FOCUSING MAPPING PRIORITIZING DESIGNING

A User's Guide to Advocacy Evaluation Planning

Harvard Family Research Project

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Why does advocacy evaluation matter?

Advocacy to influence public policy has the potential to achieve large-scale results for individuals, families, and communities. Evaluation can help to ensure that advocacy strategies are as effective as possible in their efforts to achieve those results. Positioned to inform where advocacy strategies are making progress and where midcourse corrections might be needed, evaluation can be a critical resource and support during the policy change process.

What is this tool?

Although the argument for evaluating advocacy is convincing, advocacy has long been considered "too hard to measure," and so far relatively few advocates, funders, or evaluators have taken on the challenge. But this is now changing. Interest in advocacy evaluation is surging and cutting-edge advocates are embracing evaluation as a critical part of their work. The main barrier preventing more organizations from using evaluation is a lack of familiarity with how to think about and design evaluations of advocacy efforts that are useful, manageable, and resource-efficient. Even knowing where to start can be a challenge.

Interest in advocacy evaluation is surging and cutting-edge advocates are embracing evaluation as a critical part of their work.

This tool was developed to help address that gap in knowledge. It guides users through four basic steps of advocacy evaluation planning.

Who should use it?

This tool was developed for advocates, evaluators, funders, or other stakeholders who want guidance on how to evaluate advocacy efforts. It does not assume users already have deep evaluation knowledge or experience and therefore does not go into the methodological and technical details of evaluation design. Rather, it introduces several key evaluation planning steps and helps users think about and be active participants in the process.

What does the tool generate?

Completing all the steps included in the tool will generate the core elements of an advocacy evaluation plan, including which outcomes will be measured and how.

When should it be used?

Evaluation planning should occur at the start of an advocacy effort, ideally while the strategy is being designed or soon after. This tool is based on the proven premise that evaluation can be a key resource when integrated into advocacy efforts because it can inform advocacy strategies as they evolve. To get the maximum benefit possible from this tool, evaluation plans should be in place when advocacy efforts begin.

How do I use it?

The tool has four steps to complete in sequence: Step 1: Focusing, Step 2: Mapping, Step 3: Prioritizing, and Step 4: Designing.

An insert in the guide offers a blank worksheet for users to complete these steps for their own advocacy strategies.

Step One: **Focusing**

All evaluation planning should start with an understanding of who the evaluation's users are and how they will use the evaluation, as well as what evaluation questions they want answered.[1] Getting clarity on these items up front will ensure the evaluation delivers the right kind of information when it is needed. It also will help avoid misplaced expectations down the road.

Evaluation Users

First, decide who will use the evaluation. Users are people who have a vested interest in the evaluation's findings and will engage with the evaluation. Consider which groups or individuals will want to learn about the advocacy effort's progress.

Evaluation can help advocates learn, adapt, and remain nimble in the midst of a constantly changing policy environment.

The most common advocacy evaluation users are advocates themselves. Because advocates' strategies for achieving their policy goals often evolve without a predictable script, advocates must regularly adapt their strategies in response to changing variables and conditions. To make informed decisions, advocates need timely answers to the strategic questions they regularly face. Evaluation can help advocates learn, adapt, and remain nimble in the midst of a constantly changing policy environment.

Advocacy funders also are common evaluation users. Like advocates, funders may want feedback on progress as advocacy efforts unfold so that they can adjust their grantmaking strategies. Funders also may want to know how and where advocates are impacting the policy process so that they can justify their advocacy investments or identify what capacities advocates need in order to be effective.

While advocates and funders are the most common advocacy evaluation users, consider other less obvious users, such as advocacy partners, other organizations working toward similar policy goals, or the media. For example, advocacy partners (including grassroots advocates) may want feedback on progress. In fact, such data may serve as a motivator. Consider also whether the data collected might even become part of the advocacy strategy. Evidence that the effort is making headway can be newsworthy and help push advocacy efforts closer to their policy goals.

TIP: If the evaluation has more than one set of users, try to consider and balance users' needs during the planning process. At the same time, it is wise to define which user group is primary, as sometimes all users' needs cannot be met simultaneously with the time and resources available.

1. Patton, M. (2008). *Utilization-focused evaluation (4th edition).* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Evaluation Uses

Next, determine how the evaluation will be used. Advocacy evaluation uses generally fall into two main categories: strategic learning and accountability. Evaluations can be used for one or both purposes.

- *Strategic learning* refers to advocates' (or funders') need for real-time data to inform their ongoing strategies. As data are returned, they can be used to learn what strategies or tactics are working well and where midcourse corrections may be needed. Learning also refers to using evaluation to find out which advocacy strategies or tactics are effective and why, so that those approaches can be used again.
- *Accountability* means that the evaluation holds advocates responsible for doing what they said they would do when they said they would do it. Advocates can be accountable, for example, to their funders, to themselves and their collaborators, or to the public. Most evaluations focused on the accountability function concentrate on determining if a *credible and defensible* case can be made that advocates contributed to policy outcomes and goals instead of attempting to prove that advocates definitively *caused* them.

