

*a guide to*  
**MEASURING ADVOCACY AND POLICY**

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- prepared for the
- Annie E. Casey Foundation
- by Organizational Research Services
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*Organizational Research Services (ORS), an independent Seattle-based research and evaluation firm, was founded in 1989 by Jane Reisman, Ph.D. Its mission is to guide and support outcome-based planning and evaluation in the philanthropic, non-profit and public sectors by providing the following consultation services: evaluation, coaching/technical assistance, training and workshops, outcome-based strategic planning, outcome-based contracting/grantmaking and customized manuals and guides. ORS has been working to support the evaluation efforts of the Annie E. Casey Foundation since 2001. The authors for this guide are Jane Reisman, Anne Gienapp and Sarah Stachowiak and production and editing assistance were provided by RobRoy Erickson and Nancy Plantholt.*

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*The Annie E. Casey Foundation is a private charitable organization dedicated to helping build better futures for disadvantaged children in the United States. It was established in 1948 by Jim Casey, one of the founders of UPS, and his siblings, who named the Foundation in honor of their mother. The primary mission of the Foundation is to foster public policies, human-service reforms, and community supports that more effectively meet the needs of today's vulnerable children and families. In pursuit of this goal, the Foundation makes grants that help states, cities, and neighborhoods fashion more innovative, cost-effective responses to these needs. For more information, visit the Foundation's website at [www.aecf.org](http://www.aecf.org).*

# **A GUIDE TO MEASURING ADVOCACY AND POLICY**

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FUNDED BY AND PREPARED FOR

**ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION**

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# INTRODUCTION

## PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE

As more foundations and non-profits have engaged in advocacy and policy work to address public issues and effect social change, there is a growing desire to gauge the impact of investments in this area. How to evaluate the effectiveness of advocacy and policy work is an emerging question of interest within the philanthropic and non-profit audiences. Answering that question, however, has proven difficult because relatively few instructive resources exist to help those who wish to measure progress in this area.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation commissioned this guide to help determine meaningful ways to measure and evaluate the impact of its advocacy and public policy grantmaking. Although a primary intent of this guide is to contribute practical guidance to the Annie E. Casey Foundation regarding evaluation of the foundation's investments, this guide also serves as a broad call to grantmakers to build and advance the field of evaluation in this area.

In the past decade, a number of foundations have adopted program evaluation as a tool to gauge the effectiveness of their grantmaking efforts. Many foundations and grantees who are engaged in the practice of evaluation have discovered that program evaluation can yield enormous benefits. Evaluation can be used as a tool to inform and guide strategic planning, program implementation and program management. As some foundations have shifted their grantmaking to advocacy and policy work, those who had experienced the benefits of evaluation once again hoped to use evaluation as a tool to guide planning and gauge effectiveness. However, as foundation officers quickly discovered, there are no common approaches or accepted practices regarding the evaluation of grantmaking in the area of advocacy and policy change.

This guide provides some perspective on where the field of philanthropy has been with regard to evaluation of advocacy and policy and also acknowledges the unique issues and challenges associated with measuring these efforts. In addition, this guide serves as an invitation to grantmakers to engage in and expand thinking about evaluation as it relates to advocacy and policy efforts. As seriously as many grantmakers take their investments in this area, foundations should also take seriously the need to advance evaluation of advocacy and policy work. Grantmakers are invited to engage in the discussion about how best to approach measurement in this area, what can be learned from evaluation efforts and how learnings might be applied. With broad engagement in this discussion, we can identify language, agree on approaches, and ultimately accept and adopt standards of practice so that evaluation can be used strategically to strengthen advocacy and policy efforts.

The overall purpose of this guide is twofold. To help grantmakers think about and talk about measurement of advocacy and policy, this guide puts forth a **framework** for naming outcomes associated with advocacy and policy work as well as **directions** for evaluation design. The framework is intended to provide a common way to identify and talk about outcomes, providing philanthropic and non-profit audiences an opportunity to react to, refine and adopt the outcome categories presented. In addition, grantmakers can consider some key directions for evaluation design that include a broad range of methodologies, intensities, audiences, timeframes and purposes.

## Introduction

1. Specifically, this guide presents a framework for evaluating advocacy and policy efforts that achieves the following: names specific outcome areas that describe the types of changes for individuals or within systems that are likely to occur as a result of advocacy and policy change efforts.
2. Lays out considerations intended to advance thinking about directions and standards for evaluation practice in the area of advocacy and policy work.

This framework is presented within the context of current evaluation efforts in this area, which can generally be characterized as nascent and challenging.

The hope is that this framework allows for wider acknowledgement about the following:

- ◆ How evaluation fits in the world of advocacy and policy;
- ◆ Greater acceptance of the role of evaluation for strategic learning; and
- ◆ More confidence about undertaking evaluation in this area.

Every foundation shares the desire that its grantmaking nurture strong results. Together, foundations can acknowledge how the traditional evaluation purposes and processes that some have employed may not be a good match for advocacy and policy work. Together, foundations can try out new frameworks and develop a more informed evaluation practice. By being intentional about working together, foundations can help to advance the field of evaluation practice in addition to advancing their own missions.

As a companion to this guide, ORS has collected examples of measurement tools that are applicable to advocacy and policy work. [A Handbook of Data Collection Tools: Companion to A Guide to Measuring Advocacy and Policy](#) is available at [www.organizationalresearch.com](http://www.organizationalresearch.com) and [www.aecf.org](http://www.aecf.org). It is also available as an online resource at [www.innonet.org](http://www.innonet.org).

## RESPONSE TO A NEED

The general field of evaluation offers an extensive literature that provides both theoretical and practical examples of how social scientific inquiry can be applied to outcome measurement for an array of programs, interventions and initiatives. The evaluation literature also documents a range of outcomes reflecting commonly accepted types of changes that are likely to occur for individuals, families or communities as a result of implementing various programs and initiatives. The literature provides numerous examples of how certain kinds of outcomes—such as changes in knowledge, attitudes, skills, behaviors or conditions—match with certain kinds of strategies. With advocacy and policy work, however, there are no such commonly agreed upon outcome categories. As such, the question “what to measure?” has challenged those interested in evaluating advocacy and policy change efforts.

Additionally, there is very little that has been written or discussed regarding how traditional evaluation approaches specifically apply to the measurement of advocacy and policy work. The field is relatively new, and, as stated in a recent report by Blueprint Research and Design, there are no standards of practice, acknowledged best practices, nor commonly used methods or tools.<sup>1</sup> While there are a few examples of how traditional evaluation methods have been applied to the measurement of advocacy and policy work, the evaluation literature offers little to guide foundations and non-profits. The Blueprint report, commissioned by the California

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<sup>1</sup> Guthrie, K., Louie, J., David, T. & Crystal-Foster, C. (2005). *The Challenge of Assessing Advocacy: Strategies for a Prospective Approach to Evaluating Policy Change and Advocacy*. Prepared for The California Endowment. Woodland Hills, California: The California Endowment.



Endowment, summarizes the state of the field: “After conducting 20 interviews with evaluation experts and reviewing a broad sampling of relevant reports...there is no particular methodology, set of metrics or tools to measure efficacy of advocacy grantmaking in widespread use.”<sup>2</sup>

The result of this void is a limited fund of knowledge about what constitutes effective advocacy and policy work, as well as what expectations are meaningful and appropriate for investments in advocacy and policy work. For grantmakers, this has led to uncertainty about where and how they might make effective investments in advocacy and policy work, what kinds of outcomes are possible or realistic, and what kinds of strategic adjustments in programmatic approaches or funding allocations might be needed. Echoing the desire of other foundations that want to understand whether, how and why meaningful changes occur as a result of investments and activities undertaken in the public policy arena, the President and CEO of the California Endowment, Dr. Robert K. Ross, explained why the Endowment commissioned the Blueprint report, noting the foundation sought guidance in “developing an understanding about the issues in policy change evaluation...and an approach to strengthening the foundation’s public policy change evaluation practice.”<sup>3</sup>

Part of the desire to strengthen evaluation practice regarding advocacy and policy change work comes from foundation trustees, donors and investors who are demanding greater accountability from those funded to engage in policy change work. Many foundations now routinely request that grantees document what progress has been made or what results were achieved to show that investments were sound or that returns were acceptable. And, though more funders stress the importance of evaluation, many advocacy organizations also want to know whether they have made strategic progress in their work and what level of progress constitutes a “win” or significant incremental accomplishment on the way to a longer-term policy or social change goal. This means having some process in place by which to assess progress to ensure that, as one foundation executive stated, “you’re not missing important pieces of the puzzle and you’re moving towards the goal.”<sup>4</sup>

This guide is meant to advance the emerging conversation about how to measure advocacy and policy change work by providing a consistent language to codify and frame outcomes associated with advocacy and policy work, as well as potential research directions and tools.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Krumboltz A. Executive Director, The Brainerd Foundation. (Personal communication, January 2005.)

## INTENDED AUDIENCES

The primary audience for this guide is foundation officers and other people or groups who make grants to and/or partner with advocacy organizations.

Others who may directly benefit from this guide include the following:

- ◆ Non-profit organizations engaged in advocacy and policy work;
- ◆ Community coalitions engaged in advocacy and policy work; and
- ◆ Evaluators who are involved with measurement of advocacy and policy work.

In short, this guide will be useful for all those parties who wish to do the following:

- ◆ Gauge the progress and effectiveness of their advocacy and policy work;
- ◆ Learn what is working and what needs to change regarding investments and strategies;
- ◆ Build collective knowledge about how to most effectively create effective pathways for successful advocacy and policy efforts;
- ◆ Establish accountability for both incremental and long-term changes in public policy, as well as social and environmental conditions; and
- ◆ Advance the field of evaluation for advocacy and policy work.

