CAUSAL PATHWAYS

VIRTUAL SYMPOSIUM 2023

DISCOVERING HOW, WHY, AND WHEN OUR STRATEGIES MATTER

Welcome from the ancestral homelands of the Cheyenne and Arapahoe Nations. Welcome from the ancestral homes from many other native nations from around the world.

We acknowledge the painful histories of genocide of native nations and the labor of enslaved Africans and their descendents as part of the history of the country the initiative originated from and many other parts of the world. As we acknowledge this, we also acknowledge our responsibility for addressing the persisting inequities and harm.

CAUSAL PATHWAYS **VIRTUAL SYMPOSIUM 2023**

Speakers

Jewlya Lynn,
Founder,
PolicySolve,
Co-founder of
Causal Pathways

Julia Coffman,
Co-Executive
Director of Center
for Evaluation
Innovation and
Co-founder of
Causal Pathways

Causal Pathways: Lost Causal: Framing It Up, Myths

Presented by Jewlya Lynn and Julia Coffman
Tuesday, September 19, 2023

What if we understood….

Under WHAT CONDITIONS?

HOW change happens?

WHY change happens?

What if we understood more than our strategies and outcomes… What if we understood the *causal pathways* that are changing systems?

How do we typically learn about change?

Strategies

Training advocacy organizations on housing policy issues

Resourcing advocates to work on housing advocacy

Training block captain program on advocacy strategies

Resourcing block captain program to engage their community on housing issues

Advocates were new to working on housing

Outcomes

Increased engagement of policymakers

Block captains took many different advocacy actions

Block captains recruited and supported many different community members to take actions

New and more effective policy solutions being considered, adopted, and beginning to be implemented

Increased access to quality affordable housing

New policymakers in office with openness to the issue

Unexpected level of media engagement

Context

What looks different when we test causality?

Strategies

Outcomes

Training advocacy organizations on housing policy issues and common messages

Resourcing advocates to work on housing advocacy

Baggage leftover from recent health policy battle left advocates with little credibility or access to policymakers

New and more effective policy solutions were considered, adopted, and beginning to be implemented

Increased access to quality affordable housing

Training block captain program on advocacy strategies and common messages

Block captains took many different advocacy actions

Resourcing block captain program to engage their community on housing issues

Block captains recruited and supported many different community members to take actions

Increased engagement by policymakers

Investigative journalism was already underway on housing issues

Community member stories were elevated through the media

A specific new policymaker prioritized solving the affordable housing problem

New policymaker actively recruited support among policymakers

Other Causes

The Myths about Causal Pathways Analysis

➤ **Myths about the methods**

➤ **Myths about who can participate and who benefits**

➤ **Myths about whether causal designs are useful**

➤ **Myths about whether we're already using it**

Lost Causal Article

MYTH BUSTING: There are no rigorous non-experimental designs for examining causality.

Theory-based:

Contribution analysis

Process tracing

Realist evaluation

Innovation history

Qualitative impact assessment protocol

General elimination methodology

Participatory:

Collaborative yarning

Most significant change

Outcome harvesting

Rapid outcome assessment

Collaborative outcomes reporting

Systems-based:

Causal link monitoring

Causal loop diagramming
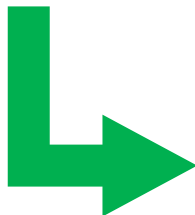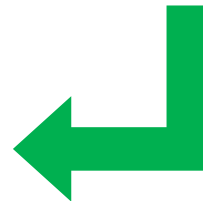
Statistically-created counterfactuals

The Myths: Causal designs aren't accessible

1. Causal designs are too burdensome for participants.

2. Causal designs cannot be implemented in ways appropriate for working with communities.

3. Causal designs are rooted in white supremacy.

4. Causal designs center philanthropy's ideas about change.

MYTH BUSTING: Causal designs are too burdensome for participants.

Strong implementation of causal methods in complex settings does require stakeholder participation.

Burden should be assessed not just based on the time required for participation; it should also be judged on the value received from the output.

Work that merely describes what happened and which outcomes resulted may not lift up lessons that can inform future efforts. The cost of participation can outweigh the value returned for the effort participants put in.
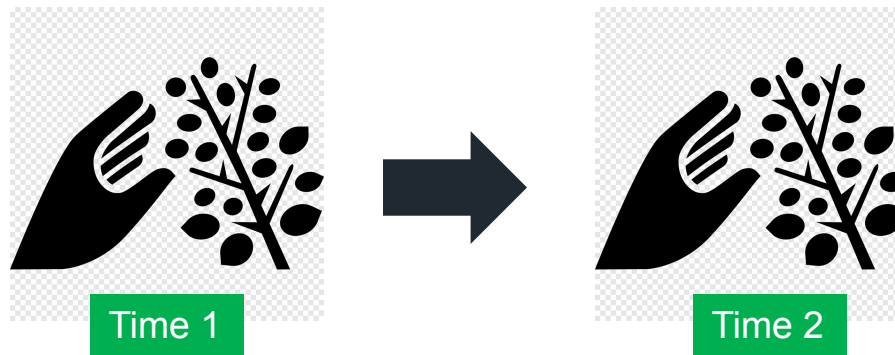
The Myths: Causal designs aren't useful for strategy

1.   Causal designs focus on the past and do not help with **future decision-making**.

2.   Causal designs are summative only and cannot be used for **real-time decision-making**.

MYTH BUSTING: Causal designs are summative only and cannot be used for real-time decision-making.

Outcome harvesting implemented with processes for validating causal pathways can be repeated over time, providing systems-sensing information combined with evaluative information about how change has happened.

Time 1

Time 2

Can observe steadily how and why the system is changing, both in response to interventions and to other factors.

Key Takeaways

1. **Causal Learning:** We are good at *thinking causally* when we design strategies. Now, we need to get better at *learning about causal pathways* in order to strengthen our strategies and impact.

2. **Methods that Work:** We are not limited to experimental and quasi-experimental designs. There are methods that help us learn about causality that are designed for complex, systemic change settings, including outcome harvesting, most significant change, collaborative yarning, process tracing, contribution analysis, and more.

3. **Rigor and Participation are Entangled**: The methods that help us understand causal pathways are the most rigorous in their analysis and most accurate in their findings when those in the system, affected by and influencing the strategies, are actively part of the learning process.

CAUSAL PATHWAYS

VIRTUAL SYMPOSIUM 2023

Our Journey Together

Day 1: Being Inspired	Day 2: Getting Practical	Day 3: Getting Ready
Case studies to **combat myths and inspire**	Panels to combat myths and identify **when to use causal pathways**	Information about **resources you can access**
Interactive discussions to explore what it means for your work	Interactive discussions with peers in similar roles, geographies	Interactive sessions with presentations by experts in specific methods, rigor, and combining methods