Don't underestimate the importance of using evaluation for strategic learning. The regular practice of getting and using data shows that organizations can adapt and evolve in response to feedback. This is a key characteristic of high-capacity and high-impact organizations.

Evaluation Questions

Now, further focus the evaluation by defining what questions the evaluation's users want answered. This step is important, as how evaluation questions are framed, their level of specificity, and how they are worded will profoundly affect what data are collected and how.

Identify evaluation questions now, but then revisit and refine them if necessary as the evaluation planning process continues.

TIP: Be as specific as possible when identifying evaluation questions. Don't just say, "Is the advocacy effort making progress?"or "Is the advocacy effort achieving its intended outcomes?" Those questions typically are too general to be useful. Instead, identify more specifically what the evaluation's users want to know. For example, more appropriate questions might be, "How effective is the advocacy effort's media strategy in reframing the policy issue of interest?" or "Is the advocacy effort increasing public will among its target audiences?"

Step Two: **Mapping**

Almost all evaluation planning involves developing a visual map of the strategy being evaluated. These visual maps (often called theories of change or logic models) illustrate how strategies will achieve change. In evaluation terms, they show how activities will lead to outcomes. This mapping helps to narrow in on exactly what about the strategy needs to be evaluated.

The Advocacy Progress Planner, an online and interactive version of the composite logic model, is available at: planning.continuousprogress.org

The "composite logic model" on page 8 was developed to facilitate the process of advocacy strategy mapping.[2] Rather than start the mapping process with a blank piece of paper, the model offers a menu of possible strategy elements to choose from.

Short definitions for each logic model component are on pages 9–10.

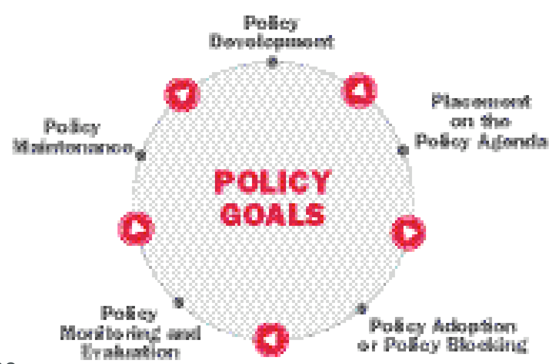
Select the components in the composite logic model that are relevant to the advocacy strategy being evaluated. Literally trace or highlight a "pathway" through the model.

Policy Impacts and Goals

Define what, in the long run, the advocacy strategy is trying to achieve.

Impacts are the big changes and benefits being sought for people, services, or systems as a result of a policy change or policy goal. For example, the advocacy strategy might aim to improve the way health care services are provided (i.e., improved services and systems), or it might seek safer communities and neighborhoods for young children (i.e., positive social and physical conditions).

Policy goals are what the advocacy strategy ultimately is trying to achieve in the policy arena. Issues at different stages in the policy process usually require different kinds of goals.



The figure at right shows a sequence of policy goals (the stages start at the top). Some issues are brand new, and the problems to be addressed require a policy solution to be developed, placed on the policy agenda, or adopted. Other issues or problems already are known and have policy solutions in place, but their implementation or evaluation is problematic. Use the figure as a guide in identifying an appropriate policy goal.

2. The model was developed by Julia Coffman (Harvard Family Research Project), Astrid Hendricks and Barbara Masters (The California Endowment), Jackie Kaye (The Atlantic Philanthropies), and Tom Kelly (Annie E. Casey Foundation). More than 50 funders, evaluators, and advocates helped refine it.

Activities/Tactics

Identify what advocates are doing to move the strategy's audiences and achieve the policy goal(s).

Interim Outcomes

Select the outcomes that must be achieved before the policy goal(s) can be accomplished. Interim outcomes are the direct results of advocacy activities or tactics.

Sometimes policy goals take years to achieve; interim outcomes signal important progress to be achieved along the way. Capturing interim outcomes also ensures that evaluations do not unfairly conclude that entire advocacy efforts failed if policy goals are not achieved.

Advocacy evaluation typically focuses on the policy change journey rather than just the destination. It captures the changes advocates make on the way to achieving policy goals.

TIP: While the focus here is on using the composite logic model for evaluation planning, it is also useful for advocacy strategy planning. Because the model identifies a full range of possible advocacy activities and outcomes, it can be used to identify what collaborators or opponents are doing and how they complement or compete with the strategy. Also, the comprehensive layout facilitates contingency planning; alternative paths to the policy goal can be identified if the current strategy is not successful.

