

NCPC Summer Institute for Systems Change

Session 4: How can you design systems change strategies?

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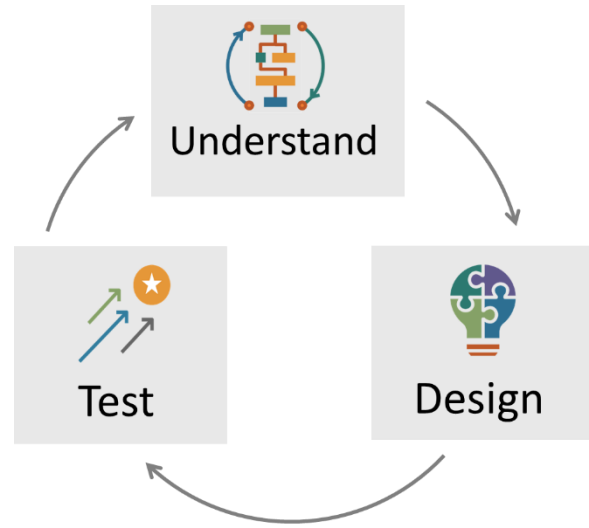
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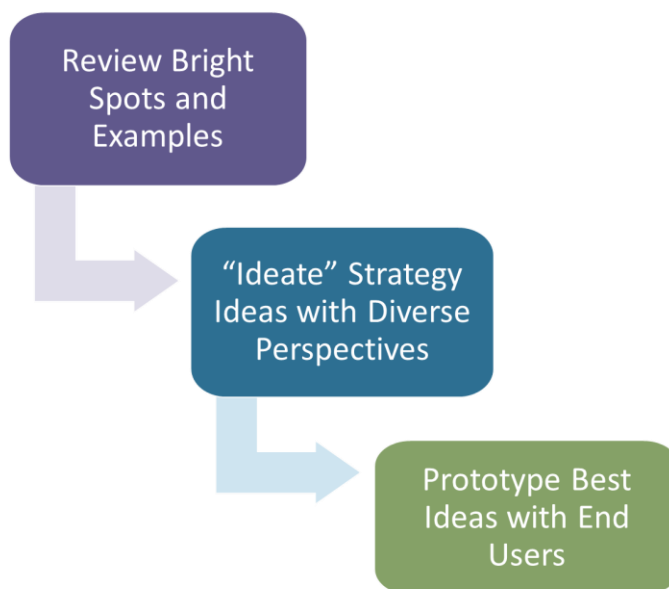
Introduction

This session describes processes and tips for how to design powerful systems change strategies to address leverage point root causes affecting your outcomes. This strategy design phase is part of a larger continuous action learning cycle where groups work to:

- 1) **UNDERSTAND** system conditions or “leverage points” that are helping and hindering outcomes for children and families.
- 2) **DESIGN** strategies to amplify what is working and address what is not.
- 3) **TEST** out these strategies in real world situations.
- 4) Gather rapid/short cycle feedback to **UNDERSTAND** whether strategies are working and why, so they can be either scaled or re-**DESIGNED**.



Example Strategy Design Process



Review Bright Spots and Examples

Draw On Local Bright Spots

A “**bright spot**” is a micro example of where local individuals, groups, or organizations have figured out how to successfully address a problem despite the odds. Bright spots usually result from people informally experimenting with problem solving and often involve innovative ideas that challenge conventional approaches.⁹

Bright spots are important because they can give you clues about how your efforts can address similar problems. Here are some example bright spots that could inform how you design strategies:

A family living under 200% FPL is able to keep their children healthy, despite limited resources.

A home visiting program is able to reach families who typically avoid engaging in the service delivery system.

A team of staff is able to coordinate their programming with other organizations, despite the barriers.

Every community and region has bright spots. The key is to discover them and learn how and why the solution worked so you can use this information to help design your own strategies.

Have diverse partners – including families and direct staff – use the questions below to ask about bright spots with their peers and look for them in their daily lives. Bring these bright spots into your strategy design process.

Bright Spot Questions

1. What are examples of where local individuals and/or organizations problem solved similar issues as our prioritized root causes?
2. How and why did their strategies work? What can we learn to inform our own strategies? What adaptations might be necessary for these ideas to work in our region?

Draw On Strategy Examples Across the Nation

In some cases, other communities may have developed and/or tested strategies related to your prioritized leverage point root causes. These examples can be helpful in designing your own strategies and are often found in reports, news stories, evaluations, journal articles, etc..

Ask partners if they have come across any strategies in other states or regions that are relevant to your selected outcomes and prioritized leverage point root causes. Bring these examples into your strategy design process.

Questions to Draw on Examples

1. What strategies have other communities used to address our prioritized leverage points?
2. How and why did their strategies work? What can we learn to inform our own strategies? What adaptations might be needed for our region?

See this [Ecosystem Strategy Menu](#) for examples

Strategies to Shift Mindsets

Strategy Ideas	Details and Considerations
Foster conversations and experiences to raise critical consciousness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage people to talk about change goals during natural interactions. Have people talk about your change goals and proposed strategies during staff meetings, local collaborative meetings, professional development, service interactions with parents, etc.¹ Help normalize that change is needed. • Embed relevant training and experiences at meetings, orientations, or ongoing professional development. Engage professionals in first-hand experiences: the service delivery system or support a firm sustainably shift mindsets, research shows combined with other efforts to align goals, d with the new mindsets/attitudes.² • Use equity assessment tools to help shift m equity impact assessment tool or an organic create a consciousness around equity in the • Create safe, facilitated spaces to discuss or facilitate to help individuals identify comm navigate or align their conflicting mindsets
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use advocacy approaches to shift the narra this guide, and this article for ideas and rec • Develop and disseminate customized mess experiences, identities, and preferences. Fr widely held values, beliefs, and personal ex values; and are inclusive and flexible enoug Emphasize the necessity, benefits, and fees which entities in the region have adopted yo and this article for more ideas. • Use multiple media channels to get messag billboards, radio, newspaper articles and let Work with local partners – including parent media channels to best reach your audience • Engage champions. Support and provide op staff, trusted community members, and pan populations to speak about the need to shif strategies; focus on champions who already talking points to help these individuals shan
Increase motivation through recognizing early adopters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pilot strategies with powerful and respected demonstrate initial small wins and build bu region/state.³ • Provide public recognition of settings or indi approaches. For example, recognize setting communications, or at local community eve

