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## **Advocacy and Policy Change Evaluation:**

### **A Brief Overview**

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#### **Background**

“Advocates have an interest in understanding what has changed as a result of their activities, and the extent to which their strategies and ways of working were effective in helping to secure change. Evaluation is a means to validate advocacy investments, support learning, and demonstrate accountability to intended beneficiaries, donors, and supporters”.<sup>i</sup>

While there is a vast literature about the evaluation of programmes, interventions and initiatives, the evaluation of advocacy projects is relatively new. For a long time, advocacy and policy change efforts were put in the ‘too hard to measure’ basket as it involves the complex and unpredictable area of policy change. Nevertheless, in recent times a small but growing number of organisations, mainly American based philanthropic organisations that fund advocacy, have begun to develop frameworks for evaluating advocacy to address these challenges.<sup>ii</sup>

In addition to frameworks, new approaches to evaluation have emerged specifically for complex efforts like advocacy that evolve over time. These more flexible approaches include, for example, developmental evaluation.<sup>iii</sup> These evaluations are often more about supporting learning and improvement while advocacy efforts are implemented. They do not make definitive judgments about success or failure. Rather, they provide feedback, generate learning, and either support strategy decisions or affirm changes to them. This informs advocacy strategy as it evolves, so advocates can progress toward their goals.<sup>iv</sup>

Evaluations also need to inform funding organisations to be able to answer questions about how and where grantees are having an impact on the policy process, which strategies are more or less successful, and what can we learn from the most effective advocacy projects and organisations.<sup>v</sup> At the same time, advocates want to know how to measure success. They see that advocacy evaluation can help them improve their work, make better plans, and involve more people in the cause.<sup>vi</sup>

#### **Advocacy and Evaluation: What’s different about evaluating advocacy and policy change?**

Firstly, there are evaluation principles of design and practice that apply to advocacy and policy change evaluations, just as they do to other evaluations. For example, all evaluators conduct systematic and data-based inquiries. Those inquiries can be quantitative or

qualitative and typically use a core set of methods such as interviews and surveys. Evaluators also have tools—like logic models or theories of change—that are helpful in most, if not all, evaluations.

Secondly, what’s different? Advocacy work differs from programmes or direct services. Advocacy strategies evolve and change over time, activities and desired outcomes can shift, and external forces and conditions can impact significantly. Also, most advocacy and social change organisations are small in terms of their size and capacity to manage evaluations.<sup>v</sup>

Given the differences in advocacy work, evaluations need to ensure the information they provide is useful and relevant to the advocacy and policy change efforts. Evaluations need to:

- **Provide real time feedback:** Report regularly and not only at the evaluation's conclusion. The purpose of real-time reporting is to ensure evaluation informs on-going decisions and strategy, especially as advocacy strategies adapt regularly in response to changing conditions. Advocates need feedback quickly after a significant event or action occurs, not just at regular time intervals.
- **Give “interim” outcomes the respect they deserve.** Advocacy needs to be assessed for more than just its impact on policy. In addition to informing policy, much advocacy work has a larger set of outcomes in mind as advocates seek to influence the larger policy process. For example, in addition to interacting directly with government officials or politicians, advocates might build partnerships with other organisations or develop relationships with journalists and editorial boards. Or they might aim to develop a network of community-based advocates who become active spokespersons. With advocacy, it is important not to assign second-class status to outcomes other than policy change. While policy change is usually the goal, other outcomes related to the broader advocacy strategy can be as important as the policy change itself. In addition, assessing a range of outcomes ensures that the evaluation does not unfairly conclude that the whole advocacy effort was a failure if the desired policy shift was not achieved.

