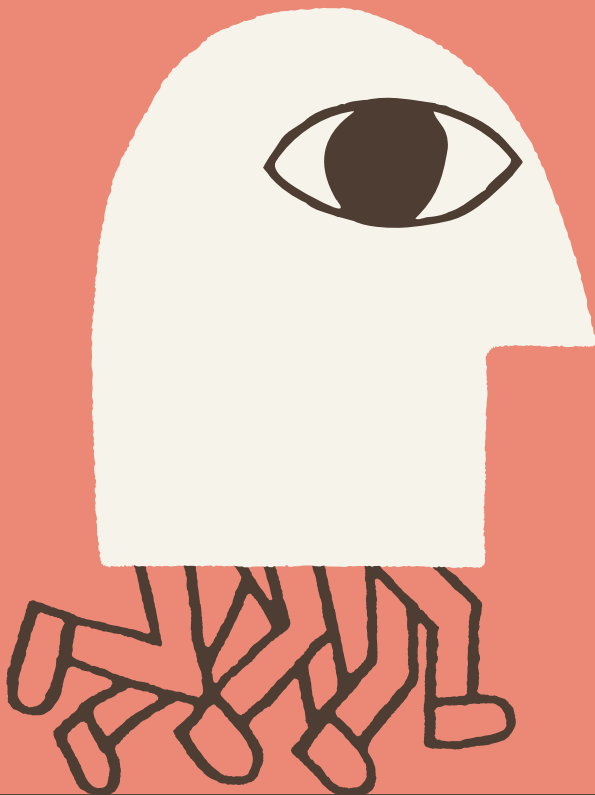


Amplifying Nonprofit Voices: Bridging the Advocacy Evaluation Gap



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Summary

1



Where We Stand

Over the past two decades, a robust field of advocacy and policy change evaluation has emerged. Now at an inflection point, the field is considering its future steps. Advocates, funders, and evaluators all play important roles, and all three have opportunities to realize significant improvements. Advocates, no matter what their level of evaluation expertise, have advocacy evaluation resources to draw on and a track record of assessing the impact of their advocacy. Evaluators and funders are reflecting on how advocacy evaluation can better address inequitable power dynamics, well as how to manage complexity and ambiguity.¹ Integrating the perspectives of those doing the work, particularly the advocates themselves, is a critical component of this process.

¹ Coffman, J., Stachowiak, S., & Raynor, J. 2021 "A learning agenda for the advocacy evaluation field's future." *New Directions for Evaluation*, 171:133–144.

Setting the Stage

In 2019, we observed that although many excellent resources have been developed over the years, many of them have been written from an evaluators' perspective, thereby potentially limiting their use by advocates. Past research by Innovation Network and others also indicated that most nonprofits did not evaluate their advocacy work, and those that did evaluate frequently faced significant hurdles to assessing their progress effectively and efficiently.² The biggest hurdles were lack of resources, lack of technical capability, and difficulties in identifying relevant outcomes and evaluation frameworks. Moreover, advocates must weigh the costs and benefits of evaluation and determine whether and how evaluation will best serve their needs.

To better understand advocates' perspectives and bridge the gap between their evaluation needs and the field of advocacy evaluation practice, we surveyed U.S. nonprofit advocates about their current advocacy practices and experiences with evaluation to answer the following questions:

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1 How common is it for advocates to evaluate their work? | 4 What challenges or barriers do advocates face with regard to evaluation? |
| 2 Why do advocates evaluate their efforts? | 5 What types of evaluation resources would they find most helpful to address these challenges? |
| 3 What evaluation methods do they use, and which methods are most useful? | 6 How is nonprofit advocacy changing, and what does this mean for advocacy evaluation? |

A key aim of this study is to update and deepen our understanding of nonprofit advocates' capacity to evaluate their advocacy, as well as to assess their strategies and tactics. Additionally, we sought to identify their evaluation needs and develop recommendations on advocate-friendly evaluation practices and aims.

² Innovation Network. (2008). Speaking for themselves: Advocates' perspectives on evaluation [Research study]. https://www.innonet.org/media/speaking_for_themselves_web_enhanced.pdf

Findings

Here is what we learned from the 175 U.S. nonprofit advocacy organizations—an admirable number given the challenges of administering and completing a survey during the COVID-19 pandemic—that responded to our survey in Spring 2021:

Evaluation Use

Nearly half of the respondents (48%) reported that they do not evaluate their advocacy efforts. Over one-third of respondents (38%) reported that they do evaluate their advocacy.

Evaluation Capacity

Three-quarters of respondents (75%) reported that they have at least some evaluation capacity. In most cases (65%), nonprofits have staff who do evaluation as part of their job, and 1 in 10 respondents reported having an evaluator on staff.

Preference for Real-Time Methods

Nonprofits that evaluate their advocacy prefer methods done in real-time, such as after-action reviews. Lower-rated methods are ones typically used by evaluators, such as interviews and surveys.

Traditional Resources Are Helpful

Nonprofits find traditional evaluation resources to be moderately helpful. Evaluation trainings or workshops topped the list (41%), closely followed by advocacy capacity assessment tools (38%).

Connecting with the Public and Key Constituencies

Nonprofit advocates want help with evaluating a range of policy issues and advocacy tactics. They place highest priority for evaluation support on getting help with assessing advocacy activities designed to inform, organize, and mobilize the general public and key constituencies.

Focus on Planning & Operations/External Strategies

Nonprofits that do evaluate their advocacy work do so for diverse reasons and audiences, but mostly to strengthen internal planning and operations and external strategy development.

Disconnect between Use and Usefulness of Methods

There are gaps between the evaluation methods that nonprofit advocates say they use and the methods they find useful, suggesting varying perspectives by advocates, evaluators, and funders on what is meaningful and useful information and what is not.

Top Challenges—Resources, Methods

Nonprofits continue to encounter a range of challenges to evaluating their advocacy, particularly time and resource constraints, as well as knowing how to evaluate their unique impact.

Facilitating Factors—Age and In-House Resources

While not predictive, a combination of organizational resources (budget, maturity, and staffing) and in-house advocacy and evaluation staffing contribute to more advocate evaluation capacity.

Nimbleness and Resiliency

Advocates have demonstrated great nimbleness and resiliency, shifting their strategies and tactics in response to COVID-19 and the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement following the murder of George Floyd in 2020.

Recommendations

We offer the following six recommendations to support collaborative reflection and follow-up by the field. At one level, the aim of this technical report is to advance non-profit advocacy evaluation “so that advocacy can fulfill its vision more effectively.”³ At another, we are mindful of the need to translate these findings into actionable strategies and activities. In the Recommendations and Actions Steps section of the report, we provide targeted suggestions to advocates, evaluators, and funders.



1. Provide Tailored Advocacy Evaluation Support

As the field considers new advocacy evaluation resources, evaluators and funders should be cognizant of the advocate perspective and how advocates like to learn, as well as the complexity of their organizations and unique circumstances. While our findings speak to specific resources that advocates prefer, nonprofits are in the best position to articulate these needs to evaluators and funders at the organizational and tactical levels.



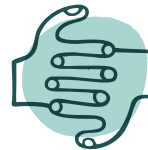
2. Adopt and Adapt Evaluation Capacity Building Resources

A key takeaway from the survey findings is that resources cannot be limited to commissioning an evaluation; building advocate capacity to do evaluation should be a shared priority. But evaluation capacity building activities need to be tailored—there is no one-size-fits-all approach. An area of evaluation practice that has received significant attention in the last two decades, developing sustainable individual and organizational evaluation capacity is increasingly part of the evaluator’s toolkit, as well as a priority of commissioners of evaluation and nonprofits themselves.



3. Adopt a Different Orientation to Advocacy and Policy Change Evaluation: Roles and Relationships

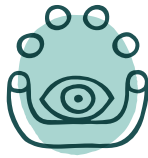
The survey findings on gains in advocate evaluation capacity and expertise (e.g., assessing impacts) and savoir faire in leveraging evaluation findings support shifting the balance to where power is shared in the partnerships between funders, evaluators, and advocates. To this end, we suggest a blurring of the lines in advocate, evaluator, and funder roles in evaluating advocacy, with all stakeholders bringing their different perspectives to bear (e.g., the usefulness of specific evaluation methods) to advance advocacy and policy change evaluation and support a culture of evaluation. Additionally, commonalities should be recognized, such as shared advocate, evaluator, and funder commitment to achieving a just, equitable society and evaluation as a means to inform change.



4. Address the Twin Challenges of Resource Constraints and Lack of Technical Expertise

Our findings on limited resources to do evaluation corroborate earlier findings. We know that addressing resource constraints is a Sisyphean task that requires a partnership approach and high commitment by all parties. But above all, there needs to be more concerted effort and willingness to consider new resources and strategies, such as supporting evaluation training and the sharing of evaluation capacity among coalition members. Our findings indicate that the majority of nonprofits doing advocacy are not evaluating that work, and the majority do not have an evaluator.

3 Gardner, A. L., & Brindis, C. D. (2017). *Advocacy and policy change evaluation: Theory and practice*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.



5. Support the Use of Meaningful Methods

Our findings on evaluation methods that nonprofit advocates use and the methods they find useful reveal a possible gap in what advocates find meaningful and what evaluators and funders find meaningful. Advocates prefer methods that are easily implemented and provide actionable information in real time and should be encouraged and supported in using these methods, increasing their overall evaluation capacity. Evaluators and funders need to follow advocates' lead and focus more on the purpose of the evaluation, the target audience, the questions that advocates want to answer, and the corresponding useful methods.



6. Take Equity to the Next Level, and Leverage Advocate Resilience and Nimbleness

In the face of the “twin pandemics” of COVID-19 and racial injustice, the survey findings indicate that nonprofit advocates have proven themselves to be resilient on many fronts. During the COVID-19 pandemic, nonprofits have shifted to virtual platforms and adapted their advocacy accordingly. They are embedding equity into their mission and activities. The time is ripe for advocates, evaluators, and funders to develop a shared understanding of how macro forces are changing advocates and their advocacy, increasing their ability to anticipate and navigate these changes, some of which will reshape evaluation practice.

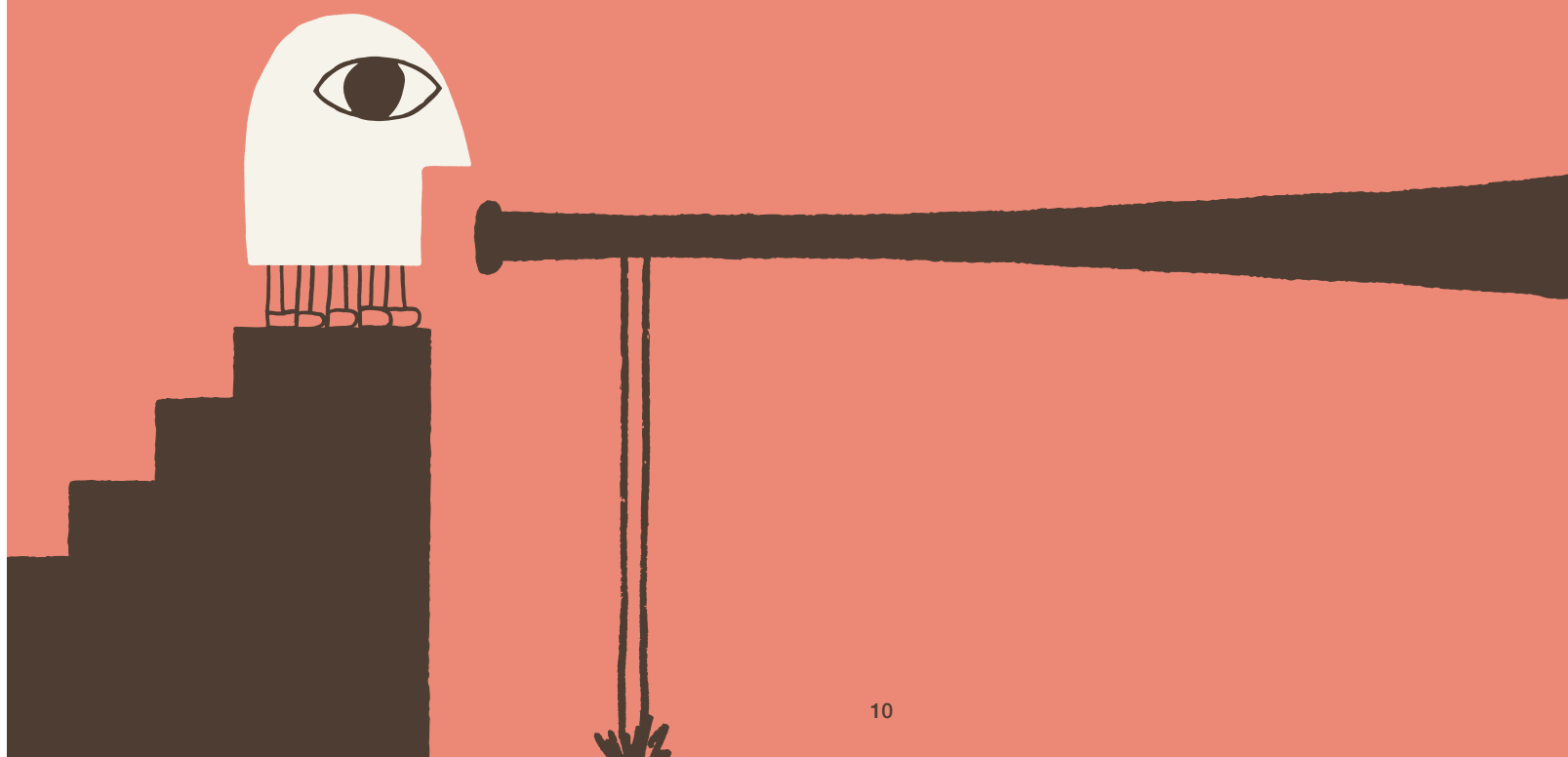
Closing Thoughts

Our survey findings present a comprehensive, detailed picture of nonprofits' evolving advocacy evaluation needs that we believe will deepen and sharpen the insights gained through systematic, context-sensitive evaluation. Although these findings are specific to U.S. nonprofits and not fully representative of all nonprofits across the sector, we believe they are of great value to the field in terms of providing a realistic picture of the challenges and opportunities that nonprofits face with regard to evaluating their advocacy. The findings confirmed what we knew about the challenges to nonprofit advocacy, which persist and are exacerbated by the uncertainty and turbulence of the times.

However, we have reason to be optimistic. Nonprofit evaluation capacity exists and can be leveraged by savvy evaluators and supportive funders. Second, we have a clearer idea of the specific types of evaluation that are used and useful to nonprofit advocates, which provides a clear path forward to providing targeted evaluation support. Third, we have a current snapshot of actual nonprofit advocacy and where advocates, evaluators, and funders will need to focus their attention, such as developing IT and virtual advocacy evaluation resources. Together, these findings help to clarify the roles that key stakeholders—advocates, evaluators, and funders—can play in evolving the field of advocacy and policy change evaluation to better meet advocate evaluation needs and increase advocacy effectiveness.

