Advocacy Evaluation Update

A co-production of the Center for Evaluation Innovation
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Welcome!

In This Issue:

New Contact Information!

The Center for Evaluation Innovation has moved into new office space with Innovation Network. Contact both organizations at:

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Also, if you would like us to feature a new resource or have suggestions for future content, please contact me at **jcoffman [at] evaluationinnovation [dot] org**.

- Julia Coffman, Editor
Director of the Center for Evaluation Innovation

*We define **advocacy** as "a wide range of activities conducted to **influence decision makers** at various levels." This means not only traditional advocacy work like litigation, lobbying, and public education, but also capacity building, network formation, relationship building, communication, and leadership development. –Innovation Network*

Framework of Factors that Affect Political Support
By Jeremy Shiffman

This article presents a framework developed by Jeremy Shiffman that helps to explain why some issues receive political attention and support while others do not. The framework can be used to help guide evaluations to examine the success of advocacy efforts trying to build political support on policy issues.

Why do some issues receive priority attention from political leaders while others receive very little? Why do global issues like child immunization and HIV/AIDS garner considerable attention and resources at certain points in time, while others like diarrheal diseases and pneumonia receive much less attention even though they are also high-burden issues? Political scientist Jeremy Shiffman developed a framework to help address these questions. The framework is grounded in social constructionism, a paradigm that focuses on how reality is created through social interaction.

Framework of Factors that Shape Political Priority
According to the framework, three factors help to explain the amount of attention that an issue receives: (1) the *actors* involved, (2) the *narrative* they use, (3) and the *landscape* or environment they face. Issues are more likely to attract support if they exhibit certain features associated with these factors.

Table 1: Framework of Factors that Shape Political Priority

Factors	Key Features
Actors: The individuals and organizations concerned with the issue	1. Networks 2. Guiding institutions
Narrative: The story actors tell about the issue	3. Category construction 4. Severity 5. Tractability 6. Emotional resonance
Landscape: The environment actors face	7. Other actors 8. Policy windows

Actors are the individuals and organizations that share a concern with the issue. They might include, for example, researchers, advocates, policymakers, nonprofits, funders, or governments.

Two features affect the strength of actors. The first is the presence of *networks* that connect actors on issues and help to give them cohesion, authority, and power. The second is the existence of effective *guiding institutions* or formal organizations with the authority and ability to lead strong and sustainable initiatives.

The quality of the **narrative** created around the issues is the second influencing factor. It addresses how effective the issue's "framing" is; that is, the way in which actors understand and portray the issue. An issue can be framed in multiple ways. For instance, HIV/AIDS has been framed as a public health problem, a development issue, a humanitarian crisis, and a security threat. Some frames resonate more than others, especially for different audiences.

Four features influence a narrative's effectiveness. *Category construction* refers to how the boundaries of a problem are defined. *Severity* is the extent to which a problem is perceived as harmful, relative to other problems. Policymakers are more likely to perceive problems that cause significant harm as more serious and thus worthy of attention than those that do not. *Tractability* is whether a problem is perceived as surmountable. This may be influenced by whether the proposed means of addressing the problem are clearly explained, cost-effective/inexpensive, backed by scientific evidence, and simple to implement. Finally, *emotional resonance* is the extent to which a problem elicits emotional or affective responses like empathy or fear. These four features are not necessarily inherent to problems; actors can frame issues in ways that affect how they are perceived.

Finally, **landscape** is the environment in which actors operate. Actors may have little control over these contextual factors, but they must take them into account if they wish to develop effective strategies. Many elements of political context matter, but two are key. First is the presence of *other actors* who are not working on the issue but are inclined to either oppose or support the issue. The second is the occurrence of *policy windows*, or moments in time when conditions align favorably for an issue, presenting advocates with particularly strong opportunities to reach political leaders. If policy windows open, political support is more likely to follow.

Application of the Framework

Shiffman has used the qualitative method of process tracing to test the framework with several global health issues. For example, he examined the case of newborn survival and the dramatic rise in interest in this issue over the last decade. Prior to 2000, few international organizations and governments paid attention to this issue in spite of the fact that each year four million babies around the world were dying during their first month of life. His research revealed that the framework helped to explain the substantial increase in attention.

