Most Significant Change
Step-by-Step Guide to Implementation
OneVillage Partners

November 2017
Developed for:

Developed and Authored by:
Sophie Dresser, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Manager
Jessica Turner, Program Associate
**Contents**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Credits</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Report by</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Images and Graphics by</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acronyms</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key Concepts, Terms and Elements</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction to MSC</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who This Guide is For</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting Started</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Steps</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expertise Needed</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OneVillage Partners’ MSC Journey</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Implementation</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff Training</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domain Development</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing a Scoring Rubric</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementation</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 1: Community Meeting</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2: Focus Group Meetings</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 3: Headline Selection</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 4: Verification Interviews</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 5: Story Writing</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 6: Presentation to Management</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 7: Final Selection</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 8: Feedback</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 9: Quantification &amp; Analysis</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 10: Revision &amp; Learning</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lessons Learned</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Implementation</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementation</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusion........................................................................................................................................23
Suggested or Further Resources ...........................................................................................................24
Appendix A: Staff Training Modules ......................................................................................................26
Appendix B: Sample Community Meeting Agenda .................................................................................28
Appendix C: Sample Focus Group Guide ...............................................................................................29
Appendix D: Sample Implementation Plan of Most Significant Change .............................................30
Credits

Report by
Sophie Dresser, Monitoring, Evaluation & Learning Manager
Jessica Turner, Program Associate

Images and Graphics by
Jessica Turner, Program Associate

A special thanks to Jill Lipski Cain and Kayla Mueller at The Improve Group for helping to adapt the textbook MSC process to one that could work in our unique organization and context.

Acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CAG</td>
<td>Community Action Group Member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOW</td>
<td>Nurturing Opportunities for Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M&amp;E</td>
<td>Monitoring and Evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEL</td>
<td>Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MS</td>
<td>Microsoft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSC</td>
<td>Most Significant Change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ORID</td>
<td>Observation, Reflection, Insights and Decisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OVP</td>
<td>OneVillage Partners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QDA</td>
<td>Qualitative Data Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>United States</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Key Concepts, Terms and Elements

The following guide to implementation process maps OneVillage Partners’ second iteration of Most Significant Change, implemented in 2017, and includes any resultant lessons learned.

**We:** OneVillage Partners and the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Team

**Program Participants:** participants of OneVillage Partners’ training programs.

**Front-line Staff:** members of the OneVillage Partners’ team who work directly with communities and facilitate the Most Significant Change process.

**Headlines:** story ideas collected directly from Program Participants who may only speak a local language and may not be literate. These story ideas are compiled in a “Headline Form” (see Figure 5) where pertinent information is collected initially, such as the participant name, role, community, and key facts from the story.

**Story Writing:** due to high illiteracy in communities where OneVillage Partners works, our staff write Most Significant Change stories based on information gathered directly from Program Participants. After gathering headlines, staff work in teams to prepare to undertake verification interviews and write stories based on additional information collected at this time.

**Translation:** OneVillage Partners works with primarily non-English speaking populations, many of whom are illiterate. Thus, we rely on skilled facilitators, who are bilingual, to translate stories and ideas as accurately as possible given what they hear from Program Participants. We recognize this opens our process to more bias, but through intensive training on Most Significant Change and qualitative data collection, we believe this method is appropriate for the context.

**Expected Outcomes:** outcomes defined through OneVillage Partners’ Theory of Change and program logic models.

**Unexpected Outcomes:** positive or negative outcomes that are not included in OneVillage Partners’ program logic models. Most Significant Change is the primary way we uncover and understand unexpected outcomes from our programming.

**Scoring Rubric:** Most Significant Change stories are chosen through several levels of selection using the same scoring system. The rubric was developed by OneVillage Partners based on our Mission, Vision and Values. Thus, the highest scoring stories are those that embody the ideals of the organization and illustrate our best work.

**Domains:** categories of stories developed in collaboration with Program Participants based on expected outcomes from OneVillage Partners’ engagement with their communities. OneVillage Partners always includes a “Catch-all” domain, which captures unexpected and negative changes that do not fall into other domains. Our domains are focused on the holistic changes we expect to see from our holistic model, and less focused on programmatic outcomes, as this data is captured through other methods.

**Feedback:** essential to OneVillage Partners’ continual growth, we solicit feedback from communities in order to better understand how to improve our approach. Feedback can be formal, such as a declaration of a community leader in a village-wide meeting, or informal, such as a conversation between a staff
member and Program Participant. Through either means, OneVillage Partners has established systems to capture this invaluable qualitative data.

**Sharing Results**: after any OneVillage Partners’ M&E activity where the community is asked for input or to provide data, we share results with the community. It is often through this process that we are able to solicit feedback from communities. Sharing results is done in a very participatory way, so community members of all education and literacy levels can understand the data.
Introduction to MSC

Most Significant Change (MSC) was developed by Rick Davies and Jess Dart in 2004. MSC utilizes stories told directly from Program Participants to assess programmatic outcomes and impact in order to improve programs and illustrate success. Program Participants lead the process by telling stories of significant change they experienced due to a program or intervention. By telling their stories and explaining why they are significant, participants play a valuable role in the selection of stories. For this very reason, MSC stories can be a powerful communications tool, as it enables impact to be explained directly by Program Participants. This guide walks through the steps of implementing your own MSC process, along with the lessons we learned along the way as we customized and refined our process.

