

MOVEMENT PLOTS

How the stories of movements might unfold

Suggested usage: Designed to accompany the Freedom Fund's movement dimensions toolbank, these nine movement plots will be integrated into social network analysis-based map presentations. They will help each movement's story come alive. **These nine movement plots are designed to accompany the Freedom Fund's movement dimensions toolbank. They will be integrated into social network analysis-based map presentations to help each movement's story come alive.** Funder notes have been added in to spark consideration of how the presentations could be used to touch the imaginations of a broader group of funders and movement contributors. It is anticipated that at each evaluation stage –baseline, midline, and endline–representatives from each movement being evaluated will select 1-2 movement plots that are supported by their data and that best tell their story. For a sample of how movement plots will be integrated with data, see this [reporting template](#) as well as this [presentation template](#).

A touch of appreciative inquiry: The concept of *appreciative inquiry* begins from the premise that systems move in the direction of the questions they ask. Rather than focusing only on what is broken or failing, appreciative inquiry directs attention to what gives a system life. As inspiration for this framework, it helps illuminate how the energy of movements propels their plots: not only through outrage or opposition, but through positive qualities. These could include the emotional support and "meeting-of-minds" that animate relationships or the shared purpose and vision that give participants the courage to make sacrifices. Read this way, each plot point reflects a shift in where energy gathers and how it evolves—from making harm speakable, to discovering one another, to imagining alternatives, to learning how to endure.

Some plot points applied within the climate justice movement: The journey of the Climate Justice Movement begins with **the naming of the harm**, a critical reframing that marked the essential shift from the term *environmentalism* to the term *climate justice*. This new framing recognizes environmental destruction is not an accident, but a systemic wrong, thus making the collective pain speakable. The injustice made visible, the movement then develops **a glimpse of the possible**, shifting its focus from what it is *against* to what it is *for*, a positive vision best articulated by the call for a "Just Transition." This is a positive, proactive framework for a fossil fuel phase-out that simultaneously delivers economic and social equity. As the movement gains influence, **progress and backlash** inevitably ensue, a turbulent period marked by sharp opposition, corporate delay tactics, and attempts to discredit activists, all of which test the commitment and internal strength of the movement. Finally, the movement enters **the paradox of success** when its core principles, like "Just Transition," go mainstream and are adopted by governments and large institutions. The critical choice facing movement actors becomes whether to **embed within these systems** by working as advisors on government policy and funding boards, or **remain in tension with them** by maintaining external pressure and a constructively critical voice.

Title	Plot point	Suggested priority dimensions and domains ¹
Emerging movement		
The naming of the problem	Every movement begins by making something speakable. What was private, normalized, or deliberately hidden gets language. At this point in the movement's story, there may be an inciting incident that brings the problem into the spotlight, an injustice that raises public alarm, or a slower, more gradual buildup of awareness that coalesces into an undeniable recognition of the wrong. This plot point is about reframing reality: <i>"This isn't just how things are. This is harm, and it has a cause."</i> It often features testimonies, data, lived experience, and the emergence of a new vocabulary that suddenly makes old pain something that gets spoken. A network map might reveal small, low-density clusters forming around shared experiences, identities, or interpretations of harm. Early couplets and triads begin to link into slightly larger groupings, signaling tentative trust-building and the first instances of connection beyond isolated individuals. The turning point comes when people decide to turn an internal psychological inflection point into behavior change—to speak, connect with others, or act in ways that make the harm publicly visible—or instead continue to accept their experiences as purely personal.	Shared purpose • Clarity (and alignment) of purpose • Motivation • Identity • Action Networked relationships • Look to for emotional support • Communicate/share information with • Collaborate with • Learn from • Share resources with Inclusive approach • Survivors/lived experience • Shifting power

¹ Movement plots are selected AFTER data collection for an evaluation is complete. Refer to the [Movement building measurement reporting template](#) for guidance on how to select plot points and provide an evidence base from dimensions and domains.