Strategies to Shift Goals

Strategy Ideas	Details and Considerations
Develop shared goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage partners in an Ecosystem Assessment process to identify shared process can bring together multiple perspectives to understand and priori ecosystem conditions affecting the 2016 America's Theory of Change. Adapt Outcomes for local children and families and can be used to identify share goals. Ensure goals are ambitious enough to motivate action yet achievab contact and available resources.^{4,5,6} • Expand goals to include the focus areas of other potential partners. Identf selected outcomes for children and families from your priority populations agencies, initiatives, and organizations representing these sectors to see if group's goals could expand to accommodate their goals as a way to devel strengthen your partnership.^{4,5} • Promote mutual understanding of goals among people with different mind interpretations.⁷ ECCAPLE Some partners from a group were concerned (including unregulated child care settings within their change goals related increasing families' access to child care would diminish quality standards initially opposed. Through dialogue, partners clarified how their goals sou high-quality standards (while ensuring they promote equity and cultural re while working to build the capacity of unregulated settings to reach these This helped to provide mutual understanding and allowed the group to mc with their shared goals.
Create alignment with shared goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Align existing goals, strategic plans, and mission statements with new sha maximize potential synergies and prevent goals from interfering with each • Put shared goals on local meeting agendas used by groups and partner or to increase people's attention to aligning the work around the shared goal • Encourage local and state funders to set new expectations related to the v by referencing them in outcome expectations, RFPs, and grant application criteria. • Help leaders demonstrate their priority for new shared goals to help shift m mindsets.¹ • Get written commitments from local partners to adopt shared goals.² • Create an organizational culture that supports change and learning to enc to value and adopt shared goals.¹⁶
Embed shared goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add expectations into job roles/responsibilities and job performance crita example, embed expectations for practices, behaviors, or changes that su shared goals, like engaging parent leaders in decision-making.¹ • Use an "health in all policies" approach. The Health in All Policies (HiAP) ap encourages decision-makers across multiple sectors and levels of govern embed a goal of promoting health into all decisions. Adapt and apply thi help embed your shared goals into regional and state decision-making ab processes, resource allocations, and programs.¹⁷

Strategies to Shift Decision-Making

Strategy Ideas	Details and Considerations
Support power building approaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support community organizing and power building that aim to put parents/caregivers with lived experience in decision-making roles where they set the agenda and gain power over how ecosystem policies are designed and implemented. It can take on many forms, such as voter outreach, participating in town halls, school board, or city council meetings, supporting mobilization efforts, training advocates to share their stories in ways that connect to larger policies and systems; and help parents and providers run for office. Cited from the playbook (see page 20 for a case example of Mothering Justice's power building work). See Michigan's Great Start Parent Coalitions as an example. • Help relevant employees (including service providers) build power. For example, child care providers created the Child Care Providers United union in California that successfully advocated to changes in state subsidy policies. • Support coalition-based power building that brings together organizations, initiatives, and groups to advocate for changes around shared causes, even allies who may not agree with each other 100 percent of the time on other issues. Cited from the playbook, see p. 44-52 for details.
Embed new decision-making roles for parents/caregivers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embed new decision-making roles for parents/caregivers from priority populations within organizations and initiatives related to selecting strategic priorities, developing services and supports, designing policies/practices, and hiring.¹⁸ Make sure to build needed capacities of parents/caregivers and professionals to ensure they can effectively engage in these processes.^{20,21} • Invite parents and caregivers to join organizations' board of directors to directly inform decision-making processes. • Create parent leader advisory councils to provide opportunities for parent leaders to give input and feedback on local decisions.¹⁹ Councils can inform the decisions of one or more organizations across a community. • Provide supports to help parents engage in leadership opportunities, such as transportation, food, and childcare.²⁰ Consider planning meetings at locations that already have childcare support in place, like churches. • Embed meaningful family engagement indicators in state standards and quality rating systems across levels (Illies 2020) Examples: 2016 HHS-EP Policy Statement on Family Engagement or Parenting Matters: Subsequent Parents of Children Ages 0-5 • Implement a group model where organizations and agencies can jointly invest in — and share access to — family engagement coordinators or specialists who provide meaningful family engagement opportunities, connect families to community services as needed, conduct staff training, and engage in consultation with administrators on how to embed family engagement across programmatic operations. (Illies 2020)
Embed new decision-making roles for parents/caregivers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help organizations embed internal opportunities (e.g., during staff meetings) for relevant staff to provide input and engage in decision-making. • Develop action teams engaging direct staff from cross-sector organizations who are relevant to prioritized leverage points in learning, decision-making, and action.²²

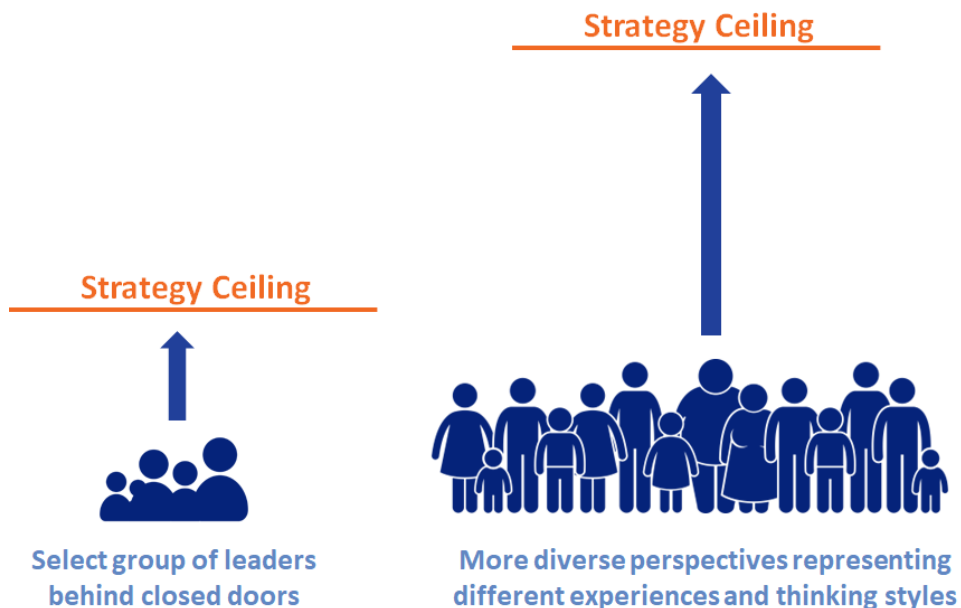
“Ideate” Strategy Ideas with Diverse Perspectives

Why Engage Diverse Perspectives in Strategy Design?

Strategies that are designed behind closed doors by a select group of system decision-makers are often constrained by the assumptions, experiences, and biases of those decision-makers.³ In turn, the resulting strategies are often not as creative as they could be, do not address the real issues that families are facing, are less likely to fit the regional context, and are ultimately less effective.⁴

Engaging diverse perspectives – especially families with lived experience – in the strategy design process can lead to more effective strategies by promoting:⁵

- **responsiveness** to families’ needs, preferences, and dreams as well as regional contexts
- **families’ power and influence** in decisions affecting their lives and communities
- **more creative** problem solving
- **community partnerships** and collective efficacy



Which Perspectives Should You Engage in Strategy Design?