Advocacy and Policy Change Composite Logic Model

IMPACTS

- Improved Services and Systems
- Positive Social and Physical Conditions

POLICY GOALS

- Policy Development
- Placement on the Policy Agenda
- Policy Adoption
- Policy Blocking
- Policy Implementation
- Policy Monitoring and Evaluation
- Policy Maintenance

ACTIVITIES/TACTICS

Communications and Outreach

- Electronic Outreach/Social Media
- Coalition and Network Building
- Briefings/ Presentations
- Earned Media
- Grassroots Organizing and Mobilization
- Public Service Announcements
- Paid Media
- Rallies and Marches
- Polling
- Media Partnerships
- Voter Education
- Demonstration Projects or Pilots

Politics and Policy

- Issue/Policy Analysis and Research
- Policymaker and Candidate Education
- Litigation or Legal Advocacy
- Policy Proposal Development
- Relationship Building with Decision Makers
- Lobbying

INTERIM OUTCOMES

Advocacy Capacity

- Organizational Capacity
- New Advocates *(including unlikely or nontraditional)*
- New Donors
- Partnerships or Alliances
- New Champions *(including policymakers)*
- More or Diversified Funding
- Collaboration and Alignment *(including messaging)*
- Organizational Visibility or Recognition

Policy

- Awareness
- Public Will
- Media Coverage
- Salience
- Political Will
- Issue Reframing
- Attitudes or Beliefs
- Constituency or Support Base Growth

Composite Logic Model Definitions

Impacts

Improved Services and Systems	Programs and services that are higher quality and more accessible, affordable, comprehensive, or coordinated.
Positive Social and Physical Conditions	Better circumstances and surroundings for people, communities, or society in general.

Policy Goals

Policy Development	Creating a new policy proposal or policy guidelines.
Placement on the Policy Agenda	The appearance of an issue or policy proposal on the list of issues that policymakers give serious attention.
Policy Adoption	Successful passing of a policy proposal through an ordinance, ballot measure, legislation, or legal agreement.
Policy Blocking	Successful opposition to a policy proposal.
Policy Implementation	Proper implementation of a policy, along with the funding, resources, or quality assurance to ensure it.
Policy Monitoring and Evaluation	Tracking a policy to ensure it is implemented properly and achieves its intended impacts.
Policy Maintenance	Preventing cuts or other negative changes to a policy.

Advocacy Activities/Tactics

Electronic Outreach/Social Media	Using technologies such as email, websites, blogs, podcasts, cell phones, Facebook, or Twitter to reach a large audience and enable fast communications.
Earned Media	Pitching the print, broadcast, or electronic media to get visibility for an issue with specific audiences.
Paid Media	Paying for media coverage through, for example, advertisements and "open letters."
Media Partnerships	Getting a media company to agree to promote a cause through its communications channels and programming.
Coalition and Network Building	Unifying advocacy voices by bringing together individuals, groups, or organizations who agree on a particular issue or goal.
Grassroots Organizing and Mobilization	Creating or building on a community-based groundswell of support for an issue or position, often by helping people affected by policies to advocate on their own behalf.
Rallies and Marches	Gathering a large group of people for symbolic events that arouse enthusiasm and generate visibility (particularly in the media).
Voter Education	Conveying an issue or position to specific groups of voters in advance of an election.
Briefings/Presentations	Making an advocacy case in person through one-on-one or group meetings.
Public Service Announcements	Placing a noncommercial advertisement to promote social causes.
Polling	Surveying the public via phone or online to collect data for use in advocacy messages.
Demonstration Projects or Pilots	Implementing a policy proposal on a small scale in one or several sites to show how it can work.

Composite Logic Model Definitions (continued)

Issue/Policy Analysis and Research	Systematically investigating an issue or problem to better define it or identify possible solutions.
Policy Proposal Development	Developing a specific policy solution for the issue or problem being addressed.
Policymaker and Candidate Education	Telling policymakers and candidates about an issue or position, and about its broad or impassioned support.
Relationship Building with Decision Makers	Interacting with the policymakers or others who have the authority to act on the issue and put change in motion.
Litigation or Legal Advocacy	Using the judicial system to move policy by filing lawsuits, civil actions, and other advocacy tactics.
Lobbying	Attempting to influence legislation by communicating with a member or employee of a legislative body or with a government official or employee who may participate in forming legislation.

Interim Outcomes

Organizational Capacity	The ability of an organization or coalition to lead, adapt, manage, and technically implement an advocacy strategy.
Partnerships or Alliances	Mutually beneficial relationships with other organizations or individuals who support or participate in an advocacy strategy.
Collaboration and Alignment (including messaging)	Individuals or groups coordinating their work and acting together.
New Advocates (including unlikely or nontraditional)	Previously unengaged individuals who take action in support of an issue or position.
New Champions (including policymakers)	High-profile individuals who adopt an issue and publicly advocate for it.
New Donors	New public or private funders or individuals who contribute funds or other resources for a cause.
More or Diversified Funding	The amount of dollars raised and variety of funding sources generated.
Organizational Visibility or Recognition	Identification of an organization or campaign as a credible source on an issue.
Awareness	Audience recognition that a problem exists or familiarity with a policy proposal.
Salience	The importance a target audience assigns an issue or policy proposal.
Attitudes or Beliefs	Target audiences' feelings or affect about an issue or policy proposal.
Public Will	Willingness of a (nonpolicymaker) target audience 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.
Constituency or Support Base Growth	Increase in the number of individuals who can be counted on for sustained advocacy or action 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.

Step Three: **Prioritizing**

Now that the advocacy strategy has been mapped, it is ready to guide the evaluation's design. Data collected on the strategy's components can determine whether the strategy is working and progressing as intended.