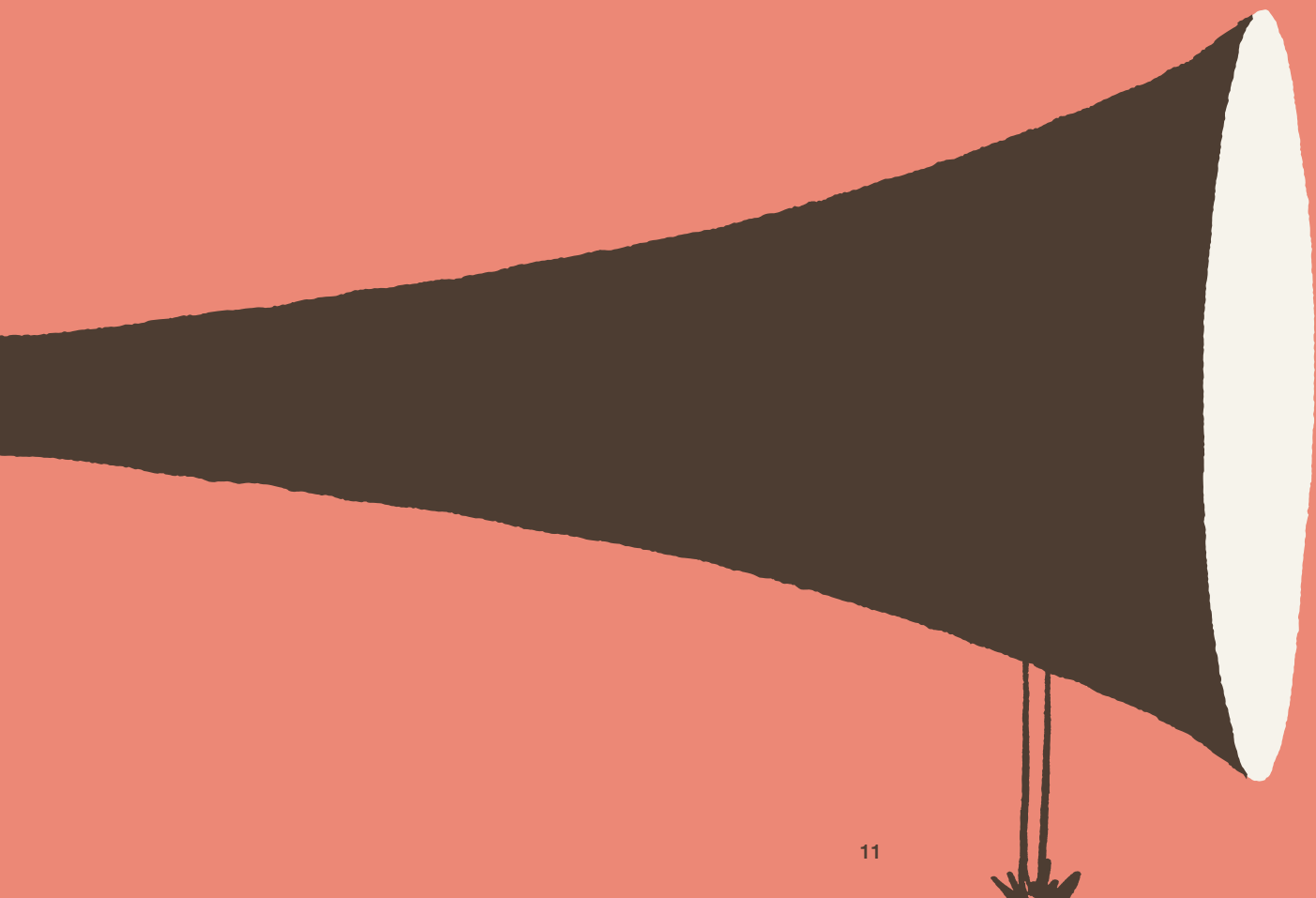
Introduction

2



Background

The field of advocacy and policy change evaluation has matured and established itself as a unique area of assessment over the past 20 years. Working together, evaluators, funders, and advocates developed a plethora of methods, tools, and resources, many of which are intended to help bolster advocates' capacity to engage in advocacy and/or assess its effectiveness.



Why Advocates?

There was good reason for targeting advocates; a 2008 study by Innovation Network found that only one in four nonprofits evaluated their advocacy work. Moreover, their research found that nonprofits faced significant hurdles to being able to assess their progress and results, such as limited resources and technical expertise.⁴ In their 2013 survey of leading advocacy organizations, such as Greenpeace International and the Sierra Club, Jim Coe and Juliette Majot found strong support for embedding Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) processes to expand advocacy effectiveness. However, there were challenges in operationalizing and/or using these systems, and context drove adoption.⁵

These hurdles are not that different from the ones that nonprofits typically encounter with regard to program evaluation—something that has been studied for many years. For example, Joanne Carman and Kimberly Fredericks argued in their 2010 study of nonprofit evaluation capacity that there are three types of nonprofit organizations with regard to evaluation. First, there are those organizations that struggle across the board with evaluation because they lack expertise and do not even have basic resources available to support evaluation. Then, there are those organizations that can engage in some evaluation but still have limited capacity because of limited internal support from management, board, and/or staff, in addition to technical challenges related to evaluation design and implementation. Lastly, there are nonprofits that can evaluate their efforts with relative success, although even these organizations struggle to find as much time as they would like to devote to the evaluation process.⁶ Similarly, in their 2018 systematic review of barriers to evaluation, Anders Malthe Bach-Mortensen and Paul Montgomery found that the key challenges that nonprofit organizations face regarding evaluation include (1) lack of financial resources, (2) lack of technical capability and evaluation literacy, and (3) identifying relevant outcome indicators and evaluation systems.⁷

⁴ Innovation Network (2008), op. cit.

⁵ Coe, J., & Majot, J. 2013. Monitoring, evaluation and learning in NGO advocacy: Findings from comparative policy advocacy MEL review project. Oxfam America.

⁶ Carman, J. G., & Fredericks, K. A. 2010. "Evaluation capacity and nonprofit organizations: Is the glass half-empty or half-full?" *American Journal of Evaluation*, 31(1): 84–104.

⁷ Bach-Mortensen, A. M., & Montgomery, P. 2018. "What are the barriers and facilitators for third-sector organizations (non-profits) to evaluate their services? A systematic review." *Systematic Reviews*, 7(13): 1–15.

Many tools, methods, and resources have been developed to strengthen nonprofit evaluation capacity and support use of evaluation findings in fine-tuning tactics and strategy development, including resources that were designed to be used by nonprofits themselves, such as Chari Smith's 2021 book, *Nonprofit Program Evaluation Made Simple*.⁸ The importance of evaluative thinking has also come to the forefront of evaluation capacity building practice, as evaluators have sought to help nonprofits transform into learning organizations.⁹ The development of these resources may be paying off. Through its ongoing research project on the state of evaluation, Innovation Network has found that the number of nonprofits evaluating their work has grown from 85% in 2010 to 92% in 2016.¹⁰

Nonprofits also began to receive support from philanthropy in the early 2000s to build their advocacy capacity and work with evaluators to assess their advocacy readiness. The result has been several field-tested advocacy capacity assessment tools, such as the Alliance for Justice's Advocacy Capacity Tool (ACT).¹¹ Support for evaluating advocacy and policy change initiatives followed, resulting in a plethora of new methods and how-to guides, such as Aspen Institute's Advocacy Progress Planner¹² and Center for Evaluation Innovation's Advocacy Strategy Framework.¹³ The first how-to book, *Advocacy and Policy Change Evaluation: Theory and Practice*, was published in 2017.¹⁴

8 Smith, C. (2021). *Nonprofit program evaluation made simple: Get your data. Show your impact. Improve your programs.* Portland OR: Arthur Brick Road.

9 Buckley, J., Archibald, T., Hargraves, M., & Trochim, W. M. 2015. "Defining and teaching evaluative thinking: Insights from research on critical thinking." *American Journal of Evaluation*, 36(3):375–388.

10 Innovation Network. (2016). *State of evaluation 2016: Evaluation practice and capacity in the nonprofit sector [Research study]*. https://www.innonet.org/media/2016-State_of_Evaluation.pdf

11 Alliance for Justice. (n.d.). *Tools for Effective Advocacy*. <https://bolderadvocacy.org/resource-library/tools-for-effective-advocacy/>

12 Aspen Planning and Evaluation Program at the Aspen Institute. (n.d.). *Tools*. <https://www.aspeninstitute.org/programs/aspen-planning-and-evaluation-program/tools/>

13 Center for Evaluation Innovation. (2015). *The Advocacy Strategy Framework: A tool for articulating an advocacy theory of change*. <https://www.evaluationinnovation.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Advocacy-Strategy-Framework.pdf>

14 Gardner & Brindis (2017), op. cit.

About This Research Project

In 2019, we recognized that although many excellent evaluation resources had been developed over the years, we were unsure whether nonprofits were using these resources to evaluate their advocacy. For starters, many—if not most—of these resources were written by evaluators or funders with limited input from nonprofit advocates. Also, we wondered about the usefulness of these resources and the gaps between advocates' learning needs and those of evaluators and funders.

Accordingly, our strategy was to seek input directly from nonprofits and learn more about their current advocacy practices and lived experience with evaluation in their organization and in evaluating their advocacy. Our aim was to better understand nonprofit advocates' ability to evaluate their advocacy capacity, strategies, and tactics; identify their evaluation needs; and develop recommendations on advocate-friendly evaluation practices. How common is it for advocates to evaluate their work? Why do nonprofits evaluate their efforts? What evaluation methods do they use, and which methods do they find useful? And, importantly, what support do nonprofit advocates want with regard to helping them better evaluate their advocacy?

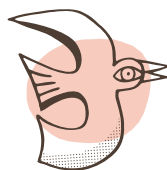
Asking advocates about their evaluation practices could not have come at a better time due to the seismic shifts we are currently experiencing in our society, the changing political terrain, and the twin pandemics of COVID-19 and systemic racism. Our survey also came at a time when the advocacy evaluation field is engaged in concerted reflection about its next phase of development.¹⁵ Moreover, we realized there are multiple users of the findings from this project, as revealed below:

Our hope is that our survey results contribute to and broaden the dialogue currently taking place. It is critical that the expertise of the people doing the work—the advocates themselves—is integrated into the methods and resources developed for evaluation. They are on the front lines of advocacy and are barometers of change. Evaluators bring expertise in conducting advocacy and policy initiatives and are constantly identifying and developing new designs and methods. Funders are uniquely positioned to shore up the partnership between advocates, evaluator, and funders and support sharing of new models and approaches to evaluating advocacy.



Advocates

Advocates with and without significant internal evaluation capacity will have a voice in the development of tailored evaluation tools they can use to help them monitor their strategies and tactics as they go.



Evaluators

Evaluators will have a bird's eye view of what advocates really need and how they can be supported in the trenches, including processes to support organizational learning and sustainability.



Funders

Funders of advocacy and policy change initiatives will have a better understanding of advocates' evaluation needs and resources to address these needs, as well as the evaluation challenges faced by grantees. This will help funders tailor their evaluation requirements and support a partnership approach to evaluation.

¹⁵ Coffman et al. (2021, September 24), op. cit.

Methodology

We designed and administered an online survey instrument with 27 open- and close-ended items in partnership with our advisory committee of advocates, evaluators, and funders. A copy of the survey instrument is available, beginning on page 64. The survey included questions about organizational characteristics (type, budget, staffing, location, etc.),¹⁶ as well as organizational advocacy practices and evaluation practices. We also asked respondents to identify relevant resources that would help them improve future evaluation efforts, as well as the best ways to provide those resources.

We sent an invitation to participate in the survey to 5,629 unique organizational contacts on the email list of the Alliance for Justice's Bolder Advocacy program. A total of 178 nonprofit advocates completed the survey from 175 unique organizations.¹⁷ Three organizations had two staff members complete the survey; in these cases, we used the first set of responses collected. With 175 responses, our response rate is 3.1%. The adjusted response rate is 9.6% (removing from the denominator bounced invitations, unopened invitations, and individuals who opted out from the email list). The survey was available online from February 16, 2021, through March 31, 2021.

The data were cleaned, and data analyses were performed in Excel. Descriptive statistics were conducted on the quantitative data, and the qualitative data were coded based on thematic and content trends. For each question, we conducted a cross-tabulation of analysis by whether a respondent said it evaluated its advocacy "Yes" or "No." We report where there are significant differences. Each coded question received a score of 80% when reviewed for interrater reliability. When interpreting the findings, we also made efforts to avoid confirmation bias and belief preservation.

Limitations

The study is exploratory and therefore is not a rigorous assessment of the specific attributes of nonprofits that result in the ability to evaluate. Nor is it a determination of whether nonprofits that evaluate their advocacy have a greater success with their tactics than those that do not. Second, while we recognized the perspectives of advocates, evaluators, and funders vary in evaluating advocacy and policy change initiatives, we did not appreciate how challenging it would be to achieve a balance in perspectives in reporting the findings. We appreciate the assistance of the advisory committee to make sure all voices are heard equally.

¹⁶ Note: We did not ask demographic questions to understand the populations and communities served by survey respondents. If this study is repeated, we suggest that this data be collected because it would support development of tailored resources and surface important differences in challenges, needs, and strengths.

¹⁷ Note: In some cases, the N is 173 responses, not 175. This is because we decided to count two responses as "complete" when they had completed 80% of the survey but had skipped the final few questions.

Project Team

Annette Gardner, PhD, MPH, is Principal at ALGardner Consulting. She co-authored the definitive evaluation book for evaluators of advocacy and policy change initiatives with Claire Brindis, DrPH, *Advocacy and Policy Change Evaluation: Theory and Practice* (Stanford University Press, 2017). A long-time evaluator, she was the lead of an innovative eight-year policy advocacy initiative to expand clinic consortia advocacy in California, as well as an evaluator of policy changes benefitting vulnerable populations. She is also an educator and has expertise in building advocate evaluation capacity and integrating foresight methods into evaluation practice.

Shannon Williams, MA, LLM, is the Director of Operations and Evaluation for the Bolder Advocacy program at Alliance for Justice. In her role, she ensures the continuity of day-to-day operations for the Bolder Advocacy program to help guide sustainable program growth. She also oversees Bolder Advocacy's evaluation work, leading both internal efforts to document program impact and external efforts to provide training and technical assistance about advocacy evaluation for nonprofits and funders. Previously, Shannon was the Director of Research and Evaluation at Rebuilding Together, a national nonprofit housing organization.

Susan Hoechstetter, MSW, is Principal at Strengthening Democracy. During her 20-year tenure at Alliance for Justice, she led the development of the first nationally recognized advocacy capacity assessment tool (ACT) as well as the community organizing capacity assessment tool (PowerCheck). A lifelong advocate who has served as the voice for farmworkers, children and families, and social workers, Sue has also provided advocacy and evaluation training and technical assistance for thousands of grassroots organizations and large nonprofits, as well as foundations. Her advocacy is described in the March 14, 1997 Congressional Record.

Advisors

We were very fortunate to have a 17-member advisory committee of advocates, evaluators, and funders who have been instrumental in building the advocacy and policy change evaluation field and collaborating on initiatives to support successful achievement of advocates' aims. They reviewed and piloted the survey and reviewed a draft version of the report.

Amy Arbretton, PhD, Evaluation Officer, Effective Philanthropy Group

Hilary Binder-Aviles, MA, Independent Nonprofit Consultant

Nicole Bowman (Lunaape/Mohican), PhD, Bowman Performance Consulting and University of Wisconsin

Claire Brindis, DrPH, Emerita Director, Philip R. Lee Institute for Health Policy Studies, University of California, San Francisco

Julia Coffman, Co-Executive Director, Center for Evaluation Innovation

George Grob, MA, President, Center for Public Program Evaluation

Tom Kelly, MPH, Knowledge, Evaluation & Learning at KEL Advising

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Findings

3



Respondent Characteristics

We asked survey respondents to complete several questions about their organizations. Their answers reflect the diversity within the nonprofit sector and underscore the importance of considering contextual factors such as organization size, budget, and staffing when making decisions about how best to approach advocacy evaluation.

Organization Type

Two-thirds (67%) of survey responses came from individuals working at 501(c)(3) public charity organizations.¹⁸ This mirrors national data available about the nonprofit sector; as of 2016, 70% of the over 1.5 million registered nonprofit organizations in the United States were 501(c)(3) public charities.¹⁹ The remainder came from a variety of other types of organizations, including 501(c)(4) social welfare organizations (7%) and affiliated 501(c)(3)/501(c)(4) organizations (9%).

