Contribution Analysis in Policy Work

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The Aspen Institute

Aspen Planning and Evaluation Program breakfast series

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Contribution Analysis in Policy Work
Assessing Advocacy's Influence

Today's objectives

❖ Introduce *Contribution Analysis in Policy Work*

❖ Provide an overview of the approach

❖ Offer case examples

❖ Describe some benefits and challenges

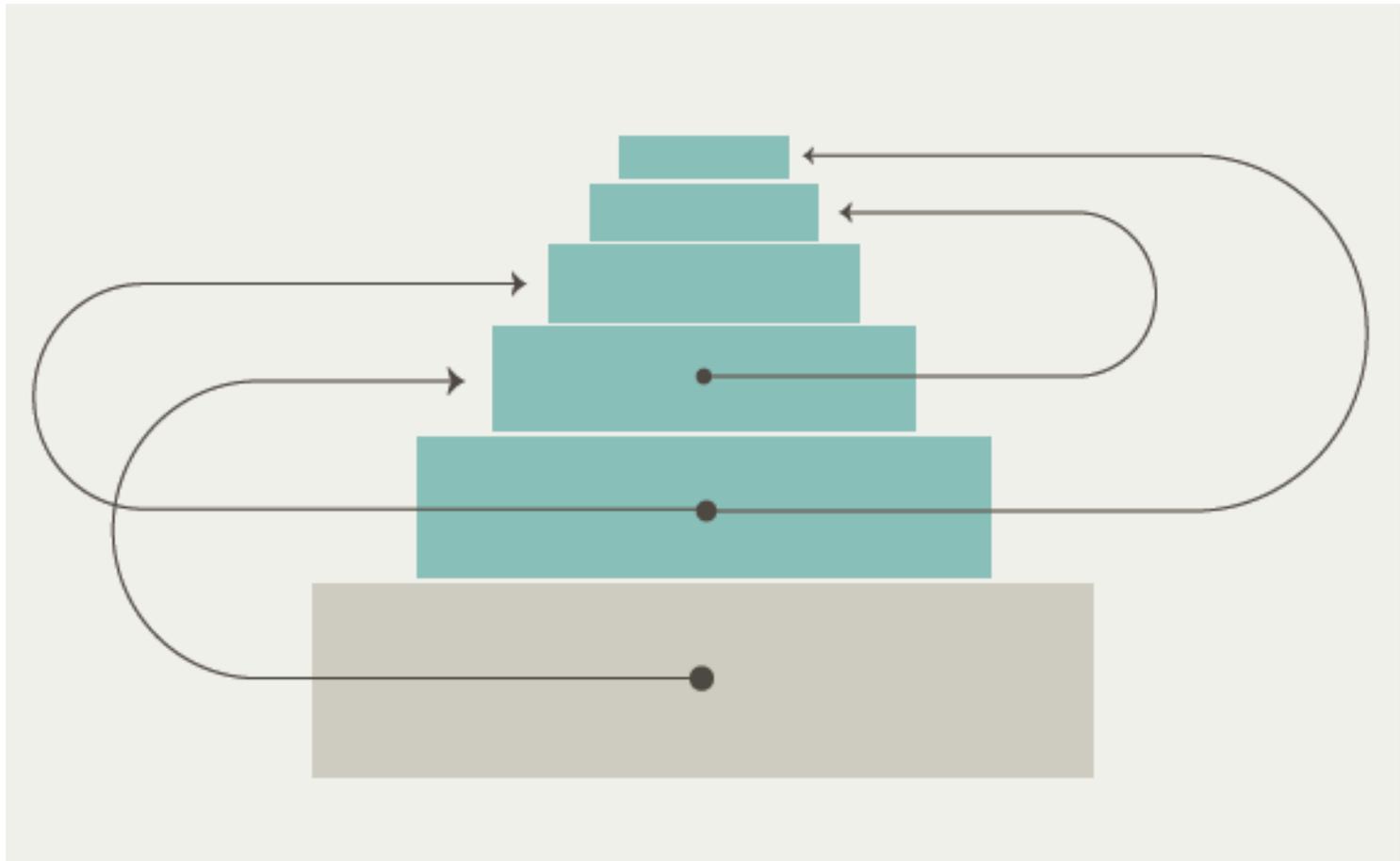❖ Answer questions and discuss other contribution analysis experiences and resources

Purpose of the brief

❖ Assist funders and evaluators to decide if contribution analysis is a good choice

❖ Provide a step-by-step guide for applying the process in an advocacy evaluation context

❖ Share case studies about how we applied it, and what we learned

Contribution analysis

❖ Theory-based approach to causal analysis that acknowledges that many factors influence a given outcome

❖ A six-step process to test a theory against logic and evidence to reduce uncertainty about the contribution of an initiative to observed results

Contribution analysis steps

Step 1
Set out the cause-effect issue to be addressed.