## ROADMAP TO THIS MANUAL

The guide is presented in two main sections:

- ◆ **Section 1** is an overview of the context for measurement of advocacy and policy work, including the inherent evaluation challenges.
- ◆ **Section 2** presents a menu of outcome categories which describe changes that may result from advocacy and policy work and discusses evaluation design issues that relate to outcome selection. This section also outlines several factors that influence the selection of an appropriate evaluation design and provides both a case example and examples of data collection tools.

In addition, [A Handbook of Data Collection Tools: Companion to A Guide to Measuring Advocacy and Policy](#) is available at [www.organizationalresearch.com](http://www.organizationalresearch.com) and [www.aecf.org](http://www.aecf.org). It is also available as an online resource at [www.innonet.org](http://www.innonet.org). This interactive compendium allows users to review specific data collection approaches and examples of measurement tools that correspond to the menu of outcome categories presented in Section 2. Users can easily adapt data collection tools to match their own evaluation efforts.

Each section of this manual contains instructive and practical information for those involved in many different aspects of advocacy and policy change work. However, you may find certain sections of this manual more helpful, depending on your particular needs, interests and perspective.

*If you are trying to determine an overall strategy to evaluate advocacy and policy change efforts, Sections 1 and 2 may help you to frame your thinking and approach.*

*If you represent an advocacy organization and are trying to determine what you might measure to demonstrate the results of your work*, the outcome categories and examples presented in Section 2 may help you to gain insights.

*If you represent an organization trying to plan how you might implement evaluation of your advocacy and policy change outcomes*, you may find the evaluation design and the tool examples in Section 2 most helpful, along with the supplemental compendium of tools.

## **SECTION 1**

### **Context of Measuring Advocacy and Policy Change Efforts**

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#### **MEASURING ADVOCACY AND POLICY CHANGE EFFORTS: A NEW EVALUATION PERSPECTIVE**

Increasingly during the past decade, shifts in strategic thinking have occurred within the philanthropic and non-profit sectors. Many foundations and non-profits recognize that “traditional” grantmaking practices, i.e., funding discrete programs and direct services, will never likely be enough to fully address the complexity and scale of social challenges, such as environmental degradation, disproportionate school achievement, child and family welfare, and poverty. While support for programs and services that provide immediate assistance and real benefits to those they serve is crucial, especially in the face of significant resource cutbacks among public programs and services, “just as crucial, and perhaps more so, is funding examinations of the underlying causes of human needs and the public and private strategies to meet them.”<sup>5</sup>

To keep with their missions to address public issues, many philanthropic efforts have sought to address social and environmental concerns not only by funding direct services, but also by looking further upstream to the conditions and policies that underlie these concerns. Ongoing program evaluation, including measurement of specific program outcomes, has played a significant role in guiding funders and grantees to look upstream. Perhaps reflection on program evaluation data has shed light on the limited reach of program and service efforts. Or, consideration of program efforts within a larger theory of change has illuminated the need for multi-faceted efforts that address broader outcomes encompassing changes for both individuals and families served as well as changes at a system or policy level.

#### **ADVOCACY AND POLICY WORK: EVALUATION CHALLENGES**

Because evaluation has proved to be a useful tool, many grantmakers seek to implement evaluation as they become involved in advocacy and policy change work. Yet organizations engaged in advocacy and public policy change efforts face many challenges when attempting to measure the effectiveness of their efforts. Some of these challenges are described below.

##### **LACK OF PRACTICAL GUIDANCE**

The field of evaluation in the area of advocacy and policy change is nascent, offering very few formally written documents that relate to approaches and methods.. To date, when evaluation of advocacy and policy work has even occurred at all, efforts can be best characterized as attempts, or even missteps. Some funders have focused on relatively narrow “output” measures—such as the number of newspaper articles printed or PSAs aired—that describe the reach of a particular campaign or public awareness initiative. Other funders have engaged in public policy work with overly ambitious expectations, such as striving for the passage of new legislation in the one- to three-year time frame typical of most grant awards. Still, other

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<sup>5</sup> Ridings, D.S., (1997). Feature: *Looking Upstream*. Foundation News & Commentary, 38, 3. Washington, D.C.: Retrieved September 28, 2004, from <http://www.foundationnews.org/CME/article.cfm?ID=2452>

fundors—holding to the gold standards of evaluation science as best practices—have used experimental designs, including such resource intensive methods as pre- and post-test surveys from a randomly sampled population group. Given the limited availability of examples and practical guidance, determining appropriate evaluation methods and practices has been difficult for foundations and non-profits.

## DIFFERING PERSPECTIVES ON THE ROLE OF EVALUATION

Besides limited guidance regarding how to best measure advocacy and policy work, other factors make evaluation in this area a difficult prospect. One of these factors is the belief among some advocacy organizations that their work cannot be measured and that any attempt to do so diminishes the power of their efforts. This cynical but widely held opinion is expressed in the following quote: *“Progressive funders constantly ask advocates and organizations to prove that our work results in policy change. They’d like us to draw a straight line between our activities and the change we seek, year after year, and they’d like us to walk down that line quickly. The fact that social movements that feed truly large scale policy change don’t work that way wouldn’t be so unfortunate if progressive elites weren’t so attached to that idea, forcing the flow of resources into very narrow channels.”*<sup>6</sup>

The measurement of advocacy and policy work exposes the differing views of many funders and those who work “on the front line” in advocacy organizations. The perspective of many foundation officers, executives and boards is often shaped by a desire for clear, documented results which provide evidence that the foundation is engaging in responsible and meaningful stewardship. In addition, foundations are frequently focused on the achievement of a specific policy change or system improvement goal. Evaluation plays a role by ensuring that expected goals and outcomes are identified and providing a process by which grantees can be held accountable. Many foundations also use evaluation processes as a way to determine what adjustments and improvements might be necessary to achieve the desired goals in either their own grantmaking practices or in grantees’ activities.

Some advocacy organizations, on the other hand, see their work as part of broad-scale social change efforts. While advocacy organizations may want to know that they are making progress, evaluation may be seen as limiting because this process involves committing to certain static outcomes that do not hold their relevancy in the dynamic, ever-changing course toward broad social change. Also, because focusing on long-term social change is what propels advocacy organizations, it may feel limiting to have work framed in terms of narrower, shorter-term outcomes. In determining best approaches to evaluation of advocacy and policy work, these differing viewpoints regarding the nature of advocacy and policy change work, as well as the purpose and role of evaluation, need to be more fully explored.

## METHODOLOGICAL CHALLENGES

The measurement of advocacy and policy work presents certain methodological challenges as well. The factors that make evaluation of advocacy and policy work complex and challenging are described in the 2005 Blueprint report. These include the role of external forces or conditions, attribution, a long time frame needed for changes to occur, shifting strategies and milestones, and grantee capacity and engagement.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Sen, R. (2006). Leading ‘La Marcha’. ThomasPaine.com. April 10. Retrieved April 11, 2006, from [http://www.tompaine.com/articles/2006/04/10/leading\\_la\\_marcha.php](http://www.tompaine.com/articles/2006/04/10/leading_la_marcha.php)

<sup>7</sup> Guthrie, K. et al., op. cit.

The combination of these factors means that the traditional social scientific methods which have served as the primary paradigm for program evaluations are often poor fits for advocacy and policy change efforts. The Alliance For Justice has pointed out that policy change is typically stimulated by numerous concurrent factors and many actors and, because change occurs over a long time horizon, “it can be difficult to show cause and effect between one specific organization’s advocacy activities and policy change.”<sup>8</sup> Therefore, standard social science methods that identify an independent variable and a specific set of dependent variables likely to affect change are not always well-suited for measurement of advocacy and policy work.

## **IDENTIFICATION OF OUTCOMES**

Another issue is the identification of realistic, meaningful outcomes. Typically, many foundations have administered their grantmaking in one- to three-year time frames, but, as noted above, policy and broader social change usually occurs in a much longer term. It is important to determine and find agreement about whether a foundation is working on a specific short-term change that is potentially achievable in a one- to three-year period, or whether a foundation is involved in a long-term process of policy or social change. To really know whether a long-term change in policy, population, social or environmental conditions occurred, philanthropic and non-profit audiences need to remain committed (in terms of both resources and on-the-ground work) for a long time.

A complicating factor is the dynamic nature of advocacy and policy work; contexts and key players are always changing. No matter how clearly an organization articulates a pathway to a desired long-term policy change goal, it would be virtually impossible to name, predict or explain all the variables that might be important within that change process.<sup>9</sup> What an organization thought was a realistic expectation for change last month may become totally unrealistic given new circumstances this month. A second consideration in the identification of outcomes concerns the typical way that many organizations have conceptualized program outcomes. Outcomes are typically expressed as “forward progress,” e.g., increases in skills, improved conditions. However, outcomes for advocacy and policy work might be “defensive” in nature, such as holding the line on bedrock human rights or enacting environmental protection legislation. Consider the insight offered by Washington State Representative Ed Murray regarding legislation passed during the state’s 2006 legislative session that banned discrimination based on sexual orientation: “As with many rights issues, [maintaining this policy] is going to require consistent vigilance...almost a constant campaign.”<sup>10</sup>

One of the key challenges in evaluation of advocacy and policy work is identification and definition of short- and intermediate-term outcomes, that is, what changes might occur on the way to longer-term change. These changes could be described either as performance measures for a grantee or as incremental achievements or conditions that indicate progress toward a long term policy change goal. In determining shorter-term outcomes, it is important for both funders and grantees to be sure that the grantee’s mission, capacity and existing commitments align with funder expectations. Foundation-grantee relationships can be strained if a funder’s expectations about what the grantee can accomplish or produce are unrealistic, for example, expecting population-level changes in children’s health to result from a one-year grant.

