergent Learning, accessed March 2, 2023, https://emergentlearning.org/

11 Research should benefit the communities we're working with and expose the systems that cause harm, rather than extract data or narratives from communities for the sole purpose of gaining knowledge, as some traditional research has done. "Research Code of Ethics," Human Impact Partners, 2023. Accessed April 2023 https://humanimpact.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/HIP-Research-Code-of-Ethics.pdf

I2L2 Expanded

2.1
Exploring relationships and connections between I2L2

While the definitions of impact, influence, leverage, and learning have remained mostly the same over time, our appreciation for the relationships between them has expanded. It is helpful to look more deeply at the connections between impact, influence, and leverage; consider the multiple directions and pathways for change; and understand the importance of ongoing learning and adaptation as a means to pursue impact. Although systems change can be linear—meaning it occurs so impact can be achieved—we know social change, particularly when seeking to address injustice and inequities, can be multi-faceted and non-linear. Below, we share four sample scenarios describing the connections between I2L2. While these scenarios are not exhaustive, we hope they illustrate the different ways social change makers must consider the interrelated building blocks of change and how they can often reinforce or build on one another.

Progress Stalls

Influence and leverage outcomes occur, but desired impact is not achieved.

When the Black Lives Matter movement took off and made strides for racial justice across and within sectors, large sums of money were directed toward Black-led organizations to help spur the movement (leverage). Corporations took public stands and passed internal policies requiring equity training for staff (influence). Public perceptions shifted and a wave of activists were galvanized in the fight for racial justice (influence). And then… support waned. The infusion of public and private funds slowed, public pressure on the government declined, and activists wondered if those early outcomes would ultimately result in sustained and meaningful change. In this scenario, learning could be used to understand what happened, surface insights, and identify new hypotheses about what strategies are most needed now.

Backward Progress

Gains in influence, leverage, and/or learning are not sustained or face backlash and retrenchment.

Funders invested heavily in organizations (leverage) across the United States to design collaborative strategies (influence) to get out the vote in 2020, particularly among low- and middle-income voters. With data and learning in hand about target demographics and corresponding effective outreach tactics in those communities (learning), organizations connected with and made the case to more voters about the importance of voting (influence). Due in part to their efforts, the 2020 election drew the United States' highest voter turnout in more than a century.[12] After seeing a record turnout of low- and middle-income voters in some states, some legislatures worked to pass laws and voting restrictions (influence) to disenfranchise those voters. Based on data in 2021, 19 states have enacted 33 laws that make it harder for Americans to vote.[13] For advocates in these states, their focus has turned to the need to protect and strengthen voting laws and regulations (influence).

Forward Progress

Impact, influence, leverage, and learning are mutually reinforcing and intertwined

A state expanded the Earned Income Tax Credit to provide more cash to hundreds of thousands of people with lower income, in part due to a relentless and effective coalition advocacy campaign (impact). To achieve the landmark win, advocates first organized a listening tour around the state to hear from low-income folks and learn what they needed, which greatly informed the campaign's policy agenda (learning). Complementing the intentional work in the community, the coalition of advocates received funding from philanthropic institutions that enabled the hiring of a campaign manager (leverage). With the added capacity, the coalition strengthened its membership by adding intersectional and bipartisan organizations and strengthened their policy advocacy efforts. They pushed (for years) for more cash for low-income people and for the inclusion of non-citizens who have been historically excluded from government tax benefits. They developed Republican and Democratic allies in the legislature, and through having strong data access and communications capacity, became a trusted point of contact for other policymakers and organizations to turn to for information (influence). In the end, the bill for the expanded tax credit had overwhelming bipartisan support, and advocates achieved a significant win for traditionally marginalized groups in their state. Now, the coalition has more power and a stronger reputation, is viewed as a trusted partner in the legislature and among advocacy partners and is positioned well to advocate for the equitable implementation of the tax credit (influence).

[12] "Election Lessons from 2020," Brennan Center for Justice, accessed March 2023, https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/election-lessons-2020.
[13] "Voting Laws Roundup: October 2021," Brennan Center for Justice, accessed March 2023, https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/voting-laws-roundup-october-2021

2.2
Sharing helpful ingredients for I2L2 thinking

Progress at the Same Time

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>>>
>>>

Efforts to address impact, influence, and leverage happen simultaneously

A funder working on criminal justice transformation seeks to change policies for who, when, and for how long people are incarcerated. At the same time, the funder provides grants to organizations that work with formerly incarcerated individuals as they reenter society, families of those who are currently incarcerated, and formerly incarcerated individuals to advocate for change. They seek changes in policies, organizational capacity, and systems (influence and leverage) at the same time they seek changes in peoples' lives (impact), in no particular order.