However, rarely are enough evaluation resources available to collect data on every part of the advocacy strategy. Many advocacy organizations are small operations with few staff and resources for evaluation. In addition, many do not want to engage in highly involved evaluations. Under these circumstances a "less is more" approach can be wise when identifying both what to evaluate and how.

Step back from the strategy and *prioritize* the components that are most essential for the evaluation. In doing this, consider the questions below. Then go back to the composite logic model and identify which strategy components marked represent the biggest evaluation priorities.

What do the evaluation's users want to know?

Consider the evaluation questions and what the evaluation's primary users want to know about the strategy's progress or success. Given these questions, are some logic model components more important to assess than others? For example, if the primary evaluation user is the organization leading the advocacy effort, and that organization wants to use the evaluation to get real-time data that will suggest opportunities for continuous strategy improvement, then the evaluation may want to focus on assessing the activities and interim outcomes that come earlier in the policy change process. A funder, on the other hand, may be more interested in learning about the strategy's ultimate success in achieving its policy outcome(s) (e.g., moving the issue higher on the policy agenda or ensuring that a policy is properly implemented).

What is the advocacy effort's unique contribution?

For some advocacy efforts, certain outcomes or impacts related to the advocacy strategy may be so long term or may hinge on so many external or contextual factors that it may be appropriate to focus the evaluation less on them and more on the shorter term or interim outcomes that are connected directly to the advocacy effort. Capturing the organization's unique contribution to the outcomes it is linked closest to may be more meaningful than capturing outcomes that many organizations or other factors will affect. Outcomes or impacts that are not prioritized will still be relevant as they will remain part of the strategy; they simply will not be the evaluation's main focus.

What is the evaluation's timeframe?

Most advocacy efforts are not short term. Policy goals take numerous years to accomplish. Evaluations, however, may take place on a shorter timeline. For example, an organization with a 10-year advocacy strategy might have a 3-year evaluation because the strategy's funder would like to make decisions about whether to continue funding after several years, or because the organization conducting the advocacy wants to understand early on whether it is gaining traction and momentum on the way to its policy goal. Consider what outcomes among those selected in the composite logic model are realistic to expect within the evaluation's timeframe.

Who will do the evaluation?

Consider whether the evaluation will be internal or external. Financial and human resources may factor into this decision. Some outcomes may be well suited for internal monitoring and tracking rather than external evaluation. Other outcomes may be better suited to the expertise or objective perspective that an external evaluator can bring (e.g., assessing advocates' influence on key audiences in the policy process, such as policymakers, the media, the business community, or voters).

Step Four: **Designing**

Now it's time to finish the evaluation planning process by making decisions about exactly what data points will be captured and how.

Measures

This step involves identifying specific measures (also called metrics, indicators, or benchmarks) that, when captured and tracked over time, will signal whether advocacy strategy elements have been successfully implemented or achieved.

Different kinds of measures go with different composite logic model elements.

Impact Measures

These measures demonstrate what will happen after a policy goal is achieved. They show the effects of policy goals for the programs, systems, or populations that policies aim to improve.

Policy Goal Measures

These measures signal whether policy goals have been achieved.

Activity/Tactic Measures

Commonly known as outputs, these "measures of effort" count what and how much advocacy activities or tactics produce or accomplish. Although these measures capture what was done, they do little to explain how well it was done or how well it worked with target audiences. Because they count tangible products, people, or events, activity/tactic measures are the easiest of all evaluation measures to identify and track.

Interim Outcome Measures

Linked to interim outcomes, these measures signal progress toward the achievement of policy goals. Unlike measures that are associated with activities and tactics, they are "measures of effect" and demonstrate changes that happen—usually within target audiences—as a result of advocacy efforts.

Go back to the priority strategy elements identified in the last step and identify measures for each element. Use the example measures on pages 14–16 as a guide. Although it is not an exhaustive list of measures for each logic model element, the list should stimulate ideas.

Pick the most meaningful and useful measures and avoid choosing too many. More data does not always mean better data, and too much data can be overwhelming.

All measures are not created equal. While it is possible to generate a long list, some measures will make more sense to track than others. Keep these guidelines in mind:

How well does the measure link to the strategy element? Measures should, to the extent possible, capture effects and provide the most direct evidence of the strategy element they are measuring.

Are data currently being collected? If not, is cost-effective data collection an option? Where data are not currently collected, the cost of additional data collection must be weighed against the potential utility of the additional data.

Is the measure important to most people? Will it provide sufficient information to convince both supporters and skeptics? Measures must provide information that will be both easily understood and accepted by the evaluation's audience.

Is the measure quantitative? Numeric indicators often provide the most useful and understandable information. In some cases, however, qualitative information is more relevant and important.

Example Composite Logic Model Measures

Impacts

Improved Services and Systems

[Measures depend on the specific policy goal. Examples follow.]

- More programs offered
- Easier access to programs or services
- Higher quality services
- More affordable services

Positive Social and Physical Conditions

[Measures depend on the specific policy goal. Examples follow.]

