Advocacy Evaluation Update

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In This Issue:

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*

Welcome!

Welcome from the Editor:

I'm Julia Coffman, Director of the new Center for Evaluation Innovation. We're a strategic partner of Innovation Network, and will temporarily be sharing their website.

As always, if you have any insights, comments, or resources to share about advocacy evaluation, don't keep them to yourself! Contact me at **jcoffman [at] evaluationinnovation [dot] org** to share your contributions with *Advocacy Evaluation Update's* growing list of subscribers (620 and counting).

- Julia

Our team is growing! Until now, *AEU* has been brought to you by Innovation Network. We're pleased to announce that the new **Center for Evaluation Innovation** is taking the reins of editorial leadership for the Update. As part of this promising collaboration, Innovation Network's staff continues to contribute to the *AEU* production process, and we will continue to feature resources at the Point K Learning Center (www.innonet.org/pointk). We hope you enjoy the latest issue!

– The *AEU* Team

Feature

Good in Theory, But Does It Work in Practice?

Lessons from Oxfam GB about Monitoring and Evaluating Advocacy

By Simon Starling, Oxfam Great Britain

Oxfam Great Britain (GB) is a member of Oxfam International, an alliance of 13 organisations working in over 100 countries to overcome poverty and injustice. Oxfam GB works on a range of social justice issues including climate change, health and education, and protection of people in crises, using strategies that include development support, emergency response to crises, and advocacy campaigns to persuade publics and their leaders of the need for lasting change.

Several years ago, we began testing new monitoring and evaluation approaches with our advocacy work, our most challenging area to measure. We focused on Oxfam GB's Climate Change Campaign, a multi-million pound, multi-country, and multi-partner effort focused on getting world leaders to take action on climate change and achieve a global deal that is just and fair for all. Our belief was that the Climate Change Campaign would benefit from a regular supply of high-quality information to inform our strategy as it evolved.

The System So Far: Key Elements and Learning

Our aim was to pilot a system that combined standard monitoring and evaluation components with innovations unique to advocacy efforts.[1] The system has been in place for 18 months and as expected some elements have worked well in a large and complex campaign context, while others have not. Key steps and elements in our system follow, along with what we have learned so far.

1. Logic model development.
   Logic models are visual maps that succinctly illustrate how strategies will achieve change. In evaluation terms, they show how activities will lead to outcomes. We developed a Climate Change Campaign logic model (ours was more of an *impact chain*) that identified its activities, outputs, outcomes, and the links between them. While this process was complex given the Campaign's many partners and layers, the final product is an effective communication and planning tool. We expect that reviewing and updating it periodically will be useful.

2. Identification of outcomes that specify the Campaign's unique contribution.
   Advocates generally set ambitious goals. For our campaign, that goal is limiting climate

[1] Monitoring means using data to determine if the conditions within or around the campaign change over time. Evaluation refers to the systematic determination of the campaign's merit, worth, or significance.

change to a less than two degree increase. Because that goal is long-term and will be affected by many actors and variables, our impact chain identifies more specific outcomes that relate directly to Oxfam GB's contribution. These outcomes also clarify the progress we expect to make before that goal is achieved (i.e., interim outcomes).

3. Use of campaign planning research as baseline data.
Campaign planning involved an enormous amount of pre-implementation research and analysis. We felt this information would provide a valuable source of baseline data if we culled through the large stacks of data and documents to pull it out. However, following the amount of time spent in planning processes, the Campaign team had little remaining motivation to return to this information to complete this task. In addition, we had difficulty picking an arbitrary date for the Campaign's start date given that it had no hard launch. While we still think this idea has merit, we need to find a way to do it so the Campaign team perceives it will serve their immediate interests rather than just serve as a tool to assist in retrospective evaluation.

4. Development of indicators of progress.
Because policy outcomes often take time to achieve, we wanted to make sure we captured measures of progress along the way. Initially, we planned to develop and track indicators for the interim outcomes in our impact chain. However, we decided to save time and energy by moving away from this level of detail and focus instead on tracking progress more informally on the broader "outcome areas" for which individual team members are responsible (e.g., policy, media, mobilisation). Team members periodically bring the information they are responsible for to the table for collective review.