Specifically, by 2010, the **actors** involved with newborn survival had developed a strong network and were being led by powerful guiding institutions. The **narrative** on newborn survival had also shifted. Actors were able to create a compelling narrative that successfully changed perceptions on the issue's severity, tractability, and importance. Better rates of newborn survival were now seen as achievable through inexpensive interventions. Newborn survival was also seen as essential to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (particularly Goal 4 on reducing child mortality).[1] In terms of the **landscape**, actors were able to convince new groups to embrace the issue, and growing numbers of low-income countries began developing programs to address the problem.

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[1] The Millennium Development Goals are international development goals that all United Nations member states and multiple international organizations agreed to achieve by the year 2015.

The framework also identified issues that actors must address to ensure that newborn survival receives more of the attention and resources it deserves. In terms of the **narrative**, actors must continue attempting to shift the perception in many low-income contexts that newborn mortality is solvable and not simply a fact of life. In terms of the **landscape**, institutionalizing attention on newborn survival in countries that have high neonatal mortality rates remains a challenge. Finally, in terms of the **actors** themselves, strengthening the links between the different networks concerned with newborn survival, maternal health, and child survival remains both a challenge and a priority.

Conclusion

This framework argues that the reasons that some issues receive political attention and others do not is a function of how issues are socially constructed by the actors who care about them, rather than as a function of some hard and objective reality. The framework does not suggest, however, that all of the factors and features it identifies are necessary or sufficient for achieving political support. In fact, some issues with low political priority possess many of these characteristics, while others with significant political attention lack several. However, existing research suggests that, other things being equal, the presence of these factors enhances the likelihood that an issue will receive attention and action from political leaders.

This framework and its application is described more fully in: Shiffman, J. (2009). A social explanation for the rise and fall of global health issues. Bulletin of the World Health Organization, 87, *608-613, and Shiffman, J. (2010).* Issue ascendance in global health: The case of newborn survival. *Copy available from the author.*

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Spotlight

Evaluating Community Organizing

Catherine Crystal Foster and Justin Louie of Blueprint Research + Design, Inc. offer their perspective on what is unique about community organizing compared to policy advocacy, and the components that should be considered when evaluating organizing work.

Community organizing for social change shares many characteristics with policy advocacy, but it differs in significant ways, and the approaches to evaluating the two also differ. As evaluators, we have partnered with organizers, advocates, and their funders over the last five years, and have seen these differences firsthand.

What is Community Organizing?

Community organizing is a democratically-governed, values-driven process that catalyzes the power of individuals to work collectively to make the changes they want to see in their communities. Community organizers honor and develop the leadership potential in everyday people by helping them identify problems and solutions, and then by supporting them as they take action to make those solutions a reality. In so doing, organizing challenges the existing power structure.

Relationships lie at the heart of organizing, and the "one-to-one" relational conversation between an organizer and a community member is the building block of organizing. As those community members participate in social change work, build skills, and take on responsibilities, they become "leaders" within the organizing group. Developing these leaders and building the "base" of leaders and other community members is an ongoing focus of community organizing.

How is Community Organizing Different from Policy Advocacy?

Organizing and advocacy differ at a core level. Community organizing is emphatically bottom-up. Community members select the issues, proffer the solutions, and drive strategy and execution. Most advocacy is fundamentally top-down, even if the work is authentically undertaken on behalf of community members. Advocates speak for others, while organizers inspire community leaders—everyday people—to speak for themselves. Organizers and leaders also believe that community members can be experts, and that expertise is not the sole domain of policy professionals.

The leader-focused lens also points to another difference from advocacy. In organizing, leadership development is a central concern and a key outcome in addition to policy change objectives. This has major implications for priorities and goals. It makes capacity development look different in organizing than in advocacy, since the capacities to attract and develop leaders are a top priority in organizing.

Finally, certain logistical aspects of organizing differ from advocacy in a significant way.

Organizers operate in a predominantly oral culture, in contrast to the more archived, written culture of advocacy. Organizing often places a premium on process and ritual, particularly as it concerns base-building and direct actions. In addition, organizing takes place in a more diffuse setting: in homes, churches, schools, or community venues, rather than in a central office or the corridors of the state house.

What are the Implications for Evaluation?