Who This Guide is For

As OneVillage Partners began to explore the feasibility of Most Significant Change, we found a significant gap in the literature beyond Davies and Dart’s extensive guide and a number of in-depth case studies. There was no real How-To guide for implementing MSC. This toolkit is written to enable practitioners and M&E experts to be able to envision their own process for MSC. OneVillage Partners adapted some aspects of the textbook MSC process that made implementation easier in a specific, rural context. We found that with some minor adjustments, MSC became approachable for all and engaged a wide range of participants.

Getting Started

First Steps

Get the right people on board: Most Significant Change takes a lot of time and effort in planning, so involving your team early is crucial. Determine who will be key stakeholders from your staff and raise interest among them. We worked with a consultant team from The Improve Group to work through
challenges and give us a fresh set of eyes as we set out on this journey. We found that having an external sounding board was key during our planning to ensure that we anticipated challenges and adapted quickly when they arose.

Review resources: Next, we reviewed the literature. Davies and Dart’s MSC Guide is the foundation for which organizations have designed their methodologies. One of the first steps taken should be to read this thoroughly and become familiar with the method. It also helps in this initial stage to review other organizations’ reports and briefs on MSC to understand different variations on the process. You can find a list of resources at the end of this document.

Expertise Needed
Most Significant Change is not a highly technical evaluation method, but qualitative research experience is important. Strong communication among staff is essential and, without a trusting and mutually-respectful relationship between your front-line staff and participants, you might find difficulty in soliciting accurate stories of change from your targeted audience. A team that exhibits strong communication, that is comfortable dealing with challenges that might arise, and that is attuned to recording and acting on lessons learned will also help ensure MSC success. Finally, from a research perspective, it is helpful to have someone with a qualitative research background in order to undertake secondary analysis on the data you collect. This process allows for deeper learning and insight into the outcomes and impact found.

OneVillage Partners’ MSC Journey

Before diving into the actual MSC steps, we thought others may benefit from hearing about our particular path in discovering and utilizing MSC. The cornerstone of OneVillage Partners’ approach is that development must be community-led; interventions must be inspired, created and implemented by community members. OneVillage Partners (OVP) believes that local people are integral to developing community solutions to their own self-defined needs. As such, MSC felt like a natural step, as we wanted the voices of community members to be more than just valued and heard, but to be the very tool by which we measure and adapt our programs. Used in conjunction with program-specific monitoring and evaluation, MSC enabled us to look at broader, holistic outcomes from our work and enabled Program Participants to lead the process by telling stories of significant change they have experienced due to their partnership with OneVillage Partners.
Working in Kailahun District in eastern Sierra Leone, we run two programs: The Community Action Program and the Nurturing Opportunities for Women (NOW) program. The Community Action Program mobilizes, trains, and supports community members to design and implement their own projects according to their self-identified priorities. Communities go through multiple project cycles; upon completing a project, another priority is selected and developed into the next project. In the second year of engagement with a community we run the NOW program; a picture-based women’s financial literacy and empowerment program. This program helps illiterate women to organize their personal and household finances, while developing the confidence to use their voice and gaining support from their families and communities to utilize their skills.

Rather than treating MSC as a standalone activity, we incorporated it directly into our program cycle.

In order to establish whether MSC was a methodology that could be adapted to the OneVillage Partners context, we worked closely with The Improve Group, a Minnesota-based evaluation firm that could help to guide our methodology. We also worked closely with our front-line staff in the planning stages. It was important to us to raise interest with those who would be involved in implementation: the staff who have formed such close bonds with the community members whose voices will be shared in this engaging process. Through a month of intensive training (15+ hours in total) conducted by the Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) team, we found our staff were ready and excited to implement MSC in selected pilot villages.

A key component of MSC that this report will outline is the development of “Domains of Change.” These are the categories where stories are filtered into after they are collected. We decided to create five domains: two program-specific domains and three domains that applied to our model. During our pilot, each domain stemmed from key questions that we had about our programs, and the impact of the OneVillage Partners model. We intentionally set domains that were rooted in behavior change in order to capture success beyond just outputs. After the MSC pilot, we included Program Participants in domain development as Davies and Dart suggested in their MSC Guide (Davies and Dart, 2004).

MSC was piloted in three of the villages we have partnered with, where staff planned for two weeks of engagement with each community in order to raise interest, gather headlines, select headlines, conduct verification interviews, and turn these headlines into MSC stories. Following the collection and analysis of stories, the information collected in this MSC process is then fed back to the communities. As with all M&E activities at OneVillage Partners, we share results of these processes with communities in order to build understanding and close feedback loops. We also believe it is important to not be extractive in our approach, ensuring that communities are aware and understand the information collected about them.

Through the tailoring of MSC for the OneVillage Partners context, we decided to make one major revision from Davies and Dart’s original model: to include ‘headlines’ in the story collection process (see Key Concepts, Terms and Elements, page 4). This was partly done to reduce the time burden on field staff in the collection of stories, and partly as the majority of our project participants are illiterate, it was not feasible to expect participants to write their own stories. Having staff to record headlines encouraged
those unable to write their own stories to still participate in this process, and enabled staff to select the most significant headlines with the Scoring Rubric, (see Figure 4) and turn them into stories without having to write hundreds of MSC stories. In addition, we were still able to use valuable headline information for qualitative and quantitative analysis.