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<sup>8</sup> Alliance for Justice. (2005). *Build Your Advocacy Grantmaking: Advocacy Evaluation Tool*. Washington, D.C.: Alliance for Justice

<sup>9</sup> Guthrie, K., op. cit.

<sup>10</sup> Garber, A. & Thomas, R. (2006). *Seattle Times*. Measure repealing gay rights won’t be on ballot. 7 June 2006. Retrieved September 1, 2006, from <http://archives.seattletimes.nwsource.com/cgi-bin/texis.cgi/web/vortex/display?slug=petitions07m&date=20060607&query=Ed+Murray>

## DIFFERENCES AMONG FOUNDATIONS

The characteristics of foundations have also made it challenging to determine and provide guidance about evaluation approaches for advocacy and policy work. As private, independent organizations that are frequently shaped by an individual's or family's values, foundations are tremendously diverse in their philosophies and practices, including their grantmaking. Additionally, different foundations are involved in different stages of public policy and social change efforts as well as different venues and different jurisdictions.<sup>11</sup> Further, foundations may have different purposes for implementing evaluation. Since all of these factors can influence evaluation decisions, it does not make sense to identify "one size fits all" evaluation approaches.

Alignment of grantmaking with a foundation's overall philosophy is also important. Foundations need to clearly articulate whether grants and investments will be targeted, (i.e., funds are directed to a certain program, activity or product that relates to a particular stage of the policy process) or general (i.e., funds are used for operational support or organizational capacity-building). Outcome expectations and evaluation approaches will significantly differ for a grant that supports a particular research effort, one that provides resources for the printing and distribution of specific materials that are part of a public awareness campaign, and a general grant that supports the overall operations of a particular organization involved in a long-term effort to change policy or conditions.

The primary purpose for evaluation of advocacy and policy work is yet another way foundations can differ. Foundations may implement evaluation to monitor grantee performance, to inform strategy development and improvement, to build knowledge across a given field, to build capacity to address particular issues, to strengthen and expand support for a policy or social change goal, or a combination of these. All of these decisions will shape a foundation's evaluation practice.

## BENEFITS OF EVALUATION

Despite the challenges, there are many good reasons to implement evaluation of advocacy and policy work. For foundations, evaluation may support best business practices or provide evidence that investments are leading to achievement of desired goals. For non-profits, evaluation may provide information that clarifies what are meaningful and appropriate expectations with regard to advocacy and policy work, as well as what strategies are most effective for achievement of desired goals. Both funders and non-profits are motivated to make the case that their investment of resources, time, efforts and dreams are making a significant difference. Evaluation research methods offer credible and reliable tools and processes to make this case, as well as to develop a deep understanding about what is working and what might need to be rethought in the area of advocacy and public policy change.

In the early 1990s, program evaluation was a new concept for many organizations involved in the delivery of social and human services. As program evaluation began to be widely implemented, skepticism and worry were common among many social and human service program providers. Complaints included providers' perceptions that the results of their programs' work could not be adequately named or measured; that program evaluation was far

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<sup>11</sup>Ferris, J.M. (2003). *Foundations & Public Policymaking: Leveraging Philanthropic Dollars, Knowledge, and Networks*. Los Angeles, California: University of Southern California, The Center on Philanthropy and Public Policy. Stages in the policy change process are defined as problem definition, agenda setting, policy formulation, policy adoption, policy implementation and evaluation of policy impact. Venues are defined as ballot initiatives, a legislative process, administrative rules, and a legal process or judicial review. Jurisdictions include local, state and national policy arenas.

too academic and complex to implement in a program setting, and that evaluation would surely take away resources from direct service delivery. Over the past decade and a half, evaluation has become much more commonplace for social service programs, particularly in the non-profit and public sectors. And while not all program evaluation designs may meet the “gold standards” of methodological rigor<sup>12</sup> because of resource or other constraints, these efforts are typically based on strong social science principles. Over and over again, program staff and managers have found evaluation efforts to yield meaningful, instructive, real-time information that has been used to determine program effectiveness, as well as how programs might be improved.

The situation is reminiscent of attitudes toward the measurement of advocacy and policy work. Evaluation in this field has been viewed as a new and intimidating prospect, though it does not have to be. This guide shows how meaningful, instructive evaluation of advocacy and policy work can be undertaken in a variety of settings. While the rigor and resource needs of control- or comparison-group designs may sometimes be appropriate, this guide offers a wide range of approaches to evaluating advocacy and policy work that are highly accessible and practical. Again, these evaluation approaches can provide meaningful information to help those involved in advocacy and policy work determine how well strategies are working, what change has occurred and how much progress is being made toward ultimate goals.

Gary Henry, a well-known evaluator of advocacy and policy who has written about his evaluation of public communication campaigns, views the tools and methodologies for evaluating this arena as “vastly deficient.” However, he states: “[w]e should not be daunted by the methodological challenges.... We have to push ahead; we have to try some new things. We have to put data collection strategies into the field even if they are imperfect, try them, and work on their development.”<sup>13</sup> This statement is true of efforts to evaluate the broad array of advocacy and policy efforts, and it is our hope this guide will help advance the field in this area.

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<sup>12</sup> That is, experimental or quasi-experimental evaluation designs

<sup>13</sup> Henry, G. T. (2002). Ask the Expert: What do evaluators of public communication campaigns need to do to advance their work and this field? The Evaluation Exchange. 3, 3. Retrieved April 13, 2006, from <http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/eval/issue20/expert1.html>



## **SECTION 2**

### **Designing Appropriate Evaluations**

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The previous section has described the landscape and context for evaluation of advocacy and policy work. This section will ground that broader discussion by offering practical guidance about specific evaluation approaches that are relevant to the advocacy and policy arena. There are many issues to consider with regard to the identification and selection of meaningful evaluation methods, including the kinds of goals to be pursued, the purpose of evaluation and a grantmaker's involvement in evaluation. We present a stepwise approach to making evaluation design choices. The three steps are as follows:

1. Start with a theory of change.
2. Identify outcome categories.
3. Select a practical and strategic approach to measurement.

Each of these steps will be discussed specifically as they apply to evaluation of advocacy and policy work.

#### **START WITH A THEORY OF CHANGE**

Theory of change has become common parlance among both funders and non-profits; the term is typically used to describe the conceptual model for achieving a collective vision. A theory of change typically addresses the set of linkages among strategies, outcomes and goals that support a broader mission or vision, along with the underlying assumptions that are related to these linkages (i.e. "If we implement these strategies, why do we expect these changes will occur?"). Theory of change has been called many things: a roadmap, a blueprint, an engine of change, a theory of action and more.<sup>1</sup>

A theory of change is typically expressed in a visual diagram that depicts a set of strategies, outcomes and goals and the logical interconnections among them. It is perhaps best viewed as a map of how you get from "here" to "there." This visual diagram is often supplemented with narrative that details key assumptions and other relevant context for understanding the specific theory of change. (See Figure on page XX for a brief example of a Theory of Change.)

Although a theory of change results in a concrete product, the process for developing this theory of change is equally as valuable as its physical documentation. The process is based on the involvement of selected stakeholders who collaborate in a process of developing agreement about the pathway for achieving their collective vision.

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<sup>1</sup> For further discussion about theory of change, see the following works:

Anderson, A. (2005). *The Community Builder's Approach to Theory of Change: A Practical Guide to Theory Development*. Retrieved May 31, 2006, from [http://www.aspeninstitute.org/site/c.huLWJeMRKpH/b.612045/k.4BA8/Roundtable\\_on\\_Community\\_Change.htm](http://www.aspeninstitute.org/site/c.huLWJeMRKpH/b.612045/k.4BA8/Roundtable_on_Community_Change.htm)

Organizational Research Services. (2004). *Theory of Change: A Practical Tool for Action, Results and Learning*. Seattle, Washington: Annie E. Casey Foundation.

Guthrie, K., Louie, J., David, T. & Crystal-Foster, C. (2005). *The Challenge of Assessing Advocacy: Strategies for a Prospective Approach to Evaluating Policy Change and Advocacy*. Prepared for The California Endowment. Woodland Hills, California: The California Endowment.

We contend that developing a theory of change is a fundamental starting point for designing an appropriate evaluation for advocacy and policy work. Two important results derive from this process:

- ◆ specificity about high level strategies and outcomes; and
- ◆ common agreement about impact.

**Specificity about high level strategies and outcomes:** Funders and non-profit organizations usually find it easy to talk about a broad vision and long-term goals that they are hoping to achieve. These goals and vision statements are typically far-reaching and reflect a profound change in basic societal conditions and the behaviors associated with these conditions.

The theory of change drills down from the global picture to create specificity about the strategies and logical outcomes that compose the path to long-term significant changes. Constructed from a high enough vantage point (approximately 30,000 feet aerial view), these strategies and outcomes represent high level actions and impacts. They do not provide a specific implementation plan. Instead, they articulate the “theory” about how change takes place and what landmarks to look for along the way. This is a particularly important process in the context of social change in which multiple approaches are at play—e.g., economic, legal, community development, educational, social marketing—and the theory of change is usually taken for granted. The specificity about progress markers reflects these distinct approaches and provides critical focus to the essential categories that are appropriate for gauging progress.