For organizing, evaluation requires additional considerations that reflect the particular qualities of the work. Most important, the bottom-up nature of organizing—driven by the community, not by organizational managers or external professionals—creates a whole new set of complexities. This orientation collides with the inherently top-down nature of traditional third-party evaluation, in which outside experts ask the questions, set the terms, and make judgments. As we have noted, organizers have a fundamentally different view from advocates not only of how decisions are made and priorities are set but also in where expertise resides. That affects how organizers view evaluation generally, and what role they see for themselves and their leaders in that process.

If the community-defined, bottom-up goals for the work do not align completely with a funder's goals, an evaluator measuring against those goals faces the difficult task of navigating between the two. When the work unfolds as part of a multi-site initiative in which multiple communities have been funded to work on an issue, those complications are compounded. Since the goals, strategies, and tactics of organizing bubble up in ways that are highly context-specific, multi-site evaluation of an organizing effort is particularly hard. It is quite difficult to standardize methodologies and roll up results when the work and processes are driven by the needs and approaches of each community.

Finally, certain practical considerations implicit in organizing work can impact evaluation. Many organizers value reflection quite highly, and incorporate it in their work more explicitly than some advocates. As a result, evaluation may be more about systematizing informal reflection and helping to focus it more on impact than process, not about teaching the value of it. Yet, while they do reflect regularly, organizers have very little time for formal evaluation and the rigorous, uniform, and documented processes of data collection and analysis that formal evaluation can imply. They pride themselves on never being in the office, instead spending their time in the community. Leaders who carry out the work are community members who may have entirely separate day jobs, making systematic evaluation far more challenging than when partnering with advocates working in a more traditional office environment.

What Can We Measure for Organizing?

The intense focus on leadership development in organizing, and the emphasis on process within some schools of organizing, lead to identification of interim benchmarks and goals that often differ from those in an advocacy campaign targeting similar policy change objectives. Organizing requires additional benchmarks and goals related to the processes of growing leadership and power, and organizers may prioritize them differently from advocates.

When determining evaluation questions, setting benchmarks, and selecting data collection methods, it helps to categorize the work in a way that incorporates the unique values and orientation of organizing. One useful framework that lays out important categories to track has been developed by the Alliance for Justice (AFJ).[2] The table below illustrates examples of

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[2] This "Core Components of Community Organizing" framework can be found at http://www.afj.org/reco/.

benchmarks we have used to capture these categories, as well as data collection methods that can be used to track progress.

Table 2: Sample Benchmarks and Data Collection Methods for the Core Components of Organizing

Category	Benchmarks	Methods for Tracking
PARTICIPATION AND MEMBERSHIP	• Changes in numbers, demographics or location of members • Changes in attendance (numbers, types of events, who attends)	• Membership tracking (including demographic and geographic info) • Attendance tracking
CONSTITUENT LEADERSHIP AND POWER	• Changes in attitudes, skills, and knowledge • Changes in self-esteem and self-efficacy • Changes in stature within community or among decision makers	• Documenting elements of growth along leadership ladders • Organizer check-ins and debriefs • Documenting 1-to-1s • Journaling/portfolios • Focus groups
ORGANIZATIONAL POWER	• Development of relationships with decision makers, media, and influential figures • Changes in stature within community or among decision makers • Changes in membership • Changes in turnout to events • Policy wins	• Power analysis • Relationship/champion scales and rubrics • Base-building/mobilization tracking • Media tracking • Policy developments tracking • Interviews • Critical incident debriefs or case studies
ORGANIZING WINS	• Policy wins • Shifts in norms or content of debate • Holding the line against negative actions	• Policy tracking • Collection of archival documents • Media tracking • Critical incident debriefs or case studies
MEANINGFUL IMPACT FOLLOWING WINS	• Implementation of policies • Changes in practices • Public accountability for action or inaction • Sustained shifts in norms or content of debate • Impact on community	• Policy implementation tracking • Community indicators tracking • Action research (accountability surveys, interviews, focus groups) • Interviews • Critical incident debriefs or case studies
ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY	• Changes staffing • Changes in infrastructure • Changes in skills • Changes in resources	• Organizational capacity assessments • Most Significant Change[3] • Interviews and check-in calls or meetings
REFLECTION AND INNOVATION	• Building on and systematizing internal processes • Infusing data and documentation into reflection • Use of data in refinement of strategy or tactics	• Interviews and check-in calls or meetings • Collection of assessment documents or examination of systems

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[3] This is a form of participatory monitoring and evaluation developed by Rick Davies and Jess Dart that involves the participants' collection and discussion of stories about the most significant changes resulting from a program or action. Download the authors' guide to the method online.