- Reduced greenhouse gas emissions
- Improved kindergarten readiness
- Reduced teen driving accidents
- Reduced dropout rates
- Increased percentage of minority students attending college

Policy Goals

Policy Development

- New proposals or guiding principles developed

Placement on the Policy Agenda

- Policies formally introduced (bills, bonds, ballot measures, regulations, administrative policies)

Policy Adoption

- Policies formally established (bills, bonds, ballot measures, regulations, administrative policies)

Policy Blocking

- Policies formally blocked (bills, bonds, ballot measures, regulations, administrative policies)

Policy Implementation

- Policies implemented or administered in accordance with requirements

Policy Monitoring and Evaluation

- Funding established to formally monitor or evaluate policies

Policy Maintenance

- Funding levels sustained for policies or programs
- Eligibility levels maintained for policies or program

Advocacy Activities/Tactics (Outputs)

Electronic Outreach

- A new website or Web pages developed
- Number and frequency of e-alert messages sent

Earned Media

- Number of editorial board meetings held
- Number of outreach attempts to reporters
- Number of press releases developed and distributed

Paid Media

- Number of print, radio, or online advertisements developed
- Dollars spent on advertisement placements
- Number and types of distribution outlets for advertisements

Media Partnerships

- Number and types of media partnerships developed
- Number and types of distribution outlets accessed through media partnerships

Coalition and Network Building

- Number of coalition members
- Types of constituency types represented in the coalition (e.g., business, nonprofit)
- Number of coalition meetings held and attendance

Grassroots Organizing and Mobilization

- Number and geographic location of communities where organizing efforts take place
- Number of community events or trainings held and attendance

Rallies and Marches	• Number of rallies or marches held and attendance • Participation of high-profile speakers or participants
Voter Education	• Number and types of voter education materials developed and disseminated • Number of voters reached through education efforts
Briefings/Presentations	• Number of briefings or presentations held • Types of audiences reached through briefings or presentations • Number of individuals attending briefings and presentations
Public Service Announcements	• Number of print, radio, or online PSAs developed • Number and types of distribution outlets for PSAs
Polling	• Polls conducted with advocacy audience(s)
Demonstration Projects or Pilots	• Number of demonstration project or pilot sites • Funding secured for demonstration projects or pilots
Issue/Policy Analysis and Research	• Number of research or policy analysis products developed (reports, brief, etc.) • Number and types of distribution outlets for products • Number of products distributed
Policy Proposal Development	• Policy guidelines or policy proposals developed • Number of organizations signing onto policy guidelines or proposals
Policymaker and Candidate Education	• Number of meetings or briefings held with policymakers or candidates • Number of policymakers or candidates reached • Types of policymakers or candidates reached (bipartisan, key committee members, etc.)
Relationship Building with Decision Makers	• Number of meetings held with decision makers
Litigation or Legal Advocacy	• Amicus briefs written • Testimony offered
Lobbying	• Number of meetings held with policymakers or candidates • Number of policymakers or candidates reached • Types of policymakers or candidates reached (bipartisan, key committee members, etc.)

Use these example measures as a guide. Although it is not an exhaustive list of measures for each logic model element, the list should stimulate ideas.

Interim Outcomes

Organizational Capacity	• Increased knowledge about advocacy, mobilizing, or organizing tactics • Improved media skills and contacts • Increased ability to get and use data
Partnerships or Alliances	• New or stronger organizational relationships developed • New relationships with unlikely partners
Collaboration and Alignment (including messaging)	• New organizations signing on as collaborators • Policy agenda alignment among collaborators • Collaborative actions taken among organizations (e.g., joint meetings, aligning of messages)
New Advocates (including unlikely or nontraditional)	• New advocates recruited • New constituencies represented among advocates • New advocate actions to support issue
New Champions (including policymakers)	• New champions or stakeholders recruited • New constituencies represented among champions • Champion actions to support issue (e.g., speaking out, signing on)
New Donors	• Number of first-time donors • New donors offering financial versus in-kind support • Average dollars given by new donors
More or Diversified Funding	• Number of overall donors • Types of donors (individual, philanthropic, corporate) • Dollars donated to support advocacy efforts • Revenue earned to support advocacy efforts
Organizational Visibility or Recognition	• Number of requests for advocate products or information (including downloads or pageviews) • Number and types of invitations for advocates to speak as experts
Awareness	• Percentage of audience members with knowledge of an issue • Website activity for portions of website with advocacy-related information
Salience	• Percentage of audience members saying issue is important to them
Attitudes or Beliefs	• Percentage of audience members with favorable attitudes toward the issue or interest
Public Will	• Percentage of audience members willing to take action on behalf of a specific issue • Attendance at advocacy events (e.g., public forums, marches, rallies)
Political Will	• Number of citations of grantee products or ideas in policy deliberations/policies • Number of elected officials who publicly support the advocacy effort • Number of issue mentions in policymaker speeches (or debates) • Number and party representation of bill sponsors and cosponsors • Number of votes for or against specific legislation
Constituency or Support Base Growth	• Website activity for portions of website with advocacy-related information • Number of fans, group members, or followers on social media websites

Methods

Once measures are identified, select the methods to capture them. Evaluation methods define how data will be collected.