**Common agreement about impact:** The Blueprint report commissioned by the California Endowment Fund (2006, pp. 18-21) has heightened our awareness about the varying conceptual models that co-exist among funders and the organizations that are steeped in advocacy and policy work. These models, which provide the ideological and structural context for a social change/policy change process, are as follows: social change, policy change and advocacy.

***Social Change Model.*** The impact of social change is large-scale societal change. This broad model includes both policy change and advocacy but is focused far more broadly on changes in physical and/or social conditions. The logical result of social change relates to conditions of poverty, the environment, health, equality, democracy and so on. Changes of this nature are measured on the level of individual and population elements—whether it is human lives or ecological species.

***Social Change Model: Case Illustration***

A prime example of this model is the Annie E. Casey Foundation Making Connections initiative that invests in a place-based comprehensive community change strategy to achieve family economic success, school readiness, effective and responsive service systems and social connectedness. This initiative takes a ten-year long-term approach to strengthening the context of children’s lives by investing in strategies that strengthen families and neighborhoods. The initiative operates on multiple levels, including both strategies that directly impact children and families and strategies that influence the resources, organizations, institutions and systems that affect children, families and neighborhoods.

***Policy Change Model.*** Policy change targets changes in the policy arena, including both policy development and implementation. The logical result of policy change may be policy development, new or revised policy, policy enforcement, adequate resources and so on. The impact of policy change efforts is change in the structural and normative context of communities and institutions. Policy change efforts are fundamental to changes in social and physical conditions, but a change in policy is not social or physical change itself.

***Policy Change Model: Case Illustration***

The Brainerd Foundation, a family foundation focused on conservation, offers a clear example of a grantmaking program focused on policy change.

**Brainerd Foundation Program Areas**

The Foundation makes grants through three program areas: Conservation Policy, Place-based Conservation and Conservation Capacity.

**Conservation Policy**

Our Conservation Policy program is aimed at achieving policy gains at the state (or provincial) and local levels. Strategies to advance this goal vary by state and province, with the overarching theme being a commitment to support policies that ensure the protection of our region's air, land and water.

We encourage groups collaborating on common policy priorities to take their work to a higher level of effectiveness by deepening their connection to public concerns and holding policymakers accountable to an informed and engaged citizenry. In places where such collaborations are not underway, we look for opportunities to bolster public support for strong conservation policies. We expect conservation advocates to advance successful policies by building their base of support and demonstrating a conservation mandate to decision makers in the region. Grants in this program range from \$20,000 to \$50,000.

Measures of Success: As a result of these investments, we expect to see: **policy gains at the state (or provincial) and local level, e.g.,** successful adoption of policy priorities identified by state and provincial level advocates.

(Please note that the Brainerd Foundation program areas span all three models described here. This excerpt is an illustration of its policy change model.)

2

***Advocacy Model.*** Advocacy is a tactic for achieving social or policy change, such as framing the issue, developing alliances, and gathering and disseminating data. The impact of advocacy efforts provides the essential infrastructure that leads to policy change and, subsequently, to social change. Key examples of the impact of advocacy efforts are strategic alliances, public awareness, public will and political will.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Brainerd Foundation. (2006). Mission and Strategy. Retrieved May 31, 2006, from [http://www.brainerd.org/about/mission\\_strategy.php](http://www.brainerd.org/about/mission_strategy.php)

<sup>3</sup> Note that federal guidelines regulate specific direct lobbying activities. For more information and guidelines, see the Alliance for Justice website: [www.afj.org](http://www.afj.org).

***Advocacy Model: Case Illustration***

The California Endowment’s transition from “grantmaking” to “changemaking” has led to development of new foundation tools that are valuable to advocacy efforts. A clear example of its support for advocacy as strategy for social change is demonstrated in its Center for Healthy Communities, an organization dedicated to mobilizing civic leaders, health providers, advocates and policymakers in the quest for solutions to critical health care issues ([www.calendow.org/chc.newsletter](http://www.calendow.org/chc.newsletter)). The Center provides an accessible and affordable conference facility, presents public programs and convenings, and provides in-depth training opportunities. For example, its HealthExchange Academy offers a series of trainings and web-based resources to “strengthen the capacity of those on the front lines of health improvement efforts.” As viewed by the California Endowment, *“Systems change starts with individual action. Advocates must have motivation and skills to get the facts, define the problem, organize support, and communicate a clear and compelling story of what is wrong and what should be done. In addition to building individual skills, training sessions will deepen overall understanding of the policy arena and help build the capacity of communities to move their own agendas forward.”*

Annie E. Casey’s Kids Count initiative also illustrates advocacy in its national work aimed at tracking the status of children in the United States. By gathering, analyzing and disseminating key indicators about children’s welfare state by state, Kids Count helps to focus both public and policy maker attention on the needs and gains in child well-being. Kids Count benchmarks enrich local, state and national discussions about policy trends and policy goals. This data-driven advocacy strategy is instrumental to guiding policy development and education that promotes policy change.

Importantly, advocacy and policy change efforts are often viewed as investments in community infrastructure, public opinion, political will or policy adoption itself. This work is less often framed as social change, a concept that tends to be more comprehensive, longer-term, and focused on changes in lives and environments. While advocacy and policy work may lead to social change, the specific funding arrangement is likely to have time and resource parameters that focus on specific advocacy and policy components rather than the long-term change in social conditions.

Best practice in the development of a theory of change calls for a group process that will allow key stakeholders or partners to grapple with directions for change and come to common agreement about the impact of advocacy and policy work. Although various partners may have different individual and group agendas, the theory-of-change work will produce a clear statement about what success will look like—both in the short- and long-term. For some efforts, “long-term” might be three years—e.g., time to create political will to support specific legislation. For other efforts, partners may be interested in a much longer time horizon—e.g., 15 or more years for restoration of environmental corridors used by large mammal habitat. For some groups, the projected impact of the theory of change may be too far out in the distance; for others, not far enough.

At a minimum, the process of developing the theory of change will provide guidelines for both funders and grantees about where they are going now, e.g., the next one to three years, and what it will look like when they arrive. Such clarity and focus on impact strengthen mutual understanding, expectations, communication and evaluation of success.

The process of developing a theory of change will offer powerful insight for all of the partners and stakeholders about the **How, What and Why** of advocacy and policy work. The strategies and outcomes clarify the **How** and **What**. The articulation of the ultimate impact describes **Why** the work is happening. The product of this work will provide essential clarity for developing an evaluation design. This clarity is essential for determining responses to key evaluation design questions, such as the following: What specific strategies and outcomes should be measured? What should be the frequency and duration of evaluation data collection? What should be the level of rigor of the evaluation structure and processes? What types of quantitative or qualitative methodologies might be applied? And, what will be the format for communicating results?

Once you have mapped your theory of change, the next step in determining your evaluation design is to identify outcomes, namely the types of outcomes that are salient to advocacy and policy work.

### **IDENTIFY YOUR OUTCOME CATEGORIES**

This guide lifts up a core set of outcome categories that directly relate to advocacy and policy. These outcomes can provide concrete direction to your selection of **What** to measure that will allow you to make the case about success and will also deepen your understanding and learning about your progress.

Outcome categories are fairly standardized and widely accepted in the service delivery arena. Counseling programs address mental health functioning, parenting programs address family management and nurturing, educational programs address student achievement and so on. In contrast, this type of standardization does not yet exist for outcomes related to advocacy and policy. The previous discussion about theory of change provides a background for understanding the context for making these outcome selections for advocacy and policy work.

Depending on the theory of change—and the conceptual model in which a set of outcomes is grounded—outcomes can be both near-term and long-term and potentially span a broad continuum. Social change outcomes are most likely to occur after multiple other changes have happened, such as public awareness, political will, policy adoption, and implementation to the physical and social changes in lives and communities. The strategies associated with both social change and policy change will further limit or expand the selection of outcomes, based on the number and type of strategies that are the focus of activity.

We have reviewed a broad range of outcome categories and sample indicators of progress, compiled from multiple sources, including evaluation reports, expert interviews with advocacy experts, and literature about foundation involvement in advocacy and policy work. Over and over, the same types of outcomes emerge. We present these outcome categories not to duplicate or correct any other existing sources, but rather to consolidate, emphasize and confirm what appear to be the important areas of change in advocacy and policy work.

Some of the outcomes presented here represent the interim steps and infrastructure that create the conditions for changes in society and the environment. Others reflect the end-game: policy adoption, funding or enforcement in various jurisdictions, e.g., local, state, federal. We have distilled these outcomes into six distinct categories representing the essential changes in lives, community conditions, institutions and systems that result from advocacy and policy work.

### 1. SHIFT IN SOCIAL NORMS

Description: the knowledge, attitudes, values and behaviors that compose the normative structure of culture and society. Advocacy and policy work has become increasingly focused on the importance of aligning advocacy and policy goals with **core and enduring social values and behaviors**.

### 2. STRENGTHENED ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

Description: the skill set, staffing and leadership, organizational structure and systems, finances and strategic planning among non-profit organizations and formal coalitions that plan and carry out advocacy and policy work. The development of these core capacities are critical **organizational conditions** of advocacy and policy change efforts.

### 3. STRENGTHENED ALLIANCES

Description: the level of coordination, collaboration and mission alignment among community and system partners, including nontraditional alliances, e.g., bipartisan alliances, unlikely allies. These **structural changes in community and institutional relationships and alliances** have become essential forces in presenting common messages, pursuing common goals, enforcing policy changes and insuring the protection of policy "wins" in the event that they are threatened.

