the evaluation exchange

A PERIODICAL ON EMERGING STRATEGIES IN EVALUATION

from the director's desk

Heather Weiss

Welcome to the first of what we expect will be several issues in Harvard Family Research Project's "Hard-to-Measure" *Evaluation Exchange* series. For years, certain kinds of nonprofit activities have received relatively little attention in the evaluation arena. While evaluators may not have much difficulty coming up with ways to assess direct services, when we encounter activities that fall outside of our evaluation comfort zone, we tend to get intimidated and give them a wide berth.

Advocacy has long been one of these "hard-to-measure" activities. Until very recently, few resources existed to guide evaluation in this area. In just the last year, however, advocacy evaluation has become a burgeoning field. As this issue makes clear, enterprising evaluators, nonprofits, and funders are tackling advocacy's hard-to-measure distinction and are sharing their ideas and approaches.

This issue of *The Evaluation Exchange* helps to build this new field by defining advocacy and policy change evaluation and summarizing the new developments shaping it. The issue describes how advocacy and policy change evaluations differ from other evaluations and offers examples of what those differences look like in real-life evaluation practice. It also features the voices of funders and advocates, who explain what they want from evaluation. And it offers descriptions of new tools—both written and electronic—that we can draw on for ideas.

Before you turn the page and read on, let me be clear about how we define advocacy in this issue. Advocacy here represents the strategies devised, actions taken, and solutions proposed to inform or influence local, state, or federal decision making. In the pages that follow, we concentrate specifically on advocacy that connects to public policy or legislation.

Advocacy strategies to inform or influence policy can include activities such as one-on-one meetings, testimony at hearings, community meetings or forums, coalition building, public education campaigns, street marches, media outreach, and electronic advocacy. Advocacy may be done by a range of individuals and groups, including professional advocates, community members, researchers, and policy analysts, and it may target different players in the policy process, including elected officials, government administrators, and the media.

Though we purposely keep our definition narrow in this issue, we recognize that advocacy can be defined much more broadly, both in terms of the activities it encompasses and its desired goal. For example, advocacy's goal might extend to achieving social justice—that is, fair treatment for all members of society—but socially just results may or may not include changes in public policy. In addition, our definition does not explicitly cover advocacy focused on community organizing or participatory democracy. We hope that future issues will address how evaluators are working within this broader definition of advocacy.

We anticipate that this and future *Evaluation Exchange* issues featuring coverage of hard-to-measure topics will be met with enthusiasm. I welcome you to share work on evaluating advocacy and policy change that you would like to see featured and ideas on other evaluation topics that are challenging you.

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> theory & practice

What's Different About Evaluating Advocacy and Policy Change?

Julia Coffman of HFRP describes four ways evaluators may need to adjust their approaches when evaluating advocacy and policy change.

One of the most common questions about the evaluation of advocacy and policy change is whether there is anything different about it compared to, say, evaluating programs or direct services. My unequivocal response is, "Yes and no."

First, let's address what's not different. To be sure, there are universal principles of evaluation design and practice that apply to advocacy and policy change evaluation just as they do to other evaluations.[1] For example, all evaluators conduct systematic and data-based inquiries. Those inquiries can be quantitative or qualitative and typically use a core set of methods such as interviews and surveys. Evaluators also have tools—like logic models or theories of change—that are helpful in most, if not all, evaluations.

In addition, all evaluations share some similarities in purpose. Evaluators aim to provide high-quality information that has significance or value for whom or what they are evaluating. While evaluators have choices in the kinds of data they produce and how they position that data for use, those choices are similar across evaluations. Evaluation can be used to inform strategy and decision making, build the capacity of evaluation stakeholders, or catalyze programmatic or societal change.

In terms of these core evaluation principles, then, evaluations of advocacy and policy are not different from all other evaluations. They can serve similar purposes and draw upon the same basic evaluation designs, models, and methods.

Now, let's address what is different. This requires us to think about how advocacy work differs from programs or direct services. The most important difference is that advocacy strategy typically evolves over time, and activities and desired outcomes can shift quickly. Also, the policy process itself is unique. While programs and direct services can be affected by unpredicted and contextual variables, the policy process takes that possibility to a whole new level. Finally, as author Allison Fine makes clear on page 24, most advocacy organizations are small both in terms of their size and their capacity to manage evaluation.

All of these distinctions have implications for how we approach evaluation to ensure that our work is relevant and gets used. Below are four recommendations for evaluators who work in the advocacy and policy change field.

1. *Get real about real-time feedback.*

The term "real time" is used most often in the computing world, where it refers to a timeframe so short as to be imperceptible and make feedback seem immediate. Computers that process information in real time read the information as it comes in and return results to users instantly.

In recent years, the term "real time" has infiltrated the evaluation world, and many evaluators now use it to describe their reporting approach. We use "real time" to mean that we report regularly and not only at the evaluation's conclusion. The purpose of real-time reporting is to position the evaluation to inform ongoing decisions and strategy.

But how many of us really follow through on our promises to report in real time? Think about what doing so actually means. True real-time reporting requires more than providing feedback at regular intervals. It means giving feedback quickly after a significant event or action occurs. While scheduling regular reporting (e.g., every 6 months) can be useful and good evaluation practice, its success in informing strategy can be hit or miss. Even if provided frequently, the data's timing may be off, or the data may arrive too late.

1. See, for example, the American Evaluation Association's *Guiding Principles for Evaluators* at www.eval.org.

All of this is important because, perhaps even more than evaluations of programs and direct services, evaluations of advocacy and policy change can benefit from real-time reporting. Most advocates' strategies for achieving their policy visions evolve without a predictable script. Consequently, advocates 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.

Evaluators who provide real-time feedback need to stay on top of advocacy strategies and focus less on their own predetermined reporting timelines and more on the timelines of who or what is being evaluated (in this case advocacy and policy change efforts). Their evaluations, at least in part, need to build in flexibility, so that when a strategy changes or a critical event occurs, the evaluation can adjust with it. The Innovation Network provides an example of this kind of flexibility with its "intense-period debrief" described on page 10. Another example comes from evaluators who very literally expect the unexpected and reserve part of their evaluation design for "rapid-response research." These methodologies are not planned up front but are designed and implemented as needed to address emerging strategy-related questions (e.g., how is media outreach working? how engaged are coalition members after a policy defeat?).

2. Give "interim" outcomes the respect they deserve.

Remember the "Million Mom March" in Washington, DC, a few years back? It happened on Mother's Day in 2000, organized to protest the country's weak gun laws. I remember seeing newspaper photos the next day of the marchers walking down the National Mall; estimates put the number of marchers as high as 750,000. While impressed with the turnout, I also remember wondering what impact the march would have. Would it actually impact policy?

From what I can surmise, the march itself did not change gun policy, at least not right away. Looking at its policy impact alone, the Million Mom March might be judged a disappointment. But that's not the only way to look at the march's impact.

A few months after the march, I learned something that changed my perspective. I have a friend who marched that day and who, prior to participating, was not at all active politically. In the months and years that followed the march, she grew into a full-fledged advocate and continued to be involved in the Million Mom March effort. In fact, after the march occurred, a national network of 75 Million Mom March Chapters formed across the U.S. to advocate regularly on state and federal gun policy; my friend became a key figure in her chapter.

From that experience, I learned that it is important to assess advocacy for more than just its impact on policy. In addition to informing policy, much advocacy work has a larger set of outcomes in mind as advocates try to sustain their influence in the larger policy process. For example, in addition to interacting

Evaluations of advocacy and policy change can benefit from true real-time reporting. Real-time reporting means more than providing feedback at regular intervals.

directly with policymakers, advocates might build coalitions with other organizations or develop relationships with journalists and editorial boards. Or they might aim to develop a network of community-based advocates who become active spokespersons.

It is fairly standard practice for evaluators who use logic models or theories of change (and many of us do) to identify interim or intermediate outcomes that set the stage for longer term outcomes. With advocacy, it is important not to assign second-class status to outcomes other than policy change. While policy change is usually the goal, other outcomes related to the broader advocacy strategy—such as whether new advocates like my friend emerge—can be as important as the policy change itself.

Another reason that it is important to look at multiple outcomes is that sometimes the desired policy change does not occur, perhaps for reasons unrelated to the quality of the advocacy effort. Assessing a range of outcomes ensures that the evaluation does not unfairly conclude that the whole advocacy effort was a failure if the policy was not achieved.

3. Design evaluations that advocates can and actually want to do.

Last year, the verb "google" was added to both the Merriam-Webster and Oxford English Dictionaries. Officially, it means to use the Google search engine to obtain information on the Internet, as in "She googled her date to see what she could learn about him." The fact that the term has moved from being a trademarked product name to become part of our common lexicon—like Xerox, Kleenex, and FedEx—is one indicator of Google's success in cornering much of the search engine market.

There are many theories about the secrets to Google's success. At least one focuses on its clean and simple interface. By being uncluttered, Google offers users what they want (accurate search results) when they want it, rather than everything they could ever want (accurate search results, news headlines, the weather, sports scores, entertainment news, etc.), even when they don't.[2]

Evaluators of advocacy and policy change efforts can learn something from Google's approach to interface design. We need to think about advocates as evaluation users and find ways to give them what they want when they want it. We've already addressed the "when they want it" part in the discussion about real-time reporting. In tackling "what they want," we need to consider how advocacy organizations look and operate.

Many advocacy organizations (like many nonprofits in general) are small operations with few staff and resources for evaluation. Most cannot afford external or highly involved evaluations and may instead find that, with evaluation, a little goes a long way. As Marcia Egbert and Susan Hoechstetter advise in their article on page 20, under these circumstances evaluators are wise to "keep it simple" when identifying both what to evaluate and how.

2. Hurst, M. (2002, October 15). Interview: Marissa Mayer, Product Manager, Google. Retrieved on January 3, 2007, from http://www.goodexperience.com/blog/archives/000066.php

Rather than put together complex evaluation plans that require extensive technical expertise and offer single point-in-time assessments (which quickly can become outdated), we might instead help advocates identify which parts of their strategies to evaluate, rather than assume they should or want to evaluate everything, and identify simple but useful ways of tracking data internally to inform their work. For example, we might use our logic models to help advocates step back from their strategies and determine where evaluation can be most useful. Maybe they feel their coalitions and media outreach already are functioning well, but their new public education campaign could benefit from assessment. We can facilitate those choices.

4. *Be creative and forward looking.*

A couple of years ago an article in *The Washington Post* caught my eye. Titled "On Capitol Hill, the Inboxes are Overflowing," the article's message was that, while we may feel sorry for ourselves with the number of emails we get in our inboxes every day, we actually should pity the poor Congress! They receive an estimated 200 million constituent messages annually, most of them electronic. With 535 members of Congress, that's a yearly average of almost 375,000 emails per member, or more than 1,000 emails per day.[3]

A good portion of this volume results from savvy electronic advocacy efforts. Advocates set up websites that allow like-minded supporters to quickly fill out forms that then send emails to lawmakers expressing their position on an issue. Voila! Democracy from our desktops.

But here's the kicker. The email volume is growing so large and so fast that Congress is finding ways to thwart it by putting up roadblocks on the information superhighway. For example, some lawmakers' email programs ask senders to solve a basic math problem before the email goes through to prove that they are real humans and not a machine spamming them. Others require senders to reveal their contact information before the email is delivered. Consequently, a source in the article was quoted as saying, "Unfortunately there is strong evidence that much of the electronic mail that citizens assume is reaching Congress is ending up in an electronic trash can."

The relevance of all this for evaluators is at least twofold. First, we need to keep in mind that advocacy tactics are constantly changing and growing. For example, advocates are growing sophisticated in their use of electronic advocacy through email, blogging, smart phone messaging, and other rapidly evolving techniques. We need to constantly monitor the advocacy field to stay current on such techniques so that we know how to evaluate them.

Second, as advocacy tactics evolve, we need to make sure that the measures we use to assess them are meaningful. With email advocacy, for example, an obvious and common measure is the number of emails that actually get sent after a call to action is issued. On one hand, there is a question of how to judge that number—what is a good response rate? One percent? Sixty percent? (The article by Karen Matheson on page 25 helps answer

that question). On the other hand, we have to question whether the measure itself has evaluative worth. We've learned now that all of the emails sent might not get through, and even if they do, there are questions about whether lawmakers and their staff actually pay attention to them. Consequently the number of emails sent may say very little about an advocacy strategy's success. We need to make sure the measures we use and create actually have interpretive value.

Because the nature of advocacy work often differs in important ways from direct services and other programs, we need to examine how evaluation can be most useful in this context. This does not mean inventing a whole new way of doing evaluation; it means adjusting our approaches in ways that make evaluation relevant and useful within the advocacy and policy context.

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Innovation Network's
Advocacy Evaluation Project

With support from The Atlantic Philanthropies, JEHT Foundation, and Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Innovation Network's Advocacy Evaluation Project is creating a dynamic exchange of knowledge and ideas about evaluating advocacy. It is serving funders, evaluators, and practitioners facing the unique evaluation challenges that advocacy poses. The Advocacy Evaluation Project intends to move the field of advocacy evaluation beyond assessing policy change alone into one that considers the fundamental components of advocacy efforts—capacity building, network formation, relationship building, communication, issue framing, leadership development, and other key components.

The Project has two main components:

• The **online clearinghouse** has a wide array of annotated resources on evaluating advocacy efforts, including reports, articles, tools, and frameworks. Many resources are drawn from other notable organizations also engaged in advocacy evaluation, such as The California Endowment, Alliance for Justice, Women's Funding Network, Just Associates, and the Communications Consortium Media Center. New resources are added each week. Materials are categorized by primary audience (funder, evaluator, or practitioner), region (domestic versus international), and by topic (general advocacy evaluation, network evaluation, communication evaluation, etc.).

• The **e-newsletter** focuses on the challenges of evaluating policy advocacy initiatives. It is helping to build the advocacy evaluation field and conversation through articles, interviews with practitioners, resources, and references. The Advocacy Evaluation Project team is soliciting input from the advocacy and evaluation field on ideas and articles that explore their experiences and lessons learned. The inaugural issue currently is in development.

To learn more about the Advocacy Evaluation Project, review clearinghouse materials, suggest additional resources, or sign up for the e-newsletter, visit www.innonet.org/advocacy.

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3. Birnbaum, J. (2005, July 11). On Capitol Hill, the inboxes are overflowing. *The Washington Post*; Birnbaum, J. (2006, October 2). Study finds missed messages on Capitol Hill. *The Washington Post*.

Strategies for Assessing Policy Change Efforts:
A Prospective Approach

Justin Louie and Kendall Guthrie of Blueprint Research and Design outline the steps for advocacy and policy change evaluators to follow in using a prospective approach to evaluation.

Prospective evaluation defines a policy change project's short- and long-term goals up front and then emphasizes evaluating advocates' progress toward those goals throughout the life of the project. By more deeply integrating evaluation with program implementation, prospective evaluation provides funders with indicators of success long before policy change can be achieved. It also collects insights that advocates can use to refine strategies and document impact to funders and constituents.

Benefits of a prospective approach include:

- Insuring up-front alignment of expectations
- Providing a framework to assess impact and monitor progress
- Delivering feedback to refine strategy and implementation
- Encouraging advocate engagement in the evaluation process
- Promoting a learning culture

Prospective evaluation involves five basic steps:

1. *Understand the context and policy environment.* Grantees, funders, and evaluators involved in assessing progress in policy change need high-quality knowledge about the environment in which change occurs. Stakeholders should know the institutions, decision-making process, and culture of public policy, including:

- The decision makers (legislature, executive, administrative agency, court system, or general public)
- The potential tactics (education, organizing, litigation, and mobilization)
- The political context (Which party is in power? What external pressures on decision makers can help or hinder you?)
- Your potential opponents (Who is working against you?)
- Your allies (Who can you count on for help?)
- Your capacity to do the work (Should a window of opportunity open, what skills, networks, and organizational capabilities can you use to take advantage of it?)

