

An Advocate's Perspective: Ten Considerations for Effective Advocacy Evaluation

By Ted Lempert, President of Children Now

1. Every advocacy campaign is unique and evaluation models must reflect this fact.

Evaluation models cannot be “one size fits all” and, therefore, must be carefully tailored to each advocacy campaign.

2. Trust between advocacy organizations and funders is essential to effective evaluation.

Open communication between the advocacy organization and funder is required at the beginning of a campaign in order to establish the right campaign benchmarks and formally acknowledge the potential challenges with evaluating interim progress. Trust enables this process to be most effective.

3. Evaluation models must be responsive to changes in the political landscape.

Evaluation models must build in flexibility so that advocacy organizations can appropriately respond to changes in the political landscape without fear of undermining the outcomes measured by the campaign's evaluation.

4. That which gets measured gets done.

It is important that advocacy evaluation models do not create disincentives for effective advocacy by favoring strategies that are easily measured. For example, “media hits” are easy to measure and tangible. However, in some advocacy campaigns visibility is undesirable; an evaluation model including media coverage as a measure of success would compromise the success of those campaigns.

5. Understand the assumptions embedded in the evaluation model.

An evaluation model built on flawed assumptions cannot be effective. For example, an evaluation model measuring policymakers' impression of an advocacy organization may assume that a favorable impression is always desired, when in fact there are instances in which an unfavorable impression actually demonstrates progress towards campaign goals.

6. Implementing supportive evaluation practices requires capacity building.

Effectively planning, executing, and evaluating an advocacy campaign is a time and resource-intensive undertaking. For example, significant amounts of senior staff time are required to conduct a thorough landscape analysis which assesses the political landscape

and evaluates the effectiveness of the campaign strategy within the current political climate.

7. The advocacy campaign should ultimately be measured by its success.

The primary objective of advocacy evaluation should be measuring the ultimate success of a campaign, that is how the campaign benefited children and the number of children who benefited from the campaign. A strong evaluation model will remain focused on that success, so that measurements of interim steps are based upon their ability to move the campaign closer to achieving the ultimate campaign goal as opposed to using interim steps as stand-alone evaluation measures.

8. There is a big difference between evaluating a campaign and evaluating a grant cycle.

Advocacy campaigns typically span several years or more, while grant cycles typically only one to two years. Evaluations must maintain a focus upon the ultimate goal of winning the campaign while creating interim benchmarks that match the overall campaign strategy.

9. Effective evaluation requires that advocates and evaluators partner to collectively create and implement an evaluation plan.

Advocates and evaluators must invest a lot of up front time in immersing evaluators in the campaign so that evaluators can understand the nuances of a campaign. In doing so, evaluators should not come to the table with a checklist of measures. Instead, evaluators and advocates must work together to create a custom-tailored evaluation model, choosing the “best” methodology for measuring the campaign objectives with an eye toward the particular campaign strategy and the availability of resources.

10. Models must be able to effectively evaluate the contributions of coalition members.

When evaluating the effectiveness of partners in a coalition, evaluators must create measures that can adequately capture each group’s value add, the varying investments in each group, and the “public credit” received by coalition members. This requires evaluators to account for the dynamics of the coalition while also remaining aware of strategic decisions that have been made during the campaign. For example, if an evaluation of the effectiveness of partners were built on measures of public credit and group A deemed it most effective to the ultimate success of the campaign to give groups B and C public credit, it would be difficult for the evaluation to adequately assess the effectiveness of group A.

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