❖ Partner with stakeholders to determine the cause-effect issue to address.

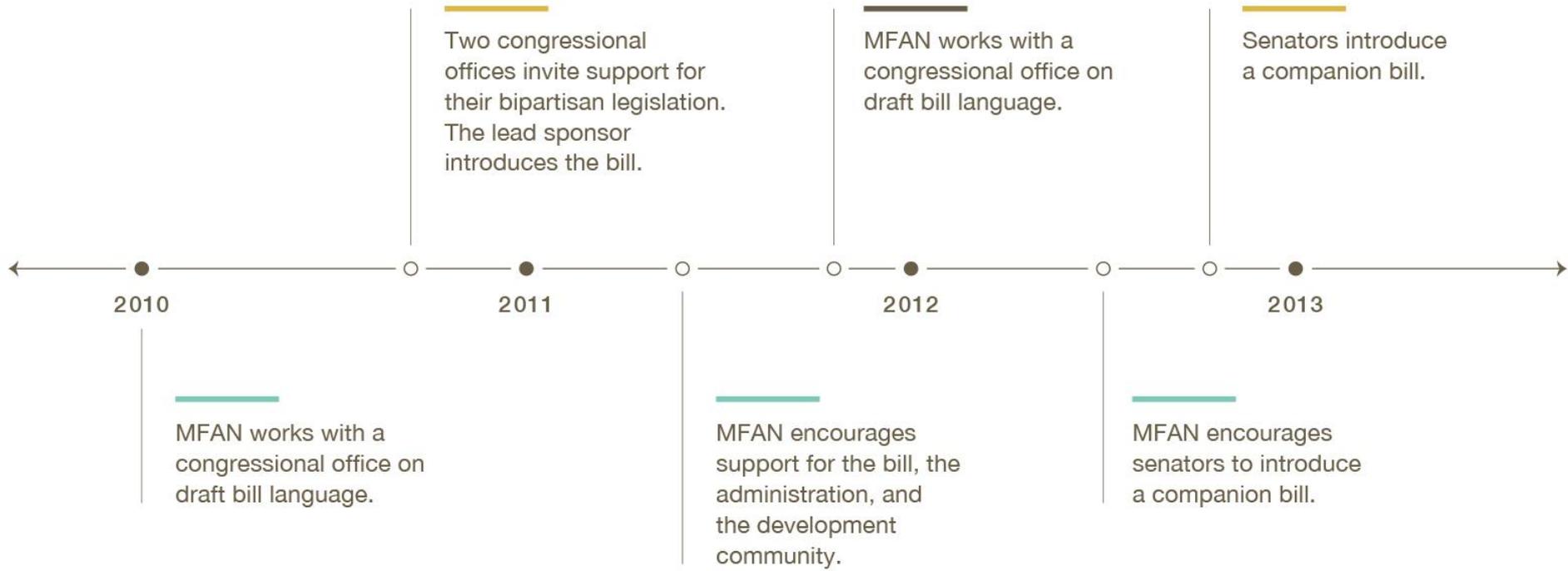❖ Select an issue that is specific and time bound.

Three causal problems for PPD-6

1. To what extent and how did MFAN contribute to the issuance of PPD-6?

2. To what extent and how did MFAN contribute to the content of PPD-6?

3. To what extent and how did MFAN contribute to the key changes that flowed from the directive?

Step 2
Develop the theory of change and the risks to it, including alternative explanations.

❖ Make explicit the theory of change.

❖ Identify causal assumptions to test.

❖ Determine other factors that may have influenced the policy outcome.

Two congressional
offices invite support for
their bipartisan legislation.
The lead sponsor
introduces the bill.

MFAN works with a
congressional office on
draft bill language.

Senators introduce
a companion bill.

2010

2011

2012

2013

MFAN works with a
congressional office on
draft bill language.

MFAN encourages
support for the bill, the
administration, and
the development
community.