2. *Develop a theory of change.* A theory of change explains how and why a project's activities are expected to lead to desired policy changes. It provides a road map to policy change, based on an assessment of the policy environment in which you are working. In many cases, policy change will be just one component of a larger social change strategy, and a theory of change can also define how specific targeted policy changes relate to larger social change goals.

Developing a theory of change need not be complex or time consuming. Often, answering some guiding questions can help jump-start the process:

- What is the problem you're trying to solve?
- What will be different if you're successful?
- What activities will you undertake to achieve your goal?
- What factors will accelerate or inhibit progress?

A theory of change must adapt to the evolving policy environment. If a strategy no longer looks like it will work and you decide to take another route, the theory should map that change.

3. *Define benchmarks.* Generally, policy change is a long-term effort, demanding many years of work. Defining benchmarks to show progress along the way is vital to an effective and useful evaluation.

Benchmarks are milestones set in advance that indicate progress. They should include incremental progress in both achieving policy goals and building internal capacity for policy advocacy. Capacity-building benchmarks are especially important markers of long-term progress. These benchmarks indicate growth in an asset that can be applied to both current and future projects. Advocates have more control over and therefore can be held more accountable for capacity-building goals.

4. *Collect data.* Data collection requires time, energy, money, and organization. Often advocates feel that collecting data draws them away from their "real" work. By keeping data collection simple, building upon the data collection that organizations already conduct, focusing on data that is meaningful to the advocate as well as the funder, and emphasizing learning over accountability, you can ease the burden of advocates' data collection.

5. *Use findings.* Evaluations need to be useful to both funders and advocates. In particular, evaluations need to answer questions advocates have about their programs, and findings need to be relayed in time to improve their work. At the beginning, evaluation questions must include those that most interest advocates, and, throughout the evaluation, findings need to be presented as close to real time as possible. Interim reports are likely to be more valuable to advocates than a final report at project completion.

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Related Resources

Available from The California Endowment at www.calendow.org:

Guthrie, K., Louie, J., David, T., & Crystal Foster, C. (2005). *The challenge of assessing policy and advocacy activities: Strategies for a prospective evaluation approach.*

Guthrie, K., Louie, J., & Crystal Foster, C. (2006). *The challenge of assessing policy and advocacy activities: Part II—Moving from theory to practice.*

Evaluation Based on Theories of the Policy Process

Harvard Family Research Project explains how it helps to ground evaluation in theories of the policy process.

As the old saying goes, "There are two things you never want to see being made—sausage and legislation." Indeed, the policy process is often not pretty, and it can be messy. Yet evaluators of advocacy efforts need to understand how the policy process works. To do so, evaluators must find ways of simplifying this typically complex process in order to evaluate the actors and their actions within it.

There are a variety of different theories that can form the conceptual underpinning of an evaluation involving the policy process. Some draw on intriguing-sounding ideas like diffusion of innovation,[1] while others, like punctuated-equilibrium theory, are more technical.[2] One particularly well-known theory comes from political scientist John Kingdon.[3]

Kingdon's Agenda-Setting Theory

According to Kingdon, agenda setting is the first stage in the policy process. The policy agenda is the list of issues or problems to which government officials, or those who make policy decisions (including the voting public), pay serious attention. Moving an idea onto or higher up on that agenda involves three processes: problems, proposals, and politics.

- *Problems* refer to the process of persuading policy decision makers to pay attention to one problem over others. Because a policy proposal's chances of rising on the agenda are better if the associated problem is perceived as serious, problem recognition is critical. It can be influenced by how problems are learned about (e.g., through data or indicators, focusing events like a disaster or crisis, constituent feedback) or defined (e.g., framed or labeled). Budget crises are a special consideration in problem recognition, as they often trump other problems.
- *Proposals* represent the process by which policy proposals are generated, debated, revised, and adopted for serious consideration. Because competing proposals can be attached to the same problem, getting a proposal on the "short list" typically takes time and the willingness to pursue it by using many tactics. Proposals are likely to be more successful if they are seen as technically feasible, compatible with decision maker values, reasonable in cost, and appealing to the public.

- *Politics* are political factors that influence agendas, such as changes in elected officials, political climate or mood (e.g., conservative, tax averse), and the voices of advocacy or opposition groups.

These three elements operate largely independently, although the actors in each can overlap. Successful agenda setting requires that at least two elements come together at a critical time—that is, when a "policy window" opens. For example, advocates may develop a policy proposal, wait for the right problem to come along, and then attach their proposal to it. Or researchers may identify a problem, but it will not get on the agenda until politics shift. Policy windows are not just chance opportunities, however; they also can be created.

Elevating an idea on the policy agenda requires investments in more than one element and in the ways that the elements can complement one another. Investing in research alone to define a problem, for example, has less chance of success than investing in problem definition *and* advocacy for proposals that get attached to that problem. The likelihood of successful agenda setting substantially increases if all three elements—problem, proposal, and politics—are linked in a single package.

Policy Stream Convergence

Problems

Proposals → Policy Window

Politics
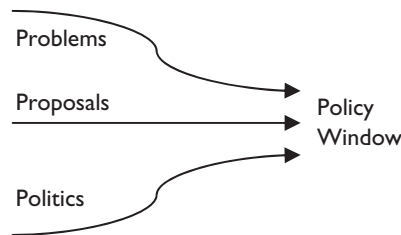
Applying Kingdon's Theory to Strategy

The Children, Families, and Communities program area of the David and Lucile Packard Foundation is funding a grantmaking program called Preschool for California's Children (referred to here as the Preschool Program). Its goal is ensuring that California makes quality preschool available for all 3- and 4-year-olds in the state.

Fundamentally, the Packard Foundation's Preschool Program strategy is based on the notion that getting a policy idea—quality preschool for all of California's children—recognized as an idea "whose time has come" requires that it appear prominently on the policy agenda. Therefore, the strategy (see figure on page 7) invests in all three elements of Kingdon's theory. It attempts to inform thinking about the problems that quality preschool can address by investing in research and communications to frame them. It invests in proposals by supporting the development of policy solutions that fit the problem, along with leadership and engagement efforts to build support for those solutions. It invests in politics by engaging influential constituencies to bring preschool problems and solutions to the fore. Preschool Program grantees and their partners are the actors in the policy process helping to drive and shape these elements.

Applying Kingdon's Theory to Evaluation

Harvard Family Research Project (HFRP) is evaluating the Preschool for California's Children grantmaking program. Because the Preschool Program's strategy is based on Kingdon's theory,

1. Berry, F. S., & Berry, W. D. (1999). Innovation and diffusion models in policy research. In P. Sabatier (Ed.), *Theories of the policy process* (pp.169–200). Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
2. True, J. L., Jones, B. D., & Baumgartner, F. R. (1999). Punctuated-equilibrium theory: Explaining stability and change in American policymaker. In P. Sabatier (Ed.), *Theories of the policy process* (pp. 97–115). Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
3. Kingdon, J. W. (1995). *Agendas, alternatives, and public policies* (2nd ed.). New York: Longman.

Preschool for California's Children Grantmaking Program Strategy

STRATEGIES	OUTCOMES	KINGDON'S PROCESS STREAMS		
Leadership & Engagement Build key constituency support to promote quality preschool policy.	Key leader support grows, new champions develop, and policy development happens collaboratively.	*Problem Identified* Awareness grows on the urgent need to improve school readiness.		
Research Make the case for quality preschool policy.	Research highlights the benefits of quality preschool programs and policy.	*Policy Proposed* Policy is informed by research and evidence.	OPEN POLICY WINDOW	*Goal* Quality preschool policy
Flagships & Local Strategy Support model preschool programs in geopolitically important communities.	Local preschool access grows, increasing leadership, issue visibility, funding, public demand, local support, and statewide interest.	*Politics Favorable* Public and political support reaches a tipping point.		

the evaluation also uses the elements of this theory as touchstones against which to examine the strategy's progress. We use a variety of methods to explore the following overarching questions about the grantmaking program's progress, momentum, and likelihood of success:

- Are the *problems* that quality preschool can address recognized and perceived as pressing? What messages are audiences using to talk about the issue?
- How are *proposals* promoting quality preschool perceived? Are they seen as technically feasible, fiscally viable, and in line with public and policymaker values?
- How are *politics* factoring in? Is support for quality preschool perceived as being statewide and with broad constituency support? Who are recognized supporters and opponents of preschool policies?
- What is the likelihood that streams will converge to open a *policy window*? Where is quality preschool on the general policy agenda? Where is it on the children's policy agenda? What is the likelihood of success and what forces are affecting that likelihood?

While there is no neat way to package the policy process to explain all of its complexity and nonlinearity, evaluations of advocacy and other promotional efforts that are based on theories of the policy process can help simplify the process to help evaluators intelligibly assess advocates' actions and their outcomes within it. While Kingdon's theory provides one way to do this, it is just one of many theories on the policy process. The Related Resources box on this page offers sources for other such theories.

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Related Resources

Birkland, T. A. (2001). *An introduction to the policy process: Theories, concepts, and models of public policy making.* **Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe.** Provides an overview of current thinking on the policy process. Also offers a glossary of terms, annotated bibliography, and guide to significant public policy research websites.

McCool, D. C. (1995). *Public policy theories, models, and concepts: An anthology.* **Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.** This edited volume provides an overview and critique of public policy theories, models, and concepts. Sections are on the theoretical foundation of policy studies, participation in policymaking, the policymaking process, policy typologies, policy subsystems, and conflict and choice in policy theory.

Sabatier, P. A. (2007). *Theories of the policy process (2nd edition).* **Boulder, CO: Westview Press.** Offers overviews of widely used theories of the policy process written by distinguished scholars. Theories include institutional rational choice, the multiple streams framework, the garbage-can model, the advocacy coalition framework, and punctuated-equilibrium theory. The edited volume ends with chapters that compare policy process frameworks, theories, and models, and offer thoughts on future directions in theory development.

Working With Logic Models to Evaluate a Policy and Advocacy Program

Authors from the Institute for Health Policy Studies at the University of California, San Francisco describe how they used both macro-level and individual grantee logic models to drive the evaluation design of the Clinic Consortia Policy and Advocacy Program.

In response to challenges related to the shifting health care environment, community health centers in California have joined together to form regional consortia and statewide organizations. Consortia vary in size, staffing, scope, and age, but all provide a unified voice for increasing services to the uninsured, offering economies of scale for shared business and program services, and allowing clinics to partner on local health improvement programs to benefit clients. Activities often include coordinated policy advocacy efforts, group purchasing agreements, centralized HMO claims management, grant writing and management, joint managed-care contracting, and billing support. Collaborative efforts assist in reducing costs, improving efficiency, and enhancing the effectiveness of community health centers.

As part of its commitment to increasing access to high-quality and affordable health care for underserved Californians, The California Endowment (The Endowment) provided multiyear funding for the Clinic Consortia Policy and Advocacy Program. In early 2001, 15 California regional community clinic associations and 4 statewide clinic organizations ("consortia" or "grantees") received 3 years of funding (totaling $9 million) to strengthen the role and capacity of consortia to support community clinic management, leadership development, policy, and systems integration needs. This funding supported activities related to policy advocacy, technical assistance, media advocacy, and shared services to increase the collective influence of clinics. In 2004, 18 grantees were re-funded for 3 years to undertake a similar set of activities.

Program Theory Drives Evaluation Design

In 2002, an evaluation team at the University of California, San Francisco (UCSF) commenced a multiyear evaluation to assess the Policy and Advocacy Program. The evaluation design was based on The Endowment's theory of change—that staffing and resources for policy advocacy and technical assistance would increase the collective influence of clinics and strengthen a broad base for long-term support of clinic policy issues. In addition, the theory hypothesized that policy advocacy activities, or activities that mobilize resources to support a policy issue or create a shift in public opinion, are critical for expanding local and state support for community clinic funding.

The UCSF team's macro-level program logic model (see figure on page 9) is based on this theory of change. Specifically, increased grantee capacity in policy advocacy was expected to lead to increased policymaker awareness of safety-net and clinic policy issues and to increased policymaker support for clinic funding. Policy wins and increased funding were then expected to trans-late into strengthened clinic operations, increased services for the underserved and uninsured, and improved health outcomes for targeted communities and populations.

The model was based on four theoretical domains:

1. *Political science.* Representation, or how and what type of influence interest groups bring to bear in influencing policy and the effectiveness of this influence
2. *Partnerships.* The role of relationships in extending an organization's reach and the gains to partner organizations
3. *Organizational development.* The gains from expanding capacity to ensure sustainability for the hub organization and its members
4. *Media.* The ability to increase decision maker and public awareness of policy issues and the potential for influencing policymaker support on a specific policy

The logic model organized the specific program objectives under three key goals:

1. To conduct policy and advocacy activities to increase awareness among policymakers and the public regarding the central role of community clinics and increase funding for comprehensive health services to underserved residents (through advocacy partnerships, policymaker education, media advocacy, and advocacy technical assistance)

Clinic Consortia Policy and Advocacy Program Grantees (2001–2003)

Alameda Health Consortium
Alliance for Rural Community Health
California Family Health Council
California Hispanic Health Care Association
California Planned Parenthood Education Fund
California Primary Care Association
California Rural Indian Health Board
Central Valley Health Network
Coalition of Orange County Community Clinics
Community Clinic Association of Los Angeles County
Community Clinic Consortium of Contra Costa
Community Health Partnership of Santa Clara County
Council of Community Clinics
North Coast Clinic Network
Northern Sierra Rural Health Network
Redwood Community Health Coalition
Sacramento Community Clinic Consortium
San Francisco Community Clinic Consortium
Shasta Consortium of Community Health Centers

2. To engage in specific quality of care improvement projects to improve patient outcomes
3. To provide clinics with technical assistance and resources to maintain or improve financial stability within clinics

Anticipated short- and intermediate-term outputs and outcomes were then listed for each objective.

Triangulation: Complementary Evaluation Methods

The UCSF team used this macro-level logic model as the framework for the evaluation design. To assess program outcomes as outlined in the logic model, the team administered both quantitative and qualitative tools, including longitudinal worksheets, open-ended interviews and surveys, focus groups, and financial data analysis. The worksheets tracked data on partnerships, policy advocacy activities, policy wins, and funding secured.

To describe the benefits, challenges, and impacts of grant-funded activities, qualitative data collection strategies included grantee interviews (annually), member clinic focus groups (2004, 2006), and nonmember clinics interviews (2006).

To assess decision makers' familiarity with consortia, clinic activities, and clinic policy issues, the team administered a policy-maker awareness survey to policymakers and community leaders *known to* consortia in 2003 and those *who were less familiar* with consortia in 2004.

Finally, the UCSF team worked with The Endowment to develop an interim report template whereby information submitted to the foundation could be imported into individual grantee logic models and vice versa. The team analyzed grantee interim and final reports submitted to The Endowment from 2001 to 2005, noting the outcomes or successful passages of each policy.

Evaluation Tool Kit and Technical Assistance

Early in the evaluation, UCSF assessed grantee evaluation capacity and data systems, identifying outcomes and the logic model process as an area that needed strengthening. Consequently, the UCSF team incorporated grantee logic models into the evaluation tool kit and provided grantees with technical assistance on their development and use. UCSF worked with grantees to develop and annually update logic models to document progress in achieving their individual objectives. Each year, UCSF staff transferred information from the grantee interim reports to the grantee logic models and sent the models back to grantees to check for accuracy and completion.