![Figure 3: We have found it helpful to use images drawn by a local artist to explain both the process of MSC and the concepts involved. This way illiterate members of the community may still be involved.](image)

**Pre-Implementation**

Prior to implementing Most Significant Change we found it necessary to train staff, to develop the domains through which the stories will be categorized and to develop a ‘scoring rubric’ against which to score the stories that are told. This pre-implementation stage is crucial to ensure all staff understand the process.

**Staff Training**

The training of staff in both the method of MSC and its importance is crucial to the success of implementation. In addition, hearing stories of change directly from the community members can inspire staff to see the broader impact of their work and focus on outcomes of change.

Our training is structured into five ‘modules,’ plus a Refresher Training (see Training Overview, below). Depending on the skill and experience level of staff, along with organizational time constraints, these can be facilitated as five intensive sessions, or broken down where more time is required. Trainings should allow ample time for new skills to be understood, developed, and practiced whenever possible.

Weekly trainings over a period of five weeks allowed staff to understand the key aspects of MSC while practicing their skills in the field. For maximum understanding it can be important to build on any similar principles that already exist in the work of the organization. For example, within OneVillage Partners we place great emphasis on treating others with respect and embodying active listening, we were able to build on this when developing ‘stories’ with participants.
We found that small groups of no more than 10 people enabled the sessions to be interactive and effective. The use of role play and interactive activities was crucial to begin putting these new skills into practice.

OneVillage Partners’ MSC Staff Training Overview

- **Training 1:**
  - Understand what MSC is and why stories can be an important tool of evaluation
- **Training 2:**
  - Understand when and how to use MSC, step-by-step
- **Training 3:**
  - Conducting interviews and focus groups
- **Training 4 & 5:**
  - Learn how to construct and write MSC stories
  - Learn how to feed these back to the community

For a detailed overview of the various sessions held with staff members, please see Appendix A.

Domain Development

Following the training of staff, the OneVillage Partners’ process begins by building excitement in the community and developing domains. We engage Program Participants in the development of the “domains” and include a ‘catch-all’ domain, to ensure that all outcomes – positive or negative – are captured in a domain. Domain development may occur as regularly as necessary; this does not form part of our Implementation Strategy as our current domains fit within our Theory of Change.

We hold a meeting with Program Participants to raise interest and develop domains with the people who know our work best – the leaders and women we train through our two programs. We found that engaging this group early meant they were more enthusiastic to be champions for the process in their communities. From a technical perspective, we also found that what they came up with was very valuable in developing domains for our MSC process.

For example, when we conducted a domain development meeting with Program Participants, we asked them to think about changes that have occurred since OneVillage Partners’ programs were implemented. We were surprised when female participants from our women’s financial literacy program talked about their use of voice as the major change, over their newfound financial literacy skills. Because of this input, our program domain for the NOW program became ‘Women Use Voice’.

During the community meeting with Program Participants, we encourage them to talk about change and the effect that OneVillage Partners has had in their community. During this meeting, staff present the concept of MSC and explain how it functions, why it is useful, and why it can be very positive for community members. At this point, staff should seek endorsement from the participants of the meeting.
to be involved in this process. From here, staff lead a discussion on outcomes from OneVillage Partners programs. Here are some example questions that have used in meetings:

- When you think about the partnership with OVP, what comes to mind?
- What symbols or memories come to mind?
- If you think of the top area where OVP has affected in your community, what is it?

Just as you may find during the collection of MSC stories, it can be difficult to get participants to think about abstract outcomes, rather than just tangible changes. See Appendix C for tools to encourage thinking about abstract change.

Following domain development, key staff meet to define the key areas of change that arose. Working through the ideas that were presented during the domain development meetings, staff use consensus building to categorize all the ideas into key areas. Staff are then guided on the number and type of domains to select.

We selected 1-2 domains for each program and 3-5 domains for our model as a whole. Our only mandatory domain for each cycle is the ‘catch-all’ domain. This is to ensure that we remain open to collect stories that do not fit into the domains that we have developed, and stories that display any negative impact. From here, members of our Senior Team meet to finalize the domains to be selected for that round of MSC.

Developing a Scoring Rubric

In order to ‘score’ stories it is necessary to develop a scoring rubric in order to have a means to analyze the stories. The development of a scoring rubric is an involved and exciting process, personal to each organization. We developed ours by talking through what success meant to us, both in terms of our

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Score 0-4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrates behavior change related to an activity of the program</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrates program contributed to change beyond the storyteller</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrates program met a need</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrates program included a marginalized person(s)</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrates a change that will affect long-term development on a community or household level</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrates self-reliance</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total Score:** [ ]

*Figure 4: Scoring Rubric*
programs and of our model. We looked at our Mission, Vision, and Values, and asked ourselves what we were expecting and hoping to understand through MSC.

The criteria we developed is based on behavior change, needs being met, inclusion, and sustainability – all cross-cutting themes of our programs and values. We would recommend assembling a leadership team to get together and think strategically about the Mission, Vision, and Values of the organization and how that would relate to your MSC process. Think about the expectations of what the MSC process could bring to light and then develop a criteria with front-line staff. While our rubric contains six elements, we have found this to be quite time consuming and we would recommend including fewer elements to score the stories. See Figure 4 for the criteria we have developed a measure to ‘score’ our stories.