It is helpful for evaluators, funders, and advocates to be familiar with the legal status of the nonprofit organizations because there are rules in place that govern what types of advocacy activities are permissible for different types of organizations. For example, 501(c)(3) public charities may engage in a limited amount of lobbying for or against public legislation, whereas 501(c)(4) social welfare organizations may engage in an unlimited amount of lobbying.²⁰



18 For more information on what a 501(c)(3) organization is, see the IRS definition of public charities at <https://www.irs.gov/charities-non-profits/charitable-organizations/public-charities>

19 National Center for Charitable Statistics. (2020, June). The Nonprofit Sector in Brief 2019. Urban Institute. <https://nccs.urban.org/publication/nonprofit-sector-brief-2019>

20 Bolder Advocacy. (2022, July 11). Comparison of 501(c)(3) and 501(c)(4) permissible activities. Alliance for Justice. <https://bolderadvocacy.org/resource/comparison-of-501c3-and-501c4-permissible-activities/>

Organization Age and Budget Size

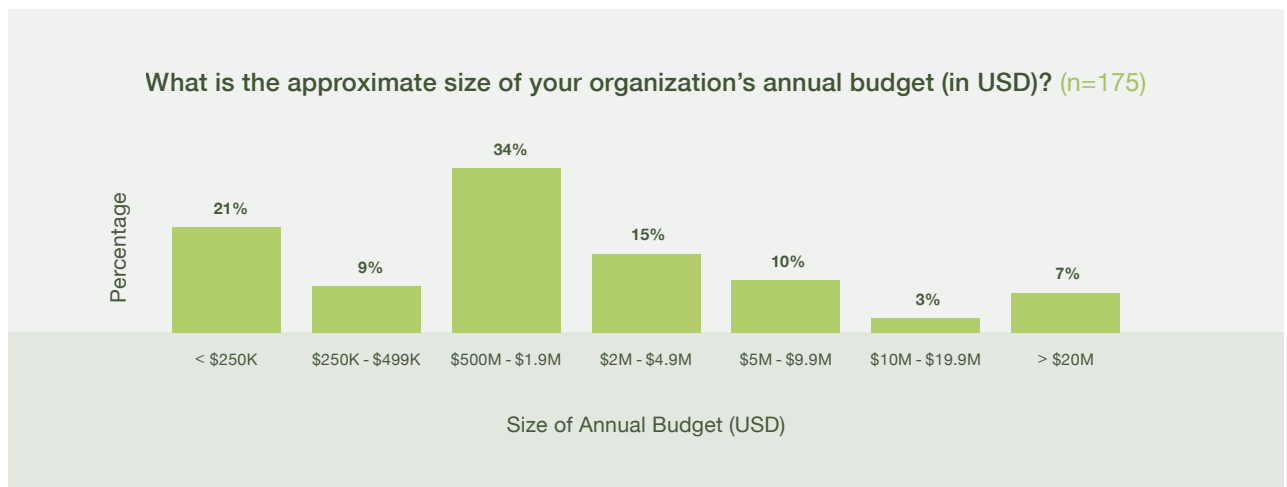
The median age of nonprofit organizations in our survey was 20 years old,²¹ although respondents varied in age from less than 5 years old (14%) to more than 50 years old (8%). The age of a nonprofit—as well as where it is in terms of its organizational life cycle—can have an impact on what types of evaluation capacity building are pos-

sible within the organization. Earlier evaluation research by Carman and Friedrichs, among others, indicates that older, more experienced nonprofits tend to have better success at implementing evaluation practices compared to younger organizations.²²



The size of a nonprofit organization’s budget also provides some indication of what resources may be available to support evaluation activities. With regard to the organizations in our sample, just under two-thirds

of the organizations (64%) reported they have an annual budget below \$1.9 million. Our sample also had less representation from organizations with budgets under \$500,000 compared to the nonprofit sector as a whole.²³



21 This is consistent with the results of a 2014 study of the data in the IRS Exempt Organizations Master File, which found that the median age of a nonprofit is 20 years old. See McLean, C. (2014, December 30). Vital records: Births and deaths in the nonprofit sector. *Nonprofit Quarterly*. <https://nonprofitquarterly.org/vital-records-births-and-deaths-in-the-nonprofit-sector/>

22 Carman, J. G., & Friedrichs, K. A. (2010), op. cit.

23 According to the most recent data available from the National Center for Charitable Statistics, 65% of 501(c)(3) public charities have annual budgets below \$250,000. See National Center for Charitable Statistics (2020, June), op. cit.

Organization Staff

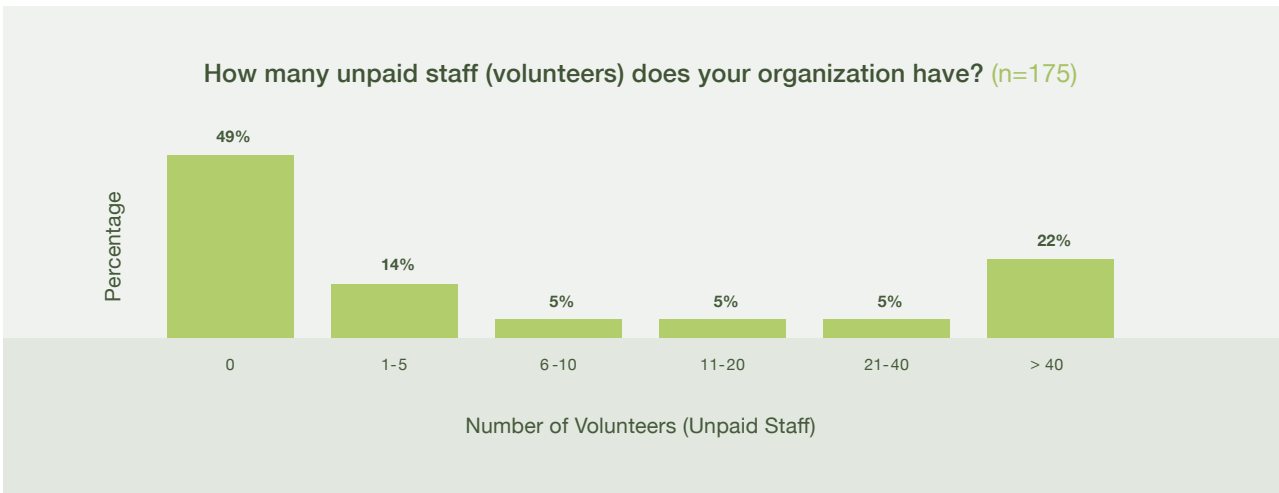
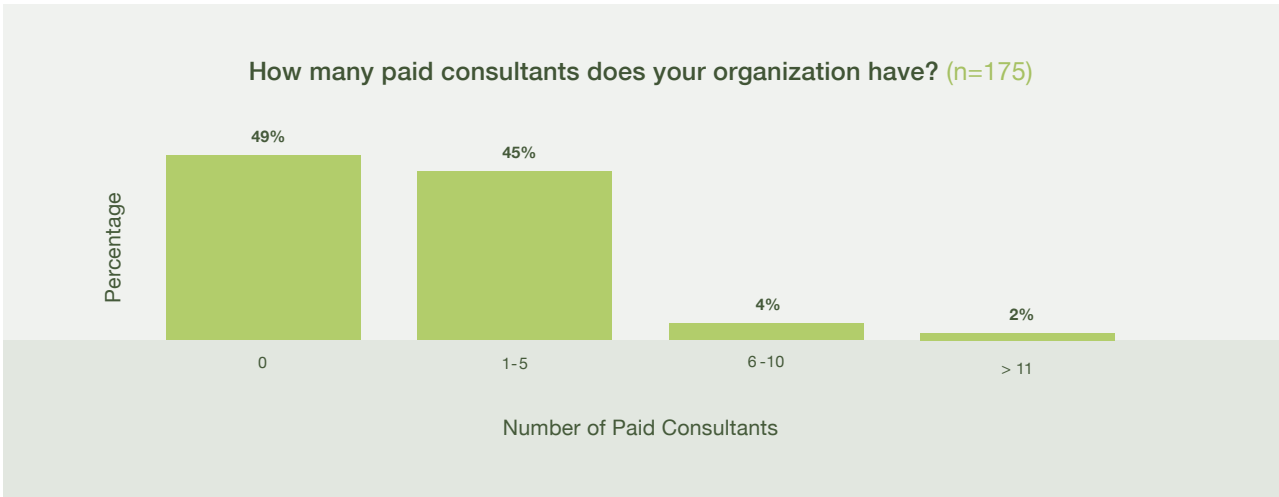
The median staff size for nonprofits in our sample was 10 employees (8 full-time and 2 part-time employees),²⁴ although respondents' size and number of staff ranged from zero to over 40 staff. Around half of the organizations in our sample reported that they also work with paid consultants (51%) and/or volunteers (51%). Staff size can affect whether the evaluation capacity within

a nonprofit organization is low or high. As discussed below, most nonprofits in our sample reported that they have staff whose responsibilities include evaluation. However, when deciding upon how best to approach advocacy evaluation, it is important to consider whether evaluation is a small or large part of that person's job.²⁵



²⁴ Note: Respondents reported the number of staff and medians were calculated. Data are presented in ranges as well.

²⁵ In 2017, Venture Philanthropy Partners worked with Dan Tsin, Director of Data and Accountability at Urban Alliance, to develop the Nonprofit Evaluation Capacity Rubric to help funders and grantees quickly estimate what a nonprofit's existing evaluation capacity looks like based on staffing. See Castillo, I. (2017). Building evaluation capacity within a nonprofit – How funders can help (and not cause trouble). Venture Philanthropy Partners. <http://www.vppartners.org/blog-post/building-evaluation-capacity-within-a-nonprofit-how-funders-can-help-and-not-cause-trouble/>



Organizational Work Location

Knowing a nonprofit's location, as well as the scope of its advocacy work, provides contextual information. We received survey responses from nonprofit organizations working in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and

Puerto Rico. Around one-fifth (19%) of the organizations in our sample reported they work nationally (in all 50 states). A small number of organizations (3%) reported they work outside the United States.



In sum, there was tremendous diversity in the nonprofit organizations that responded to our survey. Contextual factors such as organizational size, resources, and location are important to bear in mind when considering

how to design and implement an advocacy evaluation plan, so that expectations can be managed and available resources can be effectively leveraged.

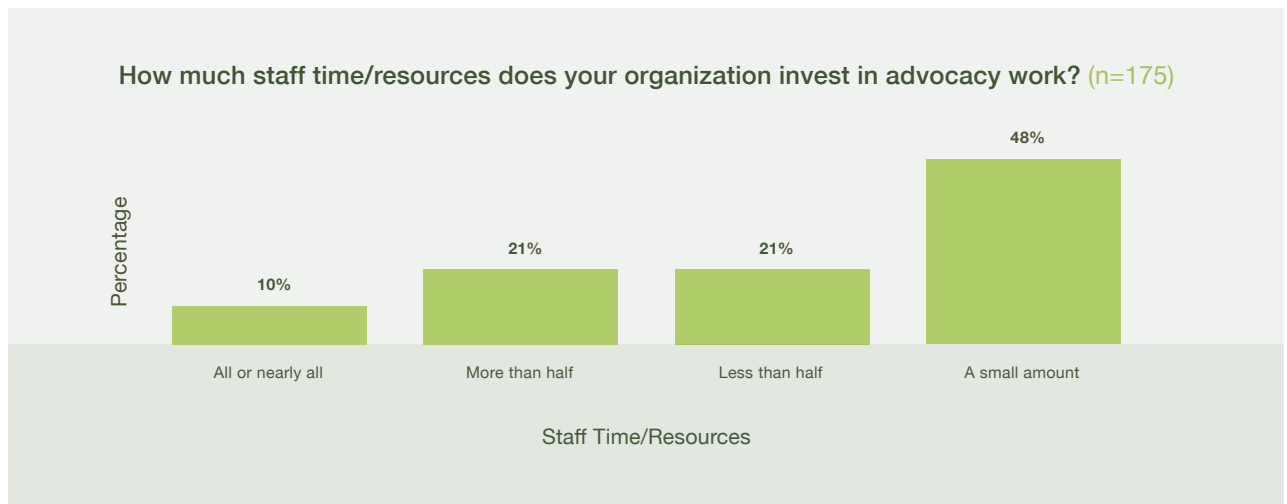
Nonprofit Advocacy Characteristics

In addition to the contextual factors reviewed above, it is also critical to consider how a nonprofit engages in advocacy, the resources it dedicates to advocacy, the policy areas the organization seeks to influence, and what tactics the organization uses in pursuit of its goals. For example, when considering how to design an evaluation for a nonprofit that engages in advocacy at the local, state, and federal levels, it is important to understand how organizational size contributes to being able to navigate policymaking processes at more than one level.

Resources Dedicated to Advocacy

Most organizations (70%) reported that they invest less than half their staff time and resources into their advocacy efforts. This is not surprising, because many nonprofits also provide direct services in the communities that they serve. Also, groups are sometimes deterred from doing advocacy because of the misperception that activities such as lobbying are off-limits, when it is

permissible for 501(c)(3) public charities and other types of nonprofits to engage in lobbying.²⁶ Similarly, board leadership seeing activism as risky or off-limits may put a damper on allocating resources to advocacy. The remainder of survey respondents (31%) reported that they allocate more than half of their staff time and resources to their advocacy.²⁷

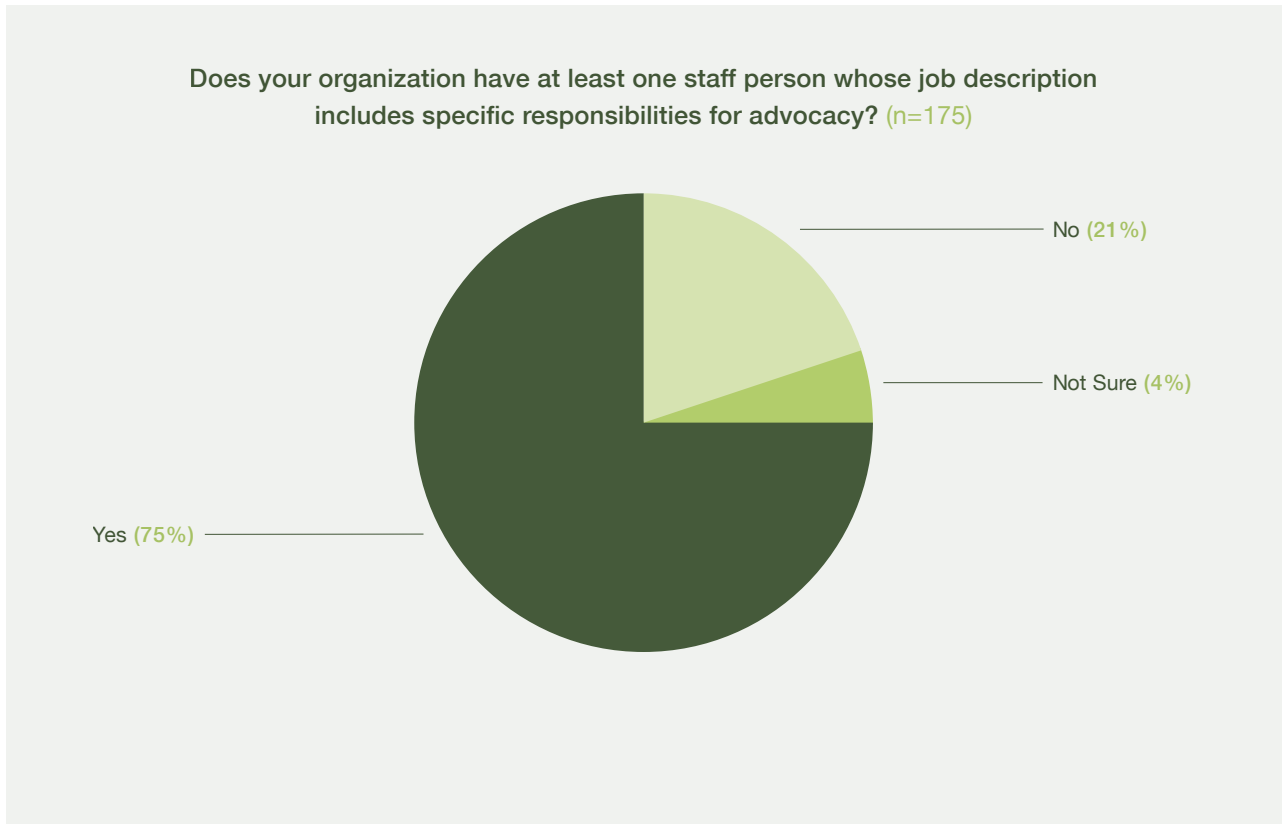


26 Bolder Advocacy. (2018, June 12). Types of Exempt Organizations and What They May Do. Alliance for Justice. <https://bolderadvocacy.org/resource/types-of-exempt-organizations-and-what-they-may-do/>

27 This may be artificially high given how we recruited participation in the survey by distributing to Bolder Advocacy's email list, which consists of advocacy-minded nonprofit organizations.