MFAN encourages
senators to introduce
a companion bill.

intermediate outcomes   other influencing factors   policy responses

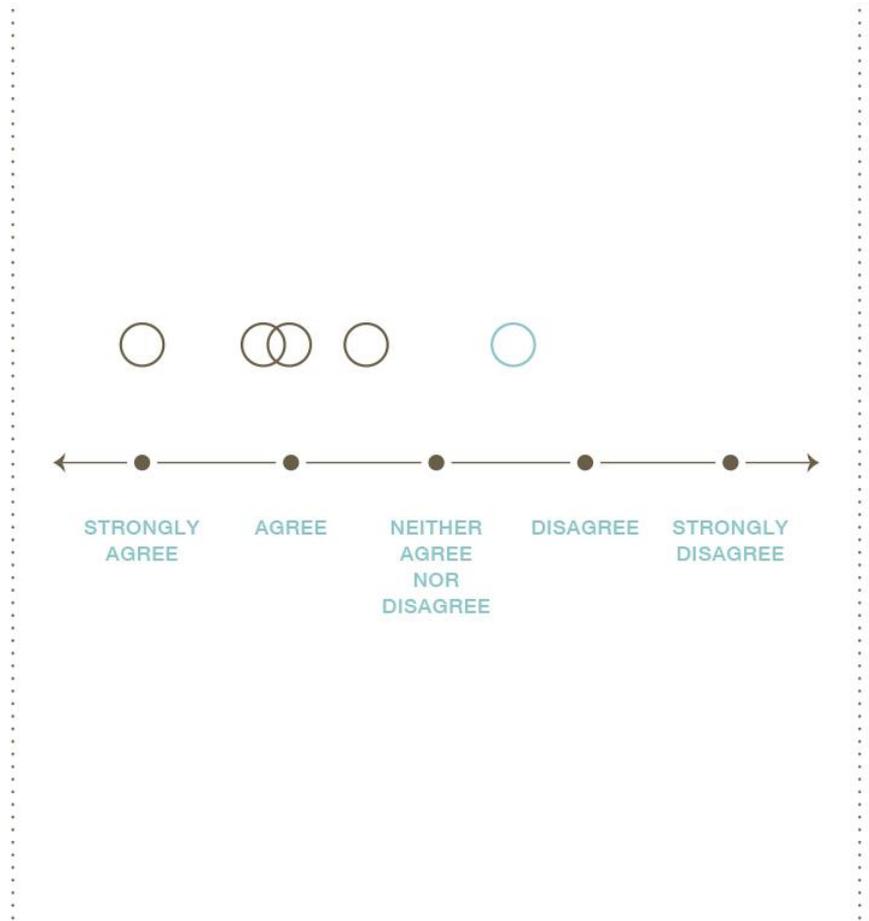# Step 3

Gather the existing evidence on the theory of change.

❖ Formulate hypotheses about linkages and assumptions in the results chain.

❖ Clarify evidence that can substantiate or disconfirm the linkages, and identify other potential influencing factors.

❖ Gather evidence to test your claims, first from those closest to the advocacy initiative.

POSITIVE ASPECTS

Reasons they did not strongly disagree with this statement, including examples and evidence

NEGATIVE ASPECTS

Reasons they did not strongly agree with this statement, including examples and evidence

STRONGLY AGREE

AGREE

NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE

DISAGREE

STRONGLY DISAGREE

Step 4

Assemble and assess the contribution claim, and challenges to it.

❖ Provide a narrative description of the outcome of interest and the emerging consensus view about the contribution claim.

❖ Account for influencing factors and key alternative explanations.

❖ Identify where evidence is lacking to assess the strength of the contribution claim.

Step 5
Seek out additional evidence.

❖Determine which linkages and alternative explanations are critical to the story and require additional evidence.

❖Seek interviews with policymakers or other policy targets, when feasible.

❖Assess the danger or harm interviews might create for the advocacy process.

Step 6

Revise and strengthen the contribution story.

❖ Revise the contribution story, based on additional data collected.

❖ Present evidence for and against the causal claim.

❖ Eliminate extraneous details that are no longer relevant to the story to make it more logically persuasive.

Step 7
Use the contribution stories to review, learn, and improve the initiative.

❖ Provide opportunities for those involved to think about how their contributions add value, and what else they might do.

❖ Build capacity for collaboration and influence.

❖ Use findings to inform future planning.

Benefits

❖Philosophically aligned with how policy evaluators generally approach their work

❖Provides a systematic approach to think critically about how advocates, allies, opponents, and policymakers influence each other's actions in a complex multi-actor environment

❖Seeks alternative explanations for policy outcomes to add credibility to the story, and avoid confirmation bias

Challenges

❖ Takes time to create and test a contribution story

❖ Requires access to advocates and policymakers

❖ Diplomacy is essential!

Questions?

Thoughts about using contribution analysis?

Where You Can Find the Brief

Contribution Analysis in Policy Work
Assessing Advocacy's Influence

- ❖ Center for Evaluation Innovation
- ❖ BLE Solutions
- ❖ ORS Impact
- ❖ RK Evaluation & Strategies

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