

System Mapping: A Case Example

System mapping, as described in the 2009 brief on “Unique Methods in Advocacy Evaluation” by Julia Coffman and Ehren Reed, is a useful tool for evaluating efforts towards systems change. According to the brief:

This method involves the visual mapping of a system, identifying the parts and relationships in that system that are expected to change and how they will change, and then identifying ways of measuring or capturing whether those changes have occurred. Used in this way, systems maps function much like theories of change; they illustrate where changes are expected to occur and help frame and guide evaluations. They also serve as powerful illustrations when presenting results to evaluation stakeholders. System maps offer a useful alternative to most conventional theories of change and logic models, however, which tend to be linear and have difficulty capturing intended changes in relationships or connections in a complex system.

Innovation Network has recently used system mapping in an evaluation for CARE, the international aid and relief organization. CARE is currently engaged in a capacity building effort to improve their internal systems—both globally and in the countries where CARE is located—for gathering, storing, and communicating information. The project is designed to lead to a more effective use of advocacy information and, ultimately, to improve CARE’s advocacy efforts targeting the United States government.

In order to better document and assess the desired systems change, Innovation Network guided representatives from CARE through an articulation of their internal processes: how those processes appear at baseline, where anticipated interventions will take place, and how the system will appear following the interventions. To ensure their accuracy, the development of CARE’s system maps was a very participatory process, involving a series of in-person meetings and telephone interviews with representatives from CARE.

The resulting system maps, excerpted in the following pages, will serve as guiding documents for the evaluation.







