

Causal Pathways: Discovering How, Why, and When Our Strategies Matter

Presented by Matthew Carr, Jewlya Lynn, and Hanh Cao Yu

Moderated by Barbara Wheeler-Bride

11:30 am - 12:30 pm PT, 2:30 pm - 3:30 pm ET • Wednesday, January 25, 2023

Causal Pathways: Discovering How, Why, and When Our Strategies Matter



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Causal Pathways: Discovering How, Why, and When Our Strategies Matter



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What if we
understood...


• WHY change
happens?

• HOW change
happens?


• Under WHAT
CONDITIONS?

What if we
understood more
than our strategies
and outcomes...

What if we
understood the
causal pathways
that are changing
systems?



Today, we will explore the concept of causal pathways through...

- Introducing key concepts
 - Sharing the experiences of an equity-focused philanthropic organization
 - Answering your questions
 - Announcing a new effort and how you can get involved
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Jewlya Lynn

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Why do we need to know **how, why, and under what conditions** change is happening?



How do we learn about change today?

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

Increased
engagement
and action by
block captains
and community
members

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 with a causal focus?

Strategies

Training advocacy organizations on housing policy issues and common messages

Resourcing advocates to work on housing advocacy

Training block captain program on advocacy strategies and common messages

Resourcing block captain program to engage their community on housing issues

Investigative journalism was already underway on housing issues

A specific new policymaker prioritized solving the affordable housing problem

Conditions

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

Block captains took many different advocacy actions

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

Community member stories were elevated through the media

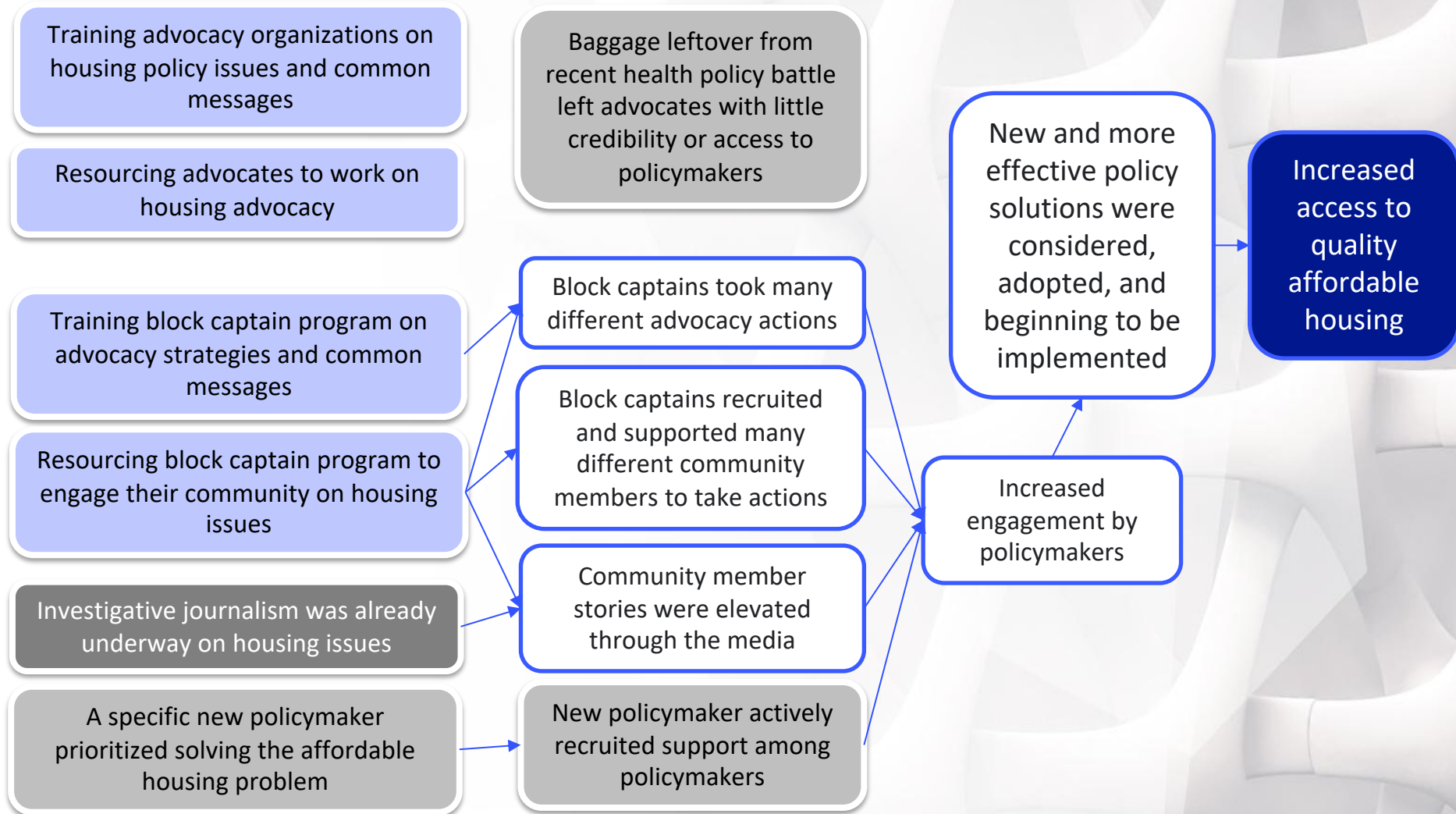
New policymaker actively recruited support among policymakers