A recent and helpful list of examples of advocacy interim outcomes has recently been published.<sup>vii</sup>

Partnerships or Alliances	Mutually-beneficial relationships with other organizations or individuals who support or participate in an advocacy strategy.
Organizational Capacity	The ability of an organization or coalition to lead, adapt, manage, and technically implement an advocacy strategy.
Collaboration and Alignment	Individuals or groups coordinating their work and acting together.
New Advocates	Previously unengaged individuals who take action in support of an issue or position.
New Champions	High-profile individuals who adopt an issue and publicly advocate for it.
Constituency or	Increase in the number of individuals who can be counted on

Support Base Growth	for sustained advocacy or action on an issue.
New Donors	New public or private funders or individuals who contribute funds or other resources for a cause.
Organizational Visibility or Recognition	Identification of an organization or campaign as a credible source on an issue.
Media Coverage	Quantity and/or quality of coverage generated in print, broadcast, or electronic media.
Issue Reframing	Changes in how an issue is presented, discussed, or perceived.
Awareness	Audience recognition that a problem exists or familiarity with a policy proposal.
Attitudes or Beliefs	Target audiences' feelings or affect about an issue or policy proposal.
Salience	The importance a target audience assigns an issue or policy proposal.
Public Will	Willingness of a target audience (non-policymakers) to act in support of an issue or policy proposal.
Political Will	Willingness of policymakers to act in support of an issue or policy proposal.

- **Be creative and forward looking.** Advocacy tactics are constantly changing and growing. For example, advocates are growing sophisticated in their use of electronic advocacy through email, blogs, social media and other technology driven developments. Evaluation techniques need to respond to these new developments and make sure that the measures we use to assess them are meaningful and have interpretive value (e.g. the number of emails sent as part of an email campaign may or may not be meaningful).

In summary, advocacy and policy change work is so highly relational and contextual, that a number of different approaches can be considered when planning for an evaluation. An overview of current advocacy evaluation practice<sup>viii</sup> highlights the kinds of approaches being used, and identifies the advantages and disadvantages of each approach. Four key evaluation design questions are posed to advocates, evaluators and funders; 1) who will do the evaluation?, 2) what will the evaluation measure?, 3) when will the evaluation take place?, and 4) what methodology will the evaluation use?. The responses illuminate the various considerations to be taken into account for each evaluation design question.

## How to Evaluate Advocacy and Policy Change Work?

The main barrier preventing more organisations and advocates from using evaluation is a lack of familiarity with how to think about and design evaluations of advocacy. As a result, a range of resources and frameworks has been developed to support advocates to undertake useful, manageable and resource efficient evaluations. The frameworks help maintain a view of progress and achievements, and help highlight interim outcomes and final impacts.

They shouldn't be adhered to slavishly, but used to guide and inform evaluation decisions and choices. It should also be noted that the following guides have been developed within an American context and in some cases, refer to political processes more relevant to their legislative environment.

Some of these frameworks are briefly described below:

**A User's Guide to Advocacy Evaluation Planning** Harvard Family Research Project.

<http://www.hfrp.org/evaluation/publications-resources/a-user-s-guide-to-advocacy-evaluation-planning>

The tool is developed for advocates, evaluators, funders and other stakeholders who want guidance on how to evaluate advocacy. It guides users through four basic steps of advocacy evaluation planning; 1) focusing, 2) mapping, 3) prioritising, and 4) designing. It is based on the key premise that evaluation can be a key resource when integrated into advocacy efforts because it can inform advocacy strategies as they evolve. As a result, they stress that evaluation planning should occur at the start of an advocacy effort.

The guide includes a blank worksheet for users to complete these steps for their own advocacy strategies. Completing the worksheet will generate the core elements of an advocacy evaluation plan, including which outcomes will be measured and how.

**A Guide to Measuring Advocacy and Policy** Prepared for the Annie E. Casey Foundation by Organizational Research Services.

[http://www.organizationalresearch.com/publications/a\\_guide\\_to\\_measuring\\_advocacy\\_and\\_policy.pdf](http://www.organizationalresearch.com/publications/a_guide_to_measuring_advocacy_and_policy.pdf)

The overall purpose of this guide is twofold. Firstly, to help funders think and talk about measurement of advocacy and policy, this guide puts forward a framework for describing outcome areas that are likely to result from advocacy and policy work. Secondly, the guide considers some key directions for evaluation design that include a broad range of methodologies, audiences, timeframes and purposes.

**Pathfinder: A Practical Guide to Advocacy Evaluation** Innovation Network Inc, Commissioned by the Atlantic Philanthropies.<sup>ix</sup>

Three guides are available to provide an introduction to advocacy evaluation to the advocate, evaluator and funder. The guides are not a detailed "how to", but provide a sense of what's involved in advocacy evaluation and what the differences are between advocacy evaluation and other program evaluation. Compared to other projects, advocacy presents unique challenges—in both its implementation and evaluation. Some examples of those challenges include: the long time frame, need for sustainability, contribution not attribution, and documenting progress.