### 4. STRENGTHENED BASE OF SUPPORT

Description: the grassroots, leadership and institutional support for particular policy changes. The **breadth, depth and influence of support among the general public, interest groups and opinion leaders** for particular issues provides a major structural condition for supporting changes in policies. 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

Description: the **stages of policy change in the public policy arena**. These stages include policy development, policy proposal, demonstration of support (e.g., co-sponsorship), adoption, funding and implementation. This outcome area has frequently been the past focus of measuring the success of advocacy and policy work. Though certainly the major focus of such work, it is rarely achieved without changes in the preconditions to policy change identified in the other outcome categories.

### 6. CHANGES IN IMPACT

Description: the **ultimate changes in social and physical lives and conditions**, i.e., changes in individuals, populations and physical environments, that motivate policy change efforts. Changes in impacts are long-term outcomes and goals. They would be important to monitor and evaluate in those funding situations in which grantmakers and advocacy organizations view themselves as partners in social change. These types of changes are influenced by policy change but typically involve far more strategies—including direct interventions, community support, and personal and family behaviors—than policy change alone.

Table 1. presents these outcome categories along with samples of outcomes and the strategies that are associated with these broad outcomes. Please note that the order of outcomes is not intended to represent their importance, sequence or priority.

**Table 1. Menu of Outcomes for Advocacy and Policy Work**

<b>1. SHIFT IN SOCIAL NORMS</b>	
Examples of Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Changes in awareness</li> <li>◆ Increased agreement on the definition of a problem (e.g., common language)</li> <li>◆ Changes in beliefs</li> <li>◆ Changes in attitudes</li> <li>◆ Changes in values</li> <li>◆ Changes in the salience of an issue</li> <li>◆ Increased alignment of campaign goal with core societal values</li> <li>◆ Changes in public behavior</li> </ul>
Examples of Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Framing issues</li> <li>◆ Media campaign</li> <li>◆ Message development (e.g., defining the problem, framing, naming)</li> <li>◆ Development of trusted messengers and champions</li> </ul>
Unit of Analysis (e.g., Who or What Changes?)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Individuals in general public</li> <li>◆ Specific groups of individuals</li> <li>◆ Population groups</li> </ul>
<b>2. STRENGTHENED ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY</b>	
Examples of Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Improved management of organizational capacity of organizations involved with advocacy and policy work)</li> <li>◆ Improved strategic abilities of organizations involved with advocacy and policy work</li> <li>◆ Improved capacity to communicate and promote advocacy messages of organizations involved with advocacy and policy work</li> <li>◆ Improved stability of organizations involved with advocacy and policy work</li> </ul>
Examples of Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Leadership development</li> <li>◆ Organizational capacity building</li> <li>◆ Communication skill building</li> <li>◆ Strategic planning</li> </ul>
Unit of Analysis (e.g., Who or What Changes?)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Advocacy organizations</li> <li>◆ Not-for profit organizations</li> <li>◆ Advocacy coalitions</li> <li>◆ Community organizers, leaders</li> </ul>
<b>3. STRENGTHENED ALLIANCES</b>	
Examples of Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Increased number of partners supporting an issue</li> <li>◆ Increased level of collaboration (e.g., coordination)</li> <li>◆ Improved alignment of partnership efforts (e.g., shared priorities, shared goals, common accountability system)</li> <li>◆ Strategic alliances with important partners (e.g., stronger or more powerful relationships and alliances)</li> <li>◆ 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)</li> </ul>
Examples of Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Partnership development</li> <li>◆ Coalition development</li> <li>◆ Cross-sector campaigns</li> <li>◆ Joint campaigns</li> <li>◆ Building alliances among unlikely allies</li> </ul>



Unit of Analysis (e.g. Who or What Changes?)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Individuals</li> <li>◆ Groups</li> <li>◆ Organizations</li> <li>◆ Institutions</li> </ul>
<b>4. STRENGTHENED BASE OF SUPPORT</b>	
Examples of Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Increased public involvement in an issue</li> <li>◆ Increased level of actions taken by champions of an issue</li> <li>◆ Increased voter registration</li> <li>◆ Changes in voting behavior</li> <li>◆ Increased breadth of partners supporting an issue (e.g., number of “unlikely allies” supporting an issue)</li> <li>◆ Increased media coverage (e.g., quantity, prioritization, extent of coverage, variety of media “beats,” message echoing)</li> <li>◆ Increased awareness of campaign principles and messages among selected groups (e.g., policy makers, general public, opinion leaders)</li> <li>◆ Increased visibility of the campaign message (e.g., engagement in debate, presence of campaign message in the media)</li> <li>◆ Changes in public will</li> </ul>
Examples of Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Community organizing</li> <li>◆ Media campaigns</li> <li>◆ Outreach</li> <li>◆ Public/grassroots engagement campaign</li> <li>◆ Voter registration campaign</li> <li>◆ Coalition development</li> <li>◆ Development of trusted messengers and champions</li> <li>◆ Policy analysis and debate</li> <li>◆ Policy impact statements</li> </ul>
Unit of Analysis (e.g., Who or What Changes?)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Individuals</li> <li>◆ Groups</li> <li>◆ Organizations</li> <li>◆ Institutions</li> </ul>
<b>5. IMPROVED POLICIES</b>	
Examples of Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Policy Development</li> <li>◆ Policy Adoption (e.g., ordinance, ballot measure, legislation, legally-binding agreements)</li> <li>◆ Policy Implementation (e.g., equity, adequate funding and other resources for implementing policy)</li> <li>◆ Policy Enforcement (e.g., holding the line on bedrock legislation)</li> </ul>
Examples of Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Scientific research</li> <li>◆ Development of “white papers”</li> <li>◆ Development of policy proposals</li> <li>◆ Pilots/Demonstration programs</li> <li>◆ Educational briefings of legislators</li> <li>◆ Watchdog function</li> </ul>
Unit of Analysis (e.g. Who or What Changes?)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Policy planners</li> <li>◆ Administrators</li> <li>◆ Policy makers</li> <li>◆ Legislation/laws/formal policies</li> </ul>

<b>6. CHANGES IN IMPACT</b>	
Example of Outcomes	◆ Improved social and physical conditions (e.g., poverty, habitat diversity, health, equality, democracy)
Example of Strategies	◆ Combination of direct service and systems-changing strategies
Unit of Analysis (e.g., Who or What Changes?)	◆ Population ◆ Ecosystem

Definition of outcomes is a crucial step of your evaluation design. We suggest that advocacy and policy efforts can be viewed in the context of one or more of these broad outcome categories. The specific element of the outcome category will be directly related to the funded strategy. Consider the following examples:

<b>Proposed Activity or Resources</b>	<b>Sample Outcome Category</b>
1. Development of a strategic plan	◆ Strengthened organizational capacity
2. Staff position for managing a media campaign	◆ Strengthened organizational capacity ◆ Shift in social norms
3. Staff and resources for organizing coalitions in six counties	◆ Strengthened organizational capacity ◆ Strengthened base of support
4. Staff, operational and evaluation costs for carrying out a demonstration pilot program	◆ Strengthened organizational capacity ◆ Improved policies
5. General operations	◆ Strengthened organizational capacity ◆ Specific outcome category that is applicable (e.g., Shift in social norms, strengthened base of support)

You will need to further refine these broad outcomes to determine specific outcome elements for measurement. Take, for example, a media campaign that is intended to (1) influence social norms and (2) increase the base of support. The design of this campaign, message development, media materials, media venues, campaign message, specific audiences, frequency of messages, placement of messages, duration of the campaign, formats, partnerships involved in carrying out the campaign, duration of this campaign, and any other related and supporting or enhancing strategies that occur simultaneously with the campaign are essential factors that will determine appropriate outcome selection. These specific outcomes are numerous. Some examples follow:

- ◆ Changes in awareness of an issue
- ◆ Changes in knowledge about the severity of an issue
- ◆ Changes in knowledge about what actions to take
- ◆ Changes in salience of an issue
- ◆ Changes in willingness to support an issue
- ◆ Changes in voting behavior

These types of outcomes can span many issue areas, including recycling, early learning opportunities for young children, affordable housing, access to medical insurance and many other wide-ranging issue areas.