Since we first talked about I2L2 in 2004, our world has shifted. We've experienced a global pandemic, continued police violence and social injustices, climate crises around the world, needless wars, huge advances in technology and AI, and the continued growth and influence of social media. The social sector has evolved to respond to these changes, with significant progress in centering Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) communities in change initiatives, valuing lived experience equally to academic credentials, expanding impact investing, using machine learning in research, and engaging in trust-based philanthropy. As actors and active participants in the broader systems of society and the field, we as an organization have also deepened our thinking and learned through successes and failures in our equity journey and our client work. Below we share some additional ingredients for I2L2 thinking.

Identify Equity as a Noun and a Verb

Although this may not be a new way of thinking, we have found it tremendously useful in developing strategy and identifying different types of equitable outcomes to achieve. Equity as a noun refers to tangible, concrete changes in people and systems, such as changes in population-level outcomes (e.g., a decreased mortality rate for Black children), changes in policies (e.g., access to an Earned Income Tax Credit for undocumented noncitizens), or changes in organizations (e.g., more BIPOC executive leadership). Equity as a verb refers to changes in the way we go about our business, the way we carry ourselves in our work and lives, or the values, processes, and practices we use every day—changes that can be harder to see but are incredibly important. These changes usually occur at the individual and organizational level and have ripple effects on larger systems, such as changes in organizational practices (e.g., improved grantmaking practices that cut the red tape for community-based organizations to access funding can in turn affect the communities served), changes in capacity (e.g., an individual's improved skills in facilitating community conversations can result in developing strategies based on an impacted community's needs), or changes in processes (e.g., translating program forms into multiple languages can increase language access and open up the program to groups that were historically excluded). The questions below reveal how those engaging in social change should think about equity as a noun and a verb.

Equity as a Noun

1

Who gets to decide what change is necessary, sufficient, and desirable? What activities and outcomes are prioritized?

2

Are we being broad-minded and more expansive in thinking about what kind of changes matter to help us avoid practices that prop up White-Dominant Culture (e.g., one right way, progress is always more/up, either/or thinking, quantity over quality)?

3

Are we walking the talk in our commitment to equity?

Equity as a Verb

1

Are we looking at who is harmed or left behind, not just who is advantaged by changes?
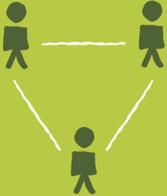
2

Are changes increasing gaps or expanding disadvan tage for some? Are we taking an intersectional lens to understand oppression and impact?

3

Does systems change result in the expected benefits? Has the system changed or transformed, not merely morphed, or reshaped to continue causing harm?

Four Layers of Systems Change

	Type	Definition	Examples
1	Single Organization	A systems change occuring within a single orgnization	Improved staff training Changes to how an org's services are delivered
2	Single Organization with Ripple Effect	A systems change that occurs within a single organization that has ripple effects into other organizations.	Funder changes grant-making rules allowing new types of organizations to apply for funding Other funders adopt the same or similar rules
3	Multiple Organizations in the same sector	A systems change that occurs among multiple organizations.	Multiple school districts adopt and implement the same race-equity framework
4	Multiple Organizations, Cross-sector	A systems change that occurs among multiple organizations, cross-sectors.	Businesses, residents, schools, and governments adopted environmental steward practices, and implemented pullution reduction projects.

SINGLE ORGANIZATION

MULTIPLE ORGANIZATIONS

Name the Layers to Systems Change

In our work partnering in and synthesizing results from complex initiatives that tackle gnarly social issues, we've learned a lot about how to untangle, identify, and name all the potential changes that can occur or have already occurred. These are often the result of efforts to influence systems and leverage resources. To help us think about different types of changes, it can be valuable to first consider the system(s) or sector(s) that changes occur in, and at what layer (or scope). The authors of the When Collective Impact Has an Impact research study presented one way to go about it, by measuring systems change within large population-level impact efforts based on what layer the change occurred in,[14] as shown on page 20. It can also be helpful to look at the formality of systems change. Some changes may be informal (e.g., agreements, new ways of working, or time-limited experiments), while others may be formal (e.g., job descriptions, new permanent roles, memorandums of understanding). Naming these layers, such as scope (e.g., single-org or multi-orgs) and formality of change, within your strategy and measurement of outcomes can help add nuance and depth to your thinking and understanding.