Who to engage in strategy design depends in part on the problem you are attempting to solve. Overall, aim to engage people who:





- **Deeply understand** – preferably from lived experience – your outcomes and prioritized leverage point root causes.
- **Have experience** addressing similar outcomes and leverage point root causes – even if they are from other unrelated sectors.
- **Are out-of-the-box thinkers** who can challenge others to move beyond the status quo.
- **Are potential “end-users”** who will carry out or benefit from strategies addressing the problem.



TIP






Think strategically about who is most relevant to engage in your strategy design process – don’t just rely on the “usual suspects”

Consider the following perspectives when determining who to engage in your strategy design process:

 <p>Families in the region who have lived experience with your outcomes and prioritized leverage point root causes, and who are potential end users of the strategies.</p> <p>Consider focusing on families from priority populations who are experiencing the greatest inequities related to your outcomes.</p>	 <p>Direct service providers from cross-sector organizations who are working on issues related to your outcomes and prioritized leverage point root causes, and who are potential end users of the strategies.</p> <p>Consider sectors such as early care and education, K-12 education, health, housing, human services, economic development, transportation, etc.</p>	 <p>Leaders and Funders within cross-sector organizations and entities who are working on issues related to your outcomes and prioritized leverage point root causes, and who are potential end users of the strategies.</p> <p>Consider leaders across multiple organizational levels (e.g., directors and mid-level supervisors). Also consider local elected officials.</p>	 <p>Community Members with a relevant perspective on your outcomes and prioritized leverage point root causes, and who are potential end users of the strategies.</p> <p>Consider community members representing faith-based groups, businesses, neighborhood associations, peer networks, community leaders, etc.</p>
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How Could You Engage These Perspectives in Strategy Design?

Develop feasible and culturally responsive methods to engage diverse perspectives in designing strategies. See the examples below for ideas. Remember to reimburse families for their time and effort and provide other needed supports to participate (e.g., transportation, child care, meals, etc.).

METHODS	Families	Service Providers	Leaders/Funders	Community Members
<p>Design Workshop or Community Café </p> <p>Bring together diverse partners to design strategies together.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Choose accessible locations (e.g., libraries, churches, parks, etc.) and accessible times that work for all participants (especially working families). Provide needed participation supports (e.g., child care, food, etc.) and adequately prepare everyone to maximize their engagement in the meeting. Carefully consider how you group participants at the workshop given current power dynamics. If extreme power dynamics exist, consider using affinity groups. See case example on next page for an idea for the design workshop format. 			
<p>Naturally occurring meetings or interactions </p> <p>Ask people strategy design questions (directly or through a host) at naturally occurring meetings, service visits, interactions, and/or community settings.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Home visits Play groups Support groups Post-worship service Libraries In waiting rooms School open houses Local events Parks Laundromats 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff meetings Supervisor meetings Professional network meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaborative meetings Professional network meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local events Neighborhood Associations Association meetings (e.g., chamber of commerce)
<p>Peer Liaisons </p> <p>Prepare families and/or staff to engage their peers in strategy design and report back what they learn.</p>	<p>Equip families to ask questions with other families in their neighborhoods or social networks.</p>	<p>Equip staff to ask questions with other staff within their organization or professional networks.</p>	<p>Equip leaders to ask questions with their peers using their professional networks.</p>	<p>Equip relevant partners to ask questions with their peers.</p>
<p>Interviews or focus groups </p> <p>Set up separate one-on-one or group strategy design sessions (in person or video call).</p>	<p>Use phone/video calls or schedule in-person conversations at accessible locations like libraries, churches, parks, etc.</p>	<p>Use phone/video calls or schedule in-person conversations at accessible locations.</p>	<p>Use phone/video calls or schedule in-person conversations at accessible locations</p>	<p>Use phone/video calls or schedule in-person conversations at accessible locations like libraries, churches, parks, etc.</p>
<p>Surveys </p> <p>Ask specific strategy design questions through paper or online surveys.</p>	<p>Hand out printed surveys through any of the methods described above.</p> <p>Send out electronic survey links through list-serves, group contact lists, social media, etc.</p>			

Example Resident Design Workshop

The San Diego Unified School District partnered with local community organizations to engage 120 people - including diverse families and students representing six languages, teachers, principals, district staff, and community partners - in a day-long workshop to design ways for family-school-community partnerships to support student learning and take collective action.

To support family and youth leadership roles and the legitimacy of their perspectives, parents and youth spoke in their own language while educators listened in (without interrupting) to the real-time translated conversations using headsets. This approach not only empowered the families and youth, but also shifted the mindsets of educators who had never heard these families' perspectives in such a direct way. The group reported this process helped to build their trust and shift their beliefs about each other.⁶

The image below shows some of the actual notes coming out of this meeting. See the [following website](#) for more details on how they made this workshop a success.