Look at the measures identified in the last step, and identify which methods are needed to capture those data points. Some choices will be obvious, as some measures can be collected using only one method. Other measures may be captured using several possible methods, and each may carry a different price tag and level of effort. It may be necessary to further prioritize the list of measures based on the number and types of methods required to capture them.

Like all evaluations, advocacy evaluations can draw on a familiar list of traditional data collection methods, such as surveys, interviews, document review, observation, polling, focus groups, or case studies.

Because the advocacy process is unique and can make data collection challenging, and because advocacy features outcomes that are unique (e.g., public will or political will), other less conventional methods are particularly applicable to advocacy evaluation, including media tracking, policy tracking, and network mapping. In addition, several new methods have been developed specifically for advocacy evaluation, including the bellwether methodology, policymaker ratings, and intense-period debriefs.

Media Tracking

Used to evaluate media strategies that often are part of advocacy efforts, this method examines whether media coverage of an issue changes over time. It counts the number of times specific search terms or phrases (e.g., the messages that advocates are using) appear in targeted media outlets during specific periods of time.

Typically, media tracking uses an online database like LexisNexis® to gather media output for analysis. LexisNexis is a news-tracking service that offers one of the world's largest searchable databases of content from national, state, and local print and broadcast media.

Basic media tracking reveals whether issues or messages are mentioned more often but says little else about that coverage. If an advocacy effort's media strategy aims to change how the media covers certain issues, then content analysis of the articles in which search terms appear usually is required. Content analysis can determine, for example, how issues are framed in the media, the sources reporters use, and where coverage appears (e.g., on the front page versus elsewhere). Because it involves coding written content, however, content analysis can be substantially more time and resource intensive than basic media tracking.[3]

Common Advocacy Evaluation Methods

Surveys or Interviews
Print, telephone, or online questioning that gathers advocacy stakeholder perspectives or feedback.

Document Review
Review of existing internal or external documents. Documents may be hard copy or electronic and may include reports, funding proposals, meeting minutes, newsletters, and marketing materials.

Observation
Participation in advocacy meetings or events to gain first-hand experience and data.

Polling
Interviews (usually by telephone) with a random sample of advocacy stakeholders to gather data on their knowledge, attitudes, or behaviors.

Focus Groups
Facilitated discussions with advocacy stakeholders (usually about 8 to 10 per group) to obtain their reactions, opinions, or ideas.

Case Studies
Detailed descriptions and analyses (often qualitative) of individual advocacy strategies and results.

3. For more on media content analysis, see Douglas Gould and Company (2004). *Writing a media analysis.* Paper developed for the Communications Consortium Media Center.Available at www.mediaevaluationproject.org.

Policy Tracking

This method monitors the progress of policy proposals in the lawmaking process. It determines what policy proposals (e.g., rules, regulations, or bills) have been introduced on an issue and how far they have moved in the policy deliberation and adoption process. Policy tracking also can be used to determine who supports specific policies (e.g., who sponsored or signed onto a bill). If budgets are tracked, this method can determine the amount of funding that an issue has generated.

For most formally introduced proposals, information on policy progress is available online. For example, the Library of Congress maintains a public website (thomas.loc.gov) for tracking federal bills, resolutions, and other Congressional activities. State legislatures also have publicly accessible websites for monitoring bill content and progress.

Network Mapping

This technique (also called social network analysis) explores whether connections or relationships exist between people, groups, or institutions, as well as the nature and strength of those relationships. Network mapping is particularly useful when the advocacy effort involves collaborative groups, coalitions, or networks. The analysis offers insight into whether and how groups or networks are connecting, who are the leaders or connectors in the group, where clusters exist, and which individuals or organizations are on the periphery.

Network mapping views and visually illustrates a group's connections in terms of nodes and ties. Nodes are the individual actors or organizations that make up the network, and ties are the relationships between them.

This method can be technically challenging and typically requires an expert with network mapping experience. The process itself has three main steps: The first is surveying group or network members to ask, for example, which individuals or organization members have worked with, how frequent their contact has been, and the types of activities they have engaged in. The second step is analyzing the data, and the third step is visually displaying it. Several software packages exist for this purpose, and the process results in a series of visual maps that show where and how the survey's respondents connect.[4]

Bellwether Methodology

This approach tracks political will. It determines where a policy issue or proposal is positioned in the policy agenda queue, how decision makers and other influentials are thinking and talking about it, and how likely they are to act on it.

"Bellwethers" are influential people in the public and private sectors whose positions require that they are politically informed and that they track a broad range of policy issues. Bellwethers are knowledgeable and innovative thought leaders whose opinions about policy issues carry substantial weight and predictive value in the policy arena. For example, they might include policymakers, the media, funders, researchers/think tanks, or other advocates.

Sample Bellwether Interview Questions

1. Currently, what three issues do you think are at the top of the [state/federal/local] policy agenda?
2. How familiar are you with [the policy of interest]?
3. What individuals, constituencies, or groups do you see as the main advocates for [the policy]? Who do you see as the main opponents?
4. Considering the current educational, social, and political context, do you think [the policy] should be adopted now or in the near future?
5. Looking ahead, how likely do you think it is that [the policy] will be adopted in the next 5 years?
6. If [the policy] is adopted, what issues do you think the state needs to be most concerned about related to its implementation?