Grantees and UCSF staff reviewed grantee logic models during a phone interview, noting the outputs (services, activities) completed and evidence of achievement of short-term outcomes in the previous year (qualitative and quantitative information). UCSF aggregated and analyzed this information, noting overall achievement of outputs and short-term outcomes. The logic models were also an excellent source for detailed information on particular policy advocacy activities, policy "wins," partnerships, and programmatic expansions. (Most grantees have the same short-term outcomes.) In the past, UCSF gave grantees final versions of their models in an Excel matrix. In 2007, UCSF will develop a narrative describing grantee achievements of their respective outputs and outcomes and areas for strengthening.

Lessons Learned

In the beginning, there was limited grantee support for the logic model process, driven in part by requests for models from multiple funders and the plethora of logic model approaches. UCSF greatly simplified the process and assumed most of the responsibility for developing and updating grantee models. Additionally, UCSF continued to emphasize the link between the macro logic model and grantee models through inclusion of grantees and The Endowment in annual discussions on the evaluation's goals and focus. Last, the alignment between the interim reports required by The Endowment and the individual grantee logic models greatly reduced the administrative burden while yielding significant evidence of grantee progress and achievement on individual and overall program outcomes.

California's network model is being watched closely by other large states. The evaluation of the Clinic Consortia Policy and Advocacy Program has made significant headway in developing (or corroborating) the original hypotheses, most notably in detailing the ways in which consortia have maximized their relationships with decision makers and become a potent voice in the policy arena on behalf of clinics and their patients.

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Macro-Level Program Logic Model

Increased grantee capacity in policy advocacy

↓

Increased policymaker awareness of safety-net and clinic policy issues

↓

Increased policymaker support for clinic funding

↓

Strengthened clinic operations

↓

Increased services for the underserved and uninsured

↓

Improved health outcomes for targeted communities and populations

Necessity Leads to Innovative Evaluation Approach and Practice

Innovation Network[1] describes their methodological innovation—the intense-period debrief—used to engage advocates in evaluative inquiry shortly after a policy window or intense period of action occurs.

In the spring and summer of 2006, following a groundswell of activities that included marches in cities from coast to coast, every major U.S. news outlet was focused on the immigration debate. Innovation Network, as the evaluator of the Coalition for Comprehensive Immigration Reform (CCIR)—a collaborative of immigrant advocacy, grassroots, and religious groups, labor organizations, and policy leaders on Capitol Hill and throughout the U.S.—found itself facing unexpected challenges. Indeed, any high profile issue and intensive movement, such as the immigration debate, poses challenges to evaluators attempting to capture activities, especially real-time efforts, for ongoing learning.

With support from The Atlantic Philanthropies, a private foundation headquartered in Bermuda, Innovation Network sought to

1. Innovation Network is a national nonprofit based in Washington, DC, that provides evaluation services, consulting, training and online resources for the sector. For more information on advocacy and related evaluation, see www.innonet.org.

Lessons About Evaluating Policy Advocacy: Context Matters

- When the campaign followed an offensive strategy, as happened during the support for the Hagel-Martinez compromise in the Senate in the spring of 2006, the coalition was more divided, resulting in a higher level of internal discomfort among its members. In this case, the evaluator is likely to get better and more candid information using key informant interviews as opposed to a group meeting.
- When the campaign followed a defensive strategy, as was the case in late summer and fall of 2006 due to stalemate between the House and Senate versions of immigration reform policy, the coalition was more unified. In this case, the focus group approach for debriefing an intense period is likely to be a comfortable format that can yield good information.
- It is useful to have an evaluation partner on standby (because the evaluator cannot predict the timing and pace of events) who is able and available to address learning opportunities from an objective perspective. New questions can emerge as events unfold. Flexibility is required to administer tools based on context, such as:
  - Public mood and political context of the opportunity window
  - Peaks and valleys of the policy advocacy cycle
  - The "inner circle" surrounding policymakers and the story of what happens behind the scenes
  - The players involved in an intense period and what activities took place

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help document CCIR's work as it unfolded and capture best practices to inform other coalitions and the advocacy field. Because of the natural peaks and valleys of the immigration reform campaign, Innovation Network needed to remain flexible and to experiment with different approaches that would yield valuable information for CCIR, Atlantic, and the sector. The evaluation sought to provide an opportunity for continuous learning, so that CCIR leadership could act on evaluation findings and make real-time adjustments to their activities and strategies.

Short of policy changes, the evaluation was intended to yield a set of indicators or benchmarks that would signal the coalition's progress. All parties hoped that a better understanding of interim progress indicators would help funders, evaluators, and advocates identify what it takes to build a successful national coalition movement for human and civil rights.

Initial Approach

Formed in 2004, CCIR sought to drive a legislative campaign to enact historic federal policy change in the form of "comprehensive immigration reform." The campaign's premise is that the U.S. immigration system is broken and must be fixed to address the flow of people coming into the country and the 12 million undocumented immigrants who are already here. In addition, coalition organizations subscribe to five key principles: reform must include (a) a path to citizenship, (b) family reunification, (c) worker protection, (d) effective enforcement of the rule of law, and (e) civic participation to facilitate the integration of newcomers in local communities.

Initially, the CCIR evaluation design incorporated a variety of methods to collect data that would help answer key evaluation questions. Many aspects of the evaluation effort were similar to aspects of direct services work. Consequently, the general methodology consisted of gathering qualitative and quantitative data through traditional methods, including interviewing key informants, conducting surveys, reviewing documents, and documenting meetings on core strategies. Due to hectic timelines and stressful work plans associated with a campaign of this scale, the evaluation approach needed to emphasize data collection methods that imposed the least burden and demands on CCIR leadership and coalition members. Evaluators therefore chose to make use of the frequent opportunities for collecting qualitative and quantitative data through tracking and analysis of media coverage, legislation, field activities, and polling.

However, the fast pace of events, and the Coalition's rapid response to them, soon necessitated a greater amount of real-time data collection. The evaluation team began conducting more frequent observation and monitoring of the coalition dynamics that played out in meetings and conference calls. Other challenges inherent to collecting real-time data included massive amounts of data generated through numerous email lists, documents, and field reports.

The CCIR evaluation quickly proved to be time consuming and resource intensive on the part of the evaluators; there never

seemed to be a down time. As the data collection activities kicked into full swing, Innovation Network gained greater insight about the unique and distinctive qualities of evaluating advocacy and policy change work (see sidebar). Two of these factors had a considerable impact on the data collection phase of the evaluation:

- A legislative policy campaign, like advocacy work generally, involves faster cycles of evolving strategies out of the necessity to react to opportunity windows and respond to external factors.
- The complex interactions among myriad players and stakeholder audiences—who are located along a continuum of connections to and engagement with policymakers—present greater challenges in capturing multiple stories and angles that oftentimes occur simultaneously.

For these reasons, the evaluators found they could not rely solely on traditional data collection methods and instead had to shift to a new approach.

Developing the Intense-Period Debrief

In the spring of 2006, the CCIR campaign was in the midst of what Innovation Network staff referred to as an opportunity "moment" or "window," a phenomenon that has been described by other researchers of policy change. Due to external events, political and economic conditions, and the dynamics among multiple "players" around an issue, organizations that conduct policy advocacy cannot adequately predict nor control the influence that external forces have on their ability to achieve desired outcomes. In the case of CCIR, the campaign experienced a simultaneous emergence of several opportunities for immigration reform—a 3- to 6-month legislative opportunity following a bipartisan compromise in the Senate, an energized field that sparked historic mass demonstrations by hundreds of thousands of immigrants and their supporters in cities across the country, and heightened competition for claiming leadership of the movement by newly emerging national and immigrant rights groups.

During this intense period, Innovation Network continued to monitor numerous meetings and conference calls and read hundreds of emails and documents. But it was unthinkable to conduct interviews with coalition leaders, which resulted in gaps in the data. Moreover, immediately following this intense period, there was a tangible burnout among everyone in the campaign. The existing methods were not effective in fully capturing the multiple perspectives and many different stories of what happened, especially accounts of interactions with policymakers and their staff.

In recognition of the context within which the evaluation was occurring, the evaluation team designed a "Debrief Interview Protocol" specifically for intense periods of advocacy. The intent of this protocol was to engage key players in a focus group shortly after a policy window or intense period occurred, to capture the following information:

- The public mood and political context of the opportunity window
- What happened and how the campaign members responded to events
- What strategies they followed

- Their perspective on the outcome(s) of the period
- How they would change their strategies going forward based on what they learned during that period

By focusing on a specific moment in the campaign and conducting it in a timely manner, this method gathered in-depth and real-time information, while keeping the interaction targeted, practical, and relevant. 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 was—and continues to be, as the campaign and evaluation continues—particularly useful for providing a way for individuals in the "inner circle" of those spheres, or concentric circles, to tell the story of what happened behind the scenes.

Will this approach work for all advocacy initiatives? Certain contextual and methodological factors should be considered when deciding if, when, and how to administer this tool. The Innovation Network evaluation team works with a small advisory group from the campaign to decide how to identify and anticipate intense periods so that individuals can be invited to participate in a debrief that is timely and captures specific information.

The novel aspects of the debrief lie in its systematic application to follow the peaks and valleys of the policy advocacy cycle. It also allows for continued tailoring of the selection of participants and, to some degree, the questions asked based on the nature of the intense period, the parties involved, and the activities that occur. As other campaigns experience similar highs and lows, it will be useful to see if application and administration of this debrief protocol has wider application and implications. If so, advocates, evaluators and funders may find this new approach a standard protocol for future evaluations of advocacy initiatives.

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How is evaluating advocacy and policy change work unique?

- Common program evaluation challenges—ranging from attribution to limited organizational capacity and the role of external factors—can be more acute when evaluating advocacy.
- Advocacy generally involves faster cycles of evolving strategies based on advocates' need to react to opportunity windows.
- Complex interactions among myriad players and audiences—who are located along a continuum of engagement with policymakers—present greater challenges in capturing multiple stories and angles that often occur simultaneously.
- Advocacy typically affects and involves more people and communities (breadth), and leads to more fundamental changes in the legal, economic and social structures of society (depth) than direct service work, which often addresses symptoms of social ills rather than root causes.

Pioneers in the Field:
Four Foundations on Advocacy Evaluation

Representatives from four foundations discuss their expectations and approaches for assessing their advocacy and public policy grantmaking.

The use of advocacy to inform public policy or systems change is an important grantmaking strategy for many foundations dedicated to achieving sustainable social change. However, as many articles in this issue attest, advocacy grants are not easily assessed using traditional program evaluation techniques. Foundations are eager for evaluation tools and approaches that help them make informed funding decisions and help advocacy grantees to assess their progress and effectiveness.

Until recently, few resources existed to guide evaluation in this area. In the last year, however, several foundations have supported the development of guiding principles and practical tools—many of which are featured in this issue—that are helping to push the field forward, grounding it in useful frameworks and a common language. In addition, several have started an informal "collaborative" to share funding ideas and coordinate their efforts.

This article features interviews with staff at four foundations—The California Endowment, The Atlantic Philanthropies, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, and the W. K. Kellogg Foundation—that are helping to build the advocacy evaluation field. We asked each foundation the following questions about their advocacy and public policy grantmaking and evaluation:

1. What role does advocacy play in your grantmaking?
2. What do you want to know from evaluation about your advocacy investments?
3. How are you supporting grantees on advocacy evaluation?
4. How are you helping to build the larger advocacy evaluation field?

The California Endowment

*Astrid Hendricks-Smith, Director of Evaluation, and
Barbara Masters, Director of Public Policy*

What role does advocacy play in your grantmaking?

The California Endowment's mission is to make quality health care more accessible and affordable for underserved individuals and communities and to make fundamental improvements in the health status of all Californians. We recognize that doing this in a significant and sustainable way requires policy and systems change. As a result, public policy work cuts across all of our grantmaking. In addition to funding advocacy directly, we encourage our direct service grantees to consider how they can contribute to the policy process.

We fund advocacy at the local, state, and national levels and support a variety of activities to inform policy, including research, community organizing, coalition building, and communications. Our funding also connects advocates, grassroots organizations, and researchers to achieve collectively the kinds of policy and systems changes we're seeking.

What do you want to know from evaluation about your advocacy investments?

Our evaluation interests lie at multiple levels. On one level, we want to know how and where our grantees are having an impact in the policy process. On another, we want to know which of the advocacy strategies we fund are more or less successful. Finally, we want to know which organizations are most effective and why so that we can learn how to help all our grantees become better advocates.

Methodologically, we fund a spectrum of evaluation approaches. We expect all evaluation to credibly and defensibly assess what grantees have accomplished, but in some respects, our expectations differ across grants. For example, we expect the external environment to factor in differently for our advocacy and direct service grants. With direct services, we examine start up and scale up and consider the factors that affect our grantees' operating environments. With advocacy, we know that advocates can't control everything within the policy process. Consequently, we sort out what they *can* control and monitor that to see if they have been effective.

How are you supporting grantees on advocacy evaluation?

A major takeaway from the work we've done so far on advocacy evaluation is that evaluation is a tool and should be integral to the overall advocacy strategy. We don't want grantees to do evaluation after the fact and rely on memory to assess impact, and we want to get away from the notion that evaluation is punitive. Rather, we want evaluation to be seen as a means to help the grantee reflect, in real time, on their advocacy strategies and assess whether they're working. Whether theirs is a multigrant initiative or an individual organization, we want grantees to develop evaluative skills and build evaluation into their day-to-day work. We are now trying to take this idea from theory to reality.

We also recognize that we have to be partners with grantees to help them develop the needed skills to achieve policy and systems change. To that end, through the Center for Healthy Communities, we have developed a Health Exchange Academy, which offers training modules on advocacy, communications, and evaluation.

Similarly, we are helping our evaluators and program officers develop and utilize the tools to support advocates and understand the policy world. We are giving them a better sense of how the policy process works and instruction on how to help organizations use evaluation for monitoring and management purposes in unpredictable environments.

Lastly, in conjunction with our policy advocacy grantees that receive general operating grants, we are carrying out an evaluation to determine the benefits and downsides of this grantmaking

tool. This evaluation will help us learn what kinds of capacities organizations need in order to be good advocates. The Endowment provides general support to policy and advocacy organizations very selectively, primarily to those organizations that are best able to utilize the flexibility they provide.

How are you helping to build the larger advocacy evaluation field?

We are excited to be involved in this field and are doing several things to help shape it. Internally, our evaluation and public policy departments do this work collaboratively, which has enabled us to bring our respective expertise and perspectives to the project.

We're funding the development of research and tools that advocates, evaluators, and funders can use. For example, we supported the prospective evaluation framework that Blueprint Research and Design developed for advocacy and policy change evaluation (featured on page 5). We're also funding the development of case studies because we tend to learn and want to try new things when we see other people doing them. Recently we published a case study about the evaluation of our obesity prevention efforts that resulted in state laws banning junk food and soda sales in the state's public schools.[1]

Also, it is important that the field have cross-sector conversations about what we're learning. We need evaluators, policy people, advocates, and funders engaged in this dialogue. We all speak different languages, and only through these conversations can we break down barriers and develop evaluation that is acceptable for all stakeholders. Last year, we held a meeting that involved all of these groups, and we plan to continue this cross-sector dialogue whenever possible.

Finally, we want to support other foundations that are not yet funding advocacy. The California Endowment already is committed to public policy work and sees it as an effective vehicle for social change. But, for other foundations that are not yet convinced, we need evaluations that enable funders to understand how progress is measured and to see its value to achieving the foundation's goals.

The Atlantic Philanthropies

Jackie Williams Kaye, Strategic Learning and Evaluation Executive

What role does advocacy play in your grantmaking?