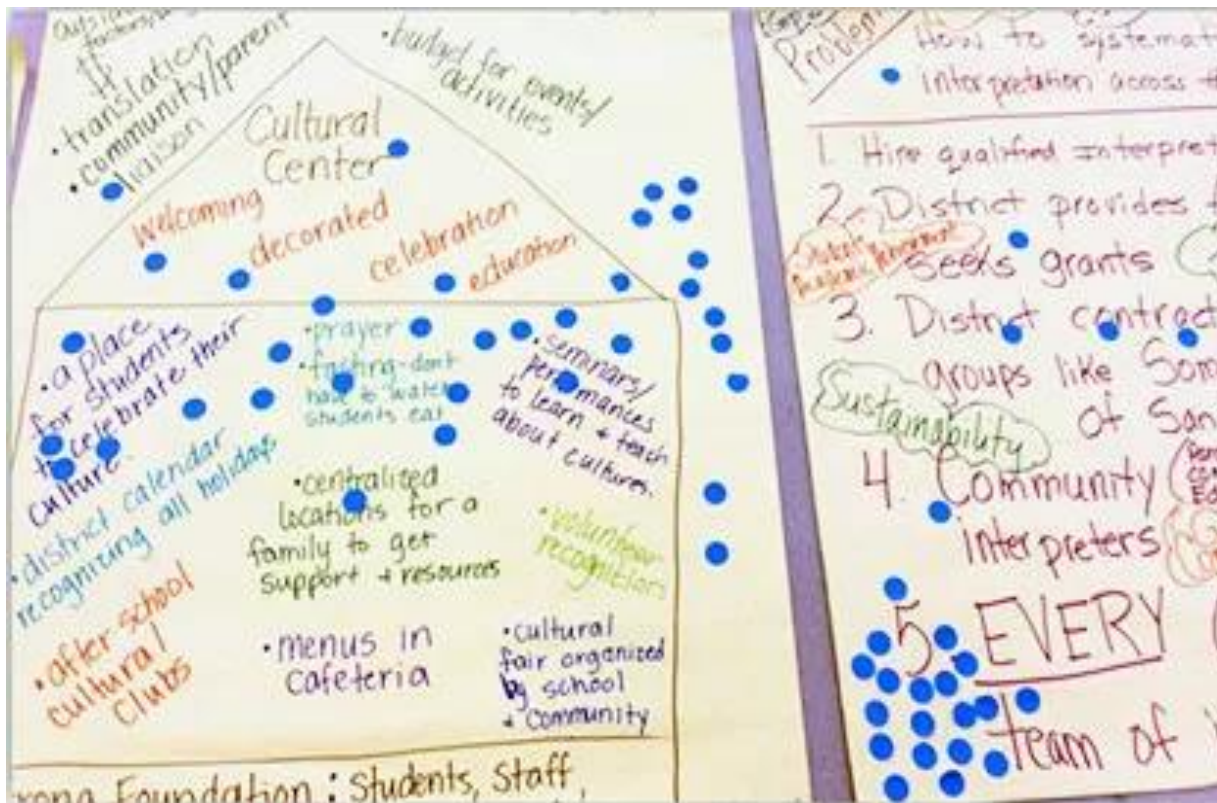


Image from focusonface.wixsite.com

How Do You Share Power within Design Processes?

Engaging diverse perspectives in the strategy design process can provide more equitable opportunities for everyone to influence conditions impacting their lives and communities.⁷ However, authentically engaging diverse perspectives – especially parent leaders representing priority populations - requires individuals who typically drive decision-making to share power.

Making decisions with others can be difficult, especially for those who haven't had much experience sharing power in their professional roles. The key is to not assume power sharing partnerships will happen, but instead to build the conditions for it to take hold and grow.⁴

Use the assessment areas below to identify what conditions your group may need to put in place *before* engaging diverse perspectives in designing ecosystem strategies to promote authentic power sharing.

“Community change partnerships exist within local realities that privilege some people over others, creating conditions that members may have to acknowledge and disrupt in order to reach their goals for more productive, healthier, successful communities”

~Kimberly LeChasseur²⁵

Promoting Shared Power

To what extent are the following conditions in place within your group?

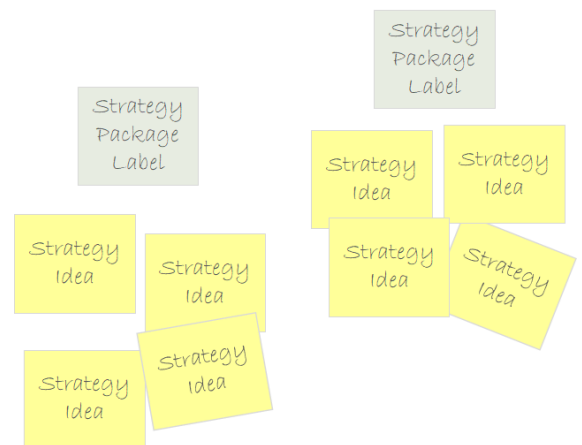
Mindsets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared value for people’s lived experience <i>in addition to</i> traditional research. • Shared belief that diverse perspectives can enhance the strategy design process.
Goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expectations that partners should share power within decision-making, along with processes to ensure accountability.
Decision-Making Processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Balanced decision-making processes that provide opportunities for often marginalized perspectives – such as parent leaders representing priority populations - to equitably influence final decisions (e.g., parents are given extra sticky dot votes during prioritizing processes, meetings engage skilled facilitators, etc.).
Policies and Practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policies and procedures to compensate families for their time and provide needed supports to participate (e.g., transportation, child care, food, etc.).
Connections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication practices that ensure information reaches and is accessible to all decision-making partners, especially those representing priority populations.
Human Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • System professionals have skills and knowledge in cultural responsiveness and are able to identify implicit biases operating within themselves and others. • Parent leaders have the skills (e.g., communication skills) and knowledge (e.g., of relevant ecosystems) they need to equitably engage in group discussions and decision-making processes.

Engage People in “Ideating” Strategy Ideas

Design thinkers argue that the best way to come up with good strategy ideas is to generate *a lot* of ideas.⁵ Even outlandish ideas can help spark new thinking and are encouraged as part of the strategy design process.

The process steps below are adapted from IDEO⁸ and Plattner⁵ and can be used to engage diverse perspectives in your strategy design process. The steps can be easily modified to fit your context.

1. Have small groups of 5-6 people stand around a flip chart (or in a virtual breakout room with a live whiteboard like [Jamboard](#)), each with sticky notes and a marker. Provide a handout with your outcomes and prioritized leverage point root causes that each team is strategizing around as a reference.
2. Give small group members 3 minutes to silently write or draw out their own strategy ideas - one idea per sticky note. Remind them to include enough details so others will know how to take action on their ideas after the meeting.
3. Have small group members share their ideas as they add them to the flip chart (or a live whiteboard like [Jamboard](#)). Remind people to listen carefully and build on each other’s ideas, writing each new idea on a separate sticky note. Emphasize that even outlandish ideas can help the creative brainstorming process, so there should be no judgements or critiques at this point.
4. After about 15 minutes, ask small groups to cluster any strategy idea sticky notes they think could work together into “strategy packages.” Remind them this doesn’t have to be perfect.
5. Have teams reflect on their strategy packages and consider what else might need to be added or moved around to make them more effective.
6. Have teams finish by creating a simple label for each strategy package on a different color sticky note to make it easier to refer to the strategy packages.



Tips for Designing Ecosystem Strategies

We all aim to design effective strategies. However, many groups never achieve their goals because their strategies are simply not powerful enough to shift ecosystem conditions and create sustainable changes.¹⁰ The strategy tips in this section were developed from research and theory on systems change. When used together, the tips can help groups create even more powerful strategies to help achieve their goals.

The acronym for the four design tips is **REST** because powerful strategies have a greater potential to break out of the exhausting cycle of short term fixes and more sustainably transform ecosystems in ways that create more equitably outcomes for children and families.



Strategy Design Process Tip

Have partners pick one of these strategy tips (e.g., draw a slip of paper out of a hat) to “represent” during a strategy design or problem solving discussion. Partners can ask questions to help the group apply their selected tip.



Shift **R**oot Causes

Address multiple, underlying root causes contributing to the problem



Advance **E**quity

Ensure strategies reach and benefit those experiencing the greatest inequities



Create **S**elf-Sustaining Solutions

Embed change processes into new or existing structures, processes, and/or operations



Tend the Soil for Implementation

Get the system ready so your strategies can flourish and grow

Tip 1: Shift Root Causes

Root causes are conditions that explain *why* a problem situation is happening. Often times the leverage point root causes you prioritize during the ecosystem assessment still have some underlying root causes affecting them that need to be taken into consideration during strategy design.