This article is excerpted from a longer brief on this topic published by the Center for Evaluation Innovation and Blueprint Research + Design, Inc. Download the entire brief for free. Email Catherine at catherine [at] policyconsulting [dot] org. Email Justin at justin [at] blueprintrd [dot] com.

Resources for Evaluating Community Organizing

Alliance for Justice maintains a web-based compendium of resources on evaluating community organizing at: www.afj.org/reco. Recently added resources include:

- *An Independent Governance Assessment of ACORN: The Path to Meaningful Reform* by Scott Harshbarger and Amy Craft
- *Measuring the Impacts of Advocacy and Community Organizing: Application of a Methodology and Initial Finding*s by Lisa Ranghelli
- *Analyzing and Evaluating Organizing Strategies* by University of Massachusetts Boston Labor Resource Center
- *Strengthening Democracy, Increasing Opportunities: Impacts of Advocacy, Organizing, and Civic Engagement in Minnesota, New Mexico, and North Carolina* by Julia Craig, Gita Gulati-Partee, and Lisa Ranghelli
- *Evaluation of NPI's Community Organizing Support Program for the Sisters of Charity Foundation of Cleveland* by Maxine Goodman Levin College of Urban Affairs

Profiles from the Field

Eva Schiffer and Net-Map

Myia Welsh of Innovation Network interviewed social scientist and facilitator Eva Schiffer about a network mapping approach that she developed called Net-Map. Eva's main regional expertise is in Africa, her home country is Germany, and her current location is Washington DC. In 2008, she was awarded the Promising Young Scientist of the Year Award by the Consultative Group on International Agriculture Research (CGIAR) for her development of Net-Map.

Tell us a little about yourself.
I am independent consultant who works on a range of projects in the international development field. For example, I work with the International Food Policy Research Institute, looking at the food policymaking process in different countries and how research can help inform that process. I am also working on an international development practitioner's forum, and a Gates Foundation project on making breastfeeding and early childhood nutrition part of nutrition agendas in Bangladesh, Ethiopia and Vietnam.

A big part of my interest right now, though, is focused on the spreading the use Net-Map as a tool for monitoring and evaluation.
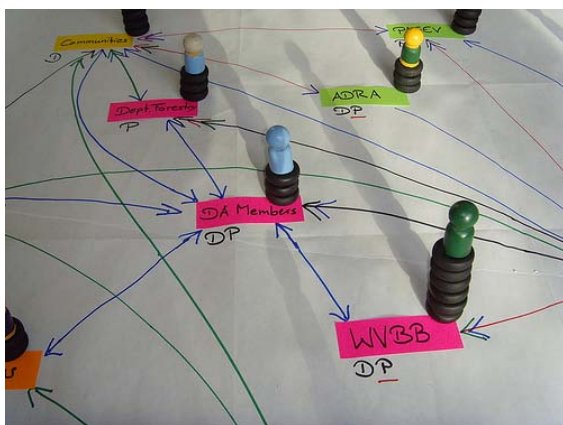

Photo by Eva Schiffer, http://www.flickr.com/photos/19176170@N03/2110905494/in/photostream/

What is Net-Map?
Net-Map is a low-tech method for mapping social networks using facilitated stakeholder interviews and discussions. Net-Maps show what actors are involved in a given network, how they are linked, how influential they are, and what their goals are.

More specifically, Net-Maps are paper maps that use actor figurines to represent the network players; colored symbols and arrows to show the formal and informal links between players; and "influence towers" or flat round stackable discs to show players' levels of influence (the higher the stack, the more influence). Net-Map is a simple way to create discussion in stakeholder groups to understand complex, real world relationships. The method can be used with stakeholder groups with either similar or conflicting goals.

Why did you develop Net-Map?
I developed this approach when I was in Ghana, working with a multi-stakeholder group that wanted to have a greater impact on water usage in their area. I was there as a researcher and wanted to help them understand their own situation better, as well as how they could have a bigger impact. I had previously developed another method that used influence towers, and then I began to learn about network mapping. I put the two concepts together to create this method.

I am not necessarily adding knowledge; I just use Net-Map to collect all of their knowledge in one place and help them structure it.