5. Deeper assessment on unique campaign elements.
We identified specific Campaign elements for deeper and more detailed evaluation efforts. For example, the "Sisters on the Planet"[2] project demonstrates the disproportionate impact of climate change on women through short films profiling the stories of four women in rich and poor countries affected by climate change. We identified specific indicators and data collection methods for the project. Staff are prompted by a set of data collection questions and the data is reviewed every three months at a project staff meeting focusing on assessing progress and sharing learning based on the data collected.

6. Data collection and reporting by campaign staff.
We know Campaign staff members are constantly informally monitoring their work and the external environment around them. We wanted to take advantage of this and so asked them to document that information more systematically for the evaluation. Early on we gave each team member "logbooks" for recording their achievements. As the Campaign expanded, this approach became too unwieldy. Instead, we now build extra time into team meetings once a month to complete forms that record outputs and outcomes staff have witnessed. We then aggregate this information into a running log of achievements.

7. Use of data for learning.
Monitoring and evaluation efforts have no value unless they are used. We wanted to make sure that opportunities existed to reflect on the data and information being gathered. We review Campaign progress through biannual "monitoring reviews" that are specifically

[2] http://www.oxfam.org.uk/get_involved/campaign/climate_change/sisters/sahena.html

devoted to this purpose and are held with internal and external stakeholders. We also set aside specific time during already-existing Campaign meetings to talk about progress and learning.

8. "After action reviews" around key events.
   Some moments in time are particularly intense and important for our Climate Change Campaign and therefore warrant increased focus for data collection and reflection. For example, Campaign staff attend and advocate during certain sessions of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). This year we sent an individual with the delegation to do additional data collection and observing. This individual interviewed internal and external stakeholders, observed advocacy efforts, and facilitated debriefs during and after the meetings. This additional effort allowed us to better document Oxfam's contribution to the event.

9. An independent external evaluation.
   In addition to internal monitoring and evaluation, we thought it was important to have an external evaluator assess the Campaign and its outcomes. We are currently recruiting an independent evaluation team. We hope that the team will be able to use the rich data available from our monitoring system, as well as interviews with key external and internal stakeholders, to make an objective, credible assessment of the campaign a whole.

Overall Lessons

We are still testing our monitoring and evaluation system, and will continue refining it as we learn more and try new things. So far our experience has resulted in several overall lessons:

Get the basics in place first. Our experience confirms the importance of taking the time upfront to develop clear campaign logic and identify the most relevant outcomes and areas to monitor. This step is particularly important in a policy context that is complex, involves many players, and where change takes time.

Balance project-level monitoring and overall campaign outcome monitoring. Our goal was to build a system that enabled learning and real-time continuous improvement. We found that setting detailed monitoring indicators worked better for concrete projects within the campaign. At the overall campaign level, given the constantly evolving strategy, we found it more feasible to track evidence of the campaigns achievements in key functional areas than use detailed indicators.

Integrate monitoring and evaluation efforts into existing reporting mechanisms where possible. Campaign staff are busy and they tend to find new monitoring and evaluation mechanisms burdensome when laid on top of existing campaign structures and responsibilities. To get buy in and participation, data collection should be simple, time efficient, and integrated into existing structures where possible. Simple tools, such as timelines or journals, can help in logging what has happened and changes that have occurred.

Simon Starling is Programme Development and Quality Advisor in the Campaigns and Policy Division at Oxfam Great Britain. He works on issues of quality and effectiveness of advocacy work, including planning, monitoring, and evaluation of international and national campaigns. Contact Simon at sstarling@oxfam.org.uk.

Profiles from the Field

The Philip R. Lee Institute for Health Policy Studies
at the University of California San Francisco

How long have you been evaluating advocacy and policy efforts?

The Philip R. Lee Institute for Health Policy Studies at the University of California, San Francisco is one of the nation's premier centers for health policy and health services research. The Institute started in 1972 and has approximately 100 faculty, staff, and fellows conducting research on health issues and health care reform. We represent a broad range of academic interests and disciplines, including public health, sociology, political science, and community psychology.

What are your areas of expertise in evaluating advocacy?

We have extensive experience *researching and evaluating* policies, programs, advocacy strategies, and health systems change using quantitative and qualitative techniques. We focus on issues that include:

- Access to care for uninsured populations
- The health care safety net
- Reproductive health
- Youth health and development of resiliency
- Chronic disease management
- Health inequities and environmental health policies
- Environmental health policy related to the built environment and land use.