Strategies are more likely to bring about positive, equitable outcomes for children and families if they directly address the root causes of system problems and leverage points.^{10,11} Why? Because strategies that fail to address root causes typically do not bring about lasting changes – even if there are some initial positive results - and often create unintended consequences that make the situation worse or increase social inequities.¹²

Designing strategies to shift root causes involves the following 3 steps:

1. Clarify prioritized leverage points
2. Identify underlying root causes
3. Design strategies to shift multiple root causes through a pathway

Clarify Prioritized Leverage Point Root Causes

Sometimes prioritized leverage points from your ecosystem assessment aren't yet ready for strategy design because they are too vague. Key details about the *who, what, where, when, and how* are missing that make it difficult to design strategies with enough specificity to change what needs to be changed.

Take this root cause chain for example:

PARTNERSHIP OUTCOME: # of/disparities in children accessing high-quality ECE
COALITION OUTCOME: # of/disparities in parents with access to living wage jobs

ROOT CAUSE THEME:
Some local organizational policies and practices are hindering access

ROOT CAUSE THEME:
Many organizations are not authentically engaging families in their internal decision making processes

It's unclear what policies and practices are hindering access, which organizations aren't engaging families, and which types of families aren't being engaged. Clarifying these details can help partners design more actionable, focused strategies.

The process of clarifying leverage points can be more effective when done collaboratively with regional or state partners, particularly those partners who are directly involved with the prioritized leverage point root causes.

In some cases, this might involve staff gathering some additional information behind the scenes and setting up individual meetings with particular partners to build their awareness and buy-in *before* the clarification process begins.

Reveal Underlying Root Causes

Most leverage point root causes prioritized from the ecosystem assessment process have additional underlying root causes that are driving the current situation and need to be exposed and understood. Without exposing these additional root causes, it may not be clear what exactly to design a strategy around without making a lot of assumptions (which rarely leads to good strategies).¹²

Refer to the root cause chain on the prior page. It's difficult to design a strategy for this situation because it's not clear *why* organizations are not authentically engaging families in their decision-making processes about internal policies and practices.

This ambiguity is a signal that you should ask the question **WHY**.

For example, you could ask the following question:

“Why are these local organizations not engaging these families in their decision-making about these types of policies and practices?”

Below are examples of underlying root causes that could be exposed using this question.

Some leaders don't value giving parents from priority populations influence in organizational decision-making.

Some leaders need additional skills, knowledge, and connections to authentically engage parents from priority populations in their decision-making processes.

Most organizations' decision-making meetings are difficult for parents from priority populations to attend given location, time, childcare, and personal costs.

Some parents need additional skills, knowledge, and connections to effectively engage in these decision-making processes.

Once these underlying root causes are revealed, you can design your strategy ideas to address them.

NOTE: if you created a system map to visualize your ecosystem assessment data, add in these new root causes and connect them to the prioritized leverage point on your map.



Strategy Design Process Tip

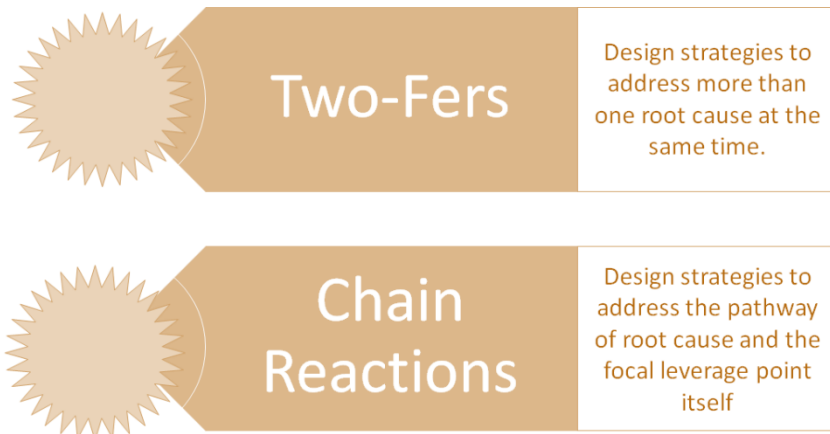
You can stop asking “why” when there aren't any more critical reasons why a problem or issue is happening, and/or the problem or issue would be resolved if you were to address all of the root causes you have identified.

Design Strategies to Directly Shift Multiple Root Causes through a Pathway

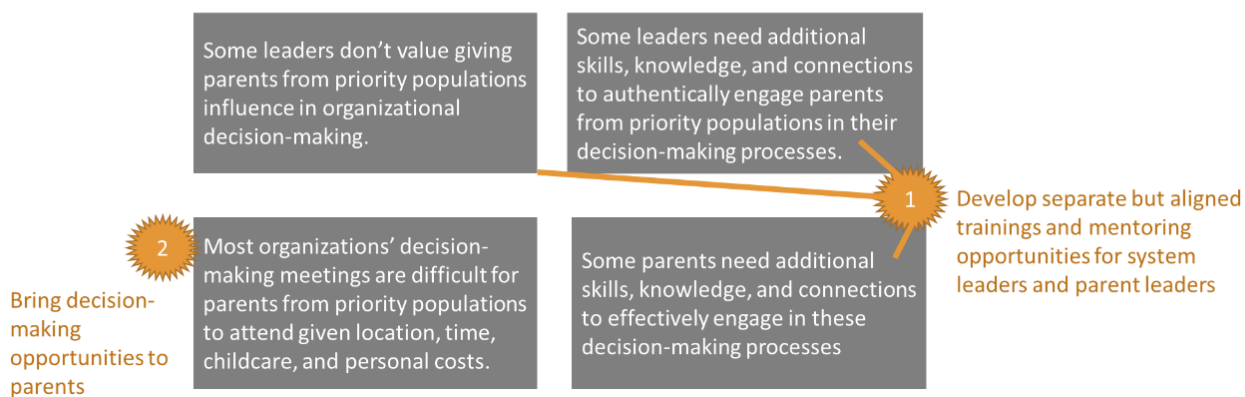
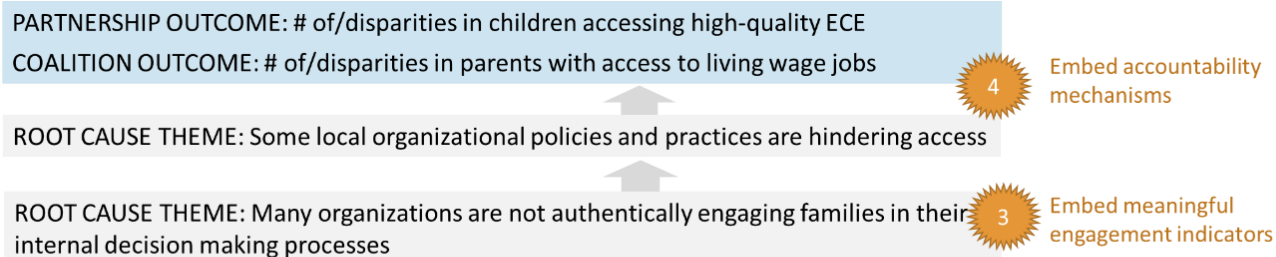
Often groups focus their strategies on a single root cause in isolation. Unfortunately, system problems are maintained by multiple root causes working together.¹¹ If these other root causes are ignored, it is unlikely that your strategies will be strong enough to ultimately improve your outcomes.¹²

To have a bigger impact, try expanding your strategies to **simultaneously address multiple root causes as part of a chain reaction to the outcome/inequity.** Think of this less as a single strategy but more as a **“strategy package.”**

Look for ways to create two-fers and chain reactions with your strategies, and periodically pause during this process to ensure your strategies are aligned and building off each other.



