



Advocacy & Policy Change Evaluation: A Primer

*Developed for the Annie E. Casey Foundation
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Emergence of Advocacy Evaluation


Since 2005, foundations, advocacy organizations, and evaluators have been involved in field-level conversations about advocacy evaluation to seek collective understanding about key elements of this work.¹ These elements include: a common language for talking about advocacy evaluation, shared understanding about approaches, implications for change in organizational evaluation practice, and identification and development of new data collection tools.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation has been a significant contributor to field building through its collaborative support of information exchanges (along with The Atlantic Philanthropies and The California Endowment), as well as by commissioning the development of a *A Guide to Measuring Advocacy and Policy*.² In addition, the Annie E. Casey Foundation has supported ORS Impact to facilitate a “real world” test of the guide’s advocacy evaluation framework with several KIDS COUNT



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state grantees. The KIDS COUNT pilot effort has provided opportunities to apply emerging tools in advocacy and policy change evaluation, and garner lessons about what it takes for organizations to engage in self-directed advocacy evaluation.

While the field remains nascent, there are areas of general consensus as well as insights that come from recent implementation of advocacy evaluation approaches. These are summarized in the following pages.

State of the Field: Areas of Consensus and Learning

1. In some ways, advocacy evaluation is *similar* to evaluation in other areas.

Advocacy evaluation is enhanced by intentionality and good planning; it is important to clearly identify and name what is to be measured and what purpose(s) evaluation serves.

Tools that help identify measures and shape evaluation plans, such as logic models, theory of change, and outcome maps are useful for advocacy evaluation planning. Many of these tools have other benefits as well, for example, to support communication about advocacy strategies and results.


Advocacy evaluation supports both accountability and learning.

2. In some ways, advocacy evaluation is *different* than evaluation in other areas.

Program evaluation typically requires program elements to be well defined and well understood. In this context, evaluation is often about identifying programmatic aspects that can be defended and replicated. In contrast, advocacy occurs in a dynamic political and partner-oriented context where strategies and outcomes are often fluid and subject to change given external factors. In advocacy evaluation, specific outcomes often cannot be well defined in advance, though it may be possible to identify broad areas of interim change. In addition, there are cases when advocates may not want particular outcomes to be publically identified.

“Our work to measure the impact of our advocacy efforts, beginning with the development of a theory of change, has moved our work forward significantly. The process of defining our strategies, outcomes, and goals gave our team a framework for discussing the values and direction of our organization in the coming years. By documenting the outcomes of our work, we are better positioned to advocate for a system that effectively serves children.”

— Director of Policy and Research,
North Carolina Action for Children
(KIDS COUNT grantee)



While strong evaluation of programs is built on fidelity and consistency, strong advocacy evaluation is much more likely to be iterative and adaptive. The difference in the degree to which an evaluation plan remains relatively constant (as in program evaluation) versus relatively fluid, also suggests differences in the role of evaluators. Within advocacy evaluation, evaluators may be more involved in ongoing consultation to define outcomes and measurement approaches.

3. Articulating theory of change provides focus to advocacy organizations that try to do it all.

The process of developing an intentional roadmap for specific advocacy efforts provides focus for advocates, as well as an opportunity for reflection, learning, integration, and adaptation of strategies. Further, as more funders begin to embrace advocacy and policy change as ways to advance their goals, they are interested in understanding the results of advocacy and policy change investments.³ This requires grantees to clarify and speak to how their work reflects what funders value and want to achieve. Since attribution, or identifying factors that actually caused a change to occur, is difficult at best given the complex and dynamic advocacy context, theory of change can also provide a point of internal accountability and shared understanding among advocacy partners, such as funders and grantees.

4. Interim outcomes are important to gauge progress.

While policy wins, policy changes, or impact on social and physical conditions are the ultimate intended results of advocacy, these are best viewed as long-term achievements. Interim outcome categories provide a frame that helps realistically and meaningfully gauge progress within a typical one-to-three year grant term, and may help establish reasonable points of accountability in a grant-funding context. Interim outcomes may also supplement performance measures (e.g., number of media placements) to enhance evaluation. Interim outcome categories reflect elements of change in communities, institutions, and systems that are likely to result from advocacy and policy work. Interim outcomes represent discrete areas of progress that lead up to and support policy change and social change agendas. Significant interim changes may be shifts in social norms, strengthened organizational capacity, strengthened alliances, and a strengthened base of support. Further, because in advocacy evaluation the unit of analysis is often less clear than in other areas (e.g., could be system changes, practice changes, policy changes, or changes within a certain population), interim outcomes can serve as placeholders and suggest pathways of change even without naming specific changes.