Consider the Ramifications of Transforming or Reforming Systems

Systemic, structural, and institutional racism exists, and it is pervasive. Its tentacles and negative effects have infiltrated our bodily and family systems (e.g., generational trauma), our organizational systems (e.g., equal pay, race gap in corporate executive offices), our community systems (e.g., red lining), and our democratic systems (e.g., racial discrimination in voting). Reform efforts try to make changes within current systems by changing roles, policies, incentives, or practices, and while these can lead to improved impacts, they fundamentally maintain the system status quo. Given the institutional racism that is already baked in, system reform can feel untenable or insufficient, especially among those who are most harmed by the current systems. To achieve equitable changes at scale and end harm and oppression, systems may instead need to be completely transformed—by dismantling them to end the current state and create something anew. Articulating a clear line of sight for whether actors are working to transform or reform a system can be important for right-sizing and aligning strategies or interventions, identifying the necessary outcomes to achieve, helping to identify what to measure and learn from, and highlighting fundamental differences about what is necessary and sufficient.

[14] A study that looked across 25 initiatives utilizing Collective Impact approaches aimed at achieving population-level change. https://www.orsimpact.com/DirectoryAttachments/10102018_33801_97_CI_Study_Executive_Summary_October_2018.pdf

2.3
Understand Your
Spheres of Influence*

Knowing how much control or influence you have to make changes can be useful for right-sizing strategy, informing evaluation, and setting expectations. Here we adapt concepts shared in *Hivos Theory of Change Thinking in Practice* related to the Spheres of Control, Influence, and Interest[15] (shown on page 23) by asking:

1 | **What do systems-change actors have direct control or power over?**

2 | **Where do they have direct or indirect influence to make changes?[16]**

3 | **Where do they have interest and ambitions that are beyond one's ability to achieve on their own?**

Ensure your strategies and expected outcomes are realistic

For example, a funder wants to greatly reduce child hunger in the United States within 10 years. A single-pronged approach with a focus on direct service only would likely not be enough to achieve the desired results, as direct service providers do not have the control, power, or influence to achieve population-level change on their own. Instead, the funder designed a multi-pronged approach that includes direct service providers, national organizations, policy advocates, other funders, and local communities and adjusted its focus to be more place-based, acknowledging each place may be on a different timeline. The funder recognized that they exist among a collection of actors/institutions working on the same and/or related strategies and outcomes, and correctly aligned its expectations for what they can contribute to, achieve, and take responsibility for based on its strategy/approach.

Identify gaps in strategy or capacity to achieve desired goals

For example, initiative leaders want to expand their work to rural areas of their state, but realized none of the current members work in proximity to or have experience engaging with rural communities. The initiative has no current control or influence in rural areas, and therefore needs to expand its partnerships, improve its capacity, and perhaps refine its approach to work in and contribute to changes for rural communities.

Inform evaluation and learning questions and approaches that unpack relationships between strategy implementation and observable changes

For example, a national organization wants to increase the production of produce in a certain geographical region using sustainable methods. They have partnered with local organizations to help implement new farming practices on the ground with farmers. Knowing it would be an incomplete picture to only measure and ask questions related to increased production, changes in the soil where produce was grown, or rainfall, evaluators also seek to answer questions that understand the relationships between organizations and strategy implementation. For example, what control or influence does the national organization have on local organizations' capacity and implementation effort? What control or influence do local organizations have in driving or contributing to changes in farmers' practices and changes in produce? Answers to these types of questions will inform how and why change has happened and what role(s) the national organization and location organizations have in contributing to change.

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[15] Framework and graphic created from *Hivos Theory of Change in Practice (2015)*.

[16] It can be helpful to distinguish between direct influence and indirect influence. Direct influence is closely related to the project's activities, typically shorter-term. Indirect influence is beyond the influence of the project itself and typically higher up or longer-term.