EXAMPLE



? How does the above strategy package create two-fers and a chain reaction up to the leverage point?

TIP 2: Advance Equity

Use an equity-focused “human-centered” design approach to center your priority populations’ unique circumstances, barriers, and aspirations into strategy design. Using this approach will help prevent your strategies from *unintentionally* increasing social inequities instead of decreasing them.¹³

Ask Equity Design Questions

One way to center equity is to ask powerful questions during the strategy design process to ensure your ideas will ultimately reach, benefit, and enhance the lives of children and families from priority populations.¹⁵ Use the questions below adapted from Phalen et al.¹⁴, Agic¹⁵, and Powell et al.¹⁶ to design your strategies to advance equity.

1

How can you ensure your strategies will **REACH** and **BENEFIT** your priority populations given their unique needs and circumstances?

2

Will your strategies create any **UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES** for your priority populations? How will you manage this?

3

Will your strategies increase your priority populations’ social, economic, and political **POWER** and **CAPACITY**?



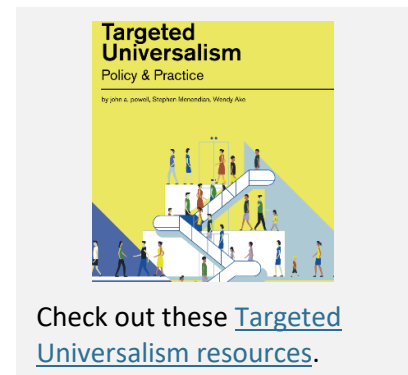
Strategy Design Process Tip

Try also embedding these questions into your learning and evaluation processes so you can track whether your strategies are successfully advancing equity as they are implemented.

Draw on a Targeted Universalism Approach

Often when people think about creating change, they design strategies aimed at improving outcomes for everyone. These are referred to as “universal strategies.” For example, offering parent leadership training opportunities to help all parents in a region increase their leadership skills can be considered a universal strategy.

Unfortunately, even well intentioned universal strategies often *increase* social inequities because they are not designed to meet the unique needs and constraints of people with the least resources (e.g., time, money, social connections, access to information, skills, etc.).¹⁴ In turn, people with more resources tend to more easily access available opportunities (referred to as “opportunity hoarding”) and in return experience the associated benefits.¹⁷



The **Targeted universalism** approach helps to address this unintended situation. The approach guides strategies to FIRST meet the needs and constraints of people with the fewest resources and experiencing the greatest social inequities, and THEN expand the strategy to also improve outcomes for all other groups.¹⁶ This helps to ensure strategies are designed to reach and benefit people most in need – as well as a broader range of people in the region/state.

EXAMPLE

Universal Strategy:

Create parent leadership training opportunities within the region.

Limitations: parents with greater resources (e.g., time, money, connections, access to information, skills, etc.) are more likely to access these opportunities than parents with fewer resources.

Targeted Universalism Strategy:

Create parent leadership training opportunities within the region that include:

- times, locations/virtual platforms, and languages accessible to priority families
- facilitators representing priority families
- targeted outreach and referral
- group norms to reduce discrimination

Targeted Universalism Strategy Design Questions

Adapted from powell et al.¹⁶

1. How can we design this strategy so it takes into account the unique needs and constraints of individuals experiencing the greatest social inequities in our region?
2. How can we expand upon these strategy ideas so they simultaneously benefit as many additional people in the region as possible?

TIP 3: Create Self-Sustaining Strategies

Changing ecosystems involves taking actions to *transform* the way things operate, not continually plugging a hole.¹¹ Unfortunately, our tendency as humans is to reactively create short-term strategies to the problems we encounter instead of designing self-sustaining solutions.¹²

The table below shows examples highlighting the difference between short-term and more self-sustaining strategies to address root causes:

Root Cause	Short-Term Strategy	More Self-Sustaining Strategy
Information on livable wage employment opportunities are not reaching all priority population parents	Put on an annual employment information fair Limitation: the fair won't reach families who did not attend, including new families coming into community after the fair	Partner with trusted, community-based organizations (e.g., salons, faith-based groups, WIC offices, etc.) to have their staff refer parents they encounter to this resource. Develop and/or leverage existing virtual platforms where priority populations can access social networks and information linking them to livable wage employment.
Child care workforce wages are not high enough to attract or retain staff.	Advocate for temporary state-funded wage supplements to the child care workforce. Limitation: funding runs out, requires constant advocacy	Pass a municipal government amendment or millage to sustainably allocate funds (e.g., from increased sales tax on beer) to provide direct compensation supplements to the child care workforce.

How do you design self-sustaining strategies?

If the strategy requires ongoing efforts, staff time, and resources to sustain the change you're trying to make...explore how to re-imagine the strategy to embed the change process into new or existing processes, policies, procedures, operations, goals, meeting agendas, protocols, or curriculums.

Consider the design questions to the right.

Design Questions:

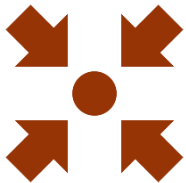
Does this strategy require ongoing efforts, staff time, and/or resources to sustain the change we're trying to make?

If yes...how can we embed this change process into new or existing structures, processes, and/or operations?

Additional Self-Sustaining Strategy Ideas

Consider how to use and adapt the following ideas to make your strategies even more self-sustaining.

EMBED elements of your strategy or change process into:



- **Annual training, higher education courses, and orientations** (e.g., for staff, collaborative members, councils, post-secondary students, etc.), including CEU training.^{27,28}
- **Intake procedures and protocols.** For example, embed new assessment questions and referral information into intake procedures
- **Handbooks or toolkits.**²⁹
- **Reminders or prompts** to use new practices.²⁸
- **Default policy requiring people to opt out vs. opt in**³³
- **Paperwork.** For example, add information on how to use WIC vouchers into the vouchers themselves.³⁰
- **Staff roles and job descriptions** to support new practices.²⁸
- **Annual staff review evaluation criteria.**²⁸
- **Policies and regulations**
- **Voter-approved levies/mileages**

Create INCENTIVES through:



- **Reduced fees** if person/entity adopts new strategies/changes (or add fees if they don't).²⁸ This could also include tax incentives.
- **Organizational perks** (e.g., prime parking spots, job promotions, etc.) to reward staff who adopt new strategies/changes.³¹
- **Vouchers** (that can be redeemed for retail goods and services, opportunity to win prizes, etc.) for adopting new strategies/changes.²⁸
- **Encourage funders to prioritize grant applications** that demonstrate commitment to new strategies/changes.