**Implementation**

We have developed a 10-step implementation strategy that differs slightly from the 10-step process outline by Davies and Dart in the MSC Guide. The following section provides a detailed overview of our implementation process. See Appendix D for a sample implementation plan covering a one-week period. While written as a constant, we are always open to suggestions for improvement from our staff and Program Participants. We expect our process to change on an annual basis.

**Step 1: Community Meeting**

Following the development of domains, a meeting is held to introduce MSC to the entire community. The purpose of this meeting is to generate excitement around this process, to answer any questions that community members may have, to outline the timeline, and to begin collecting headlines. In addition to briefing the attendees on the purpose of MSC and how the process works, we introduce the domains, using images drawn by a local artist. This meeting is very important to the success of MSC, as the whole process relies on the engagement and openness of community members to share their stories of impact and their feelings regarding the changes in their community. In doing so, it is natural that there should be an open dialogue with interested community members in order to involve them as much as possible in the process. In addition, this meeting serves to open up the MSC process to anyone who wants to participate, and not just those who have been directly involved in the work of OneVillage Partners. During our first iteration of MSC, we discovered that 22% of people who took part in the process were not direct participants of either of our programs.
Step 2: Focus Group Meetings

At the initial community meeting, we work with Program Participants to schedule focus groups. The first focus group is held with existing Program Participants (the same group that developed domains at the onset of engagement), and then with other prominent groups, such as youths, traditional authorities, and family members. These focus groups should be a safe space for participants. We found it important to take time to ensure that everyone understands the need for respect and equal participation. Once all members are in agreement to these terms, our staff facilitates a recap on the MSC process, using the same images presented in the community meeting. Then the domains are communicated and explained in detail using images.

We realized that it could be difficult for our community members to understand the notion of ‘change’ in a broader sense. This focus group can serve as an opportunity to encourage creative thinking about change, that is, not just physical change, but also emotional and societal change. See Appendix C for tools.

Step 3: Headline Selection

The selection process begins even before stories have been written, that is, we use our selection process in order to determine which headlines should be turned into stories. This rigorous selection process begins with front-line staff scoring headlines, and ends with upper management scoring stories, when they select the ‘Top Stories’ of the year.

Following the collection of headlines, staff allocate headlines to one of the chosen organizational domains (see Figure 5). Here is where the ‘catch-all/negative’ domain is crucial; to ensure that every story told has a corresponding domain. All headlines are ‘scored’ according to the degree of demonstrable evidence of the criteria detailed in the scoring rubric (see Figure 4). We found that this ensured consistency and minimized biased judgments of significance. Every member of the primary selection team scores a headline on a scale of 0-4 for each criteria. The total scores of each criterion are summed, and total headline scores from each scorer are added. The
Step 4: Verification Interviews

Davies and Dart suggest verification to ensure that both the description and interpretation of the story are valid. We validate our stories through verification interviews with participants for several reasons. First, these interviews offer a one-on-one opportunity for staff to ask further questions and discover enough information to develop a full story. Second, it allows our staff to ensure that the story really is true and uncover any potential issues with validity. This interview should be an open and transparent dialogue, with the staff taking the time to repeat back the words of the participant, to ensure accuracy and maximum ownership on behalf of the participant. Just as with any data collection and reporting process, accuracy is paramount.

Step 5: Story Writing

As we rely on our staff to write these stories of Most Significant Change, it is important to provide training on the art of writing stories. A well-written story is not only more likely to captivate the attention of the reader, but is able to reflect the sentiments of the subject in the most accurate way. Thus, it is important to us to equip staff with the best tools to make their stories engaging, accurate, and interesting.

The objectives of the story-writing workshop are for our staff to:
- Understand the audience
- Identify components that make a great story
- Be able to write compelling MSC stories

Emphasis in this training is placed on ‘story flow’ and understanding the importance of story structure. Further tips for building staff capacity in story training can be found in Appendix A, Training 5. The below graphic captures the key elements of a story that we try to convey. Once the stories are written and edited, they then move through the selection process. This process is multi-tiered and contains checks and balances to include both fairness and accuracy.

Figure 6: This graphic has helped us to explain ‘story flow’ during staff trainings
The New Wave to Community Development

Community: Yandohun  
Domain: Inclusive Leadership  
Coordinator: Abdulai Sesay  
Participant: Hawa Bokarie

Despite the increased understanding of the importance of female empowerment in development approaches, many women across Africa still face marginalization and discrimination when it comes to leadership and decision making in their community. A prevailing stereotype in Sierra Leone is that “women are meant for the kitchen and the other room”, a concept that has been broadly felt in the community of Yandohun. As a consequence of these perceptions, few women were interested in putting themselves forward for leadership.

This was further compounded by their lack of unity and their inability to mobilize, as a consequence of this women were even further excluded from decision making. Explaining this is Hawa Bokarie, a now vibrant and active member in society, committed to the development of her community Yandohun.