Most respondents (75%) also reported that they have at least one person on staff who is responsible for advocacy. However, around one-fifth (21%) indicated that they do not have at least one staff person whose job description includes responsibilities for advocacy. It is important

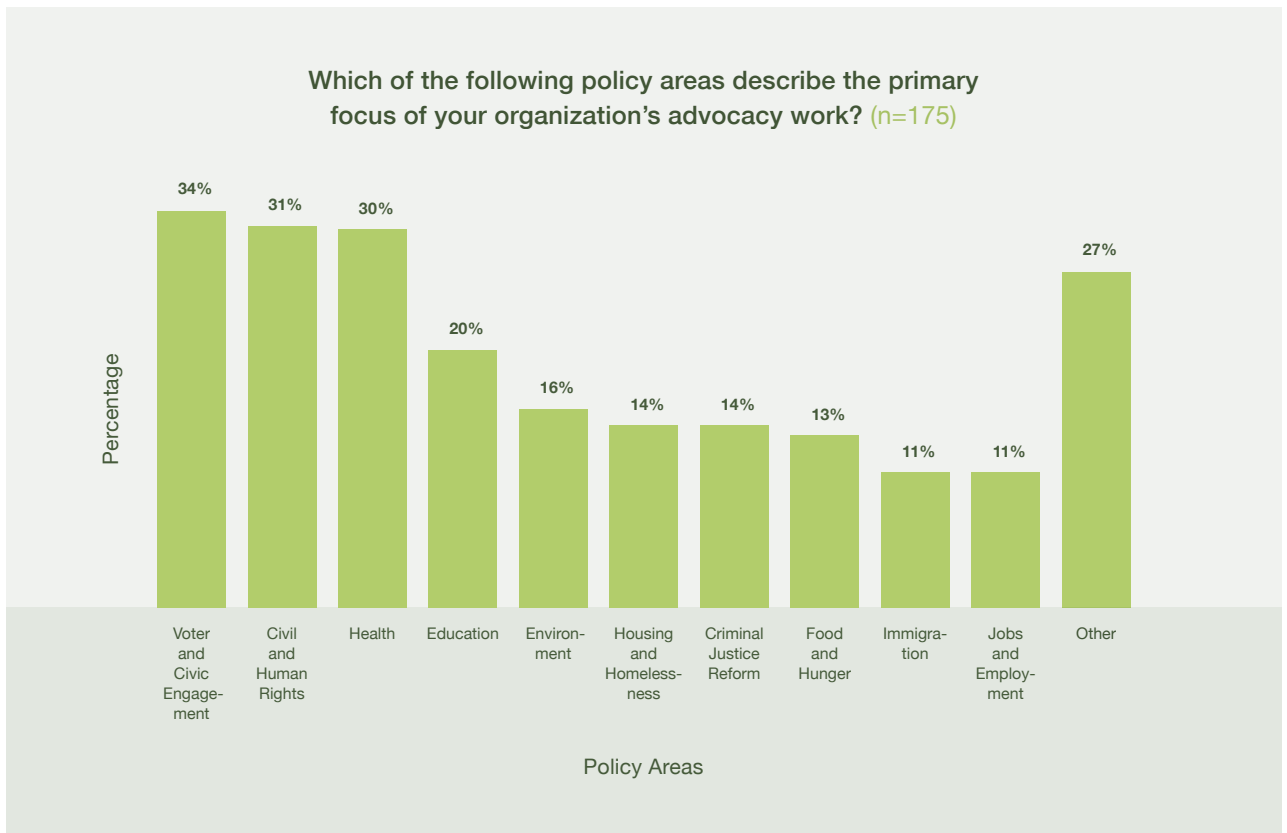
for evaluators to determine who on staff (if anyone) is responsible for advocacy because those who lead advocacy efforts on behalf of a nonprofit organization will most likely be the primary evaluation partner.



Policy Areas Targeted

When asked to check all the policy areas that describe the primary focus of their organizations' advocacy work, the most targeted issue areas by respondents were voter and civic engagement (34%), civil and human rights (31%), and health (30%). Nearly one-third (27%) also checked the "other" box in addition to one of the options we provided for them to choose from, again speaking to the diversity within the nonprofit sector, as well as

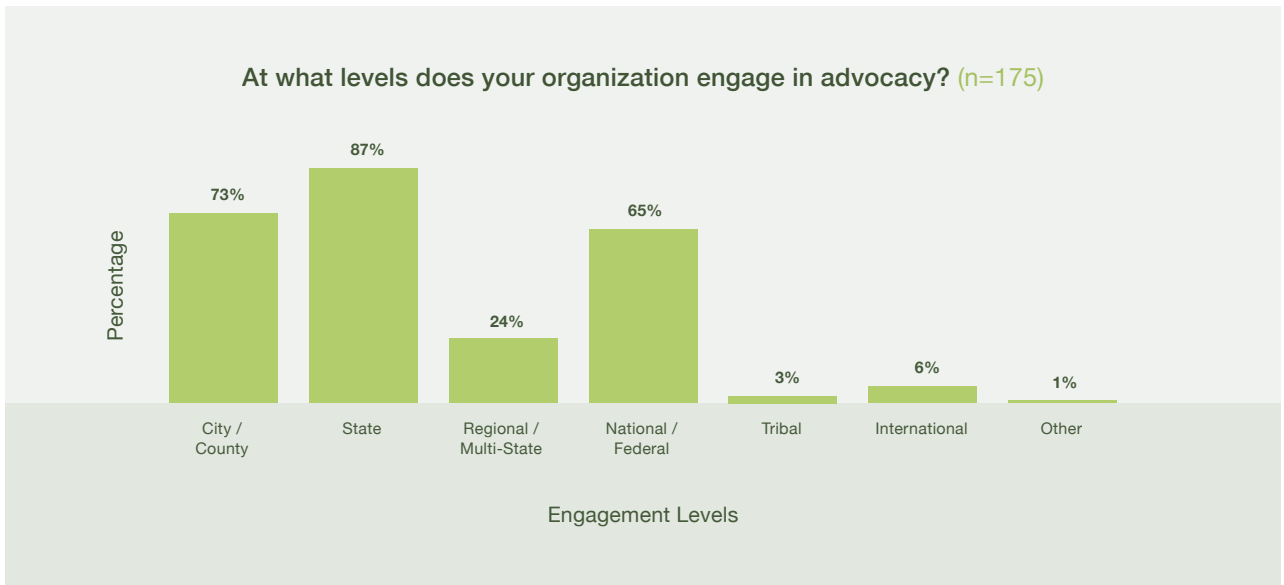
ability to focus on more than one policy issue. Just under two-thirds of respondents (63%) selected three or more policy issue areas, 17% of respondents indicated they worked on two policy issues, and 19% reported that they only worked on one policy issue. This indicates an opportunity for building expertise in multiple issue areas and that nonprofits may have complex needs with regard to evaluating different areas of their advocacy.



Levels Targeted

Most nonprofit organizations in our sample also work on advocacy initiatives at multiple levels of government, from local to federal. Around half (51%) reported they engage in advocacy at three or more levels of government, and just under one-third (31%) reported they engage in advocacy at two different levels of government. Most respondents reported they were active at the state level (87%). Nearly three-quarters (73%) were active at the local (city/county)

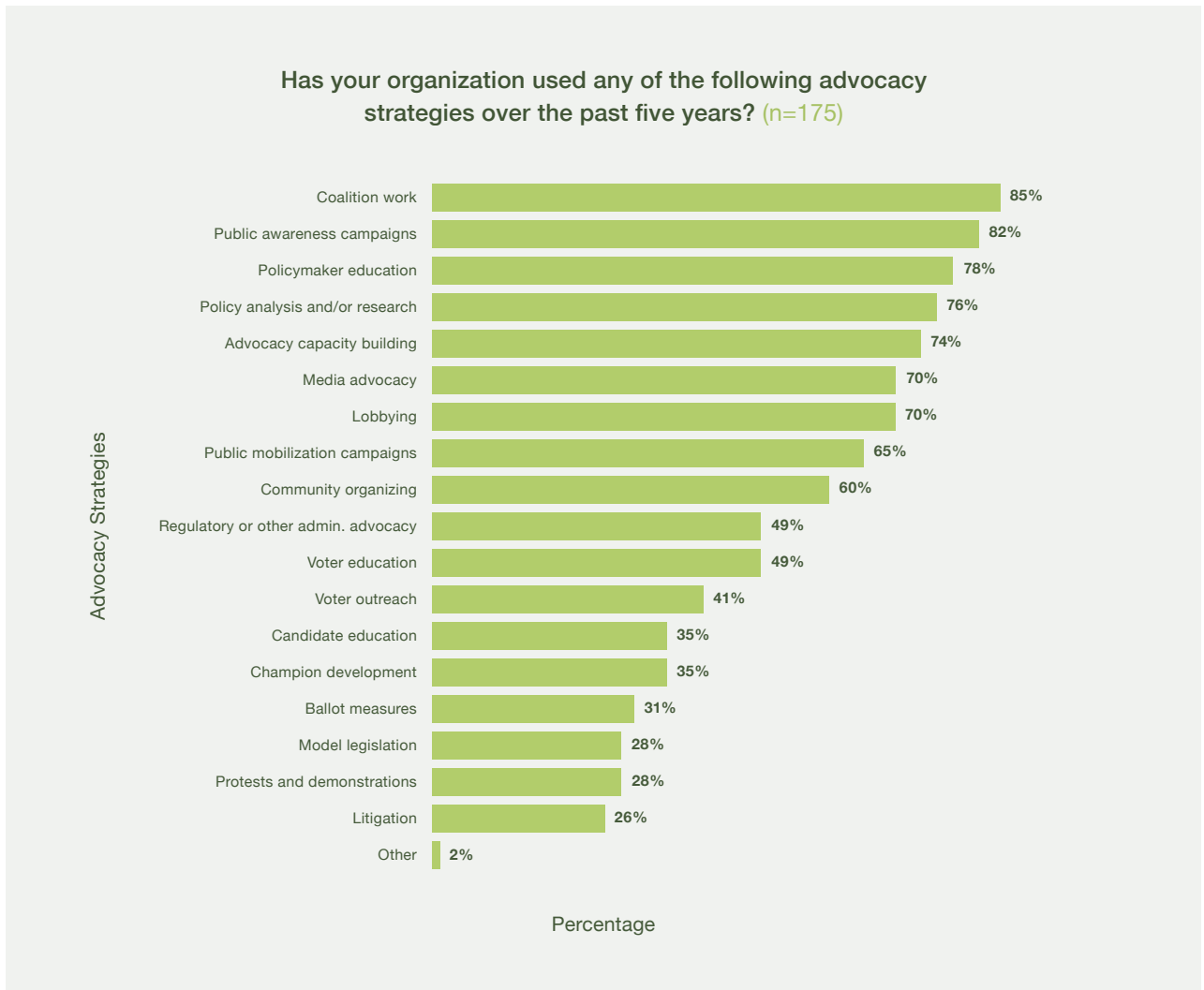
level, and just under two-thirds (65%) engaged in national level advocacy. Knowing the level (or levels) of advocacy that an organization seeks to target through its efforts is helpful for identifying specific advocacy tactics and appropriate evaluation methods. For example, coalition work may play a greater role in state and federal level advocacy, while targeting individual decision-makers may be the primary focus at the local level.



Advocacy Strategies and Tactics

We also asked survey respondents to identify the types of advocacy tactics that their organizations had used over the past five years. The most popular strategies used by nonprofits include coalition work (85%), public awareness campaigns (82%), policymaker education (78%), policy analysis and/or research (76%), advocacy capacity building (74%), media advocacy (70%), and lobbying (70%). In other studies, advocates report using multiple advocacy tactics, such as reaching out to the media and targeting decision-makers to highlight a problem. Our data corroborates this advocacy toolkit approach and capacity to change tactics or use tactics in tandem. On average, the nonprofits in our sample

said they used approximately 10 different strategies (9.82) over the past five years.²⁸ Given that nonprofit advocates are likely to engage in multiple strategies as they seek to advance their policy agendas, it is important for anyone evaluating these efforts to have at least a working knowledge of common advocacy and policy tactics and how they work together, as well as corresponding evaluation methods. We know that different strategies or tactics require varying evaluation methods. For example, organization advocacy assessment methods ask very different questions than policymaker surveys or analyses of media advocacy activities.

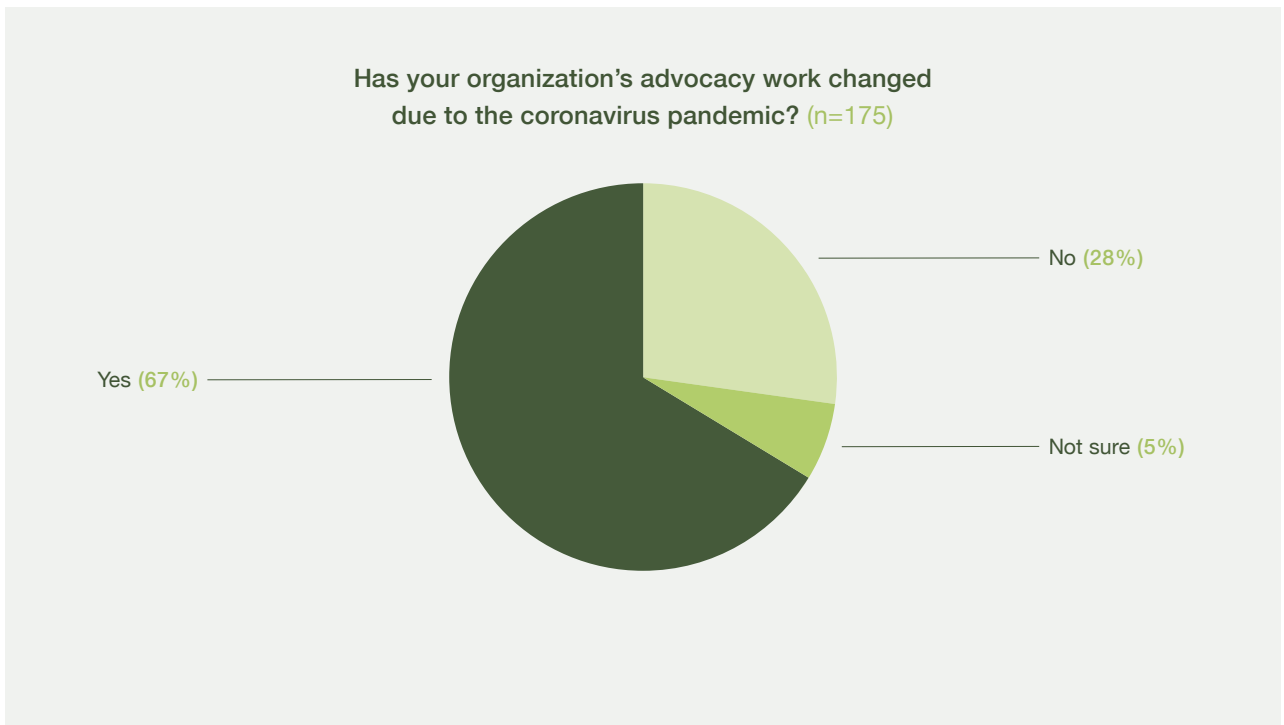


²⁸ See Appendix B for a copy of the survey instrument with definitions.

Changes in Advocacy

We asked survey participants to share how they had pivoted their advocacy tactics (if at all) in response to the twin pandemics of COVID-19 and racial injustice. Two-thirds (67%) reported that their organizations had made changes to their advocacy work due to the coronavirus pandemic, demonstrating great resiliency and adaptive capacity—a particularly important strength that effective nonprofit advocacy organizations need to possess.²⁹ The pandemic shifted advocacy online, as advocates canceled in-person activities to do their work

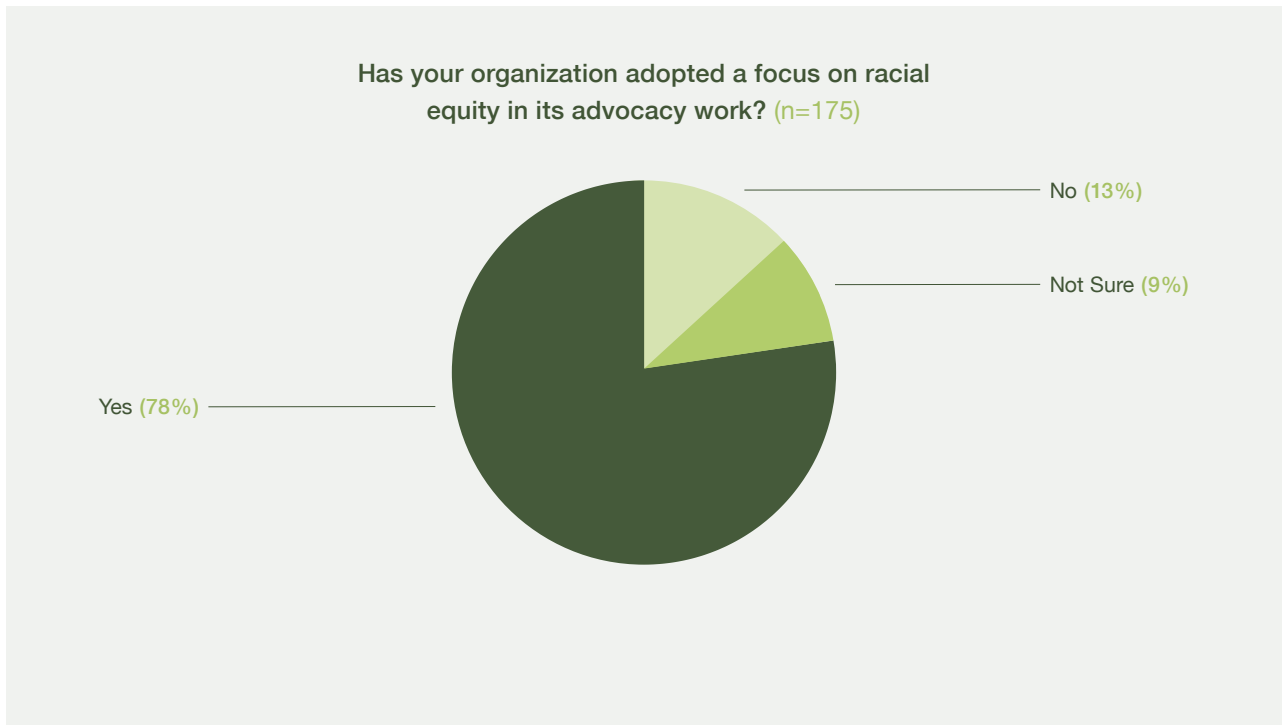
remotely. A few reported positive changes, such as new ways to cultivate relationships with policymakers and reach a broader audience due to going virtual. Others reported that they had made significant shifts in their organizations’ policy focus areas. As one respondent shared, “The organizations I work with have dramatically changed their goals—from seeking funding increases to defending against cuts. From program expansion to goals such as equitable vaccine access.”