	Note to funders: Funders often enter here because the story is compelling. While funding is, of course, important at this nascent stage, allowing home-grown resourcing to emerge helps set in place a more sustainable funding base. It also mitigates against funders having outsize influence on an emerging agenda.	
Coming out of the shadows	Some individuals in the movement start to discover one another and realize there is a specific lived experience they share. Others may find particular resonance with the issue at hand due to their own professional or personal interests. Together, they begin to form a common cause and the basis for collective action. Gradually, meetings form, WhatsApp groups emerge, hashtags circulate, and informal spaces for connection multiply. This plot is powered by belonging. The energy of finding others who are willing to put effort into, and to fight for a shared purpose, animates the group. The plot antagonists are the loneliness, fear, and apathy that undermine confidence that joint action can make a difference. The protagonists must also be careful not to exclude those who might struggle to participate due to disability, language, literacy, or other barriers. A network map might reveal an emerging core of connected participants, or larger clusters linked by a small number of bridging or brokering individuals. Connectivity increases unevenly, with some actors becoming central points of coordination while others remain largely disconnected. If movement actors move through this stage, it is because they continue to draw energy from belonging and from belief in their collective power. The turning point comes when a collective voice and nascent coordinated actions begins to form, even if initially timid—or if organizers never step forward to build on the collective energy. Note to funders: Funders often enter here because the story is compelling. While funding is, of course, important at this nascent stage, allowing home-grown	Shared purpose • Clarity (and alignment) of purpose • Motivation • Identity • Action Networked relationships • Frequency of interactions • Look to for emotional support • Communicate/share information with • Look to for leadership • Collaborate with Inclusive approach • Survivors/lived experience • Shifting power

	<i>resourcing to emerge helps set in place a more sustainable funding base.</i> <i>Additionally, funders should not only be focused on the quantity but the quality of relationships. Funding that prioritizes network expansion over relational quality and density may weaken the very belonging that makes collective action durable.</i>	
Growing movement		
A glimpse of the possible	Even as a sense of injustice continues, something new happens at this point in the story. Movement actors begin to see, sometimes only as a glimmer on the horizon, a vision of a society they have never before imagined or experienced. It may be a belief that all work could one day be considered dignified and treated as such, or that gender relations could be genuinely win-win rather than zero-sum. In this plot point, a new ideology or narrative begins to take shape,² imbuing the movement with additional energy. Participants become increasingly passionate about what they are <i>for</i>, not just what they are against. A network map might reveal a clearer core of connected participants alongside one or more larger clusters linked by bridging or brokering individuals. Connections increasingly form around shared vision and values—sometimes across countries and regions—not only shared experiences of harm. The turning point in this plot comes when this positive vision begins to capture the	Shared purpose • Clarity (and alignment) of purpose • (Alignment of) Vision for Systems Change • Motivation • Action Networked relationships • Frequency of interactions • Communicate/share information with • Look to for leadership • Collaborate with Inclusive approach • Survivors/lived experience

² While the movement may already have a shared purpose or goal, an ideology articulates the values or worldview behind that goal, e.g. the need for justice, the belief in intrinsic human rights. At the same time, a narrative adds a temporal dimension to the purpose and ideology, allowing the movement to paint, for example, the picture of a struggle over time that has peaks and ebbs, a gradual culmination of victories, etc.

	imagination of those beyond the movement's core, making it possible to recruit newer and more diverse participants. Alternatively, the movement may fail to create this vision, limiting its ability to expand from those interested in fighting the injustice to those drawn in by the future the movement proposes. Note to funders: While it's tempting to fund "action," activities that seem directly tied to furthering tangible and immediate objectives, funders can resource the gatherings, communities of practice, and reflection sessions that make dreaming together possible.	• Shifting power • Inclusion of those with influence
Progress and backlash	Progress provokes resistance, particularly, when powerful groups have vested economic and other interests in keeping the status quo in place. As the movement gains traction, opposition sharpens. The plot thickens as opponents apply countermeasures such as discrediting movement actors, distorting movement narratives, or targeting visible leaders. Broader factors such as political instability or natural disasters may also destabilize the movement. The story becomes louder, more turbulent, and more polarized. During this plot point, movement actors find their stamina and values tested. In response to opposition, and as the movement continues to integrate new members bringing new ideas, capabilities, and networks, it faces the challenge of managing both growth and pressure at the same time. There is a need to both broaden and deepen, to branch outward while strengthening the internal relationships, norms, and structures that will keep the movement strong. A network map might reveal rapid expansion alongside uneven connectivity, with dense internal clusters, limited bridging between them, and growing reliance on a small number of brokers as the network stretches under pressure. The turning point comes when the movement either accedes to external demands and fractures or dissolves, or leans more heavily into its principles while finding	Shared purpose • (Alignment of) vision for systems change • Motivation • Commitment • Action Networked relationships • Frequency of interactions • Communicate/share information with • Look to for leadership • Collaborate with • Learn from • Share resources with • Formality Inclusive approach • Shifting power • Inclusion of those in power • Inclusion of those with influence