We evaluate how advocacy impacts policy development, and assess how policy impacts advocacy. We evaluate advocacy strategies that include:

- Agenda setting
- Media advocacy
- Coalition-building
- Systems change
- Use of data by decision makers.

What do you consider your best advocacy evaluation innovations?

We are well-versed in multi-year and multi-site evaluations and have developed evaluation tools and processes to accommodate diversity among sites. For example, to accommodate geographic diversity much of our data collection is done electronically.

We also have a long tradition of using a participatory approach and of providing evaluation technical assistance. Funders and advocates participate in the development of tools and in the interpretation of data, which increases the utilization of the evaluation.

Finally, our evaluations add direct value to advocacy efforts. We provide data throughout the life of a project, providing external feedback to organizations engaged in advocacy so they can use it to fine tune their strategies.

What has surprised you about your work in this arena?

Policy change typically takes time, and tracking progress over time can be challenging. To address this, we use tools that allow us to compare progress over time on different policies and strategies, and that help us understand the context in which change occurs. For example, our annual policy survey gauges progress on a variety of health issues, from decreasing the risk of asthma flare-ups among students to preserving state funding for California's health care safety net.

We've also found, however, that not all data are useful to all participants. For example, quantitative data on legislation passed, vetoed, or pending is less meaningful than a qualitative description of policy progress. In addition, advocates are less interested in assessing the effectiveness of their advocacy approaches than in learning about advocacy best practices.

We've also found that educating grantees on how to evaluate their advocacy work is a time-intensive process and often has to be repeated given high staff turnover.

Finally, because advocacy is a multi-pronged approach that requires educating decision makers as well as the broader community, comparing the effectiveness of individual advocacy strategies (e.g., media campaigns versus in-person meetings with decision makers) reveals negligible differences. It is more useful to assess the continuum of these strategies and assist advocates in using them synergistically and strategically. This expands their advocacy skills and fosters a deeper appreciation for the importance of evaluation for both documentation and learning.

Has anything not worked as well as you'd hoped?

Our efforts to teach grantees how to use logic models to chart their course and assess their progress have on occasion been stymied by the time required to develop and update the models. Consequently, in a number of projects, our staff has had to do most of the preparation, updating, and analysis.

Teaching community and coalition members to collect and utilize data can be challenging and requires ongoing technical assistance. This is also true for community groups and advocates presenting data to policymakers. Learning how to present compelling evidence in formats that effectively translates research into usable knowledge requires thought and practice, but is doable!

How do we learn more about you and your advocacy evaluation work?

Much of our work is described in publications that are readily available electronically, such as:

- Findings from our multi-year multi-site evaluation of the Clinic Consortia Policy and Advocacy Program, an initiative to expand advocacy capacity, commissioned by The California Endowment (2002 - 2010), can be found at www.calendow.org.

- Our evaluation of the Policy Advocacy Program, a component of the Teenage Pregnancy Prevention Initiative, commissioned by The California Wellness Foundation (1995-2005) has been captured in: Brindis, C.D., Geierstanger S.P. & Faxio A. (2009). *The role of policy advocacy in assuring comprehensive family life education in California.* Health Education & Behavior.

- Student Research Teams: Research and Advocacy Efforts, funded through a grant from the Centers for Prevention and Disease Control (2002-2004) is described in: Soleimanpour, S., Brindis, C.D., Geierstanger, S.P., Kandawalla, S., & Kurlaender, T. (2008). *Incorporating youth-led community participatory research into school health center programs and policies.* Public Health Reports, 123(6), 709-716.

- Findings from our multi-year statewide evaluation of the Community Action to Fight Asthma, a primary prevention initiative to reduce environmental asthma risk factors, funded by The California Endowment (2003 – 2009), can be found at www.calendow.org.