The turning point for Hawa occurred with OVP’s intervention in 2016 when she became a Community Action Group (CAG) volunteer. Through the inclusive platform provided by OVP women felt included and valued and CAG volunteers such as Hawa received training and consequently felt empowered to lead their community. Hawa sought to influence her community and conducted house to house sensitization about gender and development, encouraging other women to be involved in all development activities. Along with her other CAG colleagues, Hawa established a partnership with OVP’s Nurturing Opportunities for Women program. Through this partnership, they were able to broaden the reach of the program and empower all women in the community with financial decision making.

Hawa and indeed many of the women in this community faced challenges when they began to assert themselves. It took time for others to take them seriously and they even struggled with other women not appreciating and respecting the work they were doing. Through re-enforcing the efforts to sensitize the authorities and community members on the role of women in community development, gradually changes began to occur. Hawa and other women in Yandohun now provide sound representation within and outside their community. Because of them, there is an increased presence of women in leadership roles, which has had the knock-on effect of encouraging greater female participation in development activities.
Step 6: Presentation to Management
The second round of selection occurs once the selected headlines have been turned into stories. The completed stories are presented to the Country Leadership Team, who scores them using the same scoring rubric from the headline selection scoring. If anyone disagrees with the selection, we undertake consensus building exercises to reach consensus on which stories advance. The consensus building has been really important for us, as some scorers might have additional information about stories that are not written on paper. The discussion provides a place to talk about details that didn’t make the final draft, which may change people’s minds about the top selected stories.

Step 7: Final Selection
The top stories from all domains are then sent to the Executive Team in the US in order to select the top story of the year. All scoring history is kept on file and outcomes of scoring at each level are communicated openly.

As the selected stories will likely be publicized by the organization, it is really important that the team is all comfortable with the stories selected and excited to use the stories for external communications purposes.

Step 8: Feedback
The sharing of results to communities is integral to OneVillage Partners’ values, and an important process that, if conducted effectively should heighten the trust and understanding between the organization and the community members. Given the high levels of illiteracy in the communities in which we work, we have found that for community members to best understand the feedback, we should use visual representations wherever possible. Using illustrations or real photos from your work to depict changes can be an effective way to reach mutual understanding on the changes discussed with a large audience.

We believe the most effective way to deliver this information will vary from community to community, and will depend upon the relationship that the organization has developed with the community. But here’s how we do it:

1. Once MSC has concluded and the entry and cleaning of data has been completed, we conduct a quick sweep of the qualitative data for any key themes and distinct changes that result from each village.
2. We then provide these results to front-line staff, and they plan a community meeting to share these results back to the community. During these meetings the Facilitator will:
   a. Explain MSC, why we do it, and how we looked at all the stories collected in their village
   b. Thank the community for their participation
   c. Share the number of headlines collected, and the types of participants, e.g. program participants and village leaders
   d. Share the overarching themes – using pictures drawn specifically for this purpose
   e. Share the key changes – using pictures drawn specifically for this purpose
   f. Ask individuals who shared highly scored headlines to share their story with the community

We have found a number of different visual tactics to be effective at communicating results to communities, such as:

- Visually representing numbers or the percentage of change with people.
  - Direct community members to move to opposite sides of the meeting space to represent a statistic, or a percentage.
- Using a matrix with local materials to visually represent the numbers and percentage of changes.
  - Drawing a matrix with sand enables information to be depicted with materials such as leaves and stones. See Figure 8.
• Using either locally drawn images or photographs of actual community members to illustrate and show changes or themes.
  
  ○ See Figure 7 for an example of an image depicting change. Photographs may be ever more effective as people can be inspired to see those they know embodying the change.

Results from Most Significant Change have many applications – to improve programs and to inform communities of their progress. Another way to apply results from an MSC process is to integrate them into next steps for a program or community. As MSC is built into our project cycle, we utilize the results to kick-start another round of engagement with communities. This allows us to hone in on what we achieved with the community, and talk about ways to build on those successes. When we share results from an MSC process back with the community, it opens the door for a vibrant discussion on the community’s next project idea and how they can continue working towards their vision.

Step 9: Quantification & Analysis
After collecting headlines, preliminary analysis can be conducted on the data. A qualified staff member should be responsible for entering data into a qualitative-friendly database.

There are many options available, and we particularly like MS Excel using the Visual Basic Application. Using qualitative data analysis (QDA) software is not required, in fact, you can do a lot of analysis simply in Excel. Setting up a User-form in Excel allows us to organize all the information from the headline form into appropriate columns, and then upload that information to a qualitative data analysis program. Here are some of the things you can understand from your dataset:

• Demographics of the people sharing headlines
• Headlines collected by region
• Headlines collected by domain
• Headlines collected by date
• Headlines collected by Program or Intervention
• Overarching themes of headlines
• Intended and unintended outcomes
• Concentration of specific outcomes based on demographics
• Prevalence of negative stories

While it is not necessary to use a QDA program, it can allow you to dive even more deeply into your dataset. During our first iteration of MSC, we tried to have front line staff members code stories as expected and unexpected – in order to speed up our qualitative research. However, we found this to be very challenging given the broad range of experience and understanding of intended and unintended outcomes amongst our staff. Given this, we decided to remove this responsibility from our front-line staff.

Our coding process is three-fold: (1) an initial review of the dataset to formulate the coding tree and become familiar with the dataset (2) a preliminary round of coding is conducted by a senior team member, in order to code the data and make edits and additions to the code tree (3) the Manager is the last one to code the dataset and make finalizations to the coding tree before doing a final round of coding and analysis.