29 Raynor, J., York, P., & Sim S-C. (2009, January). What makes an effective advocacy organization? A Framework for Determining Advocacy Capacity [Briefing paper]. TCC Group. <https://www.tccgrp.com/resource/what-makes-an-effective-advocacy-organization-a-framework-for-determining-advocacy-capacity/>

Most nonprofits (78%) also reported that their organizations have adopted a focus on racial equity in their advocacy work. While racial equity is a relatively new area of focus for some, many shared how recent events have prompted them to double down on existing commit-

ments to racial justice. As one respondent shared, “My organization has been working on equity for decades, so in this case we didn’t recently adopt the focus on equity. Our work hasn’t changed, but rather is prioritized by the current status of the pandemic.”



In sum, it’s important to have a current, comprehensive understanding of what policy areas the nonprofits are seeking to influence, what strategies they use to further their goals, and what resources they have available for

advocacy efforts. Moreover, having an understanding of advocate nimbleness and ability to pivot and adopt new advocacy tactics in the face of great change means that evaluations must be nimble and creative as well.

Nonprofit Advocacy Evaluation Capacity

We asked nonprofits about their evaluation capacity, particularly staffing, and whether they evaluate their advocacy. Respondents who reported that they do evaluate their advocacy were asked a series of questions to learn more about why they evaluate, who the primary audiences are for evaluation results, as well as which evaluation methods they use and which ones they find most useful. Individually, these questions point to areas for evaluation capacity building. Collectively, they provide evidence of progress and a barometer of how nonprofit advocates are likely to expand their capacity.

Nonprofit Evaluation Capacity

To gain insights into nonprofit evaluation capacity more broadly, we asked survey participants to identify who does evaluation within their organizations. Three-quarters of our survey respondents (75%) have staff whose jobs include responsibility for evaluation. Around 1 in 10 respondents (10%) indicated they have an evaluator on staff. Nearly one-fifth of nonprofits (17%) reported that

they work with an external evaluator. A few (8%) reported that board members and/or volunteers assist with evaluation efforts on behalf of the organizations. These results are promising because they indicate that many nonprofits are likely to have some internal evaluation expertise that can potentially be leveraged to evaluate advocacy, if they are not doing so already.



Evaluation of Advocacy Work

Nearly half of the nonprofits (48%) that responded to our survey said they do not evaluate their advocacy. Just over one-third (38%) reported that they do evaluate their advocacy, with 14% not sure whether or not they do. Clearly, there is work to be done to build nonprofit evaluation capacity, possibly from the ground up. However, the sizable percentage of nonprofits that

do evaluate their advocacy suggests that some organizations require fewer and/or different resources than those organizations with no evaluation capacity. We then asked the respondents who said they evaluated their advocacy (38%) a few additional questions to learn more about why they evaluate their advocacy, who uses the findings, and what methods they use.



Why Nonprofits Evaluate Advocacy

We discovered that nonprofits evaluate their work for diverse reasons and audiences but most often do so to support internal planning, strategies, and operations. Communicating with external stakeholders—including

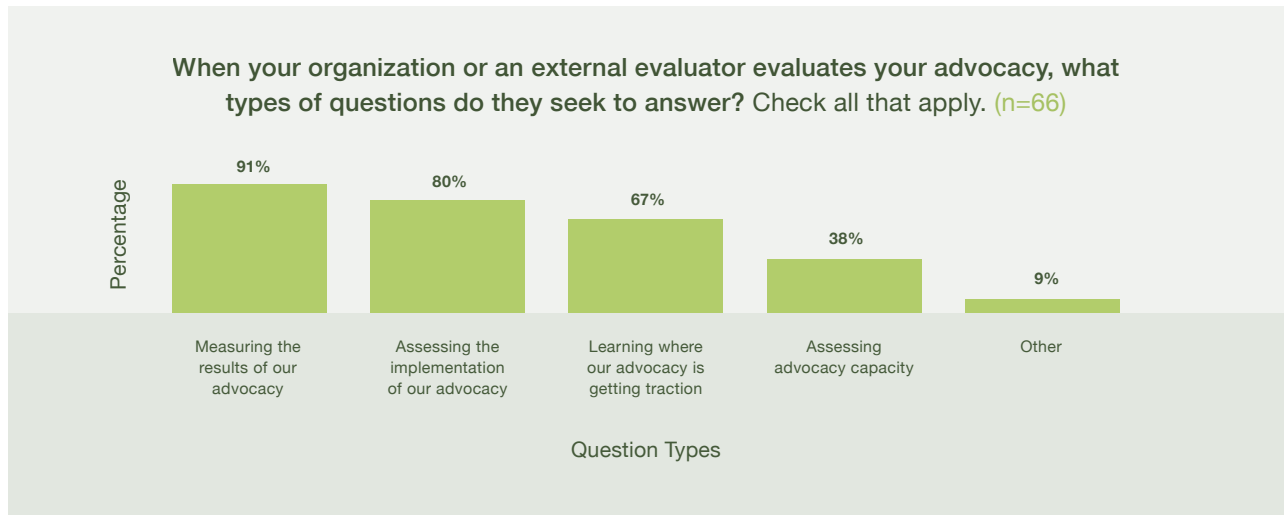
funders, partners, and policymakers—were rated as next highest in importance. This information can help with focusing an evaluation—its purpose, questions, and methods.



Advocacy Evaluation Questions

Nonprofits that evaluate their advocacy are asking a combination of process and impact questions. Above all, advocates are interested in measuring the results of their advocacy (91%), although they are also asking questions

to help them figure out what’s working and what could be improved with regard to implementation of their strategies as they look to plan future actions (80%).



Users of Evaluation Results and Findings

The primary users of evaluation findings are members of organizational leadership, including executive level (91%) and managerial staff (79%), such as policy directors, as well as members of the board of directors (52%). Half of the organizations that reported they evaluate their advocacy (50%) also reported that nonmanagerial staff use evaluation results. Nonprofits that evaluate their advoca-

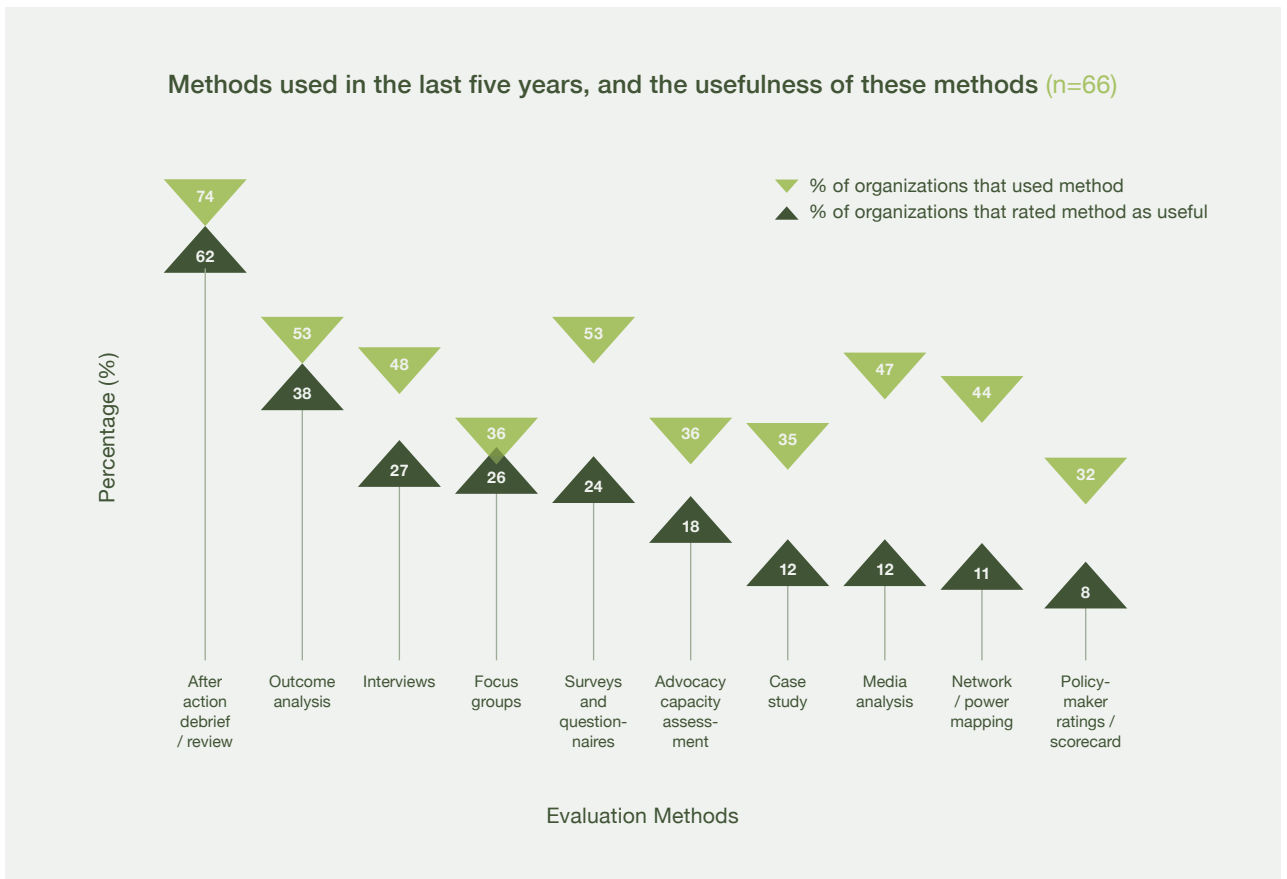
cy also sometimes share results with external stakeholders, particularly their funders (41%), and occasionally with partner organizations (26%) and policymakers (15%). A positive sign is that evaluation findings are being used by multiple end users. It also means that evaluation results and findings have to be tailored accordingly.



Advocacy Evaluation Questions

We also asked nonprofits that evaluate their advocacy about which evaluation methods they use and which methods they find useful. We discovered that there are significant gaps between use and usefulness of advocacy evaluation methods. All the methods we asked advocates about were rated lower in usefulness compared to the rating of their use. For example, 53% of nonprofits that evaluate their advocacy reported that they use surveys and questionnaires, but only 24% reported they found them useful. This raises some

serious questions about what determines an evaluation method's usefulness and to whom. For example, some evaluation methods are difficult to master and take time to implement, requiring resources that nonprofits may not have. Additionally, some methods that are meaningful to evaluators and/or funders, such as surveys and questionnaires, may be less meaningful to advocates and may not provide information that is timely and/or supportive of advocacy practice.



In sum, gaps in advocacy evaluation capacity persist, although the sizable percentage of advocates who do evaluate suggests some gains are being made. It is promising that most nonprofits are engaging in evaluation at some level, which could provide a good foundation for building advocacy evaluation capacity.

Also, the low ratings of the usefulness of methods indicates it is important to rethink how existing advocacy evaluation methods, tools, and resources can be reframed and improved to be more economical and effective for advocates.

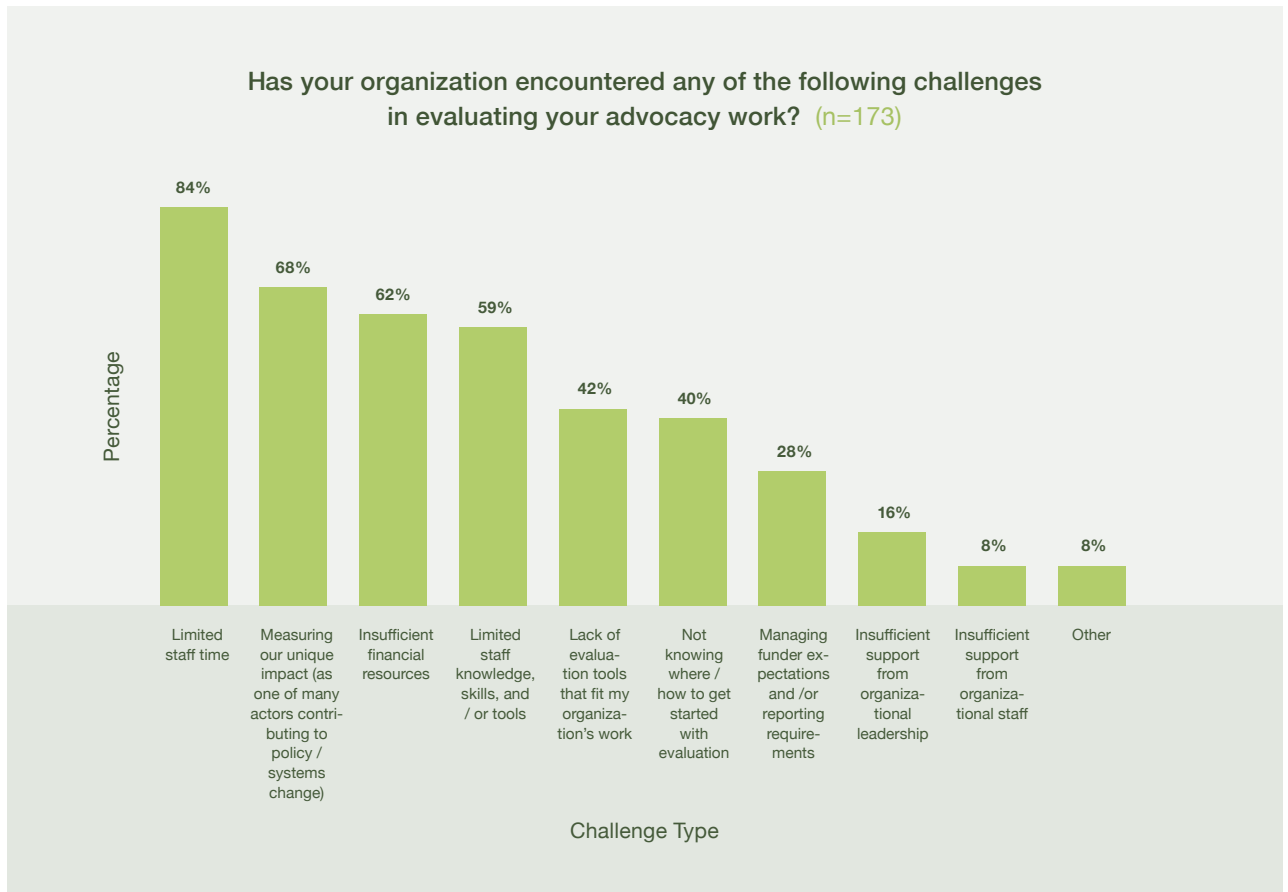
Advocacy Evaluation Challenges and Solutions

To address the gaps in evaluation capacity that nonprofits face, it is important to recognize the range of challenges—from resource constraints to technical difficulties in measuring impact in a congested policy arena—that undermine advocate evaluation activities. More importantly, we need to understand how non-profits think these challenges are best addressed and where they are specifically looking for support with regard to evaluating their advocacy strategies and tactics to meet advocates where they are.

Challenges Encountered in Evaluating Advocacy

Nonprofits that responded to our survey indicated that they encounter multiple challenges to evaluating their advocacy. Above all, nonprofits face resource constraints, such as limited staff time (84%) and insufficient financial resources (62%). The next set of highest rated challenges were technical in nature, such as limited staff knowledge of evaluation (59%), lack of evaluation tools that fit their organization (42%), and not knowing where or how to get started with evaluation (40%). Just over two-thirds of nonprofits (68%) also reported that they face challenges with regard to

measuring their organization’s unique impact as one of many actors contributing to policy/systems changes. Second, difficulties in measuring unique impact and lack of evaluation tools suggest that existing tools require further technical support and tailoring. As one respondent shared, “I have no way to measure, nor do we have the staff time or funds to do so; I would like to, but we don’t have it.” This mix of challenges that require different types of support inform feasible evaluation design as well where to target resources.