5. A number of data collection tools are available and can be customized to particular advocacy efforts or organizations.

Because the field of advocacy evaluation is relatively young, there is not yet a rich bank of tools. The following pages include a resource list of methods and tools particularly suitable to advocacy evaluation. In this area of evaluation, tools or processes that can be adapted and customized for unique situations are common. These are often qualitative in nature to better capture contextual factors, changing relationships, or changing perceptions, all of which are important in the advocacy realm. Measurement may also be implemented via tracking tools that help document—in real time—what staff observe related to various outcome areas.

6. Advocacy evaluation presents some unique challenges for funders.

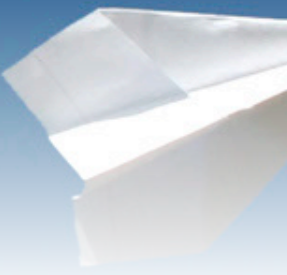
Grant-level vs. strategy-level evaluation. Funders may be seeking broad or long-term change through a well-coordinated strategy or a patchwork of individual grants without clear expectations (or clearly communicated expectations) regarding how the results or accountability of each individual grantee fit together.

Reporting advocacy evaluation results. It is not always clear what should be reported with regard to advocacy evaluation. Considerations include appropriate expectations for both individual grantees and coordinated advocacy strategies, as well as issues related to the desire for protection from total transparency.

Evaluation time-frame. The results of advocacy are perhaps best identified in the very short term or very long term. The immediate results related to implementation of specific tactics within a broad advocacy effort are typically fairly easy to identify as are the broad policy related, population, or environmental changes to which multiple advocacy tactics or campaigns contribute. As most grant cycles happen in one-, three-, or five-year increments, this has become a very typical evaluation time frame. However, because advocacy efforts can reshape dramatically during a five-year time horizon, this presents challenges with regard to identifying appropriate outcomes at the outset and evaluating these measures.

Evaluation capacity among advocacy organizations. Though many advocacy organizations have innate cultures of data and reflection, these activities are often informal. Further, most advocacy organizations have lean operations—few staff, shoestring budgets. Therefore, it is challenging to create and integrate systematic, evaluative processes. In addition, very little funding is available to





support advocacy evaluation as a routine operation. Though foundations or other groups may be interested in large-scale, long-term advocacy evaluations, this is far different from what advocates have the capacity to do on their own.

Want more?

If so, check out the following materials:

- **Want to learn more about advocacy and policy change interim outcome areas?** Check out *A Guide to Measuring Advocacy and Policy* by ORS Impact (2007). Available at: orsimpact.com
- **Here are ten tips for funders on communicating with grantees about advocacy and policy change evaluation.** Look up *Evaluating Policy Change and Advocacy: The Funder's Perspective* by Barbara Masters and prepared for the Center for Evaluation Innovation (2009). Available at: innonet.org
- **Want to see some examples of advocacy evaluation tools and data collection methods?** Flip to the next page for some resources.

"For KIDS COUNT, piloting advocacy evaluation has helped grantees be better able to articulate: 'Here's what we want to do and here's how we're going to do it' [via a theory of change]. At the same time, as a funder we need to ask grantees to identify and report on performance measures. Because the relationship between theory of change and performance measures isn't always clear or clean, program officers might find they have to run interference between what programs say is their focus and foundation pressures that dictate what grantees must report. Within Casey, performance measures can sometimes take precedence but they are not meant to exclude other types of evaluative thinking and approaches."

— Don Crary, KIDS COUNT Initiative Coordinator

1 Field-level discussions have occurred through information exchanges at conferences and sponsored convenings, through journal publications, and via the American Evaluation Association's advocacy evaluation topical interest group. See *Advocacy Evaluation Field Building: Where Are We?* presented by Julia Coffman at the 2009 American Evaluation Association Annual Meeting in Orlando, FL.

2 See *A Guide to Measuring Advocacy and Policy* (2007) by ORS Impact, prepared for the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Available at: orsimpact.com and aecf.org

3 See *Evaluating Policy Change and Advocacy: the Funders Perspective*. (2009) by Barbara Masters, prepared for the Center for Evaluation Innovation.

