



Ripple Effect Mapping:

Surfacing both anticipated and unanticipated outcomes can refocus complex initiatives.

Ripple Effect Mapping (REM) is a participatory focus group strategy meant to surface both the anticipated and unanticipated outcomes of an initiative. It is especially useful when the “story” of an initiative is non-linear or has to be responsive to changing contexts (such as in policy advocacy).

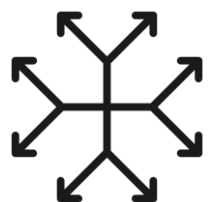
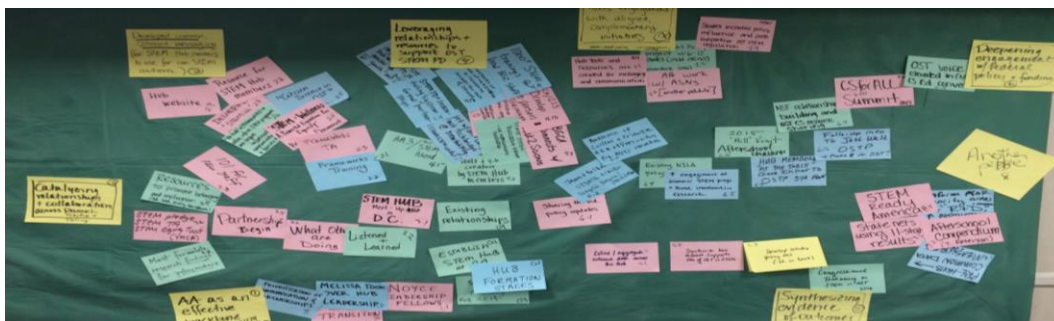


WHO + WHAT: *Different Vantage Points*

REM brings together a diverse array of stakeholders with different vantage points on an initiative. REM brings to light insights from varying perspectives, and therefore reveals a more accurate set of outcomes than those that might have emerged from a small, centralized group of actors.

Over the course of the participatory session, the map is organized into themes, and re-organized as needed, as the stakeholders work out the trajectories of various activities. The end result of a REM session is visual map representing the different events and actions that have led to outcomes, allowing stakeholders the opportunity to assess areas of strength, review gaps in activities or programming and establish next steps.

The picture below is a sample of what a completed map might look like. The yellow sheets represent unique outcomes, with additional sheets stemming from them that represent the events and actions that led to that outcome.



WHY + BENEFITS: *Non-Linear Outcomes*

REM is particularly useful for groups working to evaluate policy change, advocacy work, systems change, or network-based initiatives. For these groups, the impact of the work may be harder to tell in a linear way. REM uses an iterative and sometimes non-linear method to identify the outcomes of these types of initiatives.

Because of REM’s focus on bringing in diverse perspectives, it is a particularly good strategy for helping to map the outcomes of policy-focused initiatives that need to stay nimble and flexible to account for changing policy contexts. The final map can quickly highlight strategies that have been successful and those that have been less so, helping an initiative refocus its direction.



HOW + TIPS: *Lessons We've Learned in Practice*

- **Invite as broad and diverse a set of stakeholders as possible.** It is important to capture perspectives and outcomes from all levels of an initiative in order to have as complete of an understanding of the work as possible.
- **Start with a participatory timelining activity.** This helps the group to begin sequencing and documenting the major milestones in the initiative.
- **Allow for individual reflection.** After timelining, ask stakeholders to take some time to individually reflect and write stories about the significant events and outcomes they've witnessed or participated in. This helps to avoid slipping into groupthink when stakeholders share these reflections and stories to the group.
- **Ask for each stakeholder to share at least once.** This helps ensure that everyone's perspective is heard and captured on the map.
- **Document everything.** Use forms to capture individual's reflections, and time-lapse photography to documents the evolution of your map. Ask a co-facilitator to take detailed notes to help capture any conversations that are sparked from stakeholders sharing their insights. These conversations often contain rich, novel insights.
- **Assess and review the map for themes in real time.** Don't wait until the end of the session to identify themes. As they emerge, name them and continue to build from them.
- **Conduct follow up interviews.** In order to capture incomplete perspectives, or to dive further into a particular finding, facilitators should conduct targeted, structured interviews to complement the in-person REM session. These interviews should be with stakeholders unable to attend, or with stakeholders with particularly deep knowledge of a certain activity or outcome.



LOOKING AHEAD: *Refine and Focus*

Often the unanticipated outcomes in an initiative can be the catalyst for further innovation. But for this innovation to occur, stakeholders need the time and space to share and reflect on what has occurred from their separate vantage points. Outcomes need the time and space to be shared and reflected upon with input from stakeholders with different vantage points. REM is just such a method.



EXTRA CREDIT: *Check out these great resources that we use for our own REM work*

- [Field Guide to Ripple Effect Mapping](#), our go-to guide for thinking about this approach, from the University of Minnesota.
- [Splash & Ripple](#), a precursor to Ripple Effect Mapping, by Phillip Cox.