The Atlantic Philanthropies are dedicated to making lasting changes in the lives of disadvantaged and vulnerable people. We focus on critical social problems related to aging, disadvantaged children and youth, population health, and reconciliation and human rights. Improving the lives of intended beneficiaries in these areas requires enhancing their currently marginalized voices. We also need to increase their access to high-quality services. So, to us, advocacy is important on both accounts.

1. Isaacs, S., & Swartz, A. (2006). *Banning junk food and soda sales in the state's public schools*. Los Angeles: The California Endowment. Available at www.calendow. org/policy/index.stm

Also, in keeping with the philanthropic philosophy of our founder, Atlantic believes that committing resources over a limited period will maximize impact and plans to complete active grantmaking by 2016. Therefore, we seek changes that will endure beyond the foundation. Policy change is a strategic component for achieving that objective.

Atlantic supports several kinds of advocacy for both policy change and increased access to effective service delivery models. We support judicial advocacy through strategic litigation and campaigns, legislative advocacy to enact and implement policy, targeted advocacy campaigns to reach specific decision makers, and broader awareness and education campaigns.

What do you want to know from evaluation about your advocacy investments?

We want to help our grantees improve their work and to increase Atlantic's effectiveness as we spend down. This translates into wanting practical knowledge that can be applied. Our approach is action oriented rather than academic (although we believe that action should be research based). We want data that can be used quickly so people can make decisions and shift strategies as appropriate.

When we explore possible grants with organizations, we don't expect them necessarily to have a strong evaluation system in place because we understand that there are resource issues involved. Instead, we look for a commitment to evaluation and an ability to articulate the questions they'd like answered. When we find that mindset, we support evaluation that helps answer their questions.

Evaluation of advocacy is interesting because the end goal usually is clear and easy to measure. Less clear is what happens along the way and the lessons for advocates working toward different policy outcomes. We want advocacy and advocacy evaluation to have a clear rationale and theory of change, but we also recognize that the most useful learning comes from understanding how advocacy campaigns can be flexible in their operations and tactics. Now we are seeing theories of change that reflect contingencies about how policy change might occur. People are thinking about what *could* happen and the various pathways they might take to achieve intended policy outcomes. Evaluation brings a mindset and ability to think about those strategic issues; it elicits a "what if" mentality.

How are you supporting grantees on advocacy evaluation?

My personal desire is to eventually have evaluation integrated into nonprofit work, so that on a grantee's logic model, for example, the activities column includes evaluation as a core organizational activity that supports all others.

Integration to me means more than developing internal evaluation capacity to replace external evaluations. Grantees can integrate evaluation by partnering with a good external evaluator. Grantees should have the internal systems and skills so that they don't *have* to rely on an external evaluator to help them access data when they need it. But I also believe that, too often, we expect organizations to take on more than they are able. There are reasons that evaluators have specialized skills; they have education

and training that often make it useful to have external evaluators step in. We want Atlantic program executives and grantees to have the evaluation skills and knowledge that help them decide when to do things themselves and when more expertise is needed.

How are you helping to build the larger advocacy evaluation field?

I think our approach to grantmaking and evaluation is helping to build this field with other funders. There are three elements I think funders should consider.

First is time frame. We need fewer funders asking for multiyear outcomes with single-year grants. Either funders should provide support over multiple years or align expectations with the grant's time frame. We want grantees' evaluation plans to be realistic. We understand the long-term nature of policy change, and we give grantees permission to focus on intermediate outcomes. We also think this focus helps build the advocacy field, because how advocates achieve their intermediate outcomes is often where the most transferable learning lies.

Second, Atlantic provides capacity-building support, not just project support. It is hard for grantees to integrate evaluation if we fund only project-based evaluation. Project evaluations give no incentive to invest in evaluation systems that are useful in the long term.

Third, we provide direct evaluation support. Overall in philanthropy, very few dollars go directly for evaluation. Certainly there are project evaluations, but funders often fail to help organizations really commit to evaluation. For example, Atlantic supports information technology systems, which few people think of as evaluation related. If we want grantees to use data to make decisions, they need the systems that enable them to do that.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation

Thomas Kelly, Evaluation Manager

What role does advocacy play in your grantmaking?

The Annie E. Casey Foundation believes that policy and systems change are avenues for achieving large-scale results for vulnerable children and families. For that reason, advocacy to achieve such change is a central part of our grantmaking.

Many of our initiatives, place-based grants, and individual grants support community, state, or national advocacy. For example, our major initiative, KIDS COUNT, is a network of state child advocates in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. Our grantmaking funds a range of advocacy activities, including community organizing, outreach campaigns, targeted issue advocacy (e.g., child health insurance, predatory mortgage lending), and research.

What do you want to know from evaluation about your advocacy investments?

Our desired outcomes foundation-wide are in three areas—impact, influence, and leverage. Our challenge is to more clearly define what these areas mean and how to measure them.

Currently, we are looking at impact, influence, and leverage across all of our major investment areas, including advocacy. We know we can't be clear about our expectations for our advocacy grantees until we're clear about our expectations for ourselves. We want evaluation to help us be more transparent about our work and to instruct us on how best to invest our limited resources. For example, we want to know which outreach strategies not only raise public awareness but also generate the public will that helps moves issues forward in the policy process.

Because we know that advocacy is complex to measure, our measurement expectations for advocates have been fairly low. We're in the process now of applying the same rigor that we use for our more traditional service delivery work to advocacy. Rigor doesn't mean prescribing a specific approach; it means getting clearer about evaluation outcomes, measures, methods, audiences, and uses.

How are you supporting grantees on advocacy evaluation?

Our evaluation conversations are tailored to the different kinds of advocates we fund. Many grantees are not traditional advocacy organizations but are neighborhood service providers who can be politically influential.

The more traditional advocates, like KIDS COUNT grantees, already are having conversations about getting better at measuring progress (see the article with Kay Monaco, a New Mexico KIDS COUNT grantee, on page 16). Because they don't want cookie-cutter approaches that feel like directives, they are very engaged in helping us figure out our approach. They generate evaluation ideas and provide feedback on what we're developing, such as our new tool, *A Guide to Measuring Advocacy and Policy* (featured on page 22). As we get clearer about our approach to advocacy evaluation, this group will be the first to test it.

For the less traditional advocates, our conversations begin in a different place. We use evaluative questioning to help them define their advocacy approaches. This gets them focused on, for example, not only what they are advocating for, but who their target audiences are and who they need to work with. Then, we move onto how to measure what they are doing.

In the future, we'd like to use evaluation to help shape our training and technical assistance for grantees new to advocacy. Knowing more about effective tactics and strategies will help us know what knowledge and skills to transfer. To date, we've been highly reliant on smart advocates who know how to do this intuitively. Now, we want to identify more systematically how and why they are effective in a way that is teachable.

How are you helping to build the larger advocacy evaluation field?

As a field, we shouldn't be handcuffed by the fact that we don't yet have the perfect advocacy evaluation approaches and measures. We need to start somewhere and test our ideas. That's where we are as a foundation.

We also are communicating and collaborating with other funders on what we're doing and learning. One thing that that these discussions should do that they don't now is challenge the assumption that all advocacy is good. Advocacy is accountable for achieving policy-related outcomes. But should it also be accountable to the communities and constituencies it serves? Should it

strengthen participatory democracy, for example, so that even if a policy isn't achieved, more residents will have been involved in the political process? We need to examine advocacy's accountability to audiences beyond funders.

A foundation colleague raised another question that I think is important for the field. How can advocacy evaluation help people make more strategic choices around *what* to advocate for and not just *how* to do it? For example, is advocating for new child care service funding every year the best way to support working families, or should we look at expanding child care tax credits to reach even larger numbers of families? The field currently is focused on using evaluation to do advocacy better and rightly so. But whether and how evaluation can help us make strategic choices about advocacy positions are field-level questions that deserve a placeholder for future deliberation.

W. K. Kellogg Foundation

Sheri Brady, Director of Public Policy

What role does advocacy play in your grantmaking?

Public policy and advocacy play an important role at the Kellogg Foundation because many of the initiatives across our main program areas (health, food systems and rural development, youth and education, and philanthropy and volunteerism) are working toward systems change, which often requires changes in policy. We fund grantees' efforts to realign public and private systems in ways that benefit the communities they represent and serve.

We support advocacy that leads to long-lasting changes, leverages resources, strengthens the voices of communities, and helps the Foundation to achieve its mission and grantees to reach their goals. As a part of this support, we educate grantees on how to comply with the rules and regulations that govern public policy activities.

What do you most want to know from evaluation of your advocacy investments?

Evaluation has always been important to the Kellogg Foundation and is expected for all of our grants, including those involving advocacy. Different types of work, however, call for different ways of looking at evaluation.

With advocacy, we have to be careful. We can't count how many people were fed or how many kids got shots. Ultimately, we want to know whether an appropriation increased, if an existing policy position was sustained, or whether a new policy was enacted. But getting there sometimes takes a long while. For that reason, we need to look at what happens during the life of the project, capturing markers or indicators that tell us if we are on the right track.

Many people are critical of the indicators advocates often track, saying they are too output focused and not meaningful. For example, they often pick on things like the number of newspaper mentions or number of legislators at a briefing. I don't like the term "meaningful indicators." Whether indicators are meaningful depends on the organization doing the advocacy, how difficult their issue is given the current policy climate, and their strategy.

For example, say an advocate had 10 legislators attend a briefing. For some issues, this number might be low. For others, especially issues not currently at the top of the policy agenda, it might be a major win. It might mean that a new issue is gaining momentum and that the grantee is a recognized expert in that area. Judging an indicator without context is dangerous. We shouldn't necessarily assume that there are measures that are meaningful across all advocacy.

The Kellogg Foundation also expects advocacy to involve the people being affected by the policies in question. One of our core values is that all people have the ability to effect change in their lives and their communities. We want to know whether and how advocacy efforts make that happen.

Related to this, we are interested in whether communities are better off when our grants end. We not only want to know whether grantees informed policy; we want to know the actual or likely effects of those policies on people and communities.

How are you supporting grantees on advocacy evaluation?

First, we make sure that all of our advocacy and public policy work is within the guidelines of what the IRS allows. We educate both staff and grantees about available advocacy options.

We also support evaluation. On one level this means with dollars; we can't expect people to do evaluation if we don't pay for it. On another level this means giving grantees the tools and technical assistance to do it. This includes making sure they see a clear reason for doing evaluation in the first place.

Most advocates won't advocate for evaluation. I was recently on a panel, talking about this topic. The speaker was introducing the panel and by the time he said "evaluation," people already were asleep.

We don't want to put more and more pressure on grantees to always do more. But it's revealing that evaluation typically is considered a burden while other kinds of "asks" like communications or collaboration generally are not. We need to help advocates understand evaluation's benefits and how it will help them figure out what they are doing right and where to adjust. Right now, either we're not making that case effectively, or many advocates aren't hearing it.

How are you helping to build the larger advocacy evaluation field?

We try to demonstrate with our grantmaking that doing policy work and systems change requires longer term investments. Funders tend to make decisions based on their own grantmaking cycles rather than the needs of the fields their investing in. With policy and systems work, we can't just say arbitrarily, "Okay, it's been 3 years, and it's time to move on."

Also, the Kellogg Foundation has developed a number of tools on evaluation generally that I think are useful in this arena. Moving forward, we are interested in being involved in field-level discussions about how to adapt evaluation to the unique needs of advocates, and about the roles funders can play in continuing to build the field.

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A conversation with

Kay Monaco

Kay Monaco was executive director through January 2007 of New Mexico Voices for Children, a nonpartisan child advocacy organization that provides evidence-based policy recommendations for state-level policymakers and other opinion leaders. She has a law degree and, prior to joining New Mexico Voices for Children, spent 16 years working on criminal justice reform initiatives throughout the country, including in New York City and the District of Columbia. She is an expert on prison and jail operations and conditions of confinement and has advised numerous judges and the U.S. Department of Justice. Her work with the criminal justice system led her to a career in child advocacy by reinforcing her belief that earlier and greater investment in children would result in less crime and less incarceration, both of which have enormous fiscal and social costs.

Q What advocacy approach does New Mexico Voices for Children use?

A At New Mexico Voices for Children, we ground our policy work in good, solid research. This means we use an evidence-based approach when looking at how we can change systems to improve the health and well-being of New Mexico's children, particularly children from low-income families. In New Mexico, children in low-income families are predominantly children of color, and an increasing number are Hispanic. The core of our work revolves around poverty and economic-justice issues and the kinds of policies and strategies that can truly change families' economic status and impact child outcomes. The government can spend money indefinitely at the programmatic level, but we believe that if we don't change the *system*—the way taxes are collected and spent, for example—circumstances for these families will not change.

Our advocacy approach is to work from the top down. We engage community members at the grassroots level and community leaders, policymakers and other opinion shapers at the top. We inform them with our research and analysis. If we do that successfully, policy change can occur.

We want to succeed in changing policies, but we also want to make sure those policies have real impacts. Our theory of change has a feedback loop. After a policy changes, we ask: Did it actually impact people's lives?

Q Do you feel increasing pressure to show that your advocacy efforts make a difference?

A We are finding that funders *are* concentrating more on how to evaluate their advocacy investments. They understand that advocacy efforts often involve 5- to 10-year campaigns and that, as a result, we need to look at incremental policy changes over time, until we have a big win. This requires funders to be patient and can make it difficult to raise money.

It is much easier to get funding for a concrete program. For example, the city of Albuquerque has a safe house for abused children—a place where children who are removed from abusive households can stay for 2 or 3 days while the state locates a more permanent placement. This is an incredibly important safety valve for our children and is a tangible program that funders and donors can visit to see its effects.

Our role, by contrast, is fixing the child welfare *system* so that fewer children face abuse and neglect in the first place. When funders ask how we will change that system, we respond with a whole series of policy and social changes that need to be rolled out over the next 15 years. Because we are proposing a long-term process instead of a concrete program, some funders are less interested.

I think that we can address this problem by better educating funders. Direct service providers and policy advocates both work toward the same outcome—a better world for everyone. The difference is that service providers meet immediate needs, like food and housing crises, while policy advocates look at long-term solutions that will, hopefully, lessen the prevalence of such crises. We're really two halves of the same whole, both of us doing our part to promote change and both parts equally crucial.

Q How do you evaluate your advocacy work to show that it makes a difference?

A We approach evaluation by examining our theory of change, which we developed several years ago. Because of its shape, we call our schematic the "blowfish theory of change" (see the figure on page 18).

First, community input helps us identify the problems or issues that we need to focus on. We then use credible and reliable research and data to bring attention to those problems as well as to ways in which they can be addressed. Then, we look at how our work informed any intermediate outcomes by examining our success in engaging our audiences. We include measures like the number of businesses engaged in an issue, the number of legislative presentations we are asked to make, and the number of media hits we get.

Take our messaging work as an example. We examine how messages change over time and use that as a measure of our influence, and we look at whether the media and others echo our messages. For example, several years ago, we advocated for continued Medicaid funding. At the time, there was a national trend to cut Medicaid funding because state budgets were in trouble and Medicaid consumed a large proportion of those budgets. In response to that trend, we started a campaign that characterized Medicaid as an "economic engine." Our analyses showed that Medicaid dollars were creating jobs—many in the private health care sector—and acting as an economic stimulus with huge benefits for the state.

When we first started describing Medicaid as an economic engine, we received tremendous pushback from government officials, legislators, and the business community for applying a business concept to social justice issue. Over time, however, the legislature and press started talking about Medicaid's economic impact in our state. We considered this an advocacy success; our message was picked up and used by others as if it was their own. In turn, the message helped change legislators' minds about cutting Medicaid.