Reduce DISINCENTIVES through:



- **Streamlined or restructured work processes** that reduce time burdens so staff can more easily adopt new changes within their current workflow.³²
- **Expanded billing reimbursement categories** (embedded into billing systems) that allow providers and organizations to get reimbursed for adopting the new strategies/changes.²⁸
- **Removal of conflicting incentives.** For example, incentives for meeting a quota (number of clients) vs. providing high-quality services that benefit residents.²⁸

TIP 4: Tend the Soil for Implementation

Because systems change strategies are designed to shift the status quo, the existing system will often push back on these the changes they are trying to create.¹⁰ No matter how well you design your strategies, if you don't take active measures to get the system ready for implementation you will most likely encounter resistance, delays, and loss of momentum in your efforts.²⁰

Design Questions:

1. What could cause this strategy to fail?
2. What has to be in place for this strategy to work?

Adapted from Chang, 2019#

Instead of just “letting implementation happen,” successful change efforts actively support implementation before strategies are launched.²¹ Think of this like tilling or tending the soil to get the system ready so your strategies can flourish and grow.

What should you pay attention to when tending the soil for implementation?

Consider the same ecosystem conditions you explored through the Ecosystem Assessment process (see image below). In fact, you may have even uncovered some possible implementation barriers through the assessment process that you could bring forward into strategy design.



Tip: Tend the Soil across Ecological Layers

The more you “tend the soil” across different ecological layers, the more likely your strategy will be implemented and sustained.²⁶ Consider potential ecosystem implementation barriers across different:

- **Vertical** layers within organizations (director, management, and staff) and broader ecosystems (state, region, community, organizations, families).
- **Horizontal** layers within organizations (e.g., departments, teams, etc.) and ecosystems (cross-sector organizations and initiatives).

Anticipate and Address Potential Implementation Barriers

Identifying and addressing implementation barriers BEFORE you launch your strategy can significantly increase the likelihood of your success.²²

Talk with relevant perspectives – especially decision-makers and end-users listed in the box on the right – to identify what might get in the way of people’s **motivation, ability, and opportunity** to carry out strategies.²³ Use the questions below to help guide these conversations.

To anticipate implementation barriers, talk with end users who will:

- Decide whether or not their organization or group will help carry out the strategy
- Inform staff and colleagues about the strategy and prepare them to carry it out
- Carry out activities related to the strategy
- Benefit from or be changed by the strategy

Design Questions: What could get in the way of people’s...		
Motivation to implement or benefit from this strategy?	Ability to implement this strategy?	Opportunity to implement this strategy?
<p>MINDSETS: What current mindsets could interfere with people’s motivation to adopt the strategy? Do people see the strategy as necessary, feasible, and beneficial? Do they see the meaning and values attached to the strategy as compatible with their own values (e.g., value of personal autonomy)? What policy mandates and/or incentives are needed to motivate implementation?</p> <p>GOALS: To what extent do the goals and outcomes driving groups and organizations in this region/state support or interfere with this strategy? To what extent are there incentives in place to implement the strategies, such as performance reviews, promotions, increased recognition?</p>	<p>CONNECTIONS: What information, referrals, or resources need to flow between people or organizations for this strategy to work? Are these flows in place? Are there delays?</p> <p>HUMAN AND FINANCIAL RESOURCES: Are people in place with the right skills, knowledge, and relationships to carry out or benefit from these strategies? Do groups and organizations have adequate financial resources to carry out these strategies?</p> <p>ENVIRONMENT RESOURCES: Do organizations have needed technology to carry out these strategies? Are needed community resources in place to support the strategies?</p>	<p>DECISION-MAKING: How does the way decisions are made – including the information used, perspectives engaged, and questions asked – affect the implementation of this strategy?</p> <p>POLICY AND PRACTICE: Do the strategies fit into people’s existing procedures and workflows? What current policies, practices and procedures might get in the way of people implementing these strategies? Which are still needed to support the strategies?</p> <p>PROGRAM COMPONENTS: How compatible are these strategies with how services or programs are currently designed or delivered? What needs to change?</p>

Adapted from Damschroder et al., 2009; Holt & Armanekis, 2007; Foster-Fishman et al., 2007; Foster-Fishman & Watson, 2012; Michie, et al, 2014

Prototype Best Ideas with End Users

After ideating strategies, vet the best of your ideas with additional potential end-users. An end-user is someone who will ultimately *implement or benefit from* your strategy.

The first step in the vetting process is to identify the most important questions to ask end users to help refine your strategy.^{5,8} The specific questions you ask will depend on your particular strategy, but here are a few areas to consider as you come up with your questions:

End-users are people who will:

- carry out specific activities related to the strategy
- benefit from the strategy

	Example Strategy Vetting and Refinement Questions
Effectiveness	How well do you think this strategy will work to change [insert root cause]? How can we make this strategy even more powerful? Who or what settings does this strategy need to affect/reach for it to work?
Logistical	How big should ___ be? Where should ___ happen? When should ___ happen?
Fit	How could this strategy/change be embedded within every day practice?
Wellbeing	How do we ensure this strategy is trauma-informed?
Implementation	What could cause this strategy to fail? What needs to be in place for it to succeed?

Have partners look at their prioritized strategy packages and identify which questions are most important to ask about your design – and which end users have the most relevant perspective to answer those questions.

Gather Input with Prototypes

After developing vetting questions for different potential end-users, consider whether it would be helpful to create a model or “prototype” to help bring your strategy idea to life. Prototypes are cheap and quickly-made examples that can make it easier to communicate your strategy ideas and get practical, detailed feedback because they help end-users experience the idea in more concrete terms.^{5,8}


The feedback from end-users is then taken back and used to adapt the strategy and create the next round of prototypes. This cycle can continue until partners are confident the strategy will work well for people and contexts within your selected geographic region.

Prototypes come in many forms. Here are some common examples adapted from IDEO⁸:



Role Play

Act out the strategy idea using relevant props to help make the experience as realistic as possible.



Story Board

Draw out a comic-book style story board of your strategy idea to illustrate key processes or interactions



Diagram or Process Map

Draw a visual diagram, mind-map, or process map of the strategy idea to help people understand it.