The guides are set out in 8 (9 for the funder version) sections which each ask helpful questions for thinking about and planning an advocacy evaluation; 1) evaluation purpose, 2) roles and responsibility, 3) theory of change, 4) what to measure, 5) methodology and data collection, 6) analysis, reflection and data use, 7) communications and reporting, and 8) checking the big picture.

**Continuous Progress Tools: The Advocacy Progress Planner and Advocacy Tools** Aspen Institute.

<http://www.aspeninstitute.org/policy-work/apep/tools>

These tools are side-by-side guides to advocacy for funders and advocates. These tools enable advocates, funders, and evaluators to:

- plan better: make realistic predictions about feasible accomplishments
- evaluate better: record information to assess progress toward your goals
- advocate better: use what you learn to improve advocacy along the way

The Advocacy Progress Planner is a free online "logic model" for advocates who want to start thinking about planning and evaluation. It enables the following campaign elements to be clarified; goals and impacts, audience, campaign resources, activities and tactics, and benchmarks along the way to achieving goals.

The Advocacy Tools provide a step-by-step roadmap for planning advocacy efforts and conducting evaluations before, during and after a campaign.

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

<http://www.advocacyevaluation.org/>

The Alliance for Justice has developed two evaluation tools, both available on line but which require payment in order to access. They have been designed to assist funders and grantees to assess the results of their advocacy efforts, and the ability of organisations to sustain these efforts over time.

The Advocacy Capacity Assessment Tool helps organisations identify key ways to strengthen their advocacy capacity, and the Advocacy Evaluation Tool helps identify and describe specific advocacy achievements, both for pre-grant and post-grant information.

## **What might advocacy evaluation tell us and what's realistic?**

The frameworks described above, along with other evaluation tools and methods, make it possible to evaluate advocacy and provide answers (and raise more questions) for advocates, evaluators, and funders. For these groups, it isn't realistic to expect changes in the policy arena within a short time period, and/or focus on policy "wins" at the expense of short-term achievements.

Advocacy evaluation should identify, assess progress towards and/or measure (where appropriate) interim outcomes, and impacts. Theories of change and logic models,

described in the frameworks, can help with this. Grantees create a theory of change and share this with funders to show how;

- strategies ultimately lead to long-term policy goals, and
- short-term outcomes are connected to the longer-term goals and results that funders find compelling.

Organisations can then work with the funder to gain agreement about specific measurement priorities and achievement timeframes.<sup>x</sup>

Recent work defining interim outcomes (described above) provides useful indicators of progress and can be incorporated into advocacy evaluation. However, measures of these outcomes (when and if used) need to be treated with caution. With advocacy, what's counted needs to be meaningful. For example, an advocate might have 10 officials attend a briefing. For some issues, this might be low. But for others, especially if the issue is not at the top of the policy agenda, this could be a major win. It might mean a new issue is gaining momentum and the advocate's expertise is recognised. Indicators that count something need to be considered within the context.<sup>i,v</sup>

Showing the direct link between an advocacy effort and a policy change is difficult, as advocacy involves working with multiple actors across multiple settings. Instead of attribution, the standard that has been developed in advocacy evaluation is a focus on contribution (can a credible case be made that the advocacy effort contributed to a policy outcome?), rather than attribution (is there a causal link between the advocacy effort and a policy outcome?).<sup>viii</sup>

As noted above, policy change takes time and advocacy organisations need to be sustainable over the life of an issue. *This potentially has implications for funders who need to ensure strong infrastructure and good capacity – qualities that will keep an advocacy organisation viable for as long as it takes to achieve its ends.*

In summary, evaluation should be viewed as a tool for continuous reflection, learning, and improvement, rather than as an audit or performance review method. Evaluation activities should happen throughout the lifetime of an advocacy effort, so advocates can learn from their own work and change course when necessary.<sup>vi</sup> This pragmatic approach prioritises the importance of advocates' internal ownership of evaluation, backed if need be by well-targeted external evaluation support and tools. It positions advocacy evaluation not as a separate professional discipline, but as an integral element within the professional discipline of advocacy.<sup>i</sup>