Step 10: Revision & Learning
Once you have completed a round of MSC, Davies and Dart recommend conducting a revision of the process. We have found there is no perfect process for us, and a complex method like this requires constant iteration; as such, we have refined our process annually. Looking back on lessons learned and collaborating with key stakeholders in the process has allowed us to improve and refine immediately – before crucial information is left behind (Better Evaluation, March 2013).

Beyond revising the process, there is tremendous potential for organizational learning with MSC. OneVillage Partners has integrated our MSC process into our program cycles in such a way that allows us to prepare for the next round of engagement with a community by looking back at MSC lessons learned (programmatic), and making action plans to implement in the subsequent year. We hold a workshop with key staff in order to review programmatic lessons learned, dive deeply into those lessons, and brainstorm ways that these lessons can be addressed in the following year of engagement. It is a one-day workshop with lots of brainstorming and plenty of grand ideas. By the end of the workshop, the team has a set of actions that are then integrated into future programming.
Some examples of how we turn programmatic lessons learned into actions during this workshop are:

**Lessons Learned**

As we explored the utility of MSC, we discovered that many guides cover their programmatic lessons learned, but few detail the lessons they learned about implementing MSC. Lessons from both the pilot and second iteration of MSC for OneVillage Partners are included below:

**Pre-Implementation**
- Staff training should be highly tailored to the expertise and experience-level of your team. Frequent, less intensive trainings work well for a team that needs time to contemplate new concepts, while highly intensive training might be appropriate for an experienced team of researchers.
- Establish a culture of qualitative data collection and encourage staff to think about stories of impact not just during MSC but throughout program implementation, as this will improve their data collection and story writing skills during MSC.
- Be sure to train staff on the importance of both expected and unexpected outcomes. Front-line staff might have a tendency to gravitate towards expected outcomes or positive changes. Ensure that staff understand the importance and implications of unexpected or negative changes for programmatic learning.

**Implementation**
- Domains should be developed in a participatory way. This increases buy-in and understanding, and enables participants to be more engaged throughout the process of MSC.
• Getting participants to think about change is difficult beyond material or tangible things. Many warm up activities and probing questions are needed to allow participants to think about significant, often times more abstract change.

• Headlines or story ideas are an effective way to gather a lot of content in a time-saving manner. This enables staff to collect story ideas from a high number of people with limited time and resources.

• It is important for front-line staff to feel empowered and confident to question every story they hear. This should be a positive experience with rigor valued and praised.

Feedback

• Real photographs should be used where possible; both in the explanation of MSC and in the feeding back of results. The use of actual photographs from that particular village, in addition to illustrations, can heighten the impact and understanding.

The main lesson we have learned is understanding the crucial process of recording the lessons we have learned, and the challenges we face. This goes deep into the core of OneVillage Partners’ values, as we place great value on the feedback from both of our staff and Program Participants, ensuring the learnings are incorporated into any future programming.

Conclusion

Most Significant Change is a powerful tool to enable organizational impact to be captured and measured through the voices of those most affected by the work. The process allows for honest and constructive feedback, shows respect to participants, and gives participants a greater sense of ownership. This understanding is integral to OneVillage Partners’ work and we believe the trusting and transparent relationship we have developed with communities leads to successful and sustainable projects.

The data collected during MSC may reaffirm some of your existing assumptions or bring to life some unintended outcomes that were unforeseen. The learning that comes from Most Significant Change can impact both the programs and the organization as a whole, in a transparent and accessible manner.

While it can seem daunting at the onset, MSC is a flexible methodology, with room to iterate and adapt it based on your own needs. It also provides incredible opportunity for programmatic growth by uncovering outcomes that are difficult to measure. For communications purposes, you will find that MSC stories provide you with invaluable narrative accounts of how impactful your work is.

As with all methods, knowledge sharing of best practices and lessons learned are the keys to success so we encourage you to continue the conversation with us! You can reach OneVillage Partners at info@onevillagepartners.org or look at our reports and find out more about what we are doing at www.onevillagepartners.org.
Suggested or Further Resources

Alliance in India. (March 2007). *Stories of Significance: Redefining Change*

- This report provides an introduction into using MSC, and how MSC can interact with other Monitoring and Evaluation methods. The report explores the benefits of MSC as a participatory tool, and details their step by step process.


- This is a very practical resource that includes a case study of an evaluation that employed the use of rubrics to make evaluative judgements. This resource can be helpful in understanding the role of the scoring rubric in MSC, and how to effectively create a sound rubric.

Context. (January 2014). *Most Significant Change: ECEBC Training*

- This staff training guide provides an overview into how to train staff in the technique of MSC. While it does not provide much context on the background to the training and the experience of staff involved, it highlights some useful ideas for staff training.

Dart, J and Davies, R. (October 2003). *MSC Quick-Start Guide*

- This is a useful interactive guide that can complement Davies and Dart’s main MSC guide. It asks the reader questions about how MSC could be designed and implemented in their specific context.


- This manual designed for Equal Access staff is a useful guide to the MSC technique, with a mixture of theory and hands-on work and examples. It provides a detailed overview of how this organization (Equal Access) was been able to execute MSC. This guide breaks down each step and provides both answers and examples for why MSC should be conducted in a certain way.