Outcomes

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

Increased engagement by policymakers

Increased access to quality affordable housing



You're talking about quasi-experimental and experimental designs, right?

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

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Inside Philanthropy: The California Endowment

Building Healthy
Communities
Initiative
(2010-2020)



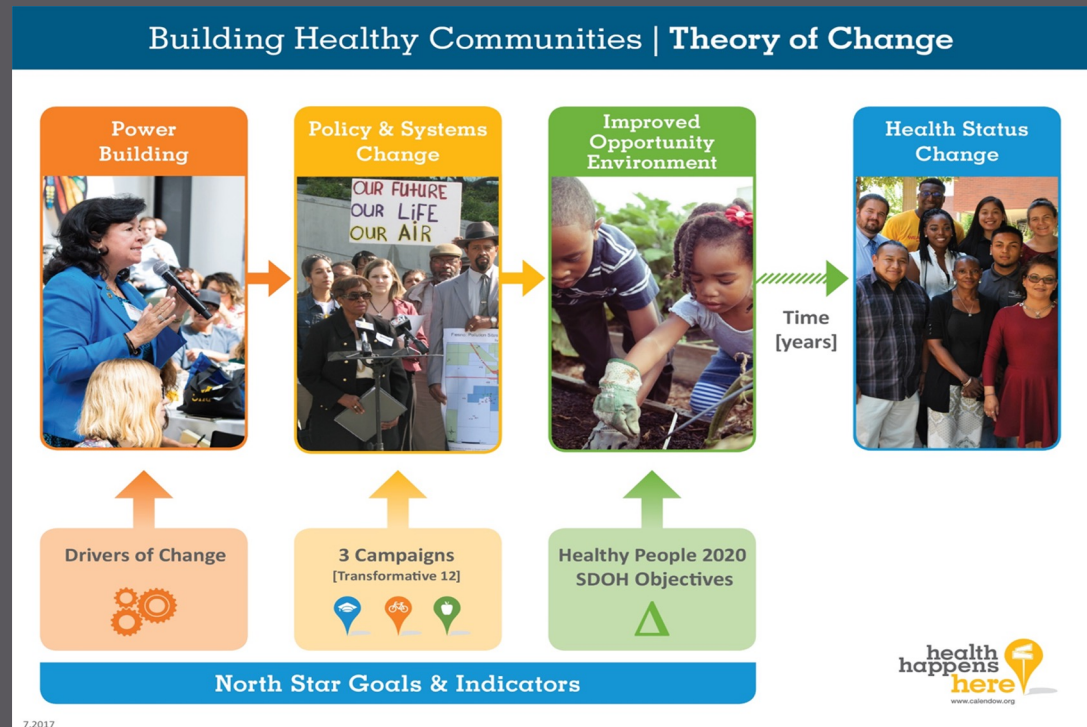
The Building Healthy Communities Initiative