It can be difficult to explain to foundations that simply preventing budget cuts is an enormous win. In this case, we showed that the phrase "economic engine" was never in the Medicaid lexicon until we started making our point. We also showed that our ally organizations began calling Medicaid an economic engine. In fact, one organization sent a postcard with a train engine on it to all of the state's legislators. We really used our message to convince legislators that Medicaid funding is important to our state's economy and has an enormous impact on the whole health infrastructure.

Ultimately, while many states around the country cut their Medicaid budgets, New Mexico did not. In fact, our Medicaid budget grew during those years. Our measures—especially the media-related measures—helped us build a credible and defensible case about our contribution to that outcome.

Q How do you define long-term success, and how do you measure your part in it?

A Ultimate success for us will mean that, in New Mexico, poverty decreases and child well-being increases. While it is difficult to make a causal link between those changes

Kay Monaco

and our efforts, again, we can build a case about our contribution to these impacts in various ways. One way is by looking at what other states or countries have accomplished with the same kinds of policy changes that we advocate for. For example, we recently examined our state's poverty level compared to several years ago and saw it had decreased somewhat. While I would never claim that we did this on our own, we were able to show that the same constellation of policy changes on which we worked in New Mexico also had impacts on poverty in Great Britain. We compared our experiences and data patterns to Great Britain's to show that we were on the right track.

Q How do you learn from and use evaluation data?

A We want to succeed in changing policies, but we also want to make sure those policies have real impacts. Our theory of change has a feedback loop that goes from policy change back to the beginning step of problem definition. After a policy changes, we ask: When the policy was implemented, did it actually impact people's lives? We then use data to find the answer.

For example, when we started working on unemployment insurance reform, we tested different theories about how to help families bridge the gap between jobs. We came out with several policy recommendations for increasing unemployment insurance. Once those policies were adopted, we looked at the benefits actually paid to families, along with other data, to examine if our theories were right. In fact, the data showed that we were partly right. Now, we have to ask ourselves if we need to go back and advocate for more policy changes.

Q What do you want to look at with evaluation that you aren't already tracking?

A I wish that we could visually map the players, both pro and con, on any single policy initiative and place ourselves on that map. We are only one of many pushes and pulls in the policy process, and we are often not the most influential or powerful players. Mapping all of the players would allow us to put our work in context. Sometimes, we have a small win, but the opposition was formidable—better resourced and with greater leverage. We'd like to capture that information. We would like the time and resources to step back and see how our work fits on the map of a policy initiative. If we could do this more often, I think we could better maximize our connections with other players and make our work even more effective.

For more information about New Mexico Voices for Children, contact current executive director Catherine Direen at cdireen@nmvoices.org.

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Evaluation and InterAction

Ken Giunta and Todd Shelton of InterAction answer HFRP's questions about their approaches and ideas on evaluating advocacy.

Tell us about InterAction and its advocacy work.

InterAction is an alliance of U.S.-based international development and humanitarian nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). We work to overcome poverty, exclusion, and suffering worldwide. Our 160 members provide relief to those affected by disaster and war, assist refugees, advance human rights, support gender equality, protect the environment, address population concerns, and press for more equitable, just, and effective public policies.

Advocacy is a big part of what we do. The premise behind InterAction is that our collective voice is stronger than our individual voices. Our members deliver about $5 billion in development assistance every year, and their collective presence often gives us a seat at the policy table. We don't always win our policy battles, but we're a respected source of information about our sector.

You're an alliance of organizations. Does this raise unique evaluation needs?

As a large alliance, our evaluation needs exist at the sector level. We need to tell the story of our collective impact, but we're challenged by how to do that. Although we know that, in some ways, the world is a better place than it was 30 years ago—for example, infant mortality is down, and literacy rates are up—some people are skeptical or unaware of the development and humanitarian sector's role in bringing about these changes. To address this, we're trying to get better at evaluation and are collecting more stories about our members' successes in order to strengthen our advocacy and share what we're learning about effective relief and development policies and practice.

With storytelling, we have to ask ourselves: What kinds of stories are most effective in changing policies? Do we need to tell stories of systemic change that demonstrate broad impact over time and at a country or regional level? And how do you substantiate claims at that level—showing, for example, that our work
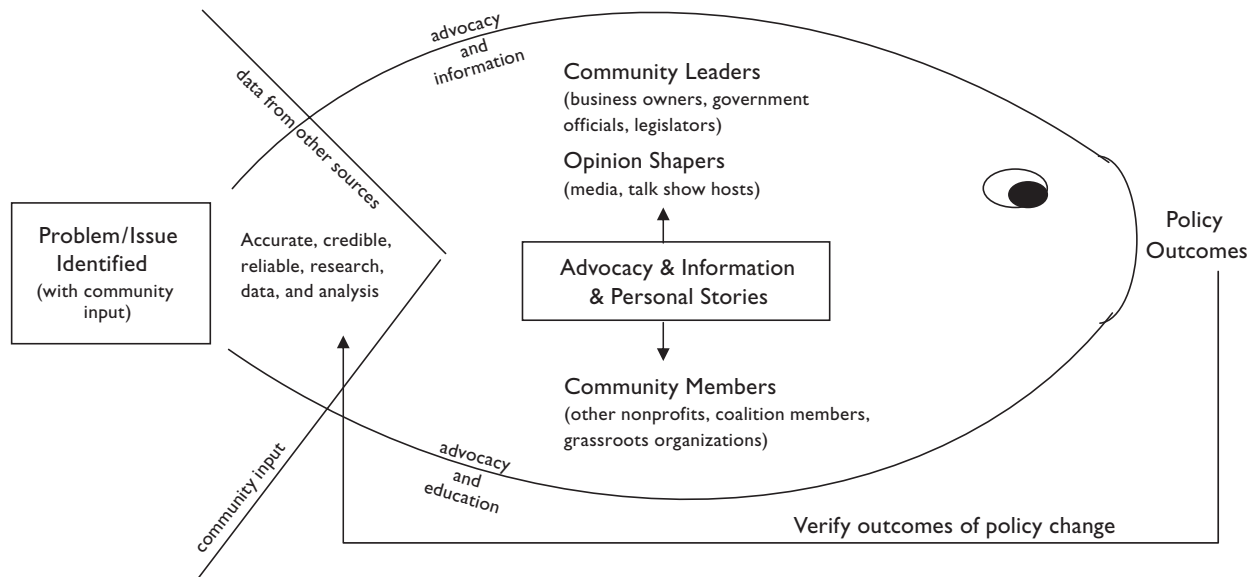
Kay Monaco
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New Mexico Voices for Children: The "Blowfish" Theory of Change

Policy change occurs when community leaders receive credible and reliable data and research AND community members provide personal stories and advocate for change.

Evaluation Measures

Problem Identified Outputs	Community Member Outcomes	Community Leader Outcomes	Opinion Shaper Outcomes
# Reports and data releases	# Website hits/click-throughs	# Businesses engaged	# Media hits (op-eds, echoing messages)
	# Data requests	# NMVC legislative presentations	# Talk show appearances (TV & radio)
	# Organizational partners	# Testimonials	# "Testimonials"
	# Community presentations	Policymaker survey	Media survey
	# Community members engaged		
	Community "satisfaction"survey		

What does monitoring and evaluation look like for real-life advocates?

Stephanie Schaefer, codirector of research at Fight Crime: Invest In Kids—a national nonprofit, bipartisan organization of law enforcement leaders and violence survivors—describes how they use evaluation to inform their advocacy and demonstrate their impact.

Can you describe your advocacy work?

We promote investments in children's programs and policies (e.g., quality early childhood education, child abuse and neglect prevention, after school, and interventions for troubled kids) as a way to prevent crime and violence. Our members include more than 3,000 police chiefs, sheriffs, prosecutors, police leaders, and violence survivors. Supported by our Washington, DC-based office and 10 state offices around the country, these members are our primary spokespersons, and they advocate at the state and federal levels.

Our national and state offices work in four areas—strategic membership recruitment and education, research and policy analysis, public education earned media campaigns, and the education of policymakers. These activities support and inform our advocacy.

How does Fight Crime: Invest in Kids evaluate its advocacy efforts?

Our funders are interested in accountability, as are we. Funders want to know how their support is making an impact. That can be a challenge with advocacy, as we are one influence among many in the policy process. But we appreciate funders' interest in accountability because the evaluation of our efforts ultimately increases their awareness of how advocacy can support social change goals.

We think about our evaluation in two ways—occasional point-in-time evaluations conducted by external evaluators and ongoing tracking that we do internally. Early on (Fight Crime: Invest in Kids started in 1996), we had an extensive external evaluation, supported by the William T. Grant Foundation, which examined our work in the broader policy environment. For example, evaluators talked to policymakers about their awareness and use of our crime-prevention research and message. We found that feedback valuable and used the process to inform development of the measures that we now track internally.

Our quantitative measures are linked to different aspects of our advocacy. For example, with regard to our member education and training, we track the number of contacts our law enforcement members make with their members of Congress. For our media outreach, we track newspaper, radio, and television coverage generated by press conferences or report releases. We also track growth in our membership, presentations, endorsements of our policy positions by law enforcement associations, and website statistics that give us a sense of our electronic visibility and exposure.

We consider our measures individually and as a whole to determine what they say about our overall progress toward our mission of giving kids the right start in life. Each year, we track a set of key indicators linked to our organizational capacity and impact, including increases in government investments in kids that reduce crime. We've tracked these indicators since our organization started and use them to assess our growth.

In addition to quantitative measures, we document our impact qualitatively through narrative stories. We recognize that these stories are anecdotal but that, combined with our quantitative measures, they provide context and convey more vividly how we and other advocates make a difference. For example, we document when policymakers quote our language or use our messages in public debates on the Senate or House floor. Most people understand that policy change doesn't occur in a vacuum, and this can be one way to make advocacy more concrete.

How do you use the data you collect?

First, we use the data to inform our strategy and determine which areas to emphasize more. For example, we use member data to identify when and where to increase our member recruitment and mobilization capacity. Or we use data on our print and television coverage to tell us whether our media strategies in targeted media markets are working. We also use data on our members' meetings with key policymakers to assess whether our members are getting the policy message to them.

Second, we use the data to demonstrate our progress and impact. For instance, we use data to make a case about the impact that advocacy has on federal investments and policy and about the specific value we contribute. By doing this, we can show foundations that supporting advocacy and policy work can impact the lives of far more children than funding direct services alone.

In the past, we've tracked foundation investments in federal after school advocacy by gathering data from foundations investing in this issue and the key advocacy organizations they fund. We then add data on federal after school funding for the same timeframe to see how well the trajectories map. Finally, we add data about our own after school work and again examine the patterns. Of course, we recognize the interpretive limits of these comparisons and that we are one of many influences that may be affecting investment levels, but such an analysis makes a solid case about the importance of nonprofit advocacy's contribution to policy outcomes.

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Evaluating Nonprofit Advocacy *Simply*: An Oxymoron?

Marcia Egbert and Susan Hoechstetter offer nine principles to guide advocacy evaluation, based on a recent and groundbreaking Alliance for Justice tool on this topic.

When Alliance for Justice and Rosenberg Foundation began a project to equip funders with a practical way to evaluate advocacy back in 2002, little relevant research or methodology was available. Consequently, Alliance for Justice and The George Gund Foundation partnered to develop new tools that would be practical, flexible, and equally easy for grantmakers and grantseekers to use. The resulting 2005 publication, *Build Your Advocacy Grantmaking: Advocacy Capacity Assessment & Evaluation Tools*, became the first guide of its kind for nonprofit advocacy. The two new tools featured in the guide will be available online for the first time in April 2007.

In the time since the guide's publication, the field of evaluating advocacy has truly taken off. Multiple evaluation models are now available, and new work is continually emerging. As the field grows, it is important to remember the principles of simplicity, flexibility, and grantee participation. We offer the following nine principles to guide evaluators and advocates in advocacy evaluation.

1. *Keep it simple.* A simple evaluation framework—even a checklist with a bit of narrative—based on advocacy experience is much more manageable for most nonprofits than complex evaluation requirements that unduly tax already sparse resources, particularly staff time.
2. *Value capacity building as a key outcome measure.* Very often, the most visible progress that results from advocacy work is the capacity built by a nonprofit. This capacity could include new coalitions formed, relationships gained with public policy decision makers, and skills developed to navigate complex legislative, judicial, executive branch, and election-related processes.
3. *Flexibility is a strength, and "failure" to reach a big goal may actually produce important incremental gains.* Perhaps the state's budget went into the red following a recession. Obtaining a desired increase in appropriations for child care programs may no be longer be feasible that year, but gaining enforcement of existing licensing requirements for higher quality of services might. The nonprofit that can change strategies when the external environment shifts is a stronger advocate. Achieving expected or unexpected benchmarks is important, given the long-term nature of much advocacy work.
4. *Let the story be told.* Understanding how and why the work unfolded as it did is central to gauging the success of advocacy activity. Telling the story provides a narrative to complement benchmarks by explaining the outside factors that caused the work to take the direction it did.
5. *Be clear about evaluation expectations from the beginning of the grant review process.* Grantseekers and grantmakers should mutually agree up front about what constitutes effective work and how much leeway grantees have to make choices that vary with the circumstances of their proposed work. The Capacity Assessment Tool can help clarify these expectations.
6. *The sum is greater than the parts.* Accepting this premise helps alleviate concerns about isolating a particular organization's precise contribution to an overall advocacy outcome. For example, unless an organization is the only one working on a particular policy issue, it may never be certain which organization's actions were the defining reason for a related policy outcome. Yet, the organization can identify specific ways in which the grantee's actions spurred or contributed to policymaking. For those who care about policy change, knowing that they or their grantee effectively influenced the outcome should be enough.
7. *Measure influence in creative ways.* Nontraditional evaluation methods can help meet the challenge of measuring influence. For example, staff members at The California Wellness Foundation deemed one grantee's public education campaign successful when they heard the California Attorney General reframe the issue in the same terms used by the public education campaigns. Other funders have sought the opinions of community members and legislators regarding how effective their grantees' efforts have been in influencing them. Typical ways to indicate influence might include an invitation for a nonprofit organization to testify at a legislative hearing or newly won support from a state agency official for changes in a regulation.
8. *Evaluation requires time and/or money.* Nonprofit advocates often have the best information available to evaluate their work, but when outside evaluators are needed, money must be allocated for them.
9. *Understand foundations' potential nonmonetary contribution to advocacy activities.* While some nonprofits will say they could have used more flexible or longer term funding, grantees may also seek funders' nonfinancial assistance in their advocacy efforts. For example, MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger contracted a consultant to evaluate its California Nutrition Initiative advocacy project. One question in their grantee survey was about in what other ways the funder could have helped its advocacy effort. MAZON learned that grantees most wanted introductions to public policy leaders.

As more funders tiptoe, walk, run, or gallop headlong into the world of funding public policy and advocacy, we hope these simple principles help alleviate a common worry that such work is impossible to measure.

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Continuous Progress: Better Advocacy Through Evaluation

Edith Asibey and David Devlin-Foltz describe the new Continuous Progress *website, which helps advocates and grantmakers collaboratively plan and evaluate advocacy efforts.[1]*

Grantmaker: I think my board is ready to consider supporting your organization's advocacy work, but there's one question I know they'll ask me: How do you plan to measure the impact of this campaign?

Advocate: Advocacy work is hard to measure. But we've been working on this issue for years, and we have the support of key legislators. We *know* when we're influencing their thinking and actions—we just do. Plus, we'll be happy to show you and your board our media placements, letters from our constituents to the White House, and the legislation championed by members of Congress in support of our issue.