### *Case Illustration*

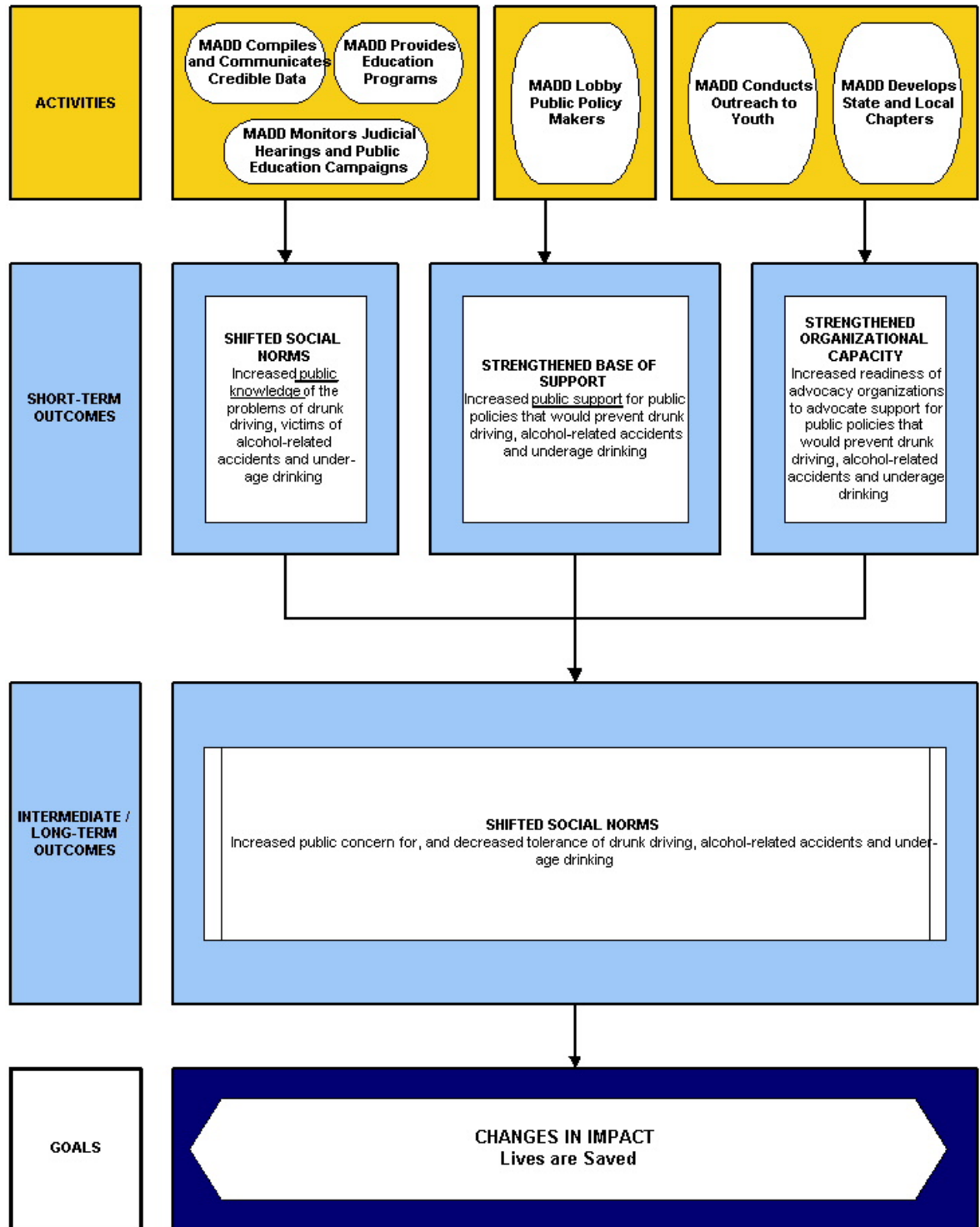
An example from a well-known advocacy organization, Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD), presents a clear illustration. Since its incorporation in 1980, MADD has made dramatic progress in shaping state and local legislation to support traffic safety and victims' rights. Simultaneously, public norms have shifted so that drunk driving is no longer socially accepted and a robust infrastructure of local MADD chapters (more than 400 nationwide) stand ready to influence public policy. While deaths from motor vehicle accidents still occur at tragic levels, the percentage of alcohol-related fatalities has markedly decreased from 60 percent in 1982 to 39 percent in 2004.<sup>4</sup> Can all progress in these areas be attributed to MADD? The unequivocal answer is "no." Has MADD contributed to these changes in public policy and social behavior? The answer is "yes, it is highly probable."

Armed with its mission to stop drunk driving, support the victims of violent crimes and prevent underage drinking, MADD provides a clear example of how intentional advocacy strategies aimed at effecting public policy and, ultimately, social change, can result in concrete changes. Growing from its origins as a grassroots advocacy organization, MADD carries out a multi-pronged approach to effecting change, including providing educational programs, lobbying, compiling and communicating credible and compelling data, developing local and state chapters, reaching out to youth, creating public education campaigns and monitoring judicial hearings. A review of MADD's activities suggests that the group's combined efforts, along with other aligned strategies and initiatives, have effectively contributed to significant changes, including changes in public knowledge, changes in public concern for the issue of drunk driving, changes in public will to address the issue through public policies, changes in the support of policy makers and increased capacity to advocate for policies that would prevent drunk driving. A simple theory of change model illustrates how MADD's efforts connect with the outcome categories advanced in this guide (see figure below).

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Alcohol Alert. Scottsdale, AZ. <sup>4</sup> <http://www.alcoholalert.com/drunken-driving-statistics.html>. Retrieved December 20, 2006.

Theory of Change "Outcome Map" for Mothers Against Drunk Driving



The selection of outcomes is a crucial step in the evaluation process. The outcome needs to be a direct reflection of the type of change that it is intended and realistic in the context of advocacy and policy work. The selection of outcomes relates to the theory of change and provides specificity regarding the success measures that are most relevant to a given effort. Once outcome selections are made, the next step in developing an evaluation design is to determine the structure and process that will be used to measure the selected outcomes. The following specific considerations will help you determine outcome measurement approaches.

## SELECT A PRACTICAL AND STRATEGIC APPROACH TO MEASUREMENT

Evaluation design typically refers to the wide range of choices related to data collection. The broad questions posed are as follows:

- ◆ What will be the level of rigor of data collection?
- ◆ From whom will data be collected?
- ◆ When will data be collected?
- ◆ What type of questions will the data address?

Answers to these types of questions provide the platform for determining the frequency of data collection, the intensity of data collection, the sample(s) from whom data will be collected, the quantitative or qualitative nature of data, the data collection tools needed and the specific information that is systematically gathered.

These design choices will necessarily depend on a variety of factors, including the purpose and audience of evaluation for a particular grantmaker and the nature of the grant awarded, i.e., size, scope, scale, capacity of the grantee and so on.

## PRACTICAL APPROACHES TO MEASUREMENT

This guide has asserted that the advocacy and policy arena has unique challenges when considering evaluation design issues concerning the long-term and dynamic nature in which change occurs in this arena. While the traditional gold standard of experimental evaluation design might work well in some circumstances, it would be out-of-reach or inappropriate in many others.

Our review of various emerging approaches to evaluation that have been applied to advocacy and policy work has led us to propose five promising directions to guide development of an evaluation design. These directions can be classified as follows:

- A. Identification and measurement of **core outcome areas** related to social change or policy change
- B. Evaluation of **strategic progress**
- C. Identification and measurement of short-term **incremental objectives**
- D. Assessment of the **capacity** of the advocacy and policy organization
- E. Case study documentation of **process and impacts**

**Direction A. Identification and measurement of core outcome areas related to social change or policy change**

**Description:**

- ◆ Focuses attention on core outcomes related to the policy and social change continuum
- ◆ Well-suited to a wide range of methodologies ranging from pre- and post-test outcome measurement to rigorous experimental designs
- ◆ Examples of core outcomes include changes in the salience of an issue, improved organizational capacity of organizations involved with advocacy and policy work, increased number of partners supporting an issue, policy adoption and improved social conditions

**When Is It Applicable?**

Longer-term policy and advocacy efforts involving a partnership among funders and advocacy organizations. This evaluation direction is most suitable to those groups who believe that evaluation data is valuable for supporting ongoing learning and course adjustments and are willing to devote resources (e.g., financial, staff time, external evaluation consultants, partner engagement, and leadership) to evaluation efforts.

**What Are the Benefits?**

- ◆ Initiatives will be able to demonstrate that their strategies have made a difference, including the following:
  - Linkages between strategies and results
  - Process learnings
  - Steps of change expressed in concrete indicators of change, e.g., short-term, intermediate-term, long-term
- ◆ Outcome evaluation data support multiple agendas of establishing merit and worth, guiding initiative improvement, fostering knowledge development and offering accountability.

**Direction B. Evaluation of Strategic Progress**

**Description:**

- ◆ A systematic plan to consider a core set of strategic questions about process that support strategic thinking and reflection.
- ◆ Primarily qualitative approach to data collection, using individual and group interviews and discussions. Can be integrated smoothly into ongoing group planning work.
- ◆ Examples of core questions: Who needs to change? Whose voice needs to be heard? Whom do you need to reach? How does change occur? What is the jurisdiction of change? What is the current window of opportunity for change? Where is it best to direct efforts over the next year? How often should we reflect on our progress to determine changes in strategies? What is a realistic short-term outcome/indicator of progress?

**When Is It Applicable?**

All advocacy and policy work. This set of evaluation questions supports strategic thinking and action and is integral to assessing progress and learning in all policy and advocacy efforts.

**What Are the Benefits?**

- ◆ Supports learning on the part of grantee and funder as well as their partners and stakeholders
- ◆ Encourages reflection, intentionality and course changes as needed
- ◆ Documents accomplishments to support accountability of the grantee's efforts

**Direction C. Evaluation of Short-Term Incremental Objectives****Description:**

- ◆ Focuses on short-term outcomes, including “wins,” indicators, outputs, milestones, benchmarks
- ◆ Identification and measurement of short-term incremental objectives
- ◆ Matches well with result-based accountability frameworks
- ◆ Examples of short-term objectives: the number of community champions engaged, the number of emails/letters to legislators, inclusion of key policy goal in proposed legislation, the number of voters registered, increased number of children enrolled in subsidized child care

**When Is It Applicable?**

All advocacy and policy work. These incremental measures offer markers of change and are well-suited to tracking progress and reporting results to internal and external audiences.