	ways to mitigate risk and manage danger. Note to funders: <i>Funder behavior during backlash often determines whether pressure fragments the movement or strengthens its solidarity. Not only through continuing to provide funds, but through making statements and other expressions of solidarity, sympathetic and principled funders can help decide the fate of the movement.</i>	
The internal reckoning	Sometimes the greatest threats to a protagonist come not from others, but from within. At this point in the story, the movement is forced to look at itself. This plot point is propelled by power dynamics, privilege, and unspoken hierarchies. The story turns inward: Who is centered? Who is invisible? Who pays the cost of leadership? Who controls resources and decision-making? The internal work required at this stage is often less dramatic and more mundane, yet no less critical. The movement may outgrow earlier forms of governance, such as leadership concentrated in a strong core or backbone organization. In response, more distributed arrangements may emerge: dispersed hubs, interconnected steering committees, shared leadership models. New communication and technology platforms may also be needed to allow information, coordination, and strategy to flow more safely and reliably across the movement. This is often a painful and sometimes tedious chapter, but also a generative one. The movement is putting in place the relational, organizational, and technical infrastructure needed to sustain present work and enable future growth. A network map might reveal a shift from centralized control toward more distributed connectivity, with multiple coordination hubs, clearer role differentiation, and more bridging roles. The turning point is when the movement develops ways to surface conflict, address harm, and redistribute power as part of its regular functioning—or defaults to	Shared purpose • (Alignment of) vision for systems change • Motivation • Identity • Action Networked relationships • Frequency of interactions • Look to for leadership • Collaborate with • Learn from • Share resources with • Formality Inclusive approach • Shifting power • Inclusion of those with influence

	addressing these issues only when crises force it to do so. Note to funders: <i>Funders can resource this plot point's unglamorous but essential work. Patient, trust-based funding is vital for enabling governance transitions, training new leaders, getting accountability systems in place, and more.</i>	
Learning to move in many ways	The movement learns not to move in only one way. What may have begun as a single, powerful tactic, e.g. campaigning, branches into a repertoire. When one channel is blocked, others carry the story forward. This plot point brings into view the public action, narrative work, policy engagement, cultural expression, mutual aid, and quieter forms of relationship-building that begin to operate in parallel, sometimes invisibly. This is the moment when suppression becomes less effective, because there is no single lever to pull. Pressure applied in one arena is met by motion in another. The movement becomes harder to predict, harder to corner, and harder to exhaust. While it might seem chaotic, it is not. Different actors play different roles that may seem out of sync but are in resonance with a shared purpose. What appears fragmented from the outside is experienced internally as versatility and intentional division of labour. A network map might reveal increasing differentiation across the network, with clusters oriented around distinct tactics, sectors, or arenas of action. Redundancy increases through multiple bridging roles and more dense connections, creating multiple pathways for information-sharing, leadership, and action. The turning point comes when opponents—and movement actors— recognize that they can slow the movement in one place, but cannot stop it everywhere at once. The movement's strength now lies not in any single tactic, but in its capacity to adapt and persist across contexts. Note to funders: <i>While choosing what to fund is a series of trade-offs and strategic</i>	Shared purpose • (Alignment of) vision for systems change • Motivation • Commitment • Action Networked Relationships • Communicate/share information with • Collaborate with • Learn from • Formality • Share resources with Inclusive Approach • Shifting power • Inclusion of those in power • Inclusion of those with influence