Advocacy Evaluation Data Collection Methods and Tools

Availability and Description

What Makes an Effective Advocacy Organization? A Framework for Determining Advocacy Capacity

Raynor, J., York, P., and Chee Sim, S. of TCC Group, (2009)

Defines core capacities for advocacy organizations and outlines a model for evaluating organizational advocacy capacity. Can be found at: http://www.tccgrp.com/pdfs/index.php?pub=EffectiveAdvocacy_final.pdf

Build Your Advocacy Grantmaking: Advocacy Evaluation Tool Advocacy Capacity Assessment Tool

Alliance for Justice, (2006)

Tools designed to help funders understand results of advocacy grantmaking. Also designed to help advocacy grantees gain insights to strengthen their advocacy work. Included is a detailed check list for assessing nonprofits' capacity to engage in advocacy work. Can be found at: http://bolderadvocacy.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/Build_Your_Advocacy_Grantmaking_paywall.pdf

A Handbook of Data Collection Tools: A Companion to "Guide to Measuring Advocacy and Policy."

Reisman, J., Gienapp, A., and Stachowiak, S., of ORS Impact, (2007)

Handbook presents multiple examples of qualitative and quantitative advocacy evaluation methods and tools, organized by interim outcome categories. Can be found at: http://orsimpact.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/a_handbook_of_data_collection_tools.pdf

Are We There Yet? A Communications Evaluation Guide

Asibey Consulting for The Communications Network, (2009)

Guide outlines a nine-step process for creating plans to monitor and measure communications. Can be found at: <http://issuu.com/comnetwork/docs/arewethereyet?mode=embed&layout=http%3A%2F%2Fskin.issuu.com%2Fv%2Fflight%2Flayout.xml&showFlipBtn=true>

Bellwether Methodology

Blair, E. (2007). Evaluating an issue's position on the policy agenda: The bellwether methodology. *The Evaluation Exchange*, 13(1).

Approach to gauge where policy makers stand and their degree of support re: policy issues of interest. Can be found at: <http://www.hfrp.org/evaluation/the-evaluation-exchange/issue-archive/advocacy-and-policy-change/evaluating-an-issue-s-position-on-the-policy-agenda-the-bellwether-methodology>

Electronic Advocacy Tracking

M+R Strategic Services and NTEN (2014). *eNonprofit Benchmarks Study*.

Study of 53 leading nonprofits provides benchmarks for several e-advocacy metrics. Can be found at: <http://mrbenchmarks.com/>



Advocacy Evaluation Data Collection Methods and Tools

Availability and Description

Policy Maker Ratings

Coffman, J. and Reed, E. (2009). *Unique Methods in Advocacy Evaluation*.

Method to gauge political will or support for a particular advocacy issue/proposal among a defined group of policymakers (e.g., legislature, council, etc.). Goes beyond typical measures (e.g., number of bills introduced on the issue, number of bill cosponsors or co-signers, number of votes for or against specific bills) to capitalize on advocates' insider knowledge about individual policymakers' stances on policy issues. Can be found at: http://www.innonet.org/resources/files/Unique_Methods_Brief.pdf

Political Will: What is it? How is it Measured?

Charney, C. (2009)

Brief defines political will and suggests an approach to measurement. Can be found at: http://www.charneyresearch.com/pdf/09May5_Charney_Newsletter_Political_Will.pdf

Resources for Evaluating Community Organizing

Alliance for Justice, (2009)

Compilation of materials and resources, including case studies, tools and methodologies, and theoretical approaches to evaluation of community organizing. Can be found at: <http://bolderadvocacy.org/tools-for-effective-advocacy/overview-of-evaluating-community-organizing/reco>

Systems Mapping

Coffman, J. and Reed, E. (2009). *Unique Methods in Advocacy Evaluation*.

Approach to create a visual systems map that helps identify, measure and capture system changes. Can be found at: http://www.innonet.org/resources/files/Unique_Methods_Brief.pdf

Retrospective Case Studies

Example: Patton, M. (2008). *Advocacy Impact Evaluation*. *Journal of Multidisciplinary Evaluation*. Volume 5: Number 9.

Approach to understand why policy change did/did not occur. Example describes a case study utilizing the General Elimination Method (also called the forensic method) where extensive data review "led to elimination of alternative or rival explanations until the most compelling explanation, supported by the evidence, remained." Available at: http://journals.sfu.ca/jmde/index.php/jmde_1/article/view/159/181





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