Useful Evaluation Resources

When asked about what types of resources they find useful regarding advocacy evaluation, survey respondents indicated that they find traditional evaluation resources to be moderately helpful. Evaluation trainings or workshops topped the list (41%), closely followed by advocacy capacity assessment tools (38%). Just under one-third of respondents indicated that they also find receiving technical support from an internal or external

evaluator (30%) as well as evaluation how-to guides or books (27%) helpful. As one respondent shared, “We are in serious need of tools.” These findings are helpful in terms of promoting greater uptake of existing advocacy evaluation methods, tools, and resources because they suggest that nonprofits may prefer hands-on training and technical guidance, as well as practical tools, such as capacity assessments and how-to guides.³⁰

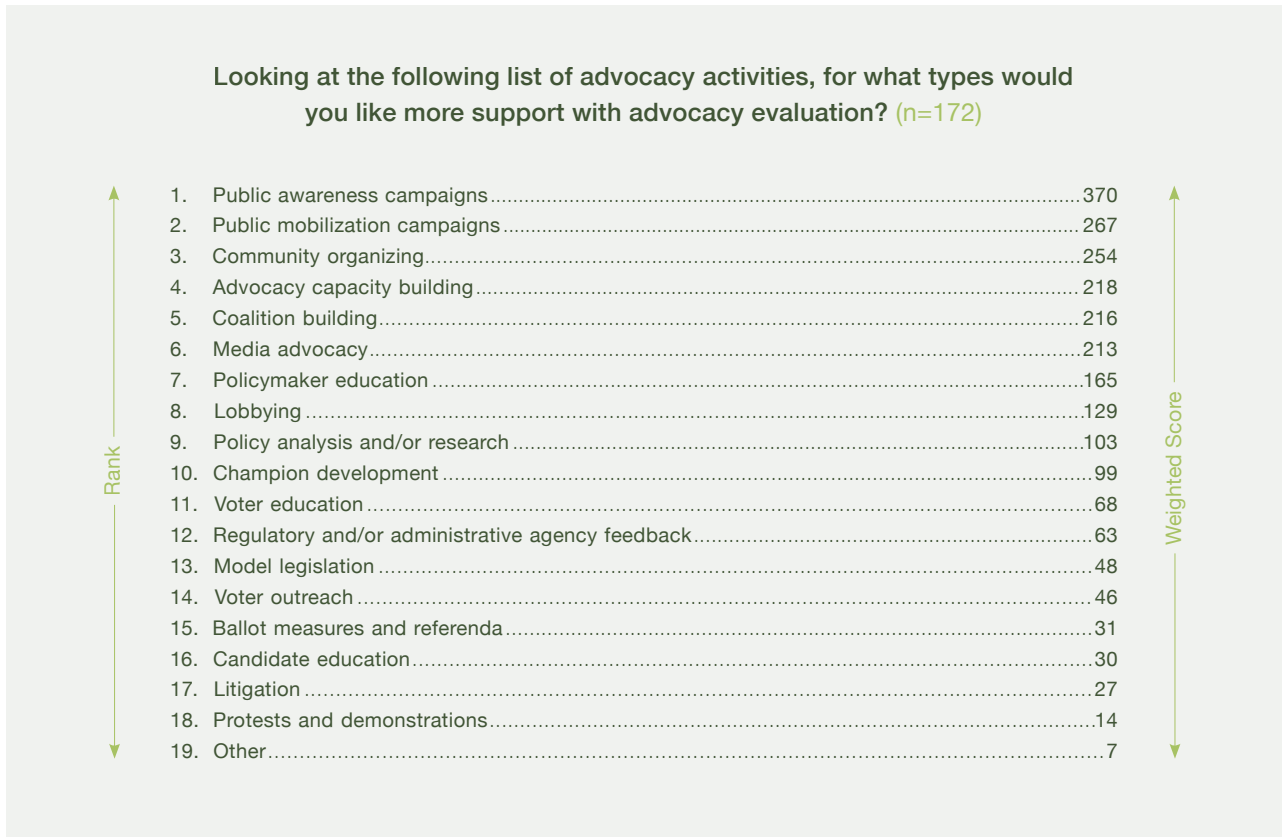


³⁰ Note: Although only 38% said they evaluated their advocacy work, a higher percent indicated they have used evaluation resources. An area of further exploration, it could be the case that nonprofit advocates have some expertise in evaluation but have not used it to specifically evaluate their advocacy.

Strategies Needing Additional Evaluation Support

Participants ranked the top five advocacy activities that they would like more support for: (1) public awareness campaigns, (2) public mobilization campaigns, (3) community organizing, (4) advocacy capacity building, and (5) coalition building. These are the same strategies

that many respondents said they had used in the past five years. Because the evaluation arena has developed methods and measures for all these tactics, we need to get them in the hands of the right people in a way that they can use them.



Organizational Resources and Evaluation Capacity Characteristics Important to Evaluating Advocacy

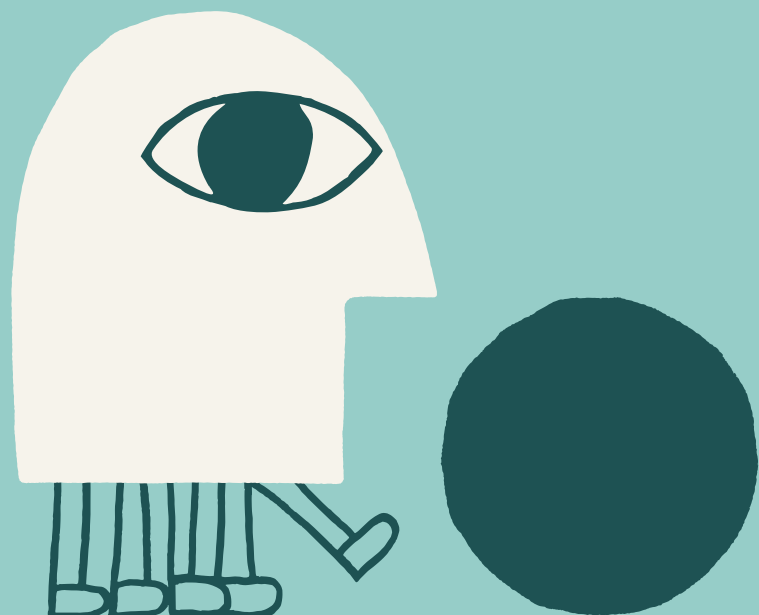
Last, we wanted to get an idea of what organizational factors positively contribute to evaluating advocacy, providing a heads-up to funders and evaluators on strengths to leverage and challenges to address. In our cross-tabulation analysis of respondents that said they evaluated their advocacy “Yes” or “No,” the organizational characteristics below are likely to contribute to evaluating advocacy.

Overall, a combination of organizational resources (budget, maturity, and staffing) and in-house advocacy and evaluation staffing contribute to advocate evaluation capacity. However, they are not necessarily predictive. Organizations with one to five full-time staff were equally likely to evaluate and not evaluate their advocacy (26% and 25% respectively).



Action Steps

4



Our Recommendations

When we embarked on our survey project, we assumed that a deeper, shared understanding of advocates' perspectives is a necessary stepping stone to expanded and improved advocacy evaluation practice. This assumption has been proven correct, and our survey results have shed light on strengths that heretofore had been unknown while also providing concrete actions that can be taken to build nonprofit advocates' evaluation capacity. In this section, we provide six recommendations for advocates, evaluators, and funders on specific strategies and approaches that will be most impactful in terms of building and expanding nonprofits' advocacy evaluation capacity.

1.



Provide Tailored Advocacy Evaluation Support

As the field considers new advocacy evaluation resources, evaluators and funders should be cognizant of the advocate perspective and how advocates like to learn, as well as the complexity of their organizations and unique circumstances. While our findings speak to specific resources that advocates prefer, nonprofits are in the best position to articulate these needs to evaluators and funders at the organizational and tactical levels. Specific actions to surface and address these needs include the following:

Advocates

Advocates have unique evaluation needs, as the results from this study demonstrate. We strongly encourage nonprofit advocates to continue sharing their experiences and perspectives with evaluators and funders, as well as their peer advocates, and to push for tools, methods, and resources that are low or no cost, accessible, and user-friendly. Second, evaluating their advocacy for diverse reasons and audiences is a strength that advocates can build on, supporting an evaluation culture that is tailored to their organization.

Evaluators

Evaluators can take comfort in knowing there are already tailored advocacy and policy change evaluation tools, methods, and resources that can be adapted to advocates' unique needs. However, the findings from this survey suggest a need for evaluators to reduce barriers to their use so that they are easier for nonprofit advocates to find and use. In addition to improving existing methods and resources based on advocates' priorities, their changing environment, and evolving experiences, evaluators should consider what new tools may need to be created or further adopted. Last, evaluators can partner with advocates and funders to reflect on evaluation findings, building in a pause and reflect period to explore the meaning and significance of the findings to advocates.

Evaluators should also be comfortable navigating the nonprofit arena. Nonprofit advocates not only work on complex and uncertain policy issues, but their organizations have unique challenges. Nonprofits employ a broad range of strategies and tactics to bring about policy changes and use a variety of complex legal structures, such as affiliated 501(c)(3)/501(c)(4) organizations and coalitions. These different structures may have implications for the types of advocacy that are possible and thus should be taken into consideration when constructing an evaluation design.³¹ Additionally, evaluators should consider using methods that provide a holistic understanding of the complex nonprofit context, such as developmental evaluation approaches, systems thinking, and/or network mapping, among others.

Funders

Funders are uniquely positioned to convene and cultivate a dialogue about what solutions may be needed to improve upon existing advocacy evaluation resources to make them more responsive to advocates' needs. Moreover, our survey results provide some indication about what advocates do and do not find to be important, which sends a clear message to funders about specific activities that may require additional support with regard to evaluation in the forms of expertise and money.

³¹ The Bolder Advocacy program at Alliance for Justice has 300+ free resources available on its website explaining the legal rules that apply to nonprofit organizations' advocacy. They also have a free technical assistance hotline for answering questions that can be accessed here: <https://bolderadvocacy.org/resource-library/technical-assistance/>.

2.



Adopt and Adapt Evaluation Capacity Building Resources

A key takeaway from the survey findings is that resources cannot be limited to commissioning an evaluation; building advocate capacity to do evaluation should be a shared priority. But evaluation capacity building activities need to be tailored—there is no one-size-fits-all approach. An area of evaluation practice that has received significant attention in the last two decades, developing sustainable individual and organizational evaluation capacity is increasingly part of the evaluator’s toolkit as well as a priority of commissioners of evaluation and nonprofits themselves. In their 2020 article on developing sustainable evaluation practice, Jay Wade and Leanne Kallemeyn identify the facilitating factors and resources contributing to sustainability, including leadership commitment to dedicated resources.³² Key action steps to supporting sustainable advocate evaluation capacity include the following:

32 Wade, J., & Kallemeyn, L. 2020. “Evaluation capacity building (ECB) interventions and the development of sustainable evaluation practice: An exploratory study.” *Evaluation and Program Planning* 79

33 We use Buckley et al.’s definition of evaluative thinking here: “Evaluative thinking is defined as critical thinking applied in the context of evaluation, motivated by an attitude of inquisitiveness and a belief in the value of evidence, that involves identifying assumptions, posing thoughtful questions, pursuing deeper understanding through reflection and perspective taking, and informing decisions in preparation for action.” Buckley, et al. (2015), op.cit.

34 Schusterman Philanthropies. (n.d.). *The Data Playbook*. <https://www.schusterman.org/playbooks/data/>

35 Fund for Shared Insight. (n.d.). Listen4Good. <https://fundforsharedinsight.org/listen4good/>

36 *Informing Change* (2017, October), op. cit.

Advocates

Advocates should be encouraged to take a learning stance or evaluative thinking mindset with respect to their advocacy so that they will effectively build their skills and knowledge with regard to evaluation.³³ The starting point will be different from nonprofit to nonprofit. Nonprofit advocates working at organizations that do not currently engage in any evaluation, and have the resources to do so, may want to consider either hiring a staff person who can support in-house evaluation capacity or partnering with an external evaluator to develop a plan to build long-term internal evaluation capacity. The Data Playbook is a great free online resource that provides concise guidance on what questions to ask and answer when building organizational evaluation capacity from scratch.³⁴ There are also online learning communities such as Listen4Good, where nonprofits can connect with peers to learn more about how to collect meaningful data.³⁵ Organizations that are unable to afford either of the above approaches could designate evaluation responsibilities to existing staff and/or engage leadership (board of directors, the executive director, attend workshops and webinars on advocacy evaluation, and use some of the free resources for novice evaluators found in Appendix A. Tapping into MEL resources as part of a grant-funded advocacy initiative is another vehicle for creating a foundation on which to build evaluation capacity. Nonprofit advocates who evaluate their advocacy are clearly in position to figure out how they can use the results from their research, as well as partner with evaluators or a learning community to figure out how to best use the information so it is a quality improvement cycle. Regardless of their expertise in evaluation, nonprofit advocates should engage leadership to be “evaluation enthusiasts” who promote and prioritize evaluation, ensuring sustainability.

Given that limited staff time to evaluate their work is a top-rated challenge among advocates, it should not be a surprise that they generally find workshops more useful than time-intensive activities such as reading books or guides. Other research also indicates that nonprofits are more likely to use evaluation capacity building resources such as capacity assessments when these tools are adapted to fit a nonprofit’s unique situation.³⁶

Evaluators

Evaluators can leverage nonprofits' existing evaluation strengths to create a culture of evaluative thinking that builds and sustains advocate evaluation capacity.³⁷ Our results suggest that most nonprofit organizations may have some in-house evaluation capacity already. These individuals can be cultivated as "evaluation champions" and encouraged to engage in peer-to-peer learning.³⁸ Accordingly, evaluators partnering with advocacy organizations should inquire about the extent to which this capacity may be in place already and formulate plans to help build and strengthen it. They can use the findings from our survey and prioritize hands-on training and technical assistance when working with nonprofit advocates, with written and online resources serving as a backup and not the main source for in-depth learning.

There are a few approaches to strengthening partnerships between evaluators and nonprofits, such as having evaluators adopt a coaching role that focuses on an organization's existing expertise and helping them to build their overall evaluation capacity.³⁹ Above all, evaluators should inquire how nonprofit advocates prefer to learn early on. Then, they should apply evaluation capacity building resources and expertise to address advocates' varying evaluation needs. For example, they could adopt a coaching role when working with nonprofits, which could range from helping them getting started with evaluation to expanding on existing evaluation expertise to include advocacy evaluation. Additionally, evaluators can focus on their interpersonal skills (e.g., cultural competence, communication, facilitation, and conflict resolution), which are key for all evaluators.⁴⁰

Funders

Funders are well-positioned to provide resources that help to lower the barriers to use of advocacy evaluation tools and resources. For instance, funders can provide funding for advocates to attend workshops, support MEL approaches as the doorway to further evaluation capacity building, and/or secure the support of an evaluation consultant to provide hands-on customized technical assistance for nonprofit grantees.

Additionally, funders can support the use of tools to assess organizational evaluation capacity, such as the Evaluation Capacity Assessment Instrument⁴¹ or the Nonprofit Evaluation Capacity Rubric,⁴² which can be used to better understand a nonprofit's complex circumstances and any barriers to evaluation. Moreover, many funders seek to build communities of practice with cohorts of grantees. Such forums can provide an opportunity to promote the use of advocacy evaluation practices. Lastly, given that the coronavirus pandemic is still ongoing, resources developed for advocacy evaluation should be available online. As Jewly Lynn and T. Mehta argue, advocacy evaluation requires a high degree of preparedness and willingness to adapt to new circumstances and dynamics, such as the increased use of technology.⁴³

37 For more information on promoting evaluative thinking and linking it to evaluation capacity building, see *Guiding Principles for Promoting Evaluative Thinking* in Buckley et al. (2015), op. cit.

38 Buckley et al. (2015), op. cit.

39 Baum Block (2018, January), op. cit.

40 American Evaluation Association. (n.d.). AEA Evaluator Competencies. <https://www.eval.org/About/Competencies-Standards/AEA-Evaluator-Competencies>

41 Taylor-Ritzler, T., Suarez-Balcazar, Y., Garcia-Iriarte, E., Henry, D. B., & Balcazar, F. E. 2013. "Understanding and measuring evaluation capacity: A model and instrument validation study." *American Journal of Evaluation*, 34(2): 190-206.

42 Castillo (2017), op. cit.

43 Lynn & Mehta (2021), op. cit.

3.