4. For more on network mapping, see Durland, M., & Fredericks, K. (Eds.). (2005). *New directions for evaluation: Social network analysis in program evaluation* (Vol. 107). New York, NY: Jossey-Bass.

The method itself involves structured interviews with bellwethers. Two aspects of this process, however—selecting the bellwether sample and setting up the interviews—require a unique “twist” that sets this approach apart from other interview processes. First, at least half the sample should include bellwethers without a special or specific connection to the policy issue being explored. This approach increases the probability that issue awareness or knowledge detected during interviews can be linked to advocacy efforts rather than personal experiences or other extraneous variables. Second, bellwethers should be unaware before the interview begins that interview questions will focus specifically on the policy issue of interest. They are informed about what the interview will generally cover, but do not receive specific details. This approach helps to ensure that bellwethers’ responses are authentic and unprompted.

Interviews might start by asking bellwethers what issues they think are at the top of the policy agenda. Their responses (which again will be unprompted) indicate whether the advocacy issue of interest shows up on that list, and if so, where, and along with what other issues. Later questions can get more specific and ask about bellwethers’ familiarity with the issue of interest and probe on what they know, allowing later content analysis to determine whether advocates’ messages surface in bellwether discourse about the issue. Questions also might ask bellwethers to predict whether they think the issue will advance in the near future or longer term. This method is repeatable over time if the advocacy strategy takes place over multiple years.[5]

Policymaker Ratings

This method also gauges political will among a defined group of policymakers (e.g., legislature, city council, etc.). The approach was developed in response to the perceived inadequacy of measures commonly used to gauge policymaker support on issues (e.g., number of bills introduced on the issue, number of bill sponsors or cosponsors, number of votes for or against specific bills). It takes a different tact to measuring such support and capitalizes on advocates’ insider knowledge about individual policymakers’ stances on policy issues. The method does not create extra work for advocates, but instead usefully transfers what they already know through their regular intelligence gathering and outreach.

With this method, advocates rate policymakers of interest on a series of three scales that assess:

- *Policymaker level of support* — Gauges individual policymaker support for an issue based on his or her public behaviors or actions on behalf of the issue.
- *Policymaker level of influence* — Rates each policymaker’s influence on the policy issue of interest (similar to the idea of a power analysis). Ratings are based on criteria that research shows relate to policymaker influence.
- *Advocates’ level of confidence* — Addresses how confident advocates are in the accuracy of their ratings on the first two scales.

5. Developed by Harvard Family Research Project (www.hfrp.org). For more on the bellwether methodology, see Blair, E. (2007). Evaluating an issue’s position on the policy agenda: The bellwether methodology. *The Evaluation Exchange, 13*(1), 29.

The preferred method is for advocates to rate policymakers independently. They then either come to a consensus on a final group rating, or independent ratings may be averaged.

Once ratings are complete and data are aggregated, it is possible to assess the extent to which the governing body as a whole supports a particular issue, and the extent to which policymakers supporting the issue have power or influence. Additional information can be added to the data set to allow for analysis of support across other variables, such as political party, geographic area, and within key committees or caucuses. This method is then repeatable to determine whether and how support shifts over time.[6]

Intense-Period Debriefs

This approach engages advocates in evaluative inquiry shortly after an intense period of action occurs, often after a policy window opens and advocates have the opportunity to make significant progress on their issue of interest. Many advocacy efforts experience periods of high-intensity activity. While those times represent critical opportunities for data collection and learning, advocates have little time to pause for interviews or reflection. The unfortunate consequence is that the evaluation is left with significant gaps in data during times in the advocacy cycle when those data are particularly valuable.

The intense-period debrief recognizes this kind of situation as a common advocacy reality and adapts to it. Shortly after a policy window or intense activity period occurs, it convenes a focus group of advocacy stakeholders and uses a "debrief interview protocol" to capture data about advocates' recent experiences. The method functions somewhat like an "after action review" and captures:

- The public mood and political context during the policy window
- What happened and how the campaign members responded to events
- Perspective on the outcome(s) achieved or not achieved
- How strategies might be adjusted in hindsight

The intense-period debrief gathers in-depth and real-time information in a targeted, practical, and respectful way. As the method's developers note: "The idea of the debrief grew out of the need to have a forum that encouraged participation from key groups and individuals engaged in different layers or 'spheres of influence' surrounding decision makers. It … [is] particularly useful for providing a way for individuals in the 'inner circle' of those spheres…to tell the story of what happened behind the scenes."[7]

TIP: How can the data be collected in the most resource-efficient way? Keep in mind that some measures can be captured by advocates themselves, such as measures associated with strategy activities and tactics. Others may require an external evaluator or other professional (e.g., a polling firm or media clipping service). Consider who will administer each method, and how that decision will affect the advocacy budget and workload. Keep the number of methods as low as possible and select methods that maximize the amount of useful information collected.

6. Developed by Harvard Family Research Project (www.hfrp.org).

7. Developed by Innovation Network (www.innonet.org). For more on intense period debriefs, see also, Bagnell Stuart, J. (2007). Necessity leads to innovative evaluation approach and practice. *The Evaluation Exchange, 13*(1), 10–11.

