ORS
ORGANIZATIONAL RESEARCH SERVICES

The Annie E. Casey Foundation

# Real-life Lessons Learned and Resources in Building Capacity for Advocacy and Policy Evaluation among KIDS COUNT Grantees

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## Background

*With the support of the Annie E. Casey Foundation (Casey), Organizational Research Services (ORS), an independent Seattle-based evaluation consulting firm, developed* A Guide to Measuring Advocacy and Policy *in 2006. The* Guide *explores ways of thinking about evaluation and advocacy and policy work and presents a framework to name outcomes associated with advocacy and policy as well as broad directions for evaluation of advocacy and policy outcomes.*

*In 2007, Casey and ORS initiated a pilot to test the* Guide'*s framework and evaluation directions in "real world" contexts. Since 2007, ORS has worked with five KIDS COUNT grantees (Children First for Oregon, Georgia Family Connection Partnership, Action for Children North Carolina, Connecticut Association for Human Services, California Children Now) by guiding a process that has involved:*

- *Identification of outcomes and performance measures that connect to advocacy and policy strategies;*
- *Development of agreement about priority measures for evaluation; and*
- *Discussion about data collection approaches that could best support documentation and evaluation of priority measures.*

*The pilot has helped ORS and Casey learn how the framework really works when it gets into the real world, including what issues can arise during evaluation planning and what it would take to document performance measures and/or evaluate priority outcomes*.

# Ten Real-Life Lessons Learned

**1. Advocates say: "Show me the tools!"** There is a great desire and demand among advocates for checklists, tools and simple approaches to evaluation and documentation. While we believe it is possible to meet this demand, we also recognize that the most appropriate and meaningful tools and approaches are best identified when advocates can address the following questions:

- What is the purpose of evaluation?
- What are the main evaluation needs?
- What are the measurement priorities?
- For outcomes, what is the likely timeframe for achievement?

Applying tools or approaches without consideration of the above questions can result in evaluation efforts or data collection that are of limited utility.

**Resources**: *A Guide to Measuring Advocacy and Policy; A Handbook of Data Collection Tools: Companion to* A Guide to Measuring Advocacy and Policy; and *A Training Companion to* A Guide to Measuring Advocacy and Policy.

**2. View theory of change through a telescope.** Advocacy and policy work is perhaps best viewed in "telescoping" or overlapping layers. For example, a large educational reform or child welfare effort directed at long-term, broad changes in policies, systems or populations may consist of several targeted campaigns or strategies, each with a specific outcome or goal, and each of these may have several activities associated with specific expected outcomes. Getting a perspective on these telescoping or overlapping layers may be very helpful to identify an evaluative focus. The process of identifying a theory of change has value by creating transparency for other advocates, including the next generation of advocates. This may involve articulating:

- A "30,000-foot view" theory of change or outcome map. This would be a high level view of major strategies or campaigns and expected long-term changes, usually including policy changes and/or changes in populations or environmental conditions. This picture is not likely to provide significant detail, and therefore is not as directly useful for evaluation planning. This is very useful, however, for high-level orientation. This view can also help illuminate areas that could be "drilled down."
- A "10,000-foot view" outcome map. This perspective provides a view of specific "pieces" of work and shows pathways towards desired long-term policy or impact changes. An outcome map at this level identifies interim outcomes, which is helpful for evaluation planning.
- Even more granular outcome maps showing specific activities within a "piece" of work and related short-term changes. Again, this view is helpful for evaluation planning.

**Resources**: Example Theory of Change "Outcome Maps" for Georgia Family Connection Partnership and Children First for Oregon.

* *Please see page 4 for a full description of all resources.*

**3. What do funders want anyway?** It is important to understand, explore and/or clarify funders' expectations with regard to evaluation of advocacy and policy change efforts. Funders' expectations about advocacy work and its likely results may be either low or non-existent (e.g., reporting on activities and/or outputs), or quite high and perhaps unrealistic (e.g., reporting on changes in social indicators or policy "wins"). There appear to be opportunities for those involved in advocacy and policy efforts to work with their funders in order to clarify and articulate evaluation purposes, needs, and priority outcomes in this area. Advocates can also help funders understand what are likely to be interim outcomes on the way to long-term goals and understand realistic timeframes for outcome achievement.

**Resources**: Four Evaluation Directions and Related Guiding Questions.

**4. It can be done!** Although evaluation of advocacy and policy change work raises challenging questions, and can be daunting, it can be done and it is being done. And, while tools and approaches to support advocacy evaluation are still emerging, many advocates are willing to try things out. Additionally, while it has been challenging for some advocates to engage in the thinking work associated with evaluation planning, many of those who've engaged in this work have seen value in doing so.

**Resources (available in early 2009)**: A brief that describes and provides perspective on some of the thorny issues that may emerge during development of a theory of change and selection of priority measures; and also considerations regarding ways to evaluate specific advocacy efforts in real time.

**5. Match up existing culture of reflection with evaluation perspectives.** A strong culture of reflection is already built into advocacy work, but many advocates don't see it as "evaluation." In a study of advocates conducted by the Innovation Network,[1] only 1 in 4 respondents said that their advocacy organizations had been evaluated. Nearly three times as many respondents said they were using "specific indicators or benchmarks to measure progress."

**6. Engaging partners - what makes sense?** It is important to consider the best way to work with partners when engaging in evaluation planning. It may be useful to have partners review a high level theory of change picture, as this can help illuminate where there are opportunities for alignment of partners' efforts. Similarly, it may be useful to share some data or findings with partners to help inform strategic progress towards shared goals. However, when working on developing an internal evaluation plan, it may not be as useful to directly involve partners in the development of theory of change, outcome maps, or evaluation planning.