- A 10-year place-based initiative designed to build community power and improve health equity in 14 California communities
- \$1.8 billion invested to support change in schools, neighborhoods, & health system
- Communities set their own priorities and focused on different types of changes and methods to achieve change

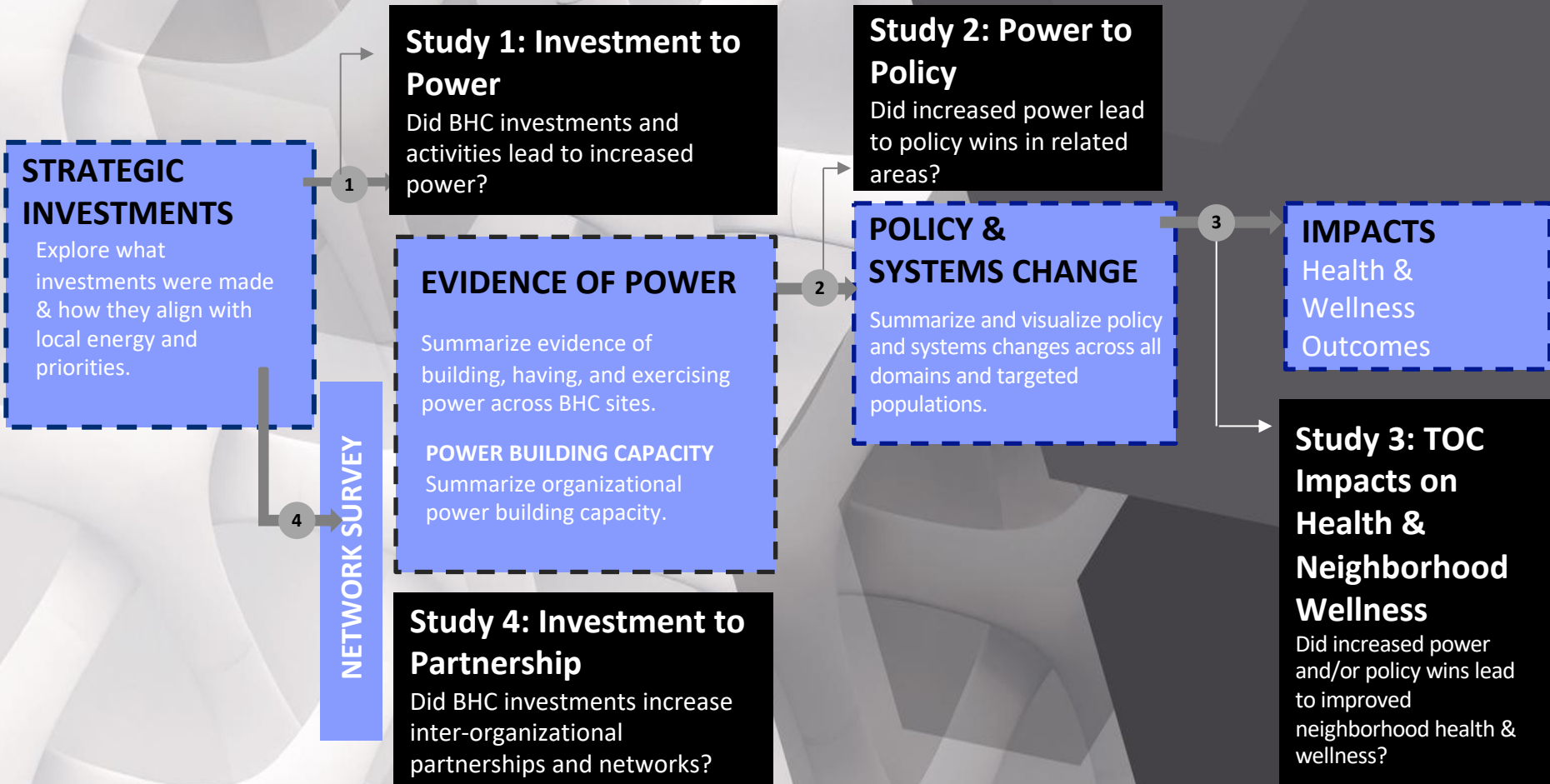


BHC Initiative: Evolving Theory of Change

- **Community power** that drives policies/systems changes to create opportunity environments
- Power is both a **'means *and* an end'**