* *"Influence"* here is different from *"influence"* in I2L2.

Interest

Are desired outcomes outside our control or influence but further momentum, take-up and scale lead to desired societal level changes? Our strategies contribute to progress, but multiple other factors and systems are at play.

Influence

Are desired outcomes in my, the organization's, or the initiative's sphere of influence? Our strategies have some influence on actors/institutions and we share responsibility for outcomes.

Control

Are desired outcomes in my, the organization's, or the initiative's sphere of control? Our strategies are solely responsible for outcomes.

I2L2 Tables

3.1
Examples of I2L2

To help illustrate what we mean by I2L2, in the following tables we provide examples of outcomes that encompass a range of different issue areas and initiatives. We also embed examples of I2L2 thinking (Scale of Impact, Equity as a Noun (N) and Verb (V), Naming the Layers to Systems Change, and Understanding Your Sphere of Influence). These outcomes are illustrative, not exhaustive, but hopefully provide useful ideas for those seeking to identify the kinds of outcomes they need to achieve to make meaningful progress toward their goals. We hope these examples will help readers (1) spring new ideas and help identify potential and relevant outcomes in their work; and (2) see the full spectrum of changes possible within I2L2 that may contribute to impact.

Table Summary

Impact	Influence	Leverage	Learning
This table shows examples of impact outcome areas, different scales of impact, and equity as a noun outcomes.	This table shows examples of various types of influence outcomes. The ingredients to I2L2 shared earlier (i.e., equity as noun or verb, layers of systems change, and spheres of influence) are useful and not always applicable; where the ingredients are relevant, we have included how the example outcomes crosswalk with these facets. When a facet is not relevant or could be variable depending on more context, the cell is left blank.	This table shows examples of leverage outcomes, cross walked with facets of I2L2 thinking when applicable. When a facet is not relevant or could be variable depending on more context, the cell is left blank.	This table shows different practices and intended benefits of engaging in learning. This is not an exhaustive list but highlights practices we like to use in our work to help clients navigate and learn from systems-change work.

Impact / Programmatic, Population, and Societal Levels

Outcome Areas	Programmatic-Level Impact	Population-Level Impact	Societal-Level Impact
Changes in social emotional well-being	Individuals feel an increased sense of social cohesion within a community	Communities across the country feel an increased sense of social cohesion	All people live happy and fulfilled lives
Changes in economic conditions	Increased employment for low-income Latinx program participants (N)	Increased income for Latinx populations in a city (N)	Black and Latinx workers have equitable participation in living wage jobs (N)
Changes in housing conditions	More veterans in Seattle are placed in permanent, affordable, and supportive housing	Homelessness in Seattle has decreased substantially	Everyone has access to safe and affordable housing
Changes in safety	Individuals in a town devastated by a climate crisis recover faster	Communities and the people who live in the Midwest recover faster during times of disaster	People are prepared and there is a robust safety net in place to support individuals' and families' recovery
Changes in educational conditions	Students experiencing poverty who participate in after-school programs have improved educational outcomes (e.g., grades, test scores) (N)	Achievement and opportunity gaps based on race and income are closed for students in a state (N)	Historically marginalized youth are successful from cradle to career (N)
Changes in the environment	An industrial district measurably reduces its greenhouse gas emissions	Improved air quality in communities of color in a region	Global warming slows

Influence / Changes in Systems

Outcome Areas	Influence Outcome Statements	Equity as a Noun or Verb	Layers of Systems Change*	Sphere of Influence**
Changes in capacity	Organizational departments decrease their silos and collaborate more		Single	Control
Changes in practices	Organizations stop practices and programs that are harmful to marginalized communities	**V**	Multi	Control
	Partner organizations implement the same race equity framework	**N**	Multi	Control
Changes in partnerships or collaborations	Partnerships representing diverse identities across industries, sectors and issues are collectively pushing for the same goals		Cross-sector	Influence
	Coalition partners strengthen their relationships with community-based organizations	**V**	Multi	Control
Changes in public or political will	Voters are more knowledgeable about economic inclusion issues			Influence
	Policymakers increasingly view economic policies as a top priority			Influence
Changes in narratives or mindsets	Favorable stories around bail reform become more dominant in the public discourse			Influence
	Stories in traditional media use more asset-based framing in stories about safety net programs			Influence
Change in public policies	Decline in/end to policies that disproportionately impact Black males who are prosecuted and/or incarcerated in the criminal justice system	**N**		Influence

