



# Evaluating narrative change

**There are many ways to assess if efforts to change a narrative are being successful and delivering real world change.**

When it comes to evaluating success in changing the narrative around an issue, there are three phases of change that can be measured to assess if the new story is taking root and helping shifts to happen: changing the story, changing the way people think, and changing policy and practice.

## Phases of change

### #1 Changing the story

Powerful stories get repeated. Stories need to be repeated over and over again to start to shift the narrative around an issue. It's possible to track and monitor how well a story has been taken up by the field, the media and in political discourse.

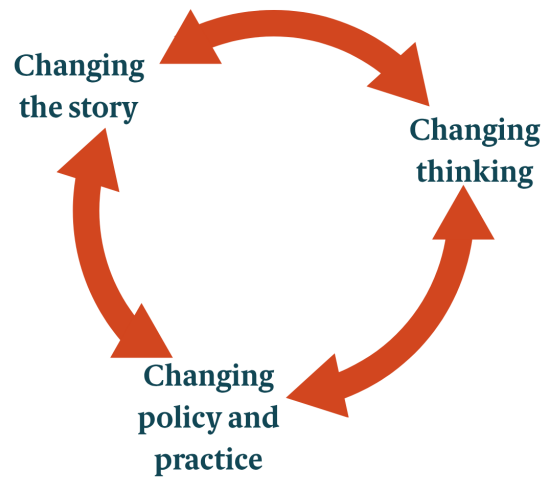
### #2 Changing the way people think

A new narrative is working when people start to think and feel differently about the issue. It's possible to track the impact of campaigning efforts, shifting attitudes and growing support for policy change and – over time – mindset shifts.

### #3 Changing policy and practice

Narrative change work is about changing the story, to help create change. It shapes, and sits alongside, our traditional campaigning and advocacy work. It's possible to monitor and evaluate the progress, big and small, in shifting policy and practice.

This process isn't linear – sometimes a policy win comes *before* public thinking has shifted and can help to shape future thinking. But policy without public support is always at risk of being backtracked. Both are necessary to secure long-term lasting change.



There are a number of ways to evaluate each phase of change and these are outlined below. It may not be necessary to evaluate each phase and the approach will depend on the outcomes being sought and, in particular, the level of ambition.

# 1. Changing the story

Narrative change can begin in many different ways. One way is when it is initiated by advocates working in a sector – homelessness campaigners changing how they make their case, lawyers standing up for the rule of law with a new frame, or public health professionals talking about the building blocks of health. So, one way to evaluate narrative change efforts is to understand if a sector has changed the story it's telling.

The questions evaluations can address are: has the field been able to take up the new story? Have we seen a shift in the way the media report on the issue? Or in how it's talked about on social media? Are political conversations changing?

## Evaluation methods

### #1 Partner evaluation

Taking a before and after snapshot of partner communications, it's possible to assess how consistently and well a new story is being applied by identifying the frames used in a range of communications. This can be combined with evaluation from coaching and training sessions to identify if, and where, additional support is required to help transition to a new story.

### #2 Field evaluation

Taking a wider sample of communications from across the field, it's possible to look at whether the story the field is telling has shifted. This can be used to evaluate progress and identify which parts of the field may need further support to adapt and use the story.

### #3 Media discourse evaluation

It's possible to review shifts in both traditional and social media to identify if the issue is being communicated about in ways that align with the new story. Again, this involves reviewing samples communications from before and after reframing efforts began. Social media listening tools can be used to support this process.

### #4 Political discourse evaluation

Using Hansard records of speeches and statements in parliament in Westminster, Edinburgh, Cardiff or Stormont. it's possible to assess any before and after shifts in political discourse on an issue.

### #5 Cultural discourse evaluation

Over a longer period, shifts in broader cultural content from film, to TV and music can be evaluated - assessing not only if the issue is being talked about, but if the framing of the issue has shifted in ways aligned with the new story.

These methods can be used in combination to get a complete picture of how the stories being told are changing.

## 2. Changing the way people think

Changing the story is not an end in itself. Changing the story is one way to shift the way people think about an issue – bringing one set of ideas to the fore and backgrounding others.

The questions evaluations can address range from assessing the effects of creative campaign execution on thinking through to long-term mindsets shifts.

### Evaluation methods

#### #1 Campaign evaluation

Large scale surveys can be used to identify if exposure to a specific well-framed campaign creative leads to shifts in attitudes and support for policy when compared to a control group.

For outdoor creatives (from billboards to campaign stunts and art installations), this can be combined this with on-the-street interviews to assess the impact of the campaign in situ.

This information is combined with traditional campaign data (i.e. clicks, signatures, attendees, actions) to generate a complete picture of the effectiveness of the campaign in shifting attitudes and driving action.

#### #2 Attitude tracking

And beyond a specific campaign, large scale nationally representative surveys can assess public attitudes towards the issue and support for policy changes as relevant. Measuring attitudes using the same survey tool at different points in time can allow an assessment of any changes.

#### #3 Mindsets tracking

While attitude tracking will show what people think at a given moment – it's mindsets data that will reveal how people are thinking and the extent to which these deeper ways of reasoning are changing.

FrameWorks has developed a tool to track mindsets over time (see Moving Mindsets). Mindsets are the deep patterns of thinking that sit beneath surface attitudes and opinions. When there are shifts in mindsets across the public, that's when culture change is taking root. A longitudinal tracking survey can monitor and evaluate shifts in mindsets over time and reveal if efforts to shift culture are working. It can also show how the issue relates to ways of thinking on other issues – opening up new avenues for partnerships and creating opportunities to build alliances for social progress.

## 3. Changing policy and practice

Effective narrative change lays the groundwork which enables real-world changes. A range of methods can be used to assess these effects on policy, practice and people's lives. Given the range of factors that can contribute to changes in policy and practice, it can be difficult to isolate the effects of narrative change in creating impact, so identifying a pattern of correlation is frequently an appropriate expectation.

### Evaluation methods

#### #1 Ripple evaluation

Ripple effects mapping is a participatory method for measuring impact that can capture intended and unintended consequences of change efforts. This method is particularly useful for evaluating complex efforts such as narrative change.

In group workshop-style sessions, key stakeholders are brought together to visually map action and impacts. This includes those with lived experience of an issue. The pathways that have led to the most significant impact are identified.

#### #2 Outcome evaluation

A full outcome evaluation is also possible involving, for example, a combination of one-to-one interviews with stakeholders, mapping of the policy and practice landscape over time to identify shifts, discourse evaluation and attitudinal and mindset shift tracking.

### About FrameWorks UK

FrameWorks UK is a not-for-profit communications research organisation. We work with mission-driven organisations to communicate about social issues in ways that will create change.

Our research shows how people understand social issues, and we use this knowledge to develop and test strategic communications to help organisations shape public conversation. We're the sister organisation of the FrameWorks Institute in the US.

Change the story. Change the world.

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