Assessing BHC's Impact



Key Pieces of the Evaluation

OUR LEARNING: WHAT, WHERE, and HOW MUCH including UNDER WHAT CONDITIONS

10-Year Dashboard

- BHC major accomplishments & challenges, key “wins”
- North Star Goals as Frame
- Outcomes-oriented, Retrospective

Impact Studies

- Theory of Change frame
- Effects on power-building, policy/systems, and campaigns
- Impact-oriented, Retrospective



Policy Advocacy & Narrative Change

- Full investigation of key policy wins (pre, during, post)
- Intersection of narrative change, state advocacy and local power-building Lessons-oriented, Prospective

10-Year Reflection Report

- BHC’s pivot to power and contributions to health equity in CA (including systems/policy change)
- Power-building frame
- Lessons-oriented, Prospective

Targeted Studies

- Focused on Sustainability, Alignment & Foundation Role
- Evolution of local work; growth of power-building ecosystem; foundation investment & Board perspectives
- Community power and regional/state advocacy as frames
- Lessons-oriented, Prospective

FUTURE LEARNING NEEDS: HOW and WHY change happened

Findings & Lessons from BHC

“WHAT” OUTCOMES:

Advanced more than 1,700 equitable policies related to health, with clear benefits for low-income Californians

- Expanded and protected health access and coverage for low-income children, youth, and families, through the health exchange, county safety net programs, and new MediCal policies.
- Secured more equitable funding for California’s public schools
- Contributed to 50% decrease in school suspensions statewide
- Contributed to a sharp drop in youth incarceration (75% decrease)

UNDER WHAT CONDITIONS:

- Partnered with state government to implement equitable policies, e.g., the California Health in All Task Force and the Office of Health Equity.



*A New Health Equity
Dialogue*



*A Richer Approach to
Power Building*



*Game-Changing
Policies & Cumulative
Capacity for Change*



*An Eco-System
Approach to Power-
Building*



Challenges to BHC Evaluation & Causal Analysis

Shifting from understanding WHAT happened to understanding WHY & HOW is difficult because...

- Requires additional data collection, beyond the initial storytelling about change
- Community power is a complex, layered concept.

Next steps:

- Supplementing mixed-methods with causal methods to investigate specific ways change happens (WHY, HOW, and under WHAT CONDITIONS)



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. This may include non-profits and grantees, constituents and community members, policymakers and community leaders, as well as others.
- 4 The Causal Pathways Initiative:** We are about to introduce you to your pathway to learning more, getting involved, and beginning to deeply investigate causal pathways. A new initiative is seeking to build awareness, understanding, and expand the investigation of causal pathways in philanthropy and social good work.



A New Initiative

The Causal Pathways Initiative is...

- Making visible the **black box of strategy** and **systems change** using evaluation approaches that make sense of causal relationships.
- Composed of a network of evaluators and funders around the globe
- Sharing many different resources to build awareness, understanding, and support action

Do you have a story to share when you or your partners investigated **HOW** and **WHY** change happened?
Please let us know! We're always looking for more stories!

www.causalpathways.org



Audience Questions



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Thank you for joining

Opportunities for further engagement



We'd love to hear your feedback

Here is a link to a brief survey:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/CausalPathways>

Thank you in advance for completing it. We'll use your feedback to plan future *SSIR Live!* webinars.



Scan it to access the survey!



Download the slides

A follow-up email will include a link for accessing this webinar as many times as you'd like for the next 12 months, as well as a link allowing you to download a PDF version of the slide deck.



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