What's Next

This tool covers several key steps in advocacy evaluation planning. Users should walk away from this process having identified who will use the evaluation, how it will be used, and what questions users have. Users also should know what aspects of the advocacy strategy will be assessed and how.

However, this tool does not cover all aspects of evaluation planning and design. For example, it does not cover who will collect the data, the technical aspects of how and when methods will be implemented and with whom, nor how and when findings will be reported. Those details need to be added before evaluation planning is complete.

Once the complete plan is in place, implementation can begin. Keep in mind that, because advocacy strategies often evolve in response to changing circumstances and conditions, advocacy evaluation plans often must shift in order to stay relevant and useful. Revisit the evaluation plan regularly to make sure it is on target and still has value for its intended users.

About the Guide

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About Harvard Family Research Project

Harvard Family Research Project (HFRP) researches, develops, and evaluates strategies to promote the well-being of children, youth, families, and their communities. HFRP works primarily within three areas that support children's learning and development: early childhood education, out-of-school time programming, and family and community support in education.

Underpinning all of HFRP's work is a commitment to evaluation for strategic learning and accountability. HFRP believes that evaluation is essential to improving and maintaining the quality of all programs, campaigns, services, and organizations. Recognizing its importance across all of HFRP's research areas and beyond, HFRP has made evaluation a core focus of its work since the organization's inception in 1983. This focus has included sharing field-wide innovative trends, tools, and techniques through *The Evaluation Exchange,* a nationally renowned periodical on emerging evaluation strategies and issues.

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Advocacy Evaluation Planning Worksheet

Download additional copies of the user guide and this worksheet at **http://www.hfrp.org/UserGuide**.

STEP ONE: FOCUS

Identify your evaluation's users, how they will use the evaluation, and your evaluation questions. Getting clarity on these items upfront will help you focus the evaluation.

EVALUATION USERS

Consider:

- Advocates
- Funders
- Partners

EVALUATION USES

Consider:

- Inform Strategy
- Show Impact

EVALUATION QUESTIONS

STEP TWO: MAP

Mark the logic model components that are part of the advocacy strategy being evaluated. Literally highlight or circle them.

Fill in the blank boxes at the bottom if you don't see part of your advocacy effort represented, or if you want to define an element more specifically.

IMPACTS

- Improved Services and Systems
- Positive Social and Physical Conditions

POLICY GOALS

- Policy Development
- Placement on the Policy Agenda
- Policy Adoption
- Policy Blocking
- Policy Implementation
- Policy Monitoring and Evaluation
- Policy Maintenance

ACTIVITIES/TACTICS

Communications and Outreach

- Electronic Outreach/Social Media
- Coalition and Network Building
- Briefings/ Presentations
- Earned Media
- Grassroots Organizing and Mobilization
- Public Service Announcements
- Paid Media
- Rallies and Marches
- Polling
- Media Partnerships
- Voter Education
- Demonstration Projects or Pilots

Politics and Policy

- Issue/Policy Analysis and Research
- Policymaker and Candidate Education
- Litigation or Legal Advocacy
- Policy Proposal Development
- Relationship Building with Decision Makers
- Lobbying

Other

INTERIM OUTCOMES

Advocacy Capacity

- Organizational Capacity
- New Advocates *(including unlikely or nontraditional)*
- New Donors
- Partnerships or Alliances
- New Champions *(including policymakers)*
- More or Diversified Funding
- Collaboration and Alignment *(including messaging)*
- Organizational Visibility or Recognition

Policy

- Awareness
- Public Will
- Media Coverage
- Salience
- Political Will
- Issue Reframing
- Attitudes or Beliefs
- Constituency or Support Base Growth

Other

STEP THREE: PRIORITIZE

Rarely are enough evaluation resources available to collect data on *every* part of the advocacy strategy. Consequently, it is important to step back from the strategy and *prioritize*.

Look at the impact, policy goal, activity, and interim outcome boxes you marked in the last step. Will your evaluation measure *all* of those components, or are some more important to focus on than others? Choose the parts of the model that you think are most important to assess and write them below in the first column marked "logic model components."

Consider:

- What do the evaluation's users most want to know?
- What will the advocacy effort's unique contribution?
- What is the evaluation's timeframe (are some outcomes not likely to be achieved in that timeframe)?
- Who will do the evaluation (do some outcomes require more expertise to measure than others)?

STEP FOUR: DESIGN

For the logic model components listed in the left column, enter in the right column what data points (measures) can be used to capture them.

Refer to the charts on pages 14–16 for suggestions on possible measures for your components.

LOGIC MODEL COMPONENTS	MEASURES

Look at the measures you identified above. What methods will you use to capture those data points? List your methods at right.

METHODS

Consider:

- Surveys
- Interviews
- Document Review
- Focus Groups
- Observation
- Media Tracking
- Blog Tracking
- Media Content
- Policy Tracking
- Public Polling
- Case Studies
- Network Mapping
- Intense Period Debriefs
- Bellwether Methodology
- Policymaker Ratings