Adopt a Different Orientation to Advocacy and Policy Change Evaluation: Roles and Relationships

The survey findings on gains in advocate evaluation capacity and expertise (e.g., assessing impacts) and savoir faire in leveraging evaluation findings support shifting the balance to where power is shared in the partnerships between funders, evaluators, and advocates. To this end, we suggest a blurring of the lines in advocate, evaluator, and funder roles in evaluating advocacy, with all stakeholders bringing their different perspectives to bear (e.g., the usefulness of specific evaluation methods) to advance advocacy and policy change evaluation and support a culture of evaluation.

Additionally, commonalities should be recognized, such as shared advocate, evaluator, and funder commitment to achieving a just, equitable society and evaluation as a means to inform change. Research by Bach-Mortensen and Montgomery found that having an organizational culture that supports evaluation is a critical factor for supporting quality evaluation within nonprofits.⁴⁴ Specific actions, many of which overlap, include the following:

Advocates

Advocates are in the position to rethink their evaluation priorities and needs in the face of great change and emphasis on self-determinism. Our survey results indicate that there are many nonprofits that do engage in some evaluation but do not currently evaluate their advocacy. One approach is to consider how advocates can build on their existing capacity and broaden their evaluation activities or develop evaluation capacity in a way that is useful to them. For example, many organizations do regularly engage in debriefings after taking specific advocacy actions but may not think of these meetings as an evaluative activity. Making simple changes to these often-informal discussions, such as establishing protocols for what questions to ask and how to take notes, is a quick way for advocates to be more intentional about evaluating their effectiveness and make better use of the information gathered through these conversations.

As for nonprofits that already successfully evaluate their advocacy, they could be recognized as role models and skilled evaluators—if they aren't already. These advocates are well-positioned to reflect on their evaluation expertise and share their experience with evaluators and funders, as well as other advocates, to deepening the knowledge base of the advocacy and policy change evaluation field. Last, advocates of all skill levels are encouraged to support an organization-wide culture of evaluation that would increase engagement of staff, volunteers, and boards of directors in determining evaluation priorities and needs.

44 Bach-Mortensen & Montgomery (2018), op. cit.

45 Baum Block, B. (2018, January). Evaluation coaching: Light up your client's expertise [Brief]. Center for Evaluation Innovation. <https://www.evaluationinnovation.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/EvaluationCoaching.pdf>

46 Fox, K., & Post, M. 2021. "Evaluating power building: Concepts and considerations for advocacy evaluators." *New Directions for Evaluation*, 171: 59–70.

47 Coe, J., & Schlangen, R. (2019). No royal road: Finding and following the natural pathways in advocacy evaluation. *Evaluation Innovation*. <https://www.evaluationinnovation.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/No-Royal-Road.pdf>

Evaluators

Evaluators need to broaden their role to be more responsive, supportive partners for nonprofit advocates and recognize the multiple hats they wear as consultants, mentors, and coaches.⁴⁵ They can develop their skills to be flexible and tailor their advocacy tactics evaluation methods and coaching skills to address the range of nonprofit advocacy scenarios and resources.

Focusing on the context and letting that drive the evaluation process is key. Evaluators need to know how to partner with advocates who are new to evaluation to help them develop flexible, easy-to-implement evaluation approaches and build a core set of evaluation skills that are sustainable. Their training and/or experience in cultural competence approaches and local knowledge and perspectives should be helpful here. Moreover, evaluators also need to know how to partner with advocates who already evaluate their work to expand their efforts to the next level, such as helping them to evaluate power building, a new frontier in advocacy and policy change evaluation.⁴⁶ In both situations, structuring an equitable partnership into the evaluation design early on will help to level power imbalances.

Above all, evaluators should approach their work with nonprofit advocates in ways that help build an evaluation culture oriented toward learning and continuous improvement. To promote such a culture, evaluators should encourage the sharing of evaluation results across the entire organization, not just with those at the leadership level. Most staff within nonprofit organizations that engage in advocacy directly or indirectly contribute to the group's advocacy success. Taking the time to share the data with them in meaningful ways can empower nonprofit staff to build power and ownership of the evaluation process. It can also be an opportunity and platform for quality improvement—understanding what factors may or may not have contributed to success and developing the next set of potential strategies to pursue.

48 Downes, S. (2016). No more half measures: Five ways foundations can better support policy campaigns and build lasting advocacy capacity. Center for Evaluation Innovation. https://www.evaluationinnovation.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/NO_HALF_MEASURES_LO.pdf

49 PEAK Grantmaking. (n.d.). Narrow the power gap. <https://www.peakgrantmaking.org/principles-for-peak-grantmaking/narrow-the-power-gap/>

Funders

Funders need to examine their role and determine whether they are providing the type of support that puts advocates' learning needs front and center. A good first step is having a shared understanding of what advocates do and how advocacy works, including a working knowledge of the interplay between advocacy tactics and the policy landscape. As argued by Jim Coe and Rhonda Schlangen, it is important to replace a predictable, linear understanding of advocacy with a systems perspective that can better factor in the more challenging aspects of advocacy, such as complexity, uncertainty, and rapid change.⁴⁷

Moreover, funders should prioritize evaluation designs that yield learnings and insights useful to advocates so that advocates are able to share information about their work and what they are learning in simple and straightforward ways. Funders can invest more time at the front end and deepen their understanding of the advocate organizational context to codesign realistic, time-saving evaluation frameworks. They can also rethink grants to be more advocate-friendly, such as how evaluation requirements in grants are structured and administered. Funders should be prepared to invest in nonprofits' long-term capacity to execute and evaluate advocacy campaigns to influence public policy in durable ways.⁴⁸ Additionally, funders can work to adopt practices to narrow the power gap between themselves and their grantee partners,⁴⁹ as well as make power building activities a higher priority in their advocacy and policy change grantmaking.⁵⁰ Partnership-based evaluation approaches that level the playing field and broaden inclusion, such as empowerment, participatory, and collaborative evaluation and developmental evaluation, can support equitable evaluation design and build relationships.⁵¹

50 Fox & Post (2021, September 24), op. cit. See also Coffman, J., Barsoum, G., Lopez, A., and Gantz, M. (2021, April). Advocacy that builds power: Transforming policies and systems for health and racial equity. Center for Evaluation Innovation. <https://www.evaluationinnovation.org/publication/advocacy-that-builds-power-transforming-policies-and-systems-for-health-and-racial-equity/>

51 Gardner & Brindis (2017), op. cit.

4.



Address the Twin Challenges of Resource Constraints and Lack of Technical Expertise

Our findings on limited resources to do evaluation corroborate earlier findings. We know that addressing resource constraints is a Sisyphean task that requires a partnership approach and high commitment by all parties. But above all, there needs to be more concerted effort and willingness to consider new resources and strategies, such as supporting evaluation training and the sharing of evaluation capacity among coalition members. Our findings indicate that the majority of nonprofits doing advocacy are not evaluating that work, and the majority do not have an evaluator. New resources and strategies include the following:

Advocates

Advocates should be nimble, efficient, and creative in finding ways to evaluate their advocacy, adopting out-of-the box thinking. Determining when and how to get started can often be challenging. A good first step for nonprofits in this situation is to take stock of internal resources and determine where they already may be on the path to evaluation. This could include tasking a student intern or volunteer with collecting basic information on advocacy, such as contacts with the media. A less is more approach that focuses on finding ways to build on existing evaluation activities in which organizations may already engage, such as media/policy tracking or after-action debriefs, can set advocates up for evaluation success. Advocacy capacity self-assessment tools also provide a practical starting point by helping advocates assess their organizations' respective strengths and weaknesses and determine where to focus their energies to build capacity to achieve their goals. Examples of these tools can be found in our resources guide in Appendix A.

Evaluators

Evaluators can similarly be nimble, efficient, and creative in factoring resources into their game plan. They can anticipate and understand how to help nonprofit advocates navigate the range of challenges to advocacy evaluation. Evaluators should keep in mind our finding that less than one-third of nonprofits have formal evaluation staff or work with external evaluation consultants when considering how best to develop new advocacy evaluation resources or tailor existing ones. This is especially important because many nonprofits across the sector may not have access to sufficient resources to work with trained evaluators on a regular basis—or at all. It is also critical for evaluators to be flexible and responsive to advocates' needs, and they should strive to partner with nonprofits in ways that impart skills that will have traction into the future. For example, they can train staff who have some evaluation expertise, being mindful that they may have other responsibilities. They can advise on or help subsidize the purchase of specific evaluation resources that will support future endeavors, such as online training modules. They can take an inventory of nonprofit evaluation resources as part of their evaluation plan and methods, such as including a question on evaluation resources in a social network analysis of coalition members. It is worth underscoring that tools that have been specifically customized to the unique context of a nonprofit organization can greatly reduce the burden on advocates, in addition to providing opportunities to increase their engagement in the evaluation process.⁵² The challenges that nonprofit advocates reported with regard to knowledge gaps and a lack of evaluation tools speaks to a need for evaluators to reexamine how advocacy evaluation methods, tools, and resources can be made more user-friendly for advocates.

52 Informing Change. (2017, October). A guide to using organizational capacity assessment tools: Finding—and using—the right tool for the job. <https://hewlett.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/A-Guide-to-Using-OCA-Tools.pdf>

53 Buchanan, P., & Buteau, E. (2017, April). Shifting winds: Foundations respond to a new political context. The Center for Effective Philanthropy. <https://cep.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/2017-Shifting-Winds-Foundations-Respond-to-a-New-Political-Context.pdf>

54 Kinarsky, A.R. 2018. "The evaluation landscape: U.S. foundation spending on evaluation." *New Directions for Evaluation*, 160:81–96.

Funders

Funders need to step up to the plate to provide sufficient funding for nonprofit advocates so that they can build their organizations' evaluation capacity by hiring in-house evaluation staff and/or building on an external evaluation consultant to provide support. Providing funding, including general support to nonprofits, that can be used for evaluation training of in-house staff is also important, particularly when funds are very limited. This could be at the individual grantee level and/or in advocacy initiatives targeting coalition. The data on foundation support are mixed. There is evidence that foundation funding for advocacy and public policy, particularly at the state and local levels, has been increasing.⁵³ However, there has been a downward trend in evaluation funding over the past decade, and foundations' annual evaluation spending has gone down from 2.6% in 2011 to 1.7% in 2014.⁵⁴ The Center for Evaluation Innovation's 2020 benchmarking report on foundation evaluation practices found that only 12% of foundations allocated evaluation funds in over one-quarter of their individual grants in 2019; down from 20% of foundations in 2015.⁵⁵

The type of funding provided to nonprofits matters too. Providing nonprofits multiyear general operating support grants is a crucial way that funders can help advocates build and sustain their organizational capacity to be effective on all fronts, including evaluation.⁵⁶ The hybrid funding models that some funders are adopting, such as pairing general operating support with additional targeted funding to address specific advocacy capacity gaps, are encouraging.⁵⁷ Moreover, funders are uniquely positioned to provide critical support for activities such as field building, network development, and other forms of capacity support to build advocacy evaluation capacity among key stakeholders.⁵⁸

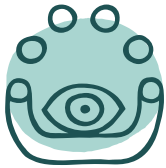
55 Beer, T., Lopez, A., Coffman, J., Athanasiades, K., & Brothe Gantz, M. (2020, January). Benchmarking foundation evaluation practices 2020. Center for Evaluation Innovation. https://www.evaluationinnovation.org/publication/cei_benchmarking2020/. See also Kinarsky (2018, September 7), *op. cit.*

56 Buteau, E., Marotta, S., Martin, H., Orensten, N., & Gehling, K. (2020). New attitudes, old practices: The provision of multiyear general operating support. Center for Effective Philanthropy. http://cep.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Ford_MYGOS_FNL.pdf

57 Downes (2016), *op. cit.*

58 Stachowiak, S., Gienapp, A., & Kalra, N. (2020, June). Not always movements: Multiple approaches to advance large-scale social change. ORS Impact. https://www.orsimpact.com/DirectoryAttachments/6242020_35339_970_Not_Always_Movements_Multiple_Approaches_Large-Scale_Social_Change.pdf

5.



Support Use of Meaningful Evaluation Methods

Our findings on evaluation methods that nonprofit advocates use and the methods they find *useful* reveal a possible gap in what advocates find meaningful and what evaluators and funders find meaningful. Advocates prefer methods that are easily implemented and provide actionable information in real time and should be encouraged and supported in using these methods, increasing their overall evaluation capacity. Evaluators and funders need to follow advocates' lead here and focus more on the purpose of the evaluation, the target audience, the questions that advocates want to answer, and the corresponding useful methods. While rightsizing less useful methods could greatly reduce the barrier to their use, the reality may be that these methods have limited benefit and should be reconsidered.⁵⁹ Other actions include:

Advocates

Advocates can use the findings on *useful* methods to better anticipate the challenges they may face and areas for which they will likely need support. For example, advocates who are new to evaluation may find after-action reviews to be a useful starting point for assessing the effectiveness of their advocacy strategies and tactics. Advocates who already assess their advocacy to some degree should consider sharing feedback from their experiences with evaluators and funders about how to improve evaluation tools, methods, and resources to make them more accessible and user-friendly.

59 Informing Change (2017, October), op. cit.

60 Norman, C. D. 2021. "Supporting systems transformation through design-driven evaluation." *New Directions For Evaluation*, 2021(170), 149–158.

61 Gardner & Brindis (2017), op. cit., p. 87.

62 Informing Change (2017, October), op. cit.

63 Lynn, J., & Mehta, T. 2021. "As technology disrupts equity, advocates take action: Where do evaluators fit in?" *New Directions for Evaluation*, 171:119–131.

64 Norman (2021, September 1), op. cit.

Evaluators

Evaluators can use the information from this survey when designing an advocacy evaluation, such as the higher importance of after-action debriefs and outcome analysis. Adopting a design-driven evaluation approach increases the service aspect of an evaluation and allows the evaluator to work with advocates and funders to identify user needs, shaping the program and the evaluation.⁶⁰ In addition, evaluation methods need to be efficient and easy to implement, adapt, administer, and analyze. For example, the evaluation field has already developed tools like the Rapid Assessment Process that can be adapted to a fast-paced advocacy campaign.⁶¹ Qualitative and quantitative data should be assessed for ease in collecting and whether the findings speak to advocates and support their evaluation aims. Last, evaluators are well-positioned to watch for new methods from other arenas that may have high relevance, such as instruments to assess power, equity, leadership, decision-making, behavior change, and changes in democracy.

In many evaluations, the individual tool or method is less important than the process in which that tool or method is used.⁶² This includes evaluator ability to use a broad array of advocacy and policy change evaluation methods and an in-depth understanding of individual advocacy tactics. Evaluators should also seek to cultivate their facilitation skills, as well as practice adapting or rightsizing evaluation tools and methods to meet advocates where they are. Technology also has the potential to reduce barriers to access advocacy evaluation methods, but evaluators must be conscientious and skilled in using and leveraging technology to support ongoing learning.⁶³

Moreover, the low rankings for usefulness that most methods received suggest that existing advocacy evaluation tools and resources may be less meaningful to advocates, are difficult to use (e.g., development, administration analyses), and/or may need to be more economical for advocates. For example, policymaker ratings/scorecards received a very low rating in terms of their usefulness, which is concerning because knowing whether an advocacy tactic has increased decision-maker support for a particular policy can make all the difference to the success of an advocacy campaign.

Funders

Funders can partner with advocates in choosing meaningful evaluation methods that are not burdensome on their grantee partners, such as engaging advocates and evaluators at the design stage of a program to better fit the program and advocates' needs.⁶⁴ Our survey results on which methods are most used and useful by advocates can inform funder decision-making on this front. Moreover, in situations where funders prioritize certain methods higher than advocates, such as a return-on-investment analysis to determine the funding gained through specific policy wins, this difference in both short- and long-term information needs should be examined and discussed. Lastly, funders should consider how they can serve as a convener of evaluators and nonprofit advocates to support further investigation of how methods that are used less frequently—or considered less useful by nonprofit advocates—can be improved.

6.



Take Equity to the Next Level, and Leverage Advocate Resilience and Nimbleness

In the face of the twin pandemics of COVID-19 and racial injustice, the survey findings indicate that nonprofit advocates have proven themselves to be resilient on many fronts. During the COVID-19 pandemic, nonprofits have shifted to virtual platforms and adapted their advocacy accordingly. They are embedding equity into their mission and activities. The time is ripe for advocates, evaluators, and funders to develop a shared understanding of how macro forces are changing advocates and their advocacy, increasing their ability to anticipate and navigate these changes, some of which will reshape evaluation practice. Key action steps include the following:

Advocates

Advocates can make sure that the equity that is embedded in their strategic planning and day-to-day work is translated into their evaluation practice. They can also look to the evaluation arena for social justice evaluation frameworks, approaches, and cases of evaluation with communities of color that integrate ethnicity, class, gender, advocacy, and equity.⁶⁵

Second, advocates are on the front lines of the seismic changes happening in our society and have a bird's eye view of the terrain on which these changes are playing out. The information they can provide is of critical value to evaluators and funders who need eyes and ears on the ground to inform their strategies and funding. Advocates may also want to strengthen their systems thinking skills and gain assistance in figuring out what data to collect prospectively (e.g., trend data on climate change and its impacts on marginalized populations) as they incorporate improvements from previous evaluation findings into their strategic planning.