Institute for Sustainable Futures. (June 2004). *'Most Significant Change' Pilot Project*

- This report provides an excellent executive summary, detailing the benefits and limitations of MSC and how it can and should be adapted to varying contexts. This guide explains the real and tangible benefits of MSC.

Olivier Serrat. (January 2009). *The Most Significant Change Technique.* Knowledge Solutions

- This guide provides a very concise overview of MSC and how and why it should be implemented in a certain way. Both the benefits and draw backs of MSC are explored succinctly with a useful timeline for implementation and explaining the broader purpose of each step.


- This book chapter concerns how stories can aid the evaluation process for organizations. This can prove to be a very useful tool when originally educating staff about the benefits to MSC. It provides an overview into when and how to use stories in evaluation, and how they can work together to complement other forms of data.

Plan Canada. (March 2014). *Youth Microfinance Project, Most Significant Change Stories: Voices of Youth*

- This comprehensive report includes explanations of MSC and the applicability of this tool in the context of microfinance. It provides a good in-depth explanation of their process and a section of training staff in MSC and how to encourage buy-in. It also provides a good overview of the benefits and limitations of MSC, and there is a useful MSC questionnaire in the annex.

- This is the ultimate guide to MSC, written by those who dreamt up the technique and have implemented it in varying contexts. This guide contains much of the information needed to design and implement MSC within your organization. The methodology is explained in detail with the relevant advantages and limitations of MSC clearly defined.

Safer World. (January 2016). *Doing Things Differently - Rethinking Monitoring and Evaluation to Understand Change*

- This paper provides a detailed insight into how to uproot and change a global Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy. The report highlights the organizational thinking that led to the decision to transition to an approach inspired by *Outcome Mapping* and *Outcome Harvesting*. Despite not strictly being MSC, it provides organizational process learning and a step by step guide to the stages of change to a more participatory M&E approach.
Appendix A: Staff Training Modules

*For a more detailed overview of our staff training, including activity ideas please contact info@onevillagepartners.org

Training 1: Understanding MSC
Approximately 3 hours

**Intended Learning Outcomes:**
1. Understand what MSC
2. Understand and identify the MSC steps, their order and key components
3. Describe why we use MSC, when and how
4. Recognize the value of stories in evaluation

**Training Components:**
- Provide background on MSC, why to use, provide examples of NGOs that have used MSC
- Explain MSC timeline and how MSC is implemented
- Discuss the merit of using stories in evaluation. Present Robert Kruger’s “Stories in Evaluation” article and discuss the learning
- Discuss the importance of both qualitative and quantitative data and when it might be more appropriate to use one rather than the other
- Feedback, revisit learning objectives, questions and updates on further trainings

Training 2: Introducing Your MSC process
Approximately 4 hours

**Intended Learning Outcomes:**
1. Understand how MSC fits into your evaluation processes
2. Develop deep understanding of MSC process
3. Gain confidence to implement MSC process with program participants

**Training Components:**
- Review why MSC will be used
- Present implementation steps overview and discuss how to mitigate any potential challenges with the timeline
- Review MSC steps and timeline
- Facilitator to present the process that will be used and the expected outcomes.
- Practice each of the ten implementation steps
- Feedback, revisit learning objectives, questions and updates on further trainings

Training 3: Gathering the Stories
Approximately 3 hours

**Intended Learning Outcomes:**
1. Understand how to conduct focus groups and interviews with participants.
2. Understand the elements of an MSC story.
3. Understand how to guide participants to talk about changes in their life.
4. Understand interview protocol.

_Training Components:_
- Review MSC implementation steps
- Introduce concept of focus groups, brainstorm how they may already be used
- Go through the Focus Group Guide
- Review homework in pairs, then as a group
- Review examples of headlines
- Provide note-taking tips
- Discuss purpose of verification interviews, then practice interviews
- Feedback, revisit learning objectives, questions and updates on further trainings

_Training 4: Writing the MSC stories & Selection_
Approximately 4 hours

_Intented Learning Outcomes:_
1. Understand how to co-write MSC stories
2. Understand the story selection process fully
3. Understand how to present information back to the community

_Training Components:_
- Discuss what makes a good headline and how it relates to the story
- Participants to practice developing headlines from existing stories, highlighting the key message
- Present idea of co-writing stories and how to do this effectively
- Begin to practice writing and discuss challenges
- Feedback, revisit learning objectives, questions and updates on further trainings

_Training 5: Story Writing Workshop_
To take place after focus groups and interviews have taken place and story writing teams are ready to draft their stories.
Approximately 2 hours

_Intented Learning Outcomes:_
1. Understand audience
2. Identify components that make a great story (descriptive, relatable, emotional, etc.)
3. Be able to write compelling MSC stories

_Training Components:_
- Introduction to creative writing
- Facilitator present ‘7 Tips for Writing a Fabulous Story’
  1. One person, one purpose, one point, in order to focus on the key message and the events leading up to it
  2. Plan the story around this key message that will stay with the reader
  3. Start with a relatable hero, anyone can be a hero of a story, but make sure the reader understands who yours is!
4. Good stories include a challenge or conflict. The compelling aspect to a story is how the subject overcomes this challenge. The reader’s interest in this challenge will be intensified by inclusion of descriptions, emotions, and relatable human aspects.
5. Put your reader in the moment. Use vivid imagery, compelling details, emotion, and varied adjectives.
6. Keep stories short, but concise and engaging.
7. Be creative.
   - Group to brainstorm the components of story writing: beginning, middle and end
   - Participants practice writing an MSC story with information from focus group discussions
   - Feedback, revisit learning objectives, and questions