*Layers of System Changes (i.e., single org changes, multi-orgs changes, or cross-sector changes)   **Spheres of influence (i.e., sphere of control, influence and interest)

Leverage / Changes in Systems

Outcome Areas	Leverage Outcome Statements	Equity as a Noun or Verb	Layers of Systems Change*	Sphere of Influence**
Changes in funding	A BIPOC-led organization receives a grant from a foundation for millions to support workers' rights	N	Single	
	New public-private partnerships increase funding streams for affordable housing developments		Cross-sector	
	Private and public institutions allocate unprecedented monetary resources to advance the movement for race equity	N	Cross-sector	
Changes in staffing	Organizational departments are adequately staffed to make strategic and meaningful progress		Single	Control
	Organizations across sectors create new positions that have adequate power to advance their diversity, equity, and inclusion goals	N	Cross-sector	
Changes in other resources	Organizational departments adopt and use new technology, and software		Single	Control
	Tribal nations increase access and use of mobile hotspots for members who live in areas with no or limited broadband	N	Single	Control

*Layers of System Changes (i.e., single org changes, multi-orgs changes, or cross-sector changes)   **Spheres of influence (i.e., sphere of control, influence and interest)

Learning / Practices and Intended Benefits

| Practices	Benefits
Collective sense-making	Acknowledges all actors (not just evaluators) have ideas and insights to contribute, helps make findings stick among evaluation users, and ensures a utilization focus.
Emergent Learning principles and practices	Emergent Learning is made for systems-change social sector actors. Its principles and practices are democratic, inviting diverse voices to the table, treating different types of expertise equally, and engaging all involved in achieving goals together.
Advisory groups of community members and/or organizations	Ensures evaluation and learning is useful to more than just those who hold the most power. Strengthens evaluation design and reporting by authentically listening and sharing power with those responsible for implementing efforts and/or those with lived experience.
Learning products that feature data visualization and design principles	Contributes to effective interpretation and usability of data, e.g., by making data and analyses clear and understandable and using inclusive design (such as color schemes that are accessible for people with colorblindness).
Inclusive language	Helps ensure audiences or consumers of learning feel valued and respected, and can enhance empathy, clarity, and understanding.[17]

[17] https://www.apa.org/ed/precollege/psn/2022/09/inclusive-language

Guidance on Using I2L2 for Strategy, Evaluation, and Learning

4.1
Using I2L2
in your work

In our work with social change agents, we know it can be challenging to develop stronger theories of change and understand if the work is making a difference. People often have a gut sense, but they may struggle with either naming outcomes or believing that certain kinds of outcomes count, especially those that are not direct impact. To address this, we have found a few ways that people can use I2L2 in their work.

Sharing power
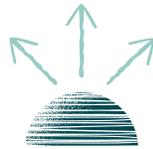
Nonprofits and funders may be most conversant with processes such as theory of change and outcome identification. Providing examples of influence and leverage outcomes that are meaningful and important can help everyone involved, especially those most impacted or closest to the work, to define what outcomes matter and are important and meaningful to them. This work to share power can occur early on during strategy development or later, when assessing emergent outcomes or using participatory processes like Most Significant Change or Outcome Harvesting,[18] to define what change has occurred.

Strengthening theories of change/strategies

Using content from I2L2 can strengthen overall theories of change. By reviewing your current strategy alongside I2L2, you may be able to name new or different kinds of systems changes you expect or need to see to achieve your goals or mission.

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[18] More information for Most Significant Change and Outcome Harvesting can be found here: https://www.betterevaluation.org/methods-approaches/approaches/most-significant-change#:~:text=The%20Most%20Significant%20Change%20(MSC,the%20most%20significant%20%E2%80%93%20and%20why, and here: https://www.betterevaluation.org/methods-approaches/approaches/outcome-harvesting

Building alignment around strategy

Getting clarity on what changes are important, among who/what, whether you seek system reform or transformation, and what layer you expect to see changes in systems (e.g., single organization, multiple organizations, cross-sector) can help parties recognize where they are aligned or not. Without alignment in these areas, people may end up inadvertently working against each other and/or disagreeing about the strategy and ways to get there collectively.