Researchers engaged in advocacy evaluation include:

- Claire Brindis, DrPH, Director of the Philip R. Lee Institute for Health Policy Studies and Professor of Pediatrics and Health Policy. claire.brindis@ucsf.edu
- Annette Gardner, PhD, MPH, Academic Specialist and Assistant Adjunct Professor in the Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences at UCSF. annette.gardner@ucsf.edu
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Editors' Picks

A User's Guide to Advocacy Evaluation Planning

This new tool from Harvard Family Research Project and developed by Julia Coffman takes users through four basic steps that generate the core elements of an advocacy evaluation plan, including what will be measured and how. The tool includes a comprehensive list of outcomes, measures, and methods that users can choose from when developing their own evaluation plans, and has a unique "pullout" worksheet that prompts users to complete each step and records planning choices.
>>Read more: *A User's Guide to Advocacy Evaluation Planning*

Pathfinder: A Practical Guide to Advocacy Evaluation

This series by Innovation Network—with advocate, evaluator, and funder editions—guides users through the advocacy evaluation process from start to finish. Drawing on Innovation Network's research and consulting experience, *Pathfinder* encourages advocates, evaluators, and funders to adopt a "learning-focused evaluation" approach, which prioritizes using knowledge for program improvement.
>>Read more: *Pathfinder: A Practical Guide to Advocacy Evaluation*

Network Health Scorecard

How can we know how a network is doing? Answering a quick series of questions can yield a useful assessment of the health of a network—diagnosing strengths and areas of growth. With just 22 questions and a 1-5 scoring system, the Scorecard focuses on key aspects of any network: purpose, performance, operations, and capacity. Regular checkups allow you to track progress and determine what the network needs next. The scorecard is designed for group use—network members respond to each question and then discuss their answers.
>>Download the *Network Health Scorecard*

The Foundation Review: New Issue on Advocacy and Policy Change

The new issue of this peer-reviewed journal has 12 articles that cover perspectives on the role of funders in supporting accountability and effectiveness in advocacy work; tools to support public policy grantmaking and advocacy evaluation; and the results of research studies and evaluations of foundation-funded advocacy and policy change efforts.
>>See the list of articles: *The Foundation Review* (4.65MB .pdf)

Spotlight

American Evaluation Association 2009 Conference

Context and Evaluation
November 11-14, Orlando, FL
www.eval.org/eval2009

We hope you are attending the conference this year, but even if you are not, see the lineup of sessions (full schedule below) sponsored by the Advocacy and Policy Change Topical Interest Group. Presenter contact information is included in each session description.

See also the pre-conference training on Capacity Building for Advocacy Evaluation being conducted by Innovation Network, Inc. and Organizational Research Services.
>>Pre-conference training

AEA 2009: Advocacy and Policy Change TIG Sessions

The Advocacy and Policy Change Topical Interest Group (TIG), which promotes this type of evaluation and facilitates communication, learning, and support among evaluators, will host these sessions throughout the conference:

- Evaluating National and State Policy Change Efforts: Campaigner and Funder Perspectives on Evaluation Context, Methods and Lessons
- Do-It-Yourself Evaluation for Small Advocacy and Community Organizing Groups
- The Holy Grail of Advocacy Evaluation: Connecting Advocacy to Long-Term Impact
- Approaches to Evaluating Advocacy and Policy Change: An International Comparison
- Advocacy and Policy TIG Business Meeting
- Body of Evidence or Firsthand Experience? Evaluation of Two Concurrent and Overlapping Advocacy Initiatives
- The Need for Mixed Methods in Advocacy Evaluation
- Advocacy Evaluation: Identifying and Using Interim Outcomes to Tell the Whole Story
- Turning the Tables: Assessing Grantmakers' Advocacy Capacity
- International Advocacy Evaluation: Coordinating Comprehensive Evaluation Across Seven Countries

[Oil Dependence of the United States on the Supplier's Nations]

[How Traditional Evaluation Thinking and Frameworks can be Adapted for Advocacy/Policy Evaluation]

[Evaluating the Effectiveness of Policy and Advocacy Coalitions]

Looking Ahead

Independent Sector Public Policy Action Institute and Annual Conference
Challenging Times, New Opportunities
November 3-4, 2009, Detroit, MI
www.independentsector.org

Grantmakers for Effective Organizations National Conference
Unleashing Philanthropy's Potential
April 12–14, 2010, Pittsburgh, PA
www.geofunders.org

Grantmakers in Health Annual Conference
Taking Risks at a Critical Time
March 10-12, 2010, Orlando, FL
www.gih.org

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