**Training 6: Refresher training**

*To take place prior to a new cycle of MSC, to remind staff of the principles of MSC and to boost their confidence in their skills to implement this.*

Approximately 3 hours

**Intended Learning Outcomes:**

1. Recall what MSC is
2. Describe why we use MSC, when and how
3. Understand the implementation plan and components
4. Review story writing techniques

**Training Components:**

- Brainstorm elements of MSC
- Revisit the MSC implementation steps
- Review the difference between headlines and stories
- Share challenges and learnings from previous iteration of MSC
- Brainstorm around questions that staff may have, such as hearing repetitive stories, hearing stories that are negative or those that do not fit into a category
- Discuss any areas staff would like to recap
- Review the community implementation plan with staff and ask for feedback and encourage any concerns to be aired.

**Appendix B: Sample Community Meeting Agenda**

1. Introduction of Staff and Leaders
2. Discussion: Why are We Here?
3. Staff share idea of MSC and why we do it
4. Introduction of MSC Steps (through illustrations)
5. Introduction of MSC Domains (through illustrations)
6. Feedback or Questions from Attendees
7. Sharing of MSC Stories from Attendees *(based on the question, “what is the most significant change you have experienced since X intervention came to your community?”)*
8. Closing remarks, thanks and informing participants for focus group meetings
### Appendix C: Sample Focus Group Guide

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Welcome</td>
<td>Facilitator to welcome participants – everyone to introduce themselves. <em>This session is about evaluating X organization’s work, based on your experiences. By the end of the session, we will aim to have gone through a process of observation and reflection about significant changes you experienced in your life since X organization came here. Your participation is valued as it will help the X organization team to continue to effectively work with the community.</em></td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Ground Rules              | 1. Aim for equal participation  
2. Display respect for others (let them finish what they’re saying, no interruptions)  
3. Keep focused  
4. Maintain momentum (don’t get bogged down in particular stories) | 5    |
| Review of MSC             | Brief review of Most Significant Change process using pictures as presented in the community meeting. Facilitator presents the MSC domains and explains each in detail.                                                 | 10   |
| Ice Breaker               | Facilitator selects an ice breaker.                                                                                                                                                                           | 5    |
| Change-thinking warm up activity | As participants are outside the training space during the ice breaker, one facilitator closes all the windows or removes all the chairs in the room. participants enter the facilitator asks the participants to think about how they feel at that time. *What has changed? What was it like before compared to now? How do you feel?*  
Goal is to get participants to start thinking and talking about change, not just physical change but also emotional. Facilitator is free to adapt activity as they see fit for the audience. | 10   |
| Pair/Share activity       | Participants are asked to provide the most significant changes in their lives.  
*Everybody’s experiences are unique. In this section, we want to get some facts about the changes they experienced, as we will come back to the community later on to gather more information, if we need it. We really want to know, what are the most significant, the BIGGEST changes you have experienced since X organization came here? We want you to feel free and comfortable to share your experiences.*  
- Facilitator introduces the question:  
  “*What is the most significant change you have experienced in your life since X intervention came here?*”  
Note-taker keeps track of which person the story is about and the key elements of the story – later these notes will be turned into a headline plus key supporting facts from the story. | 60   |
| Closing statements        | Thank participants for their input. Confirm that their participation is valued and assists X organization greatly.  
Let participants know that they may be approached for follow up information about their stories. Next month, the facilitators will come back to present the most significant change stories to the participants. | 15   |
Appendix D: Sample Implementation Plan of Most Significant Change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Community Implementation Plan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Day 1** | - **Community Meeting** led by field staff from that village to communicate MSC plan. One staff member to take notes on headline forms if headlines are presented by community members.  
- **Focus Group Meetings**: Field staff facilitate focus group meeting with Program Participants following the community meeting to gather headlines from them. Staff to take notes on headline forms. |
| **Day 2** | - Field staff hold focus group meeting with Youths to gather headlines. Staff to take notes on headline forms.  
- Field staff hold focus group meeting with Traditional Authorities to gather headlines. Staff to take notes.  
- Field staff revisit key village members using list provided by M&E Team to gather additional headlines. |
| **Day 3** | - Team continues collecting headlines and completing headline forms in the morning  
- **Headline Selection**: Team meets in the afternoon to select the top headline from each domain in each of the villages (note, 3-4 hours are needed to complete scoring)  
- **Verification Interviews**: Prep for Verification Interviews |
| **Days 4 & 5** | - Field staff to conduct Verification Interviews  
- **Story Writing**: Field staff to write stories with support from M&E Team, stories should be written and handed in to management within one week |

**Preparation prior to implementation**

1. Refresher training (2 hours) on MSC with M&E Team
2. Field staff to inform community of meeting
3. Field staff to inform project participants about focus group meetings
4. Field staff invite Traditional Authorities and Youths to focus group meeting
5. Team preps for Community Meeting and Focus Group Meetings

© OneVillage Partners 2017