**What Are the Benefits?**

- ◆ Provides those engaged in advocacy and policy work with a focus and accountability on indicators of progress, while allowing for flexibility to adjust these indicators in “real-time”
- ◆ Provides an accountability measure for funders to communicate that their “investment” in this area has made a difference in concrete, incremental terms
- ◆ Frames advocacy and policy work as a dynamic and complex process that is composed of “wins” and “losses,” some of which happen from careful and intentional planning; others from the chaotic nature of social change

**Direction D. Assessment of the capacity of the advocacy and policy organization****Description:**

- ◆ An assessment (identification and measurement) of key elements of organizational capacity needed to successfully implement advocacy and policy work
- ◆ Emphasizes a social movement model that holds up “readiness” and “sustainability” as key elements of social change
- ◆ Examples of organizational capacity outcomes: leadership, strategic planning, finances, technological capacity, communication skills and capacity.

### **When Is It Applicable?**

Longer-term policy and advocacy efforts involving a partnership among funders and advocacy organizations. This evaluation direction aligns with a partnership model of social change that emphasizes the importance of the civic infrastructure that advances advocacy and policy goals.

### **What Are the Benefits?**

Focuses attention on the “double bottom line” that progress in advocacy and policy work is dynamic and the readiness and preparedness of the agents of change (advocacy organizations) and the coalitions they mobilize are essential for advancing progress toward policy goals, deepening progress toward policy goals and holding a defensive line about policy “wins” when necessary.

## **Direction E. Case Study Documentation of Process and Impacts**

### **Description:**

- ◆ Documentation, description, reflection, and analysis of the efforts and effects—as well as the context—of advocacy and policy work
- ◆ Identifies key events, partners, circumstances, progress markers and impacts for the focus of data collection and analysis. Both qualitative and quantitative methodologies are appropriate
- ◆ Examples of case study topics: perspectives of progress from key informants at critical moments, description of key events and the processes that contributed to these markers, analysis of the partners engaged in social change effort, analysis of specific linkages in a theory of change map

### **When Is It Applicable?**

- ◆ Longer-term efforts in which knowledge development of the field of advocacy and policy work are highly prioritized or there is a desire to apply learnings and identify future strategic directions. This evaluation direction aligns with a theory-of-change framework for evaluating comprehensive community change. It further reflects an acceptance that advocacy and policy work is often grounded in chaos theory or complexity theory and may be very non-linear.

### **What Are the Benefits?**

- ◆ Advocacy organizations and their partners and stakeholders can benefit from learning about what has happened in the process of social change, e.g., types of strategies and partners engaged, “wins” and “losses,” the context (e.g., political, social, economic) of change, case illustrations, “lessons learned”
- ◆ The “story” of social change will be documented and shared broadly
- ◆ Funders of policy and social change will be able to draw upon case illustrations to communicate the story of change

Each of these directions has merit and may be applied alone or in combination with each other. It is most important to be clear about the purpose of the evaluation to guide the choice of the appropriate direction for evaluation. Once you decide upon a direction, you can select from a wide range of methodologies to apply to the evaluation, including qualitative and quantitative methods and a full spectrum of experimental, quasi-experimental and theory-of-change designs. You can select the level of formality and rigor to best fit particular situations. You can also



consider the concept of a “portfolio” approach to evaluation, whereby some advocacy and policy efforts are evaluated with far greater intensity than are other efforts.

The following illustration shows options for evaluation plans. Additional illustrations are available in the Appendix.

**OPTIONS FOR EVALUATION PLANS**

The methodology for evaluation research is based on sound social science research techniques and principles. These disciplines depart from each other in the nature of the “applied” work of evaluation research. Social science research techniques are guided by rigorous academic and scientific standards that qualify for building disciplinary knowledge. In contrast, evaluation research is guided by practical and applied interests that support the ability to make program and policy decisions. The methodological techniques are the same; however, the standards for evidence are often more stringent in the academic and scientific arenas.

As an example, we will take one of the evaluation approaches to demonstrate how to consider the range of choices. For purposes of this illustration, we will examine the identification and measurement of core outcome areas related to social change or policy change. Table 2 below outlines the focus of the outcome question, data collection methods or tools, frequency and schedule of data collection, and sampling strategy. It is important to think through each of these choices in designing a complete evaluation plan.

**Table 2. Identification and measurement of core outcome areas related to social change or policy change**

Focus	Data Collection Methods or Tools	Frequency and Schedule of Data Collection	Sampling Strategy
Broad outcomes and specific sub-outcomes and indicators related to social change and policy change	Option 1. Focus group  Option 2. Meeting Observation  Option 3. Survey conducted with community members	Regularly scheduled data collection  Option 1. Longitudinal data collection points, e.g., every six months, annually, or biannually over a particular period  Option 2. At meetings held during a particular period  Option 3. Baseline and longitudinal data collection points, e.g., every six months, annually, or biannually over a particular period	Sampling will vary according to the outcome measured.  Option 1. Random sample of the public  Option 2. All legislative representatives or their key staff  Option 3. Stratified sample of neighborhood residents in different socio-economic strata  Option 4. Purposive sample of opinion leaders  Option 5. Coalition representatives from partner organizations

This table demonstrates that evaluation options are wide ranging. For example, data to measure a change in public attitudes could be collected using one or more different approaches, including both qualitative and quantitative methods. One measurement option would be to conduct focus groups with a “purposive” sample of key informants who are deeply entrenched in a community to gain their close-up perspectives about how community attitudes or behaviors

## Section 2: Designing Appropriate Evaluations

have been changing. Key informants could include those with formal professional expertise or those with informal expertise, e.g., volunteers.

To gauge the degree to which community members or groups change their beliefs or priorities about a particular issue, another option might be to use an observation tool implemented at various community meetings. A simple observation checklist can help capture how often a particular issue is on a community meeting agenda (e.g., PTA meeting, neighborhood council meeting, community coalition meeting); whether the issue was discussed; what the main content or emphasis was; the length or depth of the discussion; and the perception of seriousness. See an example of a meeting observation checklist below.

**Observation Checklist  
For Meetings (Community, City Council, etc.)**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Length of meeting: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Setting: \_\_\_\_\_ Attendees: \_\_\_\_\_

1. What were the main issues discussed during this meeting (e.g., academic achievement, drug/alcohol issues, sexual harassment, etc.)?  
 \_\_\_\_\_

2. Was school funding on the agenda?  YES  NO  
 3. Was school funding discussed?  YES  NO

*(If answered "yes" for question 3, please continue; if answered "no" for question 3, please skip to question 8.)*

4. What was the main content of the school funding discussion?  
 \_\_\_\_\_

5. Was agreement reached in this discussion?  YES  NO  
 What was the length of the discussion? \_\_\_\_\_

6. Would you say that the issue(s) of school funding were taken seriously by the attendees?  
 YES  NO

Please explain: \_\_\_\_\_

7. Was there any action planned related to school funding?  YES  NO  
 Please explain:  
 \_\_\_\_\_

8. Additional notes or comments:  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

To gauge yet another aspect of public attitude change, a third option could be a survey that directly asks community members to report their level of agreement with and likeliness to support particular policies. This survey could gather data from a random sample of households or individuals at three time points—baseline, six months and one year later. Sample survey questions are below.

**How seriously do you think your COMMUNITY treats each of the following issues?**

1	2	3	4	5
Not Very Seriously				Very Seriously

**CHOOSE A NUMBER FROM THE SCALE ABOVE THAT SHOWS HOW SERIOUSLY YOU THINK YOUR COMMUNITY TREATS EACH PROBLEM, AND WRITE THE NUMBER (1-5) IN THE SPACE BESIDE EACH ISSUE**

<input type="checkbox"/> Living Wage <input type="checkbox"/> Early Education <input type="checkbox"/> Access to Health Care <input type="checkbox"/> Child Abuse	<input type="checkbox"/> K-12 Education <input type="checkbox"/> Environmental Issues <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation <input type="checkbox"/> Privacy Issues
--	--

**How seriously do YOU treat each of the following issues?**

1	2	3	4	5
Not Very Seriously				Very Seriously

**CHOOSE A NUMBER FROM THE SCALE ABOVE THAT SHOWS HOW SERIOUSLY YOU TREAT EACH PROBLEM, AND WRITE THE NUMBER (1-5) IN THE SPACE BESIDE EACH ISSUE.**

<input type="checkbox"/> Drug and alcohol abuse <input type="checkbox"/> Living Wage <input type="checkbox"/> Early Education <input type="checkbox"/> Access to Health Care <input type="checkbox"/> Child Abuse	<input type="checkbox"/> Teen pregnancy <input type="checkbox"/> K-12 Education <input type="checkbox"/> Environmental Issues <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation <input type="checkbox"/> Privacy Issues
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**How likely would you be to support increased state funding for each of the following issues?**

1	2	3	4	5
Not Very Seriously				Very Seriously

**CHOOSE A NUMBER FROM THE SCALE ABOVE THAT SHOWS HOW LIKELY YOU WOULD BE TO SUPPORT INCREASED PUBLIC FUNDING FOR EACH ISSUE, AND WRITE THE NUMBER (1-5) IN THE SPACE BESIDE EACH ISSUE.**

<input type="checkbox"/> Drug and alcohol abuse <input type="checkbox"/> Living Wage <input type="checkbox"/> Early Education <input type="checkbox"/> Access to Health Care <input type="checkbox"/> Child Abuse	<input type="checkbox"/> Teen pregnancy <input type="checkbox"/> K-12 Education <input type="checkbox"/> Environmental Issues <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation <input type="checkbox"/> Privacy Issues
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These three methodological options represent very different approaches to measuring the same core outcome. Depending on the purpose of the evaluation, one of these options could be implemented to measure a specific change of interest, or all three could be implemented to “triangulate” data and strengthen the information available for analysis.