Advocacy organizations and grantmaking institutions that invest in policy advocacy share an interest in getting better at evaluating advocacy's impact. But how does our fictitious advocate go from counting column inches and responses to electronic alerts to proving that her work led to policy change? This is one of the several challenges we identified through the work of our Evaluation Learning Group—an expert panel tasked with identifying best practices for foreign policy and global development advocacy. Over the span of 2 years, we interviewed numerous grantmakers, advocates, evaluators, and communications experts and conducted an extensive review of recently published studies on assessing public policy impact and related topics.[2]

Our work led us to develop *Continuous Progress*—an online collection of tools for better advocacy through evaluation (www.continuousprogress.org). The website features practical steps to help advocates, grantmakers, and consultants plan and evaluate advocacy efforts and do so in a collaborative manner. Our expectation is that the guide will result in more effective advocacy.

Although we designed *Continuous Progress* for newcomers to advocacy evaluation, we hope that the tools will also help more experienced advocates develop a more systematic approach to planning and evaluation. Over time, we believe these tools will contribute to an increased demand for rigorous, carefully designed evaluations of advocacy programs. Below, we describe the guides for both advocates and grantmakers that make up *Continuous Progress*.

1. The authors would like to acknowledge Justin van Fleet and Tarek Rizk for their support in the development of Continuous Progress.
2. Continuous Progress features an extensive list of recent studies and tools available on evaluation of public policy, advocacy grantmaking, communications strategy, and studies of U.S. public opinion on global issues, among others. Visit www.continuousprogress.org/node/56 to view the full list.

"Guide for Advocates": Proving Impact on Policy

The "Guide for Advocates" helps groups plan and evaluate their work within a dynamic policy environment. We show users how to define specific and measurable goals and provide tips for developing a theory of change; we encourage doing both at the program's onset in order to establish baselines, benchmarks, and indicators to monitor progress. The advocate guide also provides guidance on building capacity to advocate more effectively as an organization or in coalitions. Real-life examples illustrate the points discussed in each section.

"Guide for Grantmakers": Achieving Policy Change

The "Guide for Grantmakers" encourages grantmakers to define their own goals for advocacy funding by laying out a vision for the desired policy change and the needed steps to get there. We suggest that this process will be conducive to clearer, focused, and more constructive dialogue with existing and potential grantees. A well-crafted theory of change takes some of the "guesswork" out of the process for both grantseekers and grantmakers. The guide also proposes evaluation guidelines for grantees.

We urge grantmakers (and advocates) to accept that they will rarely be able to attribute policy change to a single organization's activities. *Continuous Progress* proposes instead that helping grantees prove "contribution" rather than "attribution" is a valid and more provable goal. It can also reduce tensions within coalitions when grantmakers and grantseekers agree that no single organization should get all the credit.

Collaboration: Opportunities for Shared Learning

Continuous Progress brings to life the possibilities offered by a collaboration between grantmakers and advocates during planning and evaluation. The tools make it easy. A special icon tells users when they can easily jump to the corresponding discussion in the other guide. If you're an advocate, the icon tells you, "Here's your chance to see how a grantmaker might think about whether to fund a coalition."

The guides focus on the importance of tracking incremental progress, highlighting the value of continuous learning that, when shared, builds capacity of individual organizations and the advocacy field as a whole. Staying true to our own principles, we welcome your feedback about ways to improve the tools; together, we can make continuous progress.

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A Guide to Measuring Advocacy and Policy

Organizational Research Services identifies outcomes associated with advocacy and policy work based on its new resource, A Guide to Measuring Advocacy and Policy.

While many foundations and nonprofits are interested in measuring their advocacy and policy work, currently no commonly accepted evaluation approach or practice exists. To help remedy this, the Annie E. Casey Foundation commissioned Organizational Research Services (ORS), a Seattle-based evaluation consulting firm, to create a guide that would help both the Casey Foundation and other organizations better define and document the effectiveness of their advocacy and policy strategies.

A Guide to Measuring Advocacy and Policy gives foundations and nonprofits alike a way to identify and talk about the outcomes associated with advocacy and policy work. In addition, it offers evaluation design suggestions that include a broad range of methodologies, intensities, audiences, timeframes, and purposes. The guide aims for wider acknowledgement about how evaluation fits into the world of advocacy and policy, greater acceptance of evaluation's role in demonstrating success and learning about progress, and increased confidence among those undertaking evaluation in this area.

While outcome categories are fairly standardized and widely accepted in the service delivery arena, such standardization does not yet exist for advocacy and policy work. The guide highlights a core set of outcome categories and provides concrete direction for those searching for *what* to measure about their advocacy and policy strategies.

In developing the guide, ORS reviewed a broad range of advocacy and policy outcome categories and indicators of progress. Repeatedly, the same categories of outcomes emerged. Some represent the interim steps and infrastructure that create the conditions for social change; others reflect the end goal—policy adoption, funding, or implementation and enforcement.

ORS distilled these outcomes into six distinct categories, described below, that represent the essential changes in lives, community conditions, institutions, and systems that result from advocacy and policy work. The table at right also presents these categories and the specific outcomes, strategies, and units of analysis that relate to them. The order in which outcome categories appear does not represent their relative importance or sequence.

1. *Shifts in social norms.* Social norms are the knowledge, attitudes, values, and behaviors that comprise the normative structure of culture and society. Advocacy and policy work increasingly has focused on this area because of the importance of aligning advocacy and policy goals with core and enduring social values and behaviors.
2. *Strengthened organizational capacity.* Organizational capacity is another name for the skill set, staffing and leadership, organizational structure and systems, finances, and strategic planning of nonprofits and formal coalitions that do advocacy and policy work. Development of these core capacities is critical to advocacy and policy change efforts.

3. *Strengthened alliances.* Alliances among advocacy partners vary in levels of coordination, collaboration, and mission alignment and can include nontraditional alliances such as bipartisan alliances or relationships between unlikely allies. Alliances bring about structural changes in community and institutional relationships and are essential to presenting common messages, pursuing common goals, enforcing policy changes, and protecting policy "wins."
4. *Strengthened base of support.* Nonprofits draw on grassroots, leadership, and institutional support in working for policy changes. The breadth, depth, and influence of support among the general public, interest groups, and opinion leaders for particular issues are a major structural condition for supporting policy changes. This outcome category spans many layers of culture and societal engagement including increases in civic participation and activism, "allied voices" among informal and formal groups, the coalescence of dissimilar interest groups, actions of opinion leader champions, and positive media attention.
5. *Improved policies.* Change in the public policy arena occurs in stages—including policy development, policy proposals, demonstration of support (e.g., cosponsorship), adoption, funding, and implementation. Advocacy and policy evaluation frequently focuses on this area as a measure of success. While and important focus, improved policies are rarely achieved without changes in the preconditions to policy change identified in other outcome categories.
6. *Changes in impact.* Changes in impact are the ultimate and long-term changes in social and physical lives and conditions (i.e., individuals, populations, and physical environments) that motivate policy change efforts. These changes are important to monitor and evaluate when grantmakers and advocacy organizations are partners in social change. Changes in impact are influenced by policy change but typically involve far more strategies, including direct interventions, community support, and personal and family behaviors.

A Guide to Measuring Advocacy and Policy is available on the Annie E. Casey (www.aecf.org) and ORS websites (www.organizationalresearch.com). In addition, The Innovation Network's website (www.innonet.org) offers an online supplement to the guide with sample measurement tools directly applicable to advocacy and policy work. We hope that the outcome categories described here and in the guide begin to provide foundations and nonprofits with a common approach to policy and advocacy evaluation.

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Menu of Outcomes for Advocacy and Policy Work

1. SHIFT IN SOCIAL NORMS

Examples of outcomes
- Changes in awareness
- Increased agreement about the definition of a problem (e.g., common language)
- Changes in beliefs
- Changes in attitudes
- Changes in values
- Changes in the salience of an issue
- Increased alignment of campaign goal with core societal values
- Changes in public behavior

Examples of strategies
- Framing issues
- Media campaign
- Message development (e.g., defining the problem, framing, naming)
- Development of trusted messengers and champions

2. STRENGTHENED ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

Examples of outcomes
- Improved management of organizational capacity of organizations involved with advocacy and policy work
- Improved strategic abilities of organizations involved with advocacy and policy work
- Improved capacity to communicate and promote advocacy messages of organizations involved with advocacy and policy work
- Improved stability of organizations involved with advocacy and policy work

Examples of strategies
- Leadership development
- Organizational capacity building
- Communication skill building
- Strategic planning

3. STRENGTHENED ALLIANCES

Examples of outcomes
- Increased number of partners supporting an issue
- Increased level of collaboration (e.g., coordination)
- Improved alignment of partnership efforts (e.g., shared priorities, shared goals, common accountability system)
- Strategic alliances with important partners (e.g., stronger or more powerful relationships and alliances)
- Increased ability of coalitions working toward policy change to identify policy change process (e.g., venue of policy change, steps of policy change based on strong understanding of the issue and barriers, jurisdiction of policy change)

Examples of strategies
- Partnership development
- Coalition development
- Cross-sector campaigns
- Joint campaigns
- Building alliances among unlikely allies

4. STRENGTHENED BASE OF SUPPORT

Examples of outcomes
- Increased public involvement in an issue
- Increased level of actions taken by champions of an issue
- Increased voter registration
- Changes in voting behavior
- Increased breadth of partners supporting an issue (e.g., number of "unlikely allies" supporting an issue)
- Increased media coverage (e.g., quantity, prioritization, extent of coverage, variety of media "beats," message echoing)
- Increased awareness of campaign principles and messages among selected groups (e.g., policymakers, general public, opinion leaders)
- Increased visibility of the campaign message (e.g., engagement in debate, presence of campaign message in the media)
- Changes in public will

Examples of strategies
- Community organizing
- Media campaigns
- Outreach
- Public/grassroots engagement campaign
- Voter registration campaign
- Coalition development
- Development of trusted messengers and champions
- Policy analysis and debate
- Policy impact statements

5. IMPROVED POLICIES

Examples of outcomes
- Policy development
- Policy adoption (e.g., ordinance, ballot measure, legislation, legally binding agreements)
- Policy implementation (e.g., equity, adequate funding, other resources for implementing policy)
- Policy enforcement (e.g., holding the line on bedrock legislation)

Examples of strategies
- Scientific research
- Development of "white papers"
- Development of policy proposals
- Pilots/demonstration programs
- Educational briefings of legislators
- Watchdog function

6. CHANGES IN IMPACT

Examples of outcomes
- Improved social and physical conditions (e.g., poverty, habitat diversity, health, equality, democracy)

Examples of strategies
- Combination of direct service and systems-changing strategies

Using and Evaluating Social Media for Social Change

Allison H. Fine is a senior fellow at Demos, a network of action and ideas based in New York City. She writes and speaks on increasing civic participation by harnessing the power of digital technology. In 2006, she published her latest book, **Momentum: Igniting Social Change in the Connected Age.**

What is your new book about, and why did you write it?

My book offers a fresh way of thinking about advocacy and social change work. It discusses how *social media* tools—email, the Internet, cell phones, personal digital assistants, smart phones, even iPods—promote interactivity and connectedness, which are at the very core of social change efforts.

I had been working with Web-based social change efforts for a while, but in 2005, something really caught my attention. The women of Kuwait for years had been struggling to get full suffrage to no avail. Suddenly, the legislature voted overwhelmingly for women's suffrage. Why? We think in part because many Kuwaiti women were emailing the legislature, and the bottom line was that their emails didn't wear skirts or communicate through burkas. We're in a new age of connected activism in which social media are democratizing and transforming social change efforts.

Social media offer the opportunity for people to be more meaningfully engaged in social change. New, inexpensive, and wireless hand-held gadgets give us the ability to interact with thousands or even millions of people. They don't replace the need to meet face to face and aren't a substitute for solid advocacy strategies, but they can augment and deepen that experience.

My book is a road map for advocates, their board members, and funders who want to use new digital technology to improve their efforts to solve social problems. The book doesn't prescribe solutions for specific social problems; it offers ideas on advocating more effectively in the new "Connected Age."

Why did you devote a whole chapter to evaluation?

Evaluation is so important to the success of any advocacy effort, including those that use social media. If we don't know how well we've done something, we can't get better at doing it. But in many ways, evaluation hasn't taken hold in the advocacy sector.

Advocates fear their results won't meet people's expectations and they'll be punished as a result. Often, this is because those expectations are either too long-term or too far outside advocates' control. I worked with advocates for universal child health care. Since, in most states, universal health care legislation and funding will not happen anytime soon, it was a mistake for those organizations to hinge their success entirely on that legislation's passing. They needed to hinge it on what they did on a daily basis—who they connected to, what information they shared, and how that information was used. Their evaluation efforts needed to give a meaningful short-term picture of their advocacy work and how it laid the foundation for their longer term policy goal.

Another reason evaluation hasn't taken hold in this sector is that we're not paying enough attention to what advocates, given their size and resources, are capable of doing. For 99.9% of them, evaluation has to include some form of self-assessment rather than external evaluation. My book has a chapter on the importance of self-determination—the ability of advocates to articulate, for themselves, what their work is about and how success will look. This is critical because we need the people actually doing the work to define success and how it will be measured.

For the most part, evaluation that's been pushed by outsiders has not been that helpful to advocates. Too often, it promotes a return-on-investment model that gets organizations focused on measures that are not helpful day to day in their organizations. So, advocates feel evaluation is a burden rather than something they can integrate into their work to make it better.
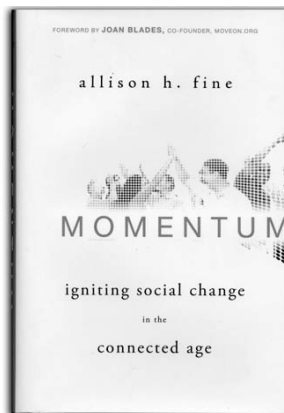
You talk about "measuring progress in new ways." What do you mean?

Most measures are too narrow to capture the robust bouillabaisse of social change. We need to focus on *how* we work, because when we work well internally and play well with others, good things happen. In the Connected Age and with social media, this means asking whether we are successful in at least three areas—connectedness, meaningful participation, and use of information.

With *connectedness*, advocates are in the business of trying to influence the way people think about an issue and how they behave as a result. The essence of that work is connecting with people and generating a broad base of support. But evaluation efforts need to measure more than just the number of people advocates connect with; they need to look at who they're connecting with and how. Are they talking *at* people or engaging in two-way conversations?

Meaningful participation means monitoring and measuring whether people are participating in ways that they enjoy and think have value. Social change efforts will die an early death if they assume that volunteers or partners enjoy what they are doing when they really don't. Is a balanced mix of participation opportunities available that fits a wide audience and creates a strong and engaged network of participants?

Use of information means assessing the usability and accessibility of the information that is part of social change efforts. Is the information actually needed? Is it in a format and framed in a way that is useful? Does it inspire action?

We need to remember that thoughtful evaluation is difficult. We have to build a culture that rewards learning and improvement over time because that's the only way we can get evaluation to happen at scale. Also, I recommend advocates do evaluation in smaller, bite-sized pieces that they can integrate into their work and use to honestly assess what is working and what isn't. This will make evaluation energizing rather than burdensome.

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The eNonprofit Benchmarks Study: Diving Into Email Metrics

Karen Matheson from M+R Strategic Services describes a recent study that helps nonprofits measure and interpret their online advocacy and fundraising success.

In the for-profit dot-com world, the bottom line is easy to measure—it all comes down to dollars and cents. For nonprofits, success is more difficult to define. How many people were educated? Informed? Served? Engaged? Activated? How much money was raised? Did legislative policy change? Did corporate policy shift? Was public opinion swayed?