Determining success

Disagreement on what amount of change is sufficient, possible, and meaningful (e.g., transformation or reform, single organization versus cross-sector change) in a certain timeframe creates conditions for disappointment and potentially leads to negative power dynamics when not addressed explicitly.

Conclusion

Although much has changed in our world in the years since ORS published our first guide about naming and measuring systemic influence and leverage, the need to define, measure, and legitimize a variety of types of outcomes to achieve large-scale, equitable change continues. We hope this update helps to show how our thinking and practices have evolved over time, with a more explicit incorporation of issues around equity and power, and additional nuance in how we understand aspects of systems change. We hope I2L2 can continue to help those in the social sector working toward social change to name and recognize progress along the way, while learning and thinking critically about how to get there, evolve, adapt, and maintain progress over time.

Appendix A
Some Additional Helpful Resources

1   Equitable Evaluation Inititiave. (2023). The Equitable Evaluation Framework, May 2023 Expansion. https://www.equitableeval.org/_files/ugd/21786c_aab47695b0d2476d8de5d32f19bd6df9.pdf

2   Ruedy, L. (2018). Six Models for Understanding Impact. Democracy Fund. https://democracyfund.org/idea/six-models-for-understanding-impact/

3   Robinson, N. (2021). A radical arc in systematically documenting political context in advocacy evaluation. New Directions for Evaluation, 2021, 95–117. https://doi.org/10.1002/ev.20470

Appendix B
Relevant Publications Authored by ORS

ORS Impact. (2021). Measuring Narrative Change: Understanding Progress and Navigating Complexity

ORS Impact. (2021). Engaging the People Nonprofits Seek to Impact in Policy Advocacy.

ORS Impact. (2020). Not Always Movements: Building a Field.

ORS Impact. (2019). When the Best Offense is a Good Defense: Understanding Measuring Advocacy on the Defense.

ORS Impact and Spark Policy Institute. (2018). When Collective Impact Has an Impact.

ORS Impact publications can be found at https://orsimpact.com/publications.aspx?RD=1

In Summary

At a Glance...

Impact, influence, leverage, and learning (I2L2) have been a meaningful contribution to, and the building blocks of, social change work for years, helping bring clarity and alignment to long-term systems change initiatives.

The Building Blocks of Social Change

Impact

Relates to changes in people—individuals, larger populations, and societies—as well as changes in ecosystems or the environment.

EXAMPLE

Achievement and opportunity gaps based on race and income are closed for students in a state

Influence

Reflects the many ways in which systems interact and can change. Influence strategies and changes may relate to organizational and business practices, degree of alignment across organizations, public discourse or common narratives, political support, and shared norms.

EXAMPLE

Coalition partners strengthen their relationships with community based organizations. Policymakers increasingly view economic policies as a top priority.
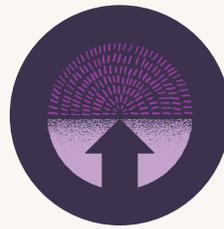
Leverage

Refers to the way social change implementers can affect systems by garnering, matching, pooling, or (re) directing resources. These actions lead to changes in the amount or use of financial resources or non-monetary resources (such as staffing dedicated to a particular issue.

EXAMPLE

Private and public institutions allocate unprecedented monetary resources to advance the movement for race equity.

Learning

Refers to practices that create space and muscle for reflection and adaptation. Learning can take place within the context of formal efforts like strategy development, evaluation, and strategic learning, or informal (but intentional) efforts to reflect back, bring experience or data to bear, and improve.

EXAMPLE

Acknowledges that all actors (not just evaluators) have ideas and insights to contribute, helps make findings stick among evaluation users, and ensures a utilization focus

When to Use I2L2

Share power. Influence and leverage outcomes that are meaningful and important can help everyone involved, especially those most impacted or closest to the work, to define what outcomes matter and are important and meaningful to them.

Strengthen theories of change. Review your current strategy alongside I2L2 to name new or different kinds of systems changes you expect or need to see to achieve your goals or mission.

Build alignment around strategy. Get clarity on what changes are important, among who/ what, whether you seek system reform or transformation, and what layer you expect to see changes in systems (e.g., single org, multiple orgs, cross-sector) to help parties recognize where they are aligned or not.

Determine success. Identify what amount of change is sufficient, possible, and meaningful.