What are the advantages of Net-Map?

Net-Map engages stakeholders in a way that other more technologically advanced network mapping tools do not. Digitally created, polished products can be intimidating to those who are not accustomed to using them or who are at a different literacy level, which can hold them back from speaking up when they disagree or see something in a different way.

Also, the physical aspects of using Net-Map allow ownership over the product in a way that computer-generated schematics do not. The data obtained can be put into a social network analysis computer program just the same, but if you just do computer-generated analysis stakeholders will not be nearly as engaged in the process.

Other advantages include that Net-Map prompts rich discussion on the "how" and "why" of a situation; its value is in the resulting discussion as well as the map itself and the possible later more complex network analysis. Also, the physical pieces involved are unintimidating and prompt engagement. When you have things to physically move around and play with, the engagement is totally different. Finally, the 3-D visual quality of the map makes it easier for people to grasp the various layers of information that are relevant to networks (players, relationships, influence power of players, etc).

How is Net-Map useful with advocacy efforts?

Understanding the influence of various players is essential to advocacy work. I used Net-Map in a project on HIV/AIDS and nutrition for the International Food Policy Research Institute. The project's goal was to develop a network to put AIDS and nutrition issues on the policy agenda. Net-Map was a practical approach for sitting down with country coordinators and mapping out the research and policy networks in the country in order to work on an advocacy strategy. It was helpful because developing a network can be an unclear task. It sounds great in theory, but there are hard questions to answer about how to do it effectively. The Net-Map method clarifies existing systems and relationships that form the landscape for advocacy.

What excites you most about Net-Map?

I get excited about the energy that emerges when we use this process. Even in sensitive situations, the method can be used as a tool for stakeholder buy-in and communication. It can completely turn around the atmosphere in groups that are experiencing some tension.

Also, without adding any of my own knowledge, I can help people learn something. Even those who have worked together for a long time can find that they have been seeing things from totally different perspectives.

Finally, I also get excited about training people to use it. I can teach people to use the basic method in as little as half of a day, and then they can go have an impact. My goal is for the use of Net-Map to spread. The more people who learn and apply it, the more interesting it gets.

Myia Welsh is an Associate at Innovation Network. To learn more about Eva and the method, visit her blog.

Editor's Picks

Webinars on Building a Successful Advocacy Effort

In these challenging times, policy advocacy efforts must be as successful as possible. Independent Sector, in collaboration with the Center for Evaluation Innovation, has been offering a five-part webinar series to help nonprofits learn about the components of *Building a Successful Advocacy Effort.* The webinars are focused on measuring the effectiveness of advocacy strategies, building internal capacity, adapting to changes in the political climate, creating effective coalitions, and using communications to enhance advocacy efforts. Webinars are free to Independent Sector members, but have a fee for non-members.

>>Register or view recordings for *Building a Successful Advocacy Effort* webinars.

2010 eNonprofit Benchmarks Study

This brand new guide for measuring nonprofit online programs against industry trends includes new data from 31 nonprofits with different sizes and areas of focus. The study details:

- The share of online revenue attributable to different types of gift programs, such as monthly giving, one-time gifts, and tribute gifts;
- Fundraising, advocacy and email messaging results by groups' list size (the study found significant differences); and
- All the online advocacy and fundraising data you need to figure out how nonprofits' online programs stack up.

>>Read the *eNonprofit Benchmarks Study*.

AEA365 Blog

This daily blog sponsored by the American Evaluation Association (AEA) is dedicated to highlighting hot tips, cool tricks, and "rad resources" for anyone with an interest in evaluation. Every day features a different short and practical post from evaluators around the globe.
>>Visit the *AEA365 Blog*.

Charney Research

Charney Research is a great resource for evaluation and strategic planning of advocacy work, both at home and abroad. They have worked on a wide variety of projects, from campaigns on health care, education, and environmental issues to voter education and election campaigns, in the US and overseas. Charney Research offers a free quarterly newsletter of interest to nonprofits and advocates. The latest issue includes articles on public attitudes to the surge in Afghanistan and avoiding language pitfalls in multicultural and international polling.
>>To receive the newsletter, send an email to editor Jeffrey Klonoski at jeffrey [at] charneyresearch [dot] com. The firm's website is www.charneyresearch.com and President Craig Charney can be reached at craig [at] charneyresearch [dot] com.