The eNonprofit Benchmarks Study is the first of its kind to look at the effectiveness of major American nonprofits using the Internet to raise money and influence public policy. Nonprofits can use this study to measure and compare their online performance to other organizations.

Methodology

The study provides a snapshot of key metrics and benchmarks for nonprofit online communications, including email fundraising and advocacy. To develop these metrics, M+R Strategic Services analyzed data from three sources: (a) *nonprofit study partners*, 15 key national nonprofits in the environmental, civil/legal rights-based, and international aid sectors, which had substantial online communications and marketing programs; (b) *aggregate data from Convio, GetActive Software, and Kintera*, major providers of online communications tools for nonprofits; and (c) *an online survey of the broader nonprofit community* with 85 respondents.

Most data came from drilling down into hundreds of email messages sent by the 15 study partners to their email list members over 2 years—from September 2003 to September 2005. We coded statistics for these messages by nonprofit type (environmental, rights-based, or international aid) and then sorted them into message-type categories (including advocacy, fundraising, e-news, and other).

The study has chapters on return on investment, email messaging, email list growth, email list composition, online advocacy, and online fundraising. One of the study's most revealing chapters—with regard to measuring the quality and effectiveness of announcements to nonprofit organizations' email subscriber lists—is on email messaging metrics.

Email Messaging Metrics

The table titled "Nonprofit Advocacy and Fundraising Email Metrics" shows the key email metrics identified for advocacy and fundraising based on the 15 nonprofit partners in the study. Metrics are listed first for all partners, and then for the nonprofits in each sector examined. The email metrics and how they were calculated are described below.

Open rates generally are an indicator of three factors: (a) how engaging an email's subject line is, (b) the email list's quality, and (c) the strength of the relationship between the organization and its subscribers. The eNonprofit Benchmarks study calculated open rates by dividing the number of people who opened an email message by the total number of recipients. The study found that open rates for advocacy emails dropped significantly across the board in the 2 years covered by the study. However, there were no corresponding drops in page completion or response rates.[1]

Page-completion rates assess the quality of an advocacy or fundraising online form. This metric was calculated by dividing the number of people who clicked on the link that sent subscribers to a form by the number of people who actually completed it.

Click-through rates measure an email's persuasiveness and salience. Although there are several ways to calculate click-through rates, the study calculated this metric as the number of people who clicked at least one link in the email divided by the total number of message recipients. This calculation is most useful for messages such as online newsletters where the goal is motivating subscribers to click on one or more article links.

Response rates gauge an email message's overall success. The study calculated this by dividing the number of people who completed on online form by the total number of email recipients.

In the email messaging metrics chapter, as in its other revealing chapters, the eNonprofit Benchmarks Study provides nonprofit organizations with new and practical ways to define success. To learn more about email messaging metrics or to read the full report, visit www.e-benchmarksstudy.com.

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1. In the fall of 2006, M+R Strategic Services did further research on the decline in open rates. Research is available at www.mrss.com/news/Why_Open_Rates_Are_Dropping_M-R_Strategic_Services.pdf.

Nonprofit Advocacy and Fundraising Email Metrics[1]

		All Partners	Environmental	Rights	International Aid
Open Rate	Advocacy	26%	26%	25%	26%
	Fundraising	23%	22%	23%	23%
Page-Completion Rate	Advocacy	84%	91%	81%	79%
	Fundraising	22%	32%	7%	33%
Click-Through Rate	Advocacy	9%	13%	7%	8%
	Fundraising	1.5%	0.8%	2.1%	1.7%
Response Rate	Advocacy	10%	14%	7%	7%
	Fundraising	0.3%	0.2%	0.2%	0.6%

1. Some click-through rates are higher than response rates. This is because messages in the click-through pool included all the links (not just those that lead to an advocacy action or donation form), while the messages in the response pool included only messages in which the link led to a fill-out form.

Constituency Building and Policy Work: Three Paradigms

Janice Hirota and Robin Jacobowitz describe three paradigms that show how constituency building and policy change efforts can work together to achieve sustainable and systemic reform.

Sustainable and systemic school reform demands the integration of policy work and constituency engagement.[1] That is the assertion of the Donors' Education Collaborative (DEC) Initiative in New York City.[2] The Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago conducted a 6-year evaluation of the DEC Initiative[3] and found that, in combining constituency building with policy work, advocates aim to do more than just achieve specific reform policies; they also seek to foster the public's will to support and monitor policy implementation, demand accountability, and conduct ongoing oversight in order to ensure quality and equitable education for all children.[4]

This article draws most heavily on three DEC projects:[5]

- *Equity Reform Project*: Creating a citizens' mandate in New York state for school finance reform linked to finance equity litigation
- *Parent Organizing Consortium*: Building a citywide association of grassroots organizations to bring parent voices into education decision making and reform
- *Transforming Education for New York's Newest*: Engaging immigrant parents and students in education issues and actions

Methodology

The evaluation used a grounded theory approach, in which theory about the phenomenon being studied—in this case, the integration

The three paradigms offer a framework for evaluating advocacy or reform efforts that have constituency building at their core.

of constituency building into policy work—was generated from evaluation data. This approach involved semistructured and open-ended interviews with multiple respondent groups, including:

- Project actors, such as staff, representatives from partnering organizations, parents, and forum sponsors
- Individuals related tangentially to projects and also directly affected by them, such as journalists and staffs in school districts or borough presidents' offices.
- Projects' intended audiences, such as New York City Board of Education administrators, community-based or reform group staff, or city and state elected officials.
- Critical observers of New York City public schools with extensive knowledge about and professional experience with education and the school system, policy and systems reform efforts, and varying institutional and constituency perspectives.

Evaluation methodology also included participant and nonparticipant observation in project events, such as strategy meetings, public events, and trainings; and review of project-generated and external artifacts, such as media coverage, city and state budgets, and New York City Board of Education meeting minutes.

The Three Paradigms

The study's findings support three paradigms, illustrated in the box on page 27. These paradigms demonstrate how policy work and constituency building can operate in tandem, informing and strengthening one another. Engaged constituencies bring on-the-ground goals, insights, and concerns to policy debates, thus contributing substantively to the shape and meaning of reform, as well as to its visibility and legitimacy. Broad-based community and organizational involvement in a reform effort can create the necessary ongoing and long-term continuity to sustain change in bureaucratized, entrenched, and often highly political public systems such as public education.

Each paradigm reflects a different stage of progress toward policy reform. The diagrams should be read from left to right; the bottom tier depicts the project's broad strategy, while the middle and top tiers present successive levels of work. In addition, each paradigm as a whole reflects a different stage of progress toward policy reform. Taken together, the paradigms show an evolution from early stages of policy change work—broadening constituencies—to later stages, in which constituent capacity is built and the reform landscape is altered.

Paradigm 1: Efforts at systemic change that draw on solid constituency support can be both effective and sustained. Such support works best when it reflects a large and diverse stakeholder base, has a meaningful connection to the reform issue at hand, and links communities with policymakers. Projects that aim to engage stakeholders with an eye to these multiple concerns can employ

1. Hirota, J. M., &. Jacobs, L. E. (2003). *Vital voices: Building constituencies for public school reform*. New York: Academy for Educational Development and Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago; Mediratta, K., Fruchter, N., &. Lewis, A. C. (2002). *Organizing for school reform: How communities are finding their voice and reclaiming their public schools*. New York: Institute for Education and Social Policy, New York University.
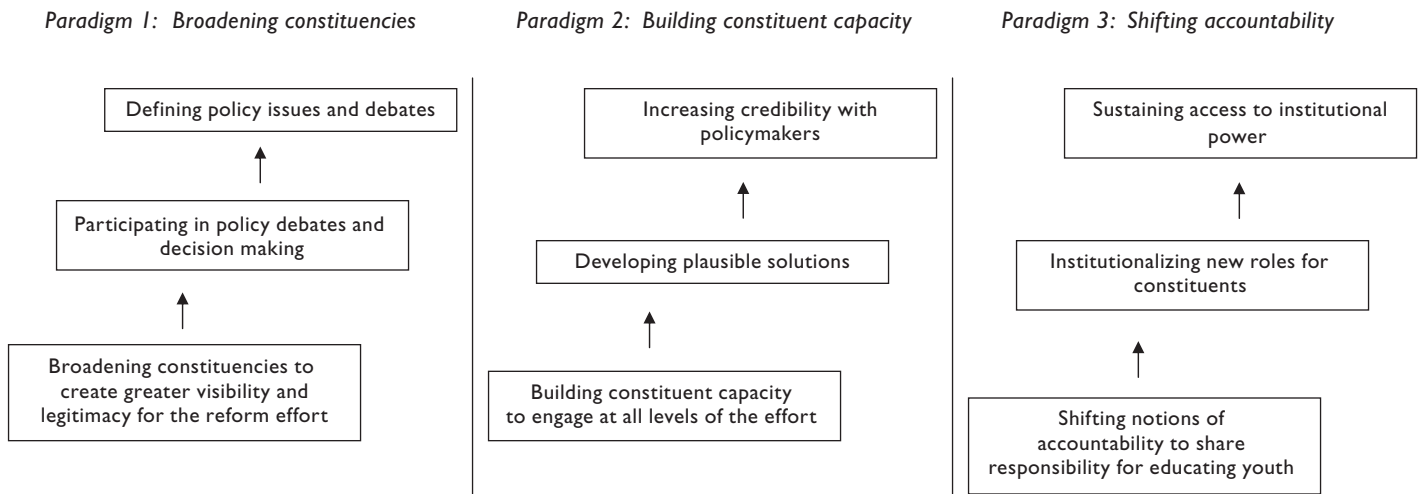2. The Donors' Education Collaborative (DEC), comprised of nearly two dozen New York City nonprofit and corporate foundations, began funding education reform projects in 1995, initially for 6 years. However, continuing and new DEC members extended their support for original and new projects into 2007 due to their strong commitment to education reform and collaborative funding.
3. Hirota, J. M., Jacobowitz, R., & Brown, P. (2004). *Pathways to school reform: Integrating constituency building and policy work*. Chicago: Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago.
4. Hirota & Jacobs, 2003; Gold, E., Simon, E., & Brown, C. (2002). *Successful community organizing for school reform and strong neighborhoods, strong schools: A comprehensive series of reports on the findings of the indicators project on education organizing*. Chicago: Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform.; Hirota, J. M., Jacobowitz, R., & Brown. P. (2000). *The Donors' Education Collaborative: Strategies for systemic school reform*. Chicago: Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago; Mediratta, et al., 2002.
5. Collaborating organizations, with quite different players, philosophies, strategies, and school reform goals, headed each of the three DEC projects described in this article.

How Policy Work and Constituency Building Work in Tandem: Three Paradigms

Paradigm 1: Broadening constituencies

```
Defining policy issues and debates
              ↑
Participating in policy debates and
        decision making
              ↑
Broadening constituencies to
create greater visibility and
legitimacy for the reform effort
```

Paradigm 2: Building constituent capacity

```
Increasing credibility with
        policymakers
              ↑
Developing plausible solutions
              ↑
Building constituent capacity
to engage at all levels of the effort
```

Paradigm 3: Shifting accountability

```
Sustaining access to institutional
           power
              ↑
Institutionalizing new roles for
         constituents
              ↑
Shifting notions of
accountability to share
responsibility for educating youth
```

constituency building and policy work iteratively to further systemic reform. Substantial stakeholder presence fortifies a project's policy voice and, in turn, fuels the project's constituency building by attracting more stakeholders. In this way, direct constituency involvement can lend authority, credibility, and legitimacy to a specified goal, thereby boosting a reform effort's policy influence. Similarly, a constituency that connects the community with policymakers creates a critical link between the need for reform and the power to respond.

Paradigm 2: "Constituency support" refers to the extent and diversity of support and also to its capacity and depth. Yet, in order to shape public dialogue and affect policy, constituents must be able to transform this understanding into credible solutions to crucial policy problems. In developing such solutions, constituents transform interactions with policymakers into problem-solving exercises. Solving these problems, in turn, enhances constituents' influence on both public and policy dialogues. Extensive training of constituents, analyses of data, and joining of local issues with systemic policy concerns can contribute to a project's capacity to act in the public sphere.

Paradigm 3: Accountability—for instance, the accountability of particular school administrators and teachers, as well as the accountability of structures and processes—is a touchstone for many reform efforts meant to ensure inclusion of multiple and relevant constituencies. Within this context, school reformers are developing ways to expand democratic participation, such as promoting transparency in planning, monitoring, and assessing school development; using data to analyze policy decisions; and creating ways to bring parents and others into policy debates and decision making.

Applying the Three Paradigms

The three Donors' Education Collaborative projects demonstrate that when successfully implemented, the strategy components—

building constituencies and formulating and advocating for policy reform—interact in dynamic and dialectical ways. Over the 6-year evaluation, the projects became conduits through which community voices connected with education policy. The projects enlarged, diversified, and strengthened individual and organizational participation in school reform advocacy. At the same time, these enhanced constituent bases engendered a legitimacy and visibility that allowed projects to access and influence the policy arena and continue to attract deeply involved constituents to the reform effort. DEC projects became in themselves a means of linking communities with policy debates in ways that simultaneously strengthened constituent bases and built an infrastructure to support policy reform.

Second, such work calls for a staged strategy, or the planned use of interim outcomes as the platform for further strategic action. The paradigms illustrate successfully implemented staged strategizing. At times, reformers draw on experience and long-term perspectives to plan multiple stages into the future. More often, such strategizing occurs as outcomes are achieved. Analysis and articulation can help clarify—for practitioners as well as constituents, funders, and policymakers—the vital and varied intersection between constituency building and policy work and its potentially compelling force.

Finally, the three paradigms offer a framework for evaluating advocacy or reform efforts that have constituency building at their core. They can function like a theory of change, with evaluations examining progress both within and across each paradigm.

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An Emerging Framework for Assessing Nonprofit Networks

Based on their new handbook Net Gains, *Madeleine Taylor and Peter Plastrik offer guidance on how to evaluate nonprofit networks that are used to achieve social change goals.*

Working with dozens of nonprofit networks has made one thing clear to us: You cannot evaluate the performance of nonprofit networks using the same framework traditionally used to evaluate nonprofit organizations. For the past 4 years, we have studied network science—which draws on physics, anthropology, and other disciplines—and looked at a cross section of network builders and funders both in the literature and in the field. From that research, a network evaluation framework emerged. We discuss that framework in *Net Gains*, a handbook for nonprofit network builders.

Our framework for assessing the performance of nonprofit networks is built on three elements: (a) understanding what is unique about networks and how they differ fundamentally from organizations; (b) recognizing that networks unleash dynamics and take evolutionary paths that lead to network effects and structures—in a complex process that can be anticipated, managed, and measured; and (c) customizing evaluation of networks to the nature and needs of the network. *Net Gains* (available for free at www.in4c.net) responds to social change agents' growing interest in becoming more intentional about shaping networks in order to achieve greater impact and effectiveness.

Drawing from the *Net Gains* chapter on evaluating networks, we summarize below our findings and recommendations.

The Unique Characteristics of Networks

Networks are not organizations, and the differences between the two are crucial to effective evaluation. Unlike organizations, networks create distinctive *network effects*. Four network effects are useful to nonprofit networks in particular:

1. *Rapid growth and diffusion.* A network grows rapidly as new members provide access to additional connections, thus enabling the network to diffuse information, ideas, and other resources more and more widely through its links.
2. *"Small-world" reach.* A network creates remarkably short "pathways" between individuals separated by geographic or social distance, bringing people together efficiently and in unexpected combinations.
3. *Adaptive capacity.* A network assembles capacities and disassembles them with relative ease, responding nimbly to new opportunities and challenges.
4. *Resilience.* A network withstands stresses, such as the dissolution of one or more links, because its nodes quickly reorganize around disruptions or bottlenecks without a significant decline in functionality.