**Resource:** Example Theory of Change "Outcome Map" for Connecticut Association for Human Services.

**7. Interest in advocacy evaluation is on the rise.** Evaluation has a clear place in the field of advocacy and policy. Advocates notice increased interest and attention from funders about the role of evaluation to help demonstrate accountability and support strategic progress in advocacy and policy work. Evaluation in this area is still emerging, but is actively being considered and explored by advocates, funders and evaluators.

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[1] "Speaking for Themselves: Advocates' Perspectives on Evaluation," Innovation Network, Inc. Commissioned by the Annie E. Casey Foundation and The Atlantic Philanthropies. Read more at www.innonet.org.

**8. Role of a coach provides a unique perspective.** The role of evaluator-as-coach provides a unique perspective on what advocacy groups encounter as they think about evaluation. Many advocacy groups have limited humanpower to engage in broad data collection efforts. In addition, methods that would require a neutral third party may be less appropriate for consideration within the context of evaluation to determine strategic progress. Given these constraints, organizations may need to start with small efforts and build over time rather than immediately having a fully developed evaluation for a campaign or strategy area.

**9. Legitimacy of performance measures.** Performance measures have a useful place in the portfolio of advocacy evaluation tools and approaches. Performance measures, which can be related to either implementation or effectiveness, provide a good entry point to evaluative thinking among advocates, and identification and tracking of performance measures should be viewed as a legitimate advocacy and policy evaluation activity.

**Resource**: excerpts from "Thinking Strategically about KIDS COUNT Performance Measures" (PowerPoint presentation).

**10. Evaluation provides focus (so advocates can breathe!).** Advocates often try to do it all to achieve their end goals. Theory of change development helps name outcomes and provides clearer focus on where evaluative efforts can help advocates rather than trying to evaluate all aspects of a strategy or campaign.

# Resources

Incorporating the experiences and learnings of KIDS COUNT grantees involved in the pilot as well as those of other funders and grantees involved in advocacy and policy work, the Annie E. Casey Foundation and ORS have developed several resources that are intended to guide and support the efforts of those seeking to pursue evaluation of advocacy and policy work.

- ***A Guide to Measuring Advocacy and Policy.*** The Annie E. Casey Foundation commissioned this guide to help determine meaningful ways to measure and evaluate the impact of its advocacy and public policy grantmaking. Although a primary intent of this guide is to contribute practical guidance to Casey regarding evaluation of its investments, this guide also serves as a broad call to grantmakers to build and advance the field of evaluation in this area. The Guide puts forth a framework for naming outcomes associated with advocacy and policy, which provides a common way for philanthropic and nonprofit audiences to identify and talk about outcomes categories. In addition, grantmakers and advocacy groups can consider some key directions for evaluation design that include a broad range of methodologies, intensities, timeframes and purposes.
- ***A Handbook of Data Collection Tools: Companion to* A Guide to Measuring Advocacy and Policy*.*** As a companion to the Guide, this is a collection of examples of measurement tools that are applicable to advocacy and policy work, presented in this Handbook.
- **A Training Companion to *A Guide to Measuring Advocacy and Policy***. This PowerPoint training tool provides information, perspectives and practical tools on the unique issues and challenges associated with measuring advocacy and policy change for both grantmakers and advocates. Included are an overview of the landscape of advocacy evaluation, step-by-step guidance for grantmakers and advocates to begin planning evaluation, and several group exercises. There are two versions of this Training Companion: one shorter, more concise

version and a longer, more comprehensive version. In the coming year, ORS plans to develop an annotated Training Guide to accompany the Training Companion decks.

- **Four Evaluation Directions and Related Guiding Questions.** Adapted from *A Guide to Measuring Advocacy and Policy,* this one-page table lists four potential "directions" for advocacy evaluation. Along with each of these directions, there are corresponding questions related to what types of policy-change efforts are taking place, as well as what might help frame or influence specific evaluation approaches.

- **Example Theory of Change "Outcome Maps."** There are several examples of theories of change available that show the overlapping layers of advocacy and policy work as a result of ORS' coaching work with the KIDS COUNT grantees. Georgia Family Connection Partnership and Children First for Oregon both have sets of outcome maps that show their higher-level, agency- or initiative-wide theory of change, along with outcome maps that offer a closer look at more specific pieces of work.

- **Excerpt from "Thinking Strategically about KIDS COUNT Performance Measures."** This PowerPoint, presented at the 2008 KIDS COUNT Conference, provides an overview of the development and use of performance measures in evaluation work. It offers guidance and key considerations for how to prioritize and select performance measures for advocacy organizations, and an introduction to ways to collect data for performance measures.

- ‡ **A brief that describes and provides perspective on some of the thorny issues that may emerge during development of a theory of change and selection of priority measures** (available in January 2009). This brief provides a map or navigation tool to help those entering into evaluation of advocacy and policy be prepared and see their course more clearly.

- ‡ **Considerations regarding ways to evaluate specific advocacy efforts in real time** (available January 2009). This guidance piece is being created in partnership with KIDS COUNT grantees and will likely include key considerations related to adopting real-time evaluative thinking as an integrated part of advocacy and policy change work.

**How to Access Resources**

All of these resources are or will be available at ORS' website, organizationalresearch.com. Those that are marked ‡ will be available in January 2009. For additional information about any of these materials or to request a copy, please contact Anne Gienapp, Sarah Stachowiak or Jane Reisman at ORS.


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*A Guide to Measuring Advocacy and Policy* and the accompanying *A Handbook of Data Collection Tools* are also available at the Annie E. Casey Foundation's website, aecf.org.