Physical Model

If relevant, create a 3D model of your strategy idea using cheap and basic materials (e.g., cardboard, pipe cleaners)

Tips for developing prototypes

The following tips are adapted from IDEO⁸ and Plattner⁵:

- **Don't spend too much time or resources** making initial prototypes – you will adjust them based on several rounds of feedback so they can be rough at first.
- As much as possible, create opportunities for end-users to interact with prototypes in the **settings where they will ultimately be used** – this results in the most useful feedback.
- **Pay attention to other observations** and input you can gain when someone responds to a prototype in addition to your specific questions.
- **Prototyping is about learning quickly** - gather feedback from *just enough people* to inform the next refinement of the prototype.

Identify Anticipated Outcomes of Strategies

As you design strategies, identify the outcomes you anticipate will result from your strategies. These outcomes will help you eventually test out your strategies to see if they are starting to make a difference (and then scale or redesign them depending on what you learn).

Outcomes can also help to further clarify your strategy ideas. As you get clearer on what changes you want to bring about, you may find the need to adjust or expand your strategies to help bring about these outcomes.

Research Finding:

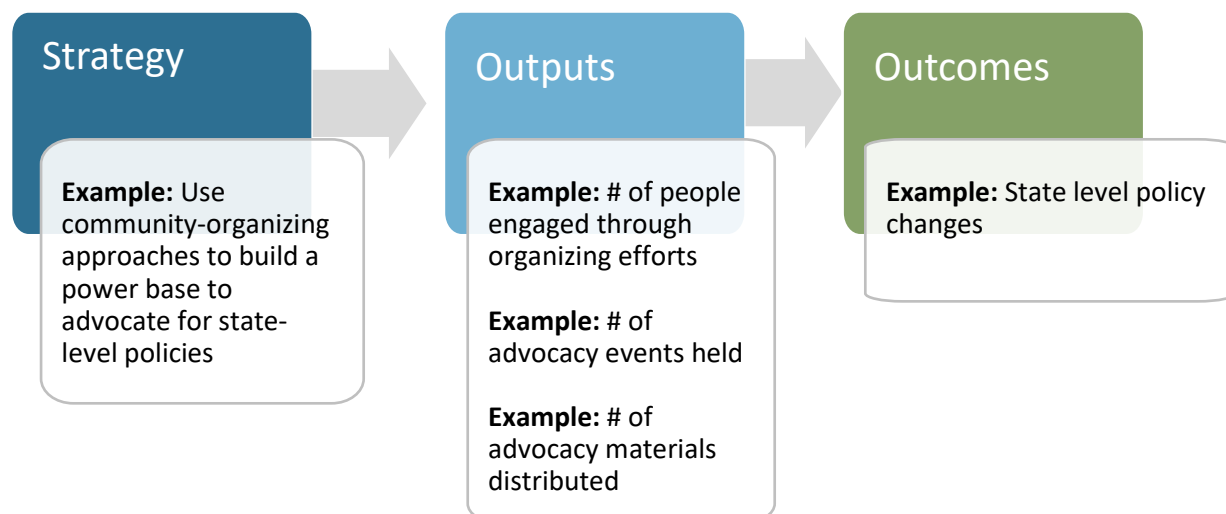
People are more likely to have buy-in around outcomes if they had a role in defining them.²⁴

What is an outcome, anyway?

An outcome is a change resulting directly or indirectly from your strategies. Outcomes tell you to what degree your change goals have shifted over time and are important for guiding decisions about whether to continue, adapt, or scale up your efforts.

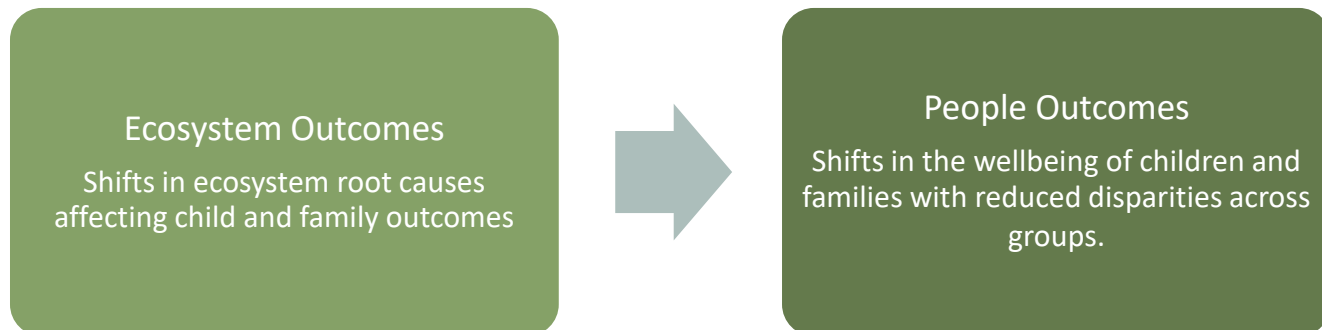
Outcomes are different than outputs.

Outputs are products of the activities you carry out as part of your strategies. People often confuse outcomes and outputs (even people with a lot of experience in this work). A good habit is to always define the difference at the beginning of meetings or sessions so everyone has a common understanding and shared language.



Identify Ecosystem Outcomes

Your strategies can help to bring about two types of outcomes: Ecosystem Outcomes and People Outcomes. Ecosystem Outcomes reflect shifts in the ecosystem root causes affecting People Outcomes for children and families. Ecosystem Outcomes are the direct focus of ecosystem change strategies.



How can you identify Ecosystem Outcomes? Flip your prioritized leverage point root causes from the ecosystem assessment into positive outcome statements. See the example below:

LEVERAGE POINT ROOT CAUSES	ECOSYSTEM OUTCOMES
Many organizational decision-making processes are not accessible to families from priority populations in terms of their times, locations, and engagement processes. (Decision-Making)	More (%) organizational decision-making processes are accessible to families from priority populations in terms of their times, locations, and engagement processes.
Information on available home visiting is not reaching families. (Connection)	More (%) processes in place to ensure information on available home visiting is reaching families.
There is a lack of licensable facilities in the region to expand ECE settings and/or accept special needs children. (Environments)	More (%) licensable facilities are available in the region to expand ECE settings and/or accept special needs children.

Identify Direct and “Bi-Product” Outcomes

Identify other ecosystem outcomes you anticipate could *naturally* come about because of your strategies *in addition* to the outcomes that directly correspond with your root causes. These “bi-product” outcomes are important to track as they often relate to building local collaborative capacity.

STRATEGY: Use community organizing approaches to build a broad power base to advocate for changes in state-level policies.	DIRECT ECOSYSTEM OUTCOME: State policy are more aligned with the ultimate outcomes for children and families.
	NATURAL “BI-PRODUCT” ECOSYSTEM OUTCOME: Increased community partnerships and organized residents in place to advocate for future issues.

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