## Resources

Opportunities to stay updated on new developments as the advocacy evaluation field continues to grow include:

- Innovation network has a free on line clearinghouse and newsletter dedicated to advocacy evaluation ([www.innonet.org/advocacy](http://www.innonet.org/advocacy))
- Centre for Evaluation Innovation which publishes a quarterly newsletter on advocacy evaluation ([www.evaluationinnovation.org](http://www.evaluationinnovation.org))
- The American Evaluation Association has an Advocacy and Policy Change Topical Interest Group ([www.eval.org](http://www.eval.org))

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<sup>i</sup> Advocacy Evaluation Update, From the Centre for Evaluation Innovation, Fall 2011, Issue #12

<http://evaluationinnovation.org/publications/newsletter>

<sup>ii</sup> Whelan, J. (2008). Advocacy evaluation: Review and opportunities.

[http://www.thechangeagency.org/\\_dbase\\_upl/Whelan\\_Advocacy\\_Evaluation.pdf](http://www.thechangeagency.org/_dbase_upl/Whelan_Advocacy_Evaluation.pdf)

<sup>iii</sup> Patton, M.Q. (2011). *Developmental evaluation: Applying complexity concepts to enhance innovation and use*. New York: The Guilford Press

<sup>iv</sup> Zandniapour, L. and Brennan, K. (2010) Advocacy evaluation and rigour. Advocacy Evaluation Update, From the Centre for Evaluation Innovation, Fall 2010, Issue #10.

[http://www.evaluationinnovation.org/sites/default/files/AEU\\_Issue10.pdf](http://www.evaluationinnovation.org/sites/default/files/AEU_Issue10.pdf)

<sup>v</sup> From Pioneers in the Field: Four foundations on advocacy evaluation. Harvard Family Research Project, The Evaluation Exchange, Vol XIII, No.1, Spring 2007, Issue Topic: Advocacy and Policy Change.

<http://www.hfrp.org/evaluation/the-evaluation-exchange/issue-archive/advocacy-and-policy-change/>

<sup>vi</sup> Speaking for Themselves – Advocates’ Perspectives on Evaluation. A research study commissioned by Innovation Network Inc. Commissioned by the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the Atlantic Philanthropies, 2008. [http://www.innonet.org/client\\_docs/File/advocacy/speaking\\_for\\_themselves\\_web\\_basic.pdf](http://www.innonet.org/client_docs/File/advocacy/speaking_for_themselves_web_basic.pdf)

<sup>vii</sup> Examples of Advocacy Interim Outcomes, Advocacy Evaluation Update, From the Centre for Evaluation Innovation, Summer 2011, Issue #11.

[http://evaluationinnovation.org/sites/default/files/AEU\\_Summer\\_2011.pdf](http://evaluationinnovation.org/sites/default/files/AEU_Summer_2011.pdf)

<sup>viii</sup> Coffman, J. (2009). Overview of Current Advocacy Evaluation Practice, Centre for Evaluation Innovation.

[http://www.innonet.org/client\\_docs/File/center\\_pubs/overview\\_current\\_eval\\_practice.pdf](http://www.innonet.org/client_docs/File/center_pubs/overview_current_eval_practice.pdf)

<sup>ix</sup> [http://www.innonet.org/client\\_docs/File/advocacy/pathfinder\\_advocate\\_web.pdf](http://www.innonet.org/client_docs/File/advocacy/pathfinder_advocate_web.pdf);

[http://www.innonet.org/client\\_docs/File/advocacy/pathfinder\\_evaluator\\_web.pdf](http://www.innonet.org/client_docs/File/advocacy/pathfinder_evaluator_web.pdf);

[http://www.innonet.org/client\\_docs/File/advocacy/pathfinder\\_funder\\_web.pdf](http://www.innonet.org/client_docs/File/advocacy/pathfinder_funder_web.pdf)

<sup>x</sup> Organisational Research Consulting (2009). Ten Considerations for Advocacy Evaluation Planning, Prepared for Annie E. Casey Foundation.

[http://www.organizationalresearch.com/publications/ten\\_considerations\\_for\\_advocacy\\_evaluation\\_planning.pdf](http://www.organizationalresearch.com/publications/ten_considerations_for_advocacy_evaluation_planning.pdf)