The Evolutionary Path of Networks

To evaluate a network, you have to know what effects it is intended produce and whether or not those effects occur. Understanding how networks use the power of connectivity inherent in networks to create effects can also aid in evaluation. Our research found that many networks move through a distinct developmental path:

1. *Connection.* All networks start by *connecting* people or organizations (nodes) with each other.
2. *Alignment.* Networks build on connections to create a shared value proposition and activity, such as learning.
3. *Production.* Networks build on connections and alignment to organize the production of a particular result.

As it follows this developmental path, a network's *structure*—that is, the distinct pattern of linkages that takes shape due to repeated connections and other factors—evolves. A hub-and-spoke structure—in which one node connects to all the other nodes in the network, but those nodes do not connect to each other—is one common network structure. But other structures (e.g., dense cluster, multiple hub) exist, and in different ways, each structure enables the effectiveness and efficiency of flows within a network.[1]

Customizing Evaluation for Networks

Given the unique characteristics and evolution of networks, we recommend the following ways to customize evaluation:

1. *Start by asking, "Why a network?"* In other words, what is the network theory of change? What do the organizers hope to accomplish with this network that they cannot accomplish with an organization? The organizers of a policy network that we work with invest in network approaches because they anticipate it will increase access to resources (e.g., people with information, advice, and connections); increase influence on policy decision makers; and result in more sophisticated policy analysis and advocacy. Evaluation of the network is driven by this theory of change.
2. *Assess multiple dimensions of the network—the results it is producing, how it (as a network) produces them, and the development of the network itself.* Network evaluation should be as much concerned with evaluating progress in the development of the network as it is focused on outcomes for stakeholders.
3. *Focus in on two key elements of a network: its connectivity and health.* Connectivity is the blood of a network. What is flowing through the network—information and other resources? What is the configuration—the structure—of nodes and links? How efficient are the connections the network makes? *Network health* depends on more than just a network's connections. Ask what enabling conditions the network must establish to achieve and sustain its desired effects.
4. *Be wary of rigid assessment frameworks that stifle creative impulses and ignore emerging initiatives and solutions.* Net-

1. Valdis Krebs and June Holley trace a four-stage structural evolution for networks, from "separated clusters" to "hub-and-spoke" to "multiple-hub" to "core-periphery." Krebs, V., & Holley, J. (2002–2006). *Building smart communities through network weaving.* Available at www.orgnet.com

Evaluating an Issue's Position on the Policy Agenda:
The Bellwether Methodology

Policy issues need both visibility and momentum to be transformed into political action. Harvard Family Research Project's bellwether methodology helps evaluators assess if both characteristics are emerging.

Most advocacy and policy change strategies are based on the notion that getting a policy issue or proposal recognized as an "idea whose time has come" requires that it be a high priority on the policy agenda. To move a policy issue onto the "short list" of issues receiving serious attention, advocates must persuade decision makers to attend to their issue over other pressing issues vying for their attention.

Assessing advocates' success in generating the "buzz" necessary to land an issue near the top of the policy agenda is a substantial evaluation challenge. It is difficult to gauge what issues are on the agenda, much less how they got there and how they are perceived. In response to this challenge, Harvard Family Research Project (HFRP) developed the *bellwether methodology*.

The bellwether methodology determines where an issue is positioned in the policy agenda queue, how lawmakers and other influentials are thinking and talking about it, and how likely they are to act on it. HFRP developed the methodology as part of its evaluation of the David and Lucile Packard Foundation's grant-making program to advance universal preschool in California. HFRP used the methodology to track whether advocacy efforts were gaining traction toward the goal of getting universal preschool onto the state-level policy agenda.

What Are Bellwethers?

By definition, bellwethers are gauges of future trends or predictors of future events. In the bellwether methodology, "bellwethers" are influential people in the public and private sectors whose positions require that they be 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.

For HFRP's evaluation, bellwethers included six groups: a) policymakers (legislative and executive), b) advocates, c) think tanks/academia, d) media, e) business representatives, and f) funders. Individual bellwethers were selected based on a range of characteristics, including their content expertise, geographic diversity, gender and ethnic diversity, partisan representation (for legislators), and cross-sector (public and private) experience.

How Does the Methodology Work?

The methodology involves structured interviews with bellwethers, but with an important twist. Instead of asking directly whether a specific issue is on the policy agenda, interview questions initially create room for a wide range of unprompted responses. Bellwethers are unaware before the interview that questions will focus on the *specific* policy issue of interest. They are informed about what the interview will generally cover but are not given specific details.

This approach ensures that bellwethers' responses are authentic and unprompted.

For example, for HFRP's evaluation of preschool policy in California, bellwethers were aware that the interview would focus on education policy for children in California. Interviews began by asking, "Thinking about policy issues *in general*—not just issues related to children—what three issues or priorities do you think are at the top of the policy agenda in California right now?" Bellwethers provided a range of responses, giving a more authentic perspective on the position of universal preschool in the policy agenda. As the interview went on, questions narrowed to focus on more specific information on the policy issue of interest (see text box). HFRP also included specific questions about messaging and effective promotional activities related to universal preschool.

How Are Data Analyzed and Used?

The bellwether methodology provides both summative data about an advocacy strategy's success to date and formative data for shaping its future. Bellwether data indicate where an issue stands on the policy agenda and how effectively advocates have leveraged their access to increase an issue's visibility and sense of urgency.

Opportunities for real-time learning, including looking at competing issues and analyzing current advocacy strategy and potential areas for improvement, are also created. For example, HFRP examined what kinds of messaging and advocacy approaches made the most lasting impressions on bellwethers. HFRP also summarized bellwethers' assessments of the possibility of political movement on universal preschool in the near future and highlighted opportunities for learning by creating an opportunity for dialogue around midcourse advocacy strategy adjustments.

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Bellwether Interview Protocol: Sample Questions

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

Evaluating Advocates' Spheres of Influence
With Domain Leaders

The evaluation of the Center for Tobacco-Free Kids gathered data from a wide range of the audiences that the advocacy organization targets in order to influence public policy.

Evaluators face a difficult challenge in assessing the effectiveness of advocacy campaigns designed to influence policy. Methods must extend beyond traditional opinion polling and quantitative measurement to capture the qualitative influence that advocacy activities have on policy leaders' thinking and positions. Evaluators also must consider the broad range of audiences and domains that advocates target to inform policy. Advocacy typically involves much more than attempts to reach elected officials directly; it also involves working strategically with the many groups and individuals who play roles in and influence the policy process.

Several years ago, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) commissioned The Lewin Group to evaluate a key RWJF grantee, the Center for Tobacco-Free Kids[1] (the Center), a national advocacy leader and resource on tobacco control. Begun in 1995, the Center attempts to influence public attitudes and policies on tobacco for the purpose of preventing children from smoking, helping smokers to quit, and protecting everyone from secondhand smoke. The Center promotes the visibility of tobacco issues in the media, educates policymakers, and partners with state and grassroots advocacy groups to inform policy at the state and federal levels.

The evaluation's goal was to investigate the Center's role in tobacco control advocacy, its strengths and weaknesses, and opportunities for future growth. In response to the challenges posed by evaluating advocacy efforts, The Lewin Group and RWJF developed an evaluation approach that examined questions about the Center with *domain leaders* connected to tobacco control issues.

Who Are Domain Leaders?

Like most advocacy organizations, the Center works with leaders in a range of ways and across a variety of domains—including government, media, research, and state and national advocacy. Individuals and organizations working in these domains are key players in the policy process, influencing the policy agenda and each other in interconnected ways. From these domain leaders, The Lewin Group sought to capture perspectives on the Center's effectiveness.

The evaluation targeted domain leaders who were connected to tobacco control efforts. The Lewin Group selected these leaders—who were often aware of the Center's work and who included Center critics—based on expert key informant suggestions. Domain leaders in this evaluation included:

- Senior federal officials working on tobacco issues
- Journalists covering tobacco issues

1. The Center also is known as the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids.

- National tobacco control advocates
- State tobacco control advocates
- Researchers focused on tobacco issues
- RWJF staff focused on tobacco issues.
- Other Center funders
- Center board members and staff

Methodology

The evaluation approach was developed with guidance from RWJF staff and an expert panel of advisors that included three substantive domain experts who worked closely with The Lewin Group on the evaluation. Almost 70 semistructured telephone interviews were conducted with domain leaders. The three substantive domain experts conducted interviews with federal policymakers and state advocacy groups; senior Lewin Group staff conducted all others. Interview participants knew that the interview's purpose was to talk about the Center's work. Questions covered:

- Familiarity with and nature of interactions with the Center
- Sources for accessing tobacco information
- Utility of the Center's services and information resources
- The Center's perceived contributions and accomplishments
- Recommendations for Center improvements

All leaders were asked to describe their interaction with the Center and to provide feedback on ways the Center might improve both its relationship with the domain leaders and the Center's influence in the broader policy arena. Protocols for each group differed but featured some common questions so that responses could be compared across domains. These extensive interview protocols, which included specific questions about the Center's activities, provided rich data about the Center's positioning in the tobacco control field.

Data were analyzed thematically both within and across domains. Findings were reported separately for government officials, media, state advocates, national advocates, researchers, and RWJF staff.

Advocates typically target multiple leverage points in the policy process. Their effectiveness with audiences at each point can make a substantial difference in their ultimate effects on policy. By seeking the full array of domain leader perspectives in the Center for Tobacco-Free Kids' intended sphere of influence, the evaluation was able to contribute data on multiple facets of the Center's advocacy strategy, including media outreach, research, and coalition and constituency building.

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Evaluation and Interaction

impacted a country's Ministry of Education, which, in turn, led to major education reforms that had far-reaching results? Systemic changes have happened; we're just not sharing them effectively with each other, with the public, and with policymakers.

Also, at the sector level, some feel that the international development and humanitarian sector is too self-serving or predictable in its advocacy. InterAction has been sensitive to that and has tried to balance the positions we take, and we're curious about our sector's progress in countering that perception.

InterAction is standards based. How are you using member standards to promote evaluation?

We believe in integrating sound evaluation throughout our organizations. At the same time, we support strategic evaluation, which means selectively allocating scarce resources to evaluating high-priority activities at appropriate times. One way we can promote this approach network-wide is through our standards.

Fifteen years ago, our members developed standards in the areas of governance, finance, communications with the U.S. public, management practice, human resources, and program and public policy. NGOs must comply with these standards to become and remain members. More recently, our members developed a *Position Statement on Demonstrating NGO Effectiveness* that includes evaluation principles (see text box). Now we're building those principles into our new member standards.

Members will need support to meet these evaluation standards. How will you do that?

Our working group on monitoring and program effectiveness is looking at the ways in which the alliance and individual members can assess impact, including the impact of advocacy. We're also trying to become a community of practice. The working group is asking members in different areas to share how they measure their impact. Our goal is to become a repository of evaluation ideas and measures so that our members can learn from one another and assess the impact of their own work and advocacy.

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InterAction Evaluation Principles

Each InterAction member will:

1. Articulate its own criteria for success in bringing about meaningful changes in people's lives, both in terms of its mission and in terms of major program goals.
2. Regularly evaluate its progress towards such success.
3. Mainstream relevant monitoring and evaluation in agency policy, systems and culture.
4. Allocate adequate financial and human resources for its strategic evaluation needs.
5. Collaborate with partners and stakeholders in developing mutually satisfying goals, methods, and indicators for project and program activities.

The American Evaluation Association (AEA) is **launching a new Topical Interest Group (TIG)** on evaluating advocacy and policy change. The new TIG will promote evaluation in this area and facilitate communication, learning, and support among evaluators who are interested or working in the field. Specifically, the TIG will aim to raise the profile and professionalism of advocacy and policy change evaluation; create an opportunity for ongoing information exchange; and expose members to new evaluation resources, theories, methods, and professional development opportunities. For more information, contact Julia Coffman at jcoffman @evaluationexchange.org.

The Center for Outcomes at the Rensselaerville Institute in New York, in partnership with the Washington, DC-based Alliance for Justice, offers an **Outcomes for Advocacy workshop** that introduces advocates and funders to outcome tools that shift the focus from what advocates produce and disseminate (e.g., publications, policy papers, awareness campaigns, media messages) to what their audiences actually do with the information when they get it. Workshop participants receive case studies, impact verification techniques, ways to define and hit influence targets, and other practical assistance. www.rinstitute.org/center4outcomes

Assessing Nonprofit Networks

works need room to grow and change and the freedom to produce unanticipated results. Evaluation processes should inform network stakeholders as they make decisions about the network but should not become a "straightjacket" that binds the network to following a detailed plan.

5. *Tap other networks to gain perspective about how your network is doing.* Some networks turn to other network practitioners to assess their work and explore possible improvements. They take advantage of the experience of people who have been in their shoes and who can take a look at their network practice and offer honest feedback.

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Ten Takeaways on Evaluating Advocacy and Policy Change

HFRP summarizes key observations raised in this issue of The Evaluation Exchange. *Note that the focus here is on advocacy that informs public policy at the local, state, or federal levels.*

1. *Advocacy evaluation has become a burgeoning field.* Advocacy that influences or informs policy has the potential to achieve large-scale results for individuals, families, and communities. Consequently, there is much interest in understanding how to make advocacy more effective. While advocacy evaluation was previously considered "too hard to measure," enterprising evaluators, nonprofits, and funders are now tackling the advocacy evaluation challenge and are sharing their ideas and innovations.

2. *Advocacy evaluation is particularly challenging when approached with a traditional program evaluation mindset.* Evaluation approaches need to adjust to the differences between advocacy and other types of programs or services. For example, advocacy strategy typically evolves over time, *and activities and their desired outcomes can shift quickly.*

3. *The goals of advocacy and policy change efforts—that is, whether a policy or appropriation was achieved—typically are easy to measure.* The real challenge is assessing what happens along the way and what can be learned from that journey.

4. *Many funders' interest in advocacy evaluation is driven by a desire to help advocates continuously improve their work, rather than to prove that advocacy is a worthy investment.* At the same time, funders not currently engaging in advocacy may need examples from evaluation that convinces them of the latter.

5. *Advocates must often become their own evaluators.* Because of their organizational size and available resources, evaluation for many advocates requires *internal* monitoring and tracking of key measures rather than external evaluation.

6. *External evaluators can play critical roles.* In the advocacy and policy change field, external evaluators are commonly used for several purposes—helping advocates design their internal tracking systems; assessing advocates' influence on key constituencies (e.g., policymakers, media, business, voters); or assessing larger scale collaborative efforts involving multiple organizations working toward a similar policy purpose.

7. *Context is important.* The same result on the same measure may mean success for one advocacy effort but disappointment for another. What measures are chosen and how they are interpreted depends on the organization doing the advocacy and its experience with advocacy, the difficulty of the issue given the current policy and economic climate, and the advocacy strategy.

8. *Theories of change and logic models that help drive advocacy evaluation should be grounded in theories about the policy process.* This includes understanding the various leverage points and audiences that advocates may affect to move policy forward.

9. *Measures must mean something.* Advocates are growing sophisticated in their use of email and other social media to conduct electronic advocacy. The field needs to avoid perfunctory measures of these new techniques and make sure that measures have interpretive value.

10. *Evaluation creativity is important.* Assessing advocates' influence in the policy process—in particular, their influence on policymakers' (and other key constituencies') thinking and decision making—often requires methodological creativity (examples of which are contained in this issue).

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