The three options listed in Table 2 are far from comprehensive. You should consider the full spectrum of social science techniques for measuring core outcomes, though some of the other evaluation directions may imply more restricted choices. For example, the measurement of short-term incremental changes would likely focus on more expedient methodologies in view of a shorter time frame. Similarly, evaluation of strategic progress would rely heavily on data

collection methods that can be quickly implemented. We provide illustrations of options for each of these evaluation directions in a set of tables included in the appendix. These options are intended to suggest a range of ways to think about methodological choices, while keeping in mind that they are not the only choices available.

This guide has presented considerations and issues related to design choices to help those interested in evaluating advocacy and policy work make strategic choices. Through the three-step process presented, interested parties can give shape to a useful and practical approach to evaluation.

After the pathway has been laid out in a theory of change and outcomes have been identified, those seeking to evaluate advocacy and policy work will need to consider the types of questions they hope to answer, as well as the evaluation directions that may yield the most meaningful and relevant information to address those questions. Once evaluation directions have been established, the next step is to identify the specific data collection procedures and tools that are directly applicable.

For examples of data collection tools, we direct you to the following publication: [A Handbook of Data Collection Tools: Companion to A Guide to Measuring Advocacy and Policy](#). This compendium, which offers concrete and practical examples of actual data collection tools and methods that can be applied in the field, is available at: [www.organizationalresearch.com](http://www.organizationalresearch.com) and [www.aecf.org](http://www.aecf.org). In addition, an online resource is available at [www.innonet.org](http://www.innonet.org).

## CONCLUSION

As those involved in advocacy and policy change efforts have sought to strengthen and expand their impact, evaluation of advocacy and policy work has become a new and emerging field. This fledgling frontier in advocacy and policy evaluation offers many exciting possibilities, but it does not yet have a consistent language or the commonly accepted standards of practice that have developed alongside program evaluation over the past two decades. Further, only a small handful of examples exist to illustrate how evaluation of advocacy and policy work has been undertaken in the real world.

This guide is unique in its comprehensive exploration of advocacy and policy change evaluation approaches, and we hope that readers have found the contents to be useful. We have strived to not only present the context for evaluation of advocacy and policy change efforts, but also to suggest a consistent framework to conceptualize, describe and discuss the potential outcomes of this work. Additionally, we have offered considerations about evaluation design so that those interested might begin to identify relevant directions for measurement and inquiry. We hope that this guide, along with its companion, leads people to try out evaluation, reflect on their findings and share their learnings more broadly.

We believe this guide has the potential to help advance the field by equipping grantmakers, non-profit organizations and evaluators with a language for future discussion as well as tools for undertaking measurement for the purposes of evaluation. We hope that this guide inspires those interested in this field to try new strategies and approaches, to believe that evaluation of advocacy and policy work is not only doable but worthwhile, and to boldly forge ahead.

**APPENDIX A: ILLUSTRATIONS OF OPTIONS FOR  
EVALUATING PLANS**

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A GUIDE TO MEASURING ADVOCACY AND POLICY

**Table A-1. Identification and Measurement of Core Outcome Areas Related to Social Change or Policy Change**

Focus	Data Collection Methods or Tools	Frequency and Schedule of Data Collection	Sampling Strategy
<p>Broad outcomes and specific sub-outcomes and indicators related to social change and policy change. Process measures that contribute to these outcomes are also relevant for the analysis.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What aspect of Policy change will occur as a result of the strategies involved in a specific campaign?</li> <li>2. What indicators will signify progress for these outcomes?</li> <li>3. What type, level, duration and quality of activities contribute to these outcomes?</li> <li>4. Which partners will collaborate to achieve these outcomes and in what ways?</li> <li>5. What external conditions might affect the achievement of these policy outcomes?</li> </ol>	<p>Option 1. Survey</p> <p>Option 2. Key informant interviews (conducted by internal or external evaluators)</p> <p>Option 3. Content analysis of media publications, ordinances, legislation, etc</p>	<p>Regularly scheduled data collection</p> <p>Option 1. Pre and post test data collection points</p> <p>Option 2. Pre and post test and midpoint data collection points</p> <p>Option 3. Longitudinal data collection points, e.g., every six months, annually, or biannually over 10 years</p>	<p>Sampling will vary according to the outcome measured.</p> <p>Option 1. Random sample of the public</p> <p>Option 2. All legislative representatives or their key staff</p> <p>Option 3. Stratified sample of neighborhood residents in different socio-economic strata</p> <p>Option 4. Purposive sample of opinion leaders</p> <p>Option 5. Coalition representatives from partner organizations</p>



**Table A-2. Evaluation of Short-Term Incremental Objectives**

<b>Focus</b>	<b>Data Collection Methods or Tools</b>	<b>Frequency and Schedule of Data Collection</b>	<b>Sampling Strategy</b>
<p>Core questions about the markers of achieving incremental objectives</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What are the goals and objectives of a campaign?</li> <li>2. How tangible indicators of progress will signify a successful result?</li> <li>3. What results do you intend to achieve over the next 3 months? Six months? 12 months?</li> </ol>	<p>Option 1. Survey</p> <p>Option 2. Results checklist or spreadsheet</p> <p>Option 3. Key informant interviews conducted by external evaluator (structured or semi-structured)</p>	<p>Regularly scheduled data collection</p> <p>Option 1. Monthly data collection points</p> <p>Option 2. Quarterly data collection points</p> <p>Option 3. Annual data collection, including retrospective analysis</p>	<p>Primarily purposive sampling strategy in which the respondents are selected for their knowledge and awareness of strategic progress</p> <p>Option 1. Representative sample of staff</p> <p>Option 2. Executive staff and board of directors</p> <p>Option 3. Executive director</p> <p>Option 4. Members of a coalition</p> <p>Option 5. Beneficiaries of the campaign goals, e.g., children in specific school district, households living below the federal poverty level in a specific neighborhood, or other population group</p>

**Table A-3. Evaluation of Strategic Progress**

<b>Focus</b>	<b>Data Collection Methods or Tools</b>	<b>Frequency and Schedule of Data Collection</b>	<b>Sampling Strategy</b>
<p>Core questions about the process and indicators of progress.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Who needs to change (e.g. policy makers, agency staff who enforce policy, public opinion leaders)?</li> <li>2. How does change occur (e.g., change in ordinance, change in policy, funding for policy, enforcement of existing policy)?</li> <li>3. What type, level, duration and quality of activities contribute to these outcomes?</li> <li>4. What is the current window of opportunity for change?</li> <li>5. Which partners will collaborate to achieve these outcomes? In what way?</li> <li>6. What is a realistic short-term outcome/indicator of progress?</li> </ol>	<p>Option 1. Focus group</p> <p>Option 2. Reflection log or journal</p> <p>Option 3. Key informant interviews conducted by external evaluator (structured or semi-structured)</p>	<p>Regular ongoing data collection</p> <p>Option 1. Monthly data collection points</p> <p>Option 2. Multiple data collection points at commencement, mid-course and conclusion of grant or campaign</p>	<p>Primarily purposive sampling strategy in which the respondents are selected for their knowledge and awareness of strategic progress</p> <p>Option 1. Representative sample of staff</p> <p>Option 2. Executive staff and board of directors</p> <p>Option 3. Executive director</p> <p>Option 4. Members of a coalition</p>

**Table A-4. Assessment of the Capacity of the Advocacy and Policy Organization**

<b>Focus</b>	<b>Data Collection Methods or Tools</b>	<b>Frequency and Schedule of Data Collection</b>	<b>Sampling Strategy</b>
Capacity of non-profit organization overall or with respect to a particular area, e.g. leadership, fund development, communication strategies, strategic planning	<p>Option 1. Structured self-assessment tool</p> <p>Option 2. Structured on-line survey</p> <p>Option 3. Key informant interviews conducted by external evaluator (structured or semi-structured)</p>	<p>Option 1. Multiple data collection points-- Commencement of grant and annual assessments</p> <p>Option 2. Single data collection point-- Conclusion of a grant year</p>	<p>Primarily purposive sampling strategy in which the respondent are selected for their knowledge and awareness of the organizational capacity.</p> <p>Option 1. Representative sample of staff</p> <p>Option 2. Executive staff and board of directors</p> <p>Option 3. Executive director</p>

**Table A-5. Case study Documentation of Process and Impacts**

Focus	Data Collection Methods or Tools	Frequency and Schedule of Data Collection	Sampling Strategy
<p>Key events, partners, strategies, progress markers and reflections in the development and implementation of advocacy and policy work</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What are the perspectives of different advocacy partners regarding a new legislative proposal?</li> <li>2. Why wasn't there enforcement of a designated marine protected area?</li> <li>3. How did students respond to new school policy about nutritious options in vending machines? (e.g., changes in attitudes, behavior, health conditions)</li> </ol>	<p>Option 1. Observations and reflections</p> <p>Option 2. Key informant interviews (conducted by internal or external evaluators)</p> <p>Option 3. Content analysis of media publications, ordinances, legislation, etc</p> <p>Option 4. Survey</p>	<p>Ongoing data collection</p> <p>Option 1. Periodic data collection points scheduled during events</p> <p>Option 2. Specific data collection schedule that precedes and follows the implementation of a new strategy or policy (pre and post test)</p> <p>Option 3. Intensive data collection during key events and critical moments</p> <p>Option 4. Weekly log including descriptive and reflective input</p>	<p>The sample will be comprehensive and inclusive of various stakeholders and participants. The sampling frame will be emergent as events unfold.</p> <p>Option 1. Key participants</p> <p>Option 2. Key partners</p> <p>Option 3. Key beneficiaries</p>



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