	choices, adopting a portfolio or diversified investment approach helps the movement gain multiple pathways to success.	
Rooted movement		
The wisdom threshold	At any stage, movements must be quick to learn and adapt, but particularly at this point in its story, there has been enough experience to support deeper and more deliberate reflection. Patterns of cause and effect become clearer over time, and this maturing movement has had the length of days to become wiser, if it chooses, by integrating lessons into its strategy, structures, and norms. Externally, the movement's story may seem slower and more unglamorous, as newer events catch the public's and policymakers' fancy and media attention fades. The initial "low-hanging fruit" of movement wins gives way to the obdurate work of changing deep-seated societal norms and values. The story may seem less trendy but the plot is still deepening—and the movement may still be on track to achieve some of its greatest wins A network map might reveal a movement that has shifted from a hub-and-spoke configuration driven by a few central actors to a more distributed and resilient web. Connections are denser and more reciprocal. The turning point comes when the movement chooses endurance over overly reflexive action and sees patterns over time, not just isolated lessons. Rather than responding to events as they arise, the movement revisits underlying assumptions, strategies, and ways of working, adjusting them in light of accumulated experience. This is where many movements quietly succeed or quietly dissolve. Note to funders: <i>In this introspective stage, funders can make space for learning, reflection, adaptation, and rest, rather than accelerate burnout by demanding constant novelty and results.</i>	Shared purpose • (Alignment of) vision for systems change • Motivation • Action Networked relationships • Communicate/share information with • Look to for leadership • Collaborate with • Learn from • Share resources with Inclusive approach • Shifting power • Inclusion of those in power • Inclusion of those with influence

The paradox of success	Can success look like failure? One might imagine a plausible “happy death” for the movement: a fading away because goals have been achieved. Long-sought policy wins may occur, researchers may publish validating studies, celebrities may use their platforms on behalf of the movement, influencers may create enduring memes, and seemingly all of a sudden, the cultural zeitgeist may shift in the movement’s favour. In short, whether or not institutions have formally changed their behavior, funding allocations have been made, or movement goals have been codified into law, the “moment” has been seized. The thing the movement opposed is no longer acceptable in the eyes of the public, and though the battle may not be fully won, it may now feel inevitable. As the movement goes mainstream and gains power, it runs the risk of falling short of its own values and principles. It will inevitably have learned to make compromises to survive, and some of these compromises may blunt the raw energy that initially propelled it. Victories may be more partial, language may become bureaucratic, and wins may feel smaller than the original dream, even as, over time, they produce meaningful improvements in real lives. A network map might reveal a movement that has shifted from a hub-and-spoke configuration driven by a few central actors to a more distributed and resilient web. Connections are denser and more reciprocal. The turning point is when the movement decides whether to embed itself within institutions to steward gains, remain in tension with them to preserve values and apply pressure, or step back to avoid dilution and co-optation. Though it is not a black-and-white choice, how it is navigated will shape whether mainstreaming consolidates change or quietly erodes the movement’s original purpose. Note to funders: <i>As the movement’s influence diffuses and hard-fought goals get adopted by institutional actors (e.g. international agencies, thinktanks, lawmakers), funders face a choice between supporting the stewards within the movement who still carry the torch, or shifting resources entirely to some institutional adopters.</i>	Shared purpose • (Alignment of) vision for systems change • Motivation • Commitment Networked relationships • Communicate/share information with • Look to for leadership • Collaborate with • Learn from • Formality Inclusive approach • Survivors/lived experience • Inclusion of those in power • Inclusion of those with influence
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The story refuses to end	Some struggles are not the work of one moment, but of multiple decades or generations, and the movement, even when seeming to die, may simply be reincarnating itself. The torch is passed to new carriers; the story passes to new tellers. A new generation reframes the struggle in its own language. This plot point decides whether the movement fossilizes or evolves. At this stage in the story, original participants may want to tell a singular narrative: <i>We saw something grievous, and we did this to respond to it. Though we faced opposition, we eventually prevailed.</i> But movement narratives are not singular, nor are they tidy. There will be many accounts of the movement’s story and just as many judgments about how successful it has been, reflecting differences in status, generation, and identity. At this late stage, even the metaphor of a vigorously plotted story begins to break down. This invites a meta lens on storytelling and a reflexive lens on research—not as an abstract methodological concept, but as a response to the movement’s own plurality of viewpoints. The search for a single, coherent account is contradicted or contested. The one consistent feature of this plot point is that there is no single plot. A network map might reveal a movement that has shifted from a hub-and-spoke configuration driven by a few central actors to a more distributed and resilient web. Connections are denser and more reciprocal. The turning point comes when the movement either trusts the story to live beyond its founders, even as its energy disperses, or attempts to control the story and slowly loses vitality. Note to funders: <i>Funders can resource the telling of the multiple stories of the movement, helping to keep its victories and disappointments, but also its strategies and tactics alive for future movements.</i>	Shared purpose • Motivation • Identity • Action Networked Relationships • Communicate/share information with • Look to for emotional support • Look to for leadership • Collaborate with • Learn from Inclusive Approach • Survivors/lived experience • Shifting power • Inclusion of those with influence
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