⁶⁵ Neubauer, L., McBride, D., Guarjado, A. D., Casillas, W. D., and Hall, M. 2020. Examining issues facing communities of color today: The role of evaluation to incite change. *New Directions for Evaluation*. 166: 7–11.

Evaluators

Evaluators can support this work by ensuring appropriate and accessible equity constructs, outcomes, and measures are available and highlighting the ways in which advocates have baked in equity in their organizations and advocacy practice. They could also benefit from engaging diverse communities with lived experience in reviewing the results of the advocates' evaluation efforts. Evaluation approaches need to adjust as well, such as methods to assess virtual advocacy and incorporate equity. The Equitable Evaluation Initiative provides important guidance on how traditional evaluation methods can be reconfigured to embed equity by embracing complexity and reflecting expanded notions of validity and rigor.⁶⁶ Last, evaluators can reflect on how their own evaluation practice is influenced by their lived experience, being mindful of the power they hold and whether they perpetuate inequities.⁶⁷

Evaluators must also be nimble and pay close attention to the changes occurring around them. Advocacy evaluation designs and methods must be timely and factor in volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity—referred to as VUCA in the business arena. Foresight methods (e.g., alternative scenarios and environmental scanning) and systems thinking and complexity science tools are increasingly must have methods for evaluating complex, emergent, and uncertain advocacy and policy change initiatives.⁶⁸

Funders

Funders have also been making changes to better incorporate equity into their grantmaking by minimizing grant application and reporting requirements and increasing access to multiyear unrestricted funding.⁶⁹ As shared above, providing consistent, multiyear general operating support funding is critically important to supporting strong nonprofit advocacy organizations—as well as the ability of these organizations to monitor their effectiveness through evaluation. They could also benefit from engaging diverse communities with lived experience in reviewing the results of advocates' evaluation efforts and supporting action that stems from these findings.

Funders can also be thought partners with advocates and evaluators in understanding the larger macro forces at play in society and how advocates can adapt in response. They too can be encouraged to expand their systems thinking skills and support the future-proofing of evaluation designs and findings.

66 Equitable Evaluation Initiative. (n.d.). Reimagining the purpose and practice of evaluation. <https://www.equitableeval.org/>

67 Neubauer, L., & Hall, M. E. 2020. Is inciting social change something evaluators can do? Should do? *New Directions for Evaluation*, 166:129–135.

68 Gates, E. F., Walton, M., Videira, P., & McNall, M. 2021. Introducing systems- and complexity-informed evaluation. *New Directions for Evaluation*, 170:13–25.

69 Buteau, E., Orensten, E., & Marotta, S. (2021). Foundations respond to crisis: Lasting change? Center for Effective Philanthropy. http://cep.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/CEP_Foundations-Respond-to-Crisis_Lasting_Change.pdf



Conclusions

Our results provide a clear, detailed understanding of nonprofit advocates' evolving needs and strengths, as well as the challenges—new and old—that they face with regard to evaluating their work. The findings confirmed what we knew about the challenges to nonprofit advocacy evaluation, which persist. While these challenges have been exacerbated by the uncertainty and turbulence of the times, we have reason to be optimistic.

Nonprofit evaluation capacity exists and can be leveraged by engaged advocates, savvy evaluators, and supportive funders. Additionally, we have a clearer idea of the specific types of evaluation that are used and useful to nonprofit advocates, which provides a clear path forward to providing targeted evaluation support. Although many of these challenges are the same ones that nonprofit advocates have historically faced, the resources to address them have evolved. Last, we have a current snapshot of actual nonprofit advocacy and how it is evolving, pointing to where advocates, evaluators, and funders will need to focus their attention, such as developing IT and virtual advocacy evaluation resources.

The seismic shifts over the past several years have prompted the advocacy and policy change evaluation field to revisit its assumptions about advocates and advocacy, resulting in “an inflection point” in which the field is “poised to enter a new phase of development.”⁷⁰ As the advocacy evaluation field considers its next steps, we hope advocates, evaluators, and funders will consider the lessons found within our survey findings, as well as the perspectives of advocates as key members of that field. Much work remains to be done to rethink, build, and strengthen advocacy evaluation practice, but we have a sense of the direction and the resources to increase advocate effectiveness during this transformational period.

70 Coffman et al. (2021, September 24), op. cit., p. 133.



Resources

In this section we provide suggestions for advocacy evaluation resources and indicate whether they are best suited for organizations that are new to evaluation or those that have a solid base of evaluation expertise. Additionally, we list resources by type of advocacy tactic, as well as those that support evaluator evaluation capacity building expertise.

Advocates.

How-to Guides

Beginner Level

1. *A User's Guide to Advocacy Evaluation Planning* by Julia Coffman (2009). <https://archive.globalfrp.org/publications-resources/browse-our-publications/a-user-s-guide-to-advocacy-evaluation-planning>
2. *Advocacy Progress Planner* by Aspen Institute (2018). <https://www.aspeninstitute.org/programs/aspen-planning-and-evaluation-program/tools/>
3. *An Advocacy Evaluation Mini-Toolkit: Tips and Tools for Busy Organizations* by LFA Group (2013). <https://www.alnap.org/system/files/content/resource/files/main/advocacy-evaluation-mini-toolkit.pdf>
4. *Getting Started: A Self-Directed Guide to Outcome Map Development* by ORS Impact (2014). <https://www.orsimpact.com/directory/Getting-Started-Guide.htm>
5. *Oklahoma Tribal Advocacy Toolkit* by National Indian Education Association (2018). <https://www.niea.org/advocacy-resources>
6. *The Advocacy Strategy Framework: A Tool for Articulating an Advocacy Theory of Change* by Julia Coffman and Tanya Beer at Center for Evaluation Innovation (2015). <https://www.evaluationinnovation.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Advocacy-Strategy-Framework.pdf>

Intermediate Level

1. *A Guide to Measuring Advocacy and Policy* by ORS Impact (2007). <https://www.orsimpact.com/directory/Guide-to-Measuring-Advocacy.htm>
2. *Advocacy and Policy Change Evaluation: Theory and Practice* by Annette L. Gardner and Claire D. Brindis (2017). <https://www.sup.org/books/title/?id=24906>
3. *EAA Advocacy Evaluation Guide* prepared by Christina Mansfield for the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance (2011). https://www.betterevaluation.org/en/resources/guide/eaadvocacy_evaluation_guide
4. *Pathfinder: A Practical Guide to Advocacy Evaluation* by Innovation Network for the Atlantic Philanthropies (2009). http://www.pointk.org/resources/files/pathfinder_evaluator_web.pdf
5. *When the Best Offense is a Good Defense: Understanding and Measuring Advocacy on the Defense* by ORS Impact (2019). https://www.orsimpact.com/directory/Defensive_Advocacy.htm

Advanced Level

1. *No Royal Road: Finding and Following the Natural Pathways in Advocacy Evaluation* by Jim Coe and Rhonda Schlangen (2019). <https://www.evaluationinnovation.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/No-Royal-Road.pdf>
2. *Pathways for Change: 10 Theories to Inform Advocacy and Policy Change Efforts* by ORS Impact (2013). <https://www.orsimpact.com/directory/Pathways-for-Change-10.htm>

Advocates and Evaluators.

Topical areas where advocates say they want more evaluation support

Advanced Capacity

1. *ACT (Advocacy Capacity Tool) and ACT! Quick* by Alliance for Justice/Bolder Advocacy (2020). <https://bolderadvocacy.org/resource-library/tools-for-effective-advocacy/evaluating-advocacy/>
2. *Advocacy Capacity Assessment Tool: Facilitator's Guide* by USAID (2017). https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5a57ffe52aeba57afe10b243/t/5ae7a30f8a922d40d2a82ba4/1525130002235/ABH_aca_tool+guide.pdf
3. *Advocacy Core Capacity Assessment Tool* by TCC Group (2007). <https://www.tccgrp.com/resource/advocacy-core-capacity-assessment-tool-advocacy-ccat/>
4. "Examining Issues Facing Communities of Color Today: The Role of Evaluation to Incite Change" by Leah C. Neubauer, Dominica McBride, Andrea D. Guajardo, Wanda D. Casillas, and Melvin E. Hall in *New Directions For Evaluation*, Vol. 2020, Issue 166.
5. *Informing Advocacy and Communications Capacity Building Efforts* by ORS Impact (2019). <https://www.orsimpact.com/directory/InformingAdvocacy.htm>
6. *The Advocacy Capacity Review Guide* by Rhonda Schlangen and Aspen Planning and Evaluation Program. <https://www.aspeninstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/HewlettSRHRAAdvocay.ACRGuide.Public-1.29.20.pdf>
7. *What Makes an Effective Advocacy Organization? A Framework for Determining Advocacy Capacity* by the TCC Group for The California Endowment (2009). <https://www.tccgrp.com/resource/what-makes-an-effective-advocacy-organization-a-framework-for-determining-advocacy-capacity/>

Assessing Power and Influence

1. *Advocacy That Builds Power: Transforming Policies and Systems for Health and Racial Equity* by Julia Coffman, Gigi Barsoum, Albertina Lopez, and Mariah Broth Gantz at the Center for Evaluation Innovation (2021). <https://www.evaluationinnovation.org/publication/advocacy-that-builds-power-transforming-policies-and-systems-for-health-and-racial-equity/>
2. *Introduction to Power Mapping* by Center for Nonprofit Management (2021). <https://cnmsocal.org/news/introduction-to-power-mapping/>
3. *Monitoring and Evaluation of Policy Influence and Advocacy* by Josephine Tsui, Simon Hearn, and John Young at Overseas Development Institute (2014). <https://cdn.odi.org/media/documents/8928.pdf>
4. *Powercube.net, an Online Resource for Thinking About Power Relations* by the Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex (2011). <https://www.powercube.net/>
5. *Six Things We've Learned About Power and their Implications for Evaluation* by Katie Fox at Innovation Network (2019). <https://www.innonet.org/news-insights/resources/six-things-weve-learned-about-power-and-their-implications-for-evaluation/>

Coalitions, Collaboratives, Collective Impact

1. *The Alignment Index: An Innovative Tool* by ORS Impact and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (2014). <https://www.orsimpact.com/blog/The-Alignment-Index-An-Innovative-Tool.htm>
2. *Evaluating Collective Impact: Five Simple Rules* by Marc Cabaj (2014). <https://www.tamarackcommunity.ca/hubfs/Resources/Publications/Evaluating%20Collective%20Impact%205%20Simple%20Rules.pdf>
3. *Guide to Evaluating Collective Impact* by Hallie Preskill, Marcie Parkhurst, and Jennifer Splansky Juster at FSG (2013). <https://www.fsg.org/resource/guide-evaluating-collective-impact/>
4. *Unique Methods in Multi-Stakeholder Advocacy Evaluation* by ORS Impact (2018). <https://www.orsimpact.com/directory/unique-methods-in-multi-stakeholder-ae.htm>
5. *What Makes an Effective Coalition: Evidence-Based Indicators of Success* by Anne Gienapp (ORS Impact), Jewlya Lynn (Spark Policy Institute), Rebecca Ochtera (Spark Policy Institute), and Jared Raynor (TCC Group) for the California Endowment (2011). <https://www.tccgrp.com/resource/what-makes-an-effective-coalition-evidence-based-indicators-of-success/>

Community Organizing

1. *Core Components of Community Organizing Evaluation* by Alliance for Justice (2008). <https://bolderadvocacy.org/community-organizing/core-components-of-community-organizing-evaluation/>
2. *Grassroots Action and Learning for Social Change: Evaluating Community Organizing* by Catherine Crystal Foster, Justin Louie, and the Center for Evaluation Innovation (2010). http://www.pointk.org/client_docs/File/center_pubs/evaluating_community_organizing.pdf
3. *PowerCheck: Community Organizing Capacity Assessment Tool and PowerCheck Quick* by the Alliance for Justice/Bolder Advocacy (2018). <https://bolderadvocacy.org/community-organizing/>

Contribution Analysis

1. *Contribution Analysis in Policy Work: Assessing Advocacy's Influence* by ORS Impact (2017). <https://www.orsimpact.com/directory/contribution-analysis.htm>
2. *Four Tools for Assessing Grantee Contribution to Advocacy Efforts* by Tanya Beer and Julia Coffman at Center for Evaluation Innovation (2015). <https://www.evaluationinnovation.org/publication/four-tools-for-assessing-grantee-contribution-to-advocacy-efforts/>
3. *RAPID Outcome Assessment* by Overseas Development Institute (2013). <https://cdn.odi.org/media/documents/7815.pdf>

Evaluators and Funders.

Evaluation capacity building resources

Equity in Evaluation

1. Equitable Evaluation Framework by Equitable Evaluation Initiative (2017). <https://www.equitableeval.org/>
2. Awake to Woke to Work: Building a Race Equity Culture by Equity in the Center (2018). <https://equityinthecenter.org/aww/>
3. Resources for Evaluation from Racial Equity Tools (2021). <https://www.racialequitytools.org/resources/evaluate>

Other Evaluation Resources

1. Beyond the Win: Pathways for Policy Implementation by ORS Impact (2016). <https://www.orsimpact.com/directory/beyond-the-win.htm>
2. Champion and “Champion-ness”: Measuring Efforts to Create Champions for Policy Change by David Devlin-Foltz and Lisa Molinaro at Aspen Institute (2010). https://www.aspeninstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/files/content/docs/pubs/Champions_and_Championness_Aug2010.pdf
3. Evaluating Legal Advocacy: A How-To Guide for Evaluators, Funders, and Advocates by Jared Raynor and Deepti Sood at TCC Group (2016). <https://www.evaluationinnovation.org/publication/evaluating-legal-advocacy-a-how-to-guide-for-evaluators-funders-and-advocates/>
4. Data Collection for Advocacy Evaluation: The “Intense-Period Debrief” by Innovation Network (2007). http://www.pointk.org/client_docs/File/advocacy/intense_period_debrief.pdf
5. Learning at the Speed of Trust Learning Brief by Itad (2022). <https://www.itad.com/knowledge-product/learning-at-the-speed-of-trust-learning-brief/>
6. Not Always Movements: Multiple Approaches to Advance Large-Scale Social Change by ORS Impact (2020). https://www.orsimpact.com/directory/not-always-movements.htm?categories=&key-words=&pg=2_4

Evaluation Capacity Building

1. A Guide to Organizational Capacity Assessment Tools for William & Flora Hewlett Foundation by Informing Change (2017). <https://hewlett.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/A-Guide-to-Using-OCA-Tools.pdf>
2. Building Evaluation Capacity: Activities for Teaching and Training (2nd Ed.) by Hallie Preskill and Darlene Russ-Eft. (2016) Sage Publications: Los Angeles, CA.
3. Evaluation Coaching: Light Up Your Client’s Expertise by Betsy Baum Block at Center for Evaluation Innovation (2018). <https://www.evaluationinnovation.org/publication/evaluation-coaching-light-up-your-clients-expertise/>
4. Learning from Mapping MLE Capacity for Advocacy by Isabel Vogel and Stefanie Wallach at Itad (2019). https://www.itad.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Briefing-paper-1_190627-1.pdf
5. Informing Advocacy and Communications Capacity Building Efforts by ORS Impact (2019). <https://www.orsimpact.com/directory/InformingAdvocacy.htm>
6. “New Directions for Evaluative Thinking” by Anne T. Vo and Thomas Archibald in New Directions for Evaluation, Volume 2018, Issue 158. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/ev.20317>
7. Point K Learning Center by Innovation Network. <http://www.pointk.org/resources/search/results?page=4&mode=browse&category=383>



Survey Instrument

In this section, we share the questions that were used to assess the state of advocacy evaluation and better understand the challenges that nonprofit advocates face in measuring their efforts. The actual survey was conducted online in partnership with the University of California, San Francisco, the Alliance for Justice’s Bolder Advocacy program, and Strengthening Democracy.

Section 1

About Your Organization

The following questions are designed to collect basic information about your organization. This data will help us compare trends and findings across organizations that complete this survey.

1. What is the name of your organization?

2. What is your type of organization?

- 501(c)(3) tax-exempt public charity
- 501(c)(3) tax-exempt private foundation
- 501(c)(4) tax-exempt social welfare organization
- Project with a fiscal sponsor
- An informal group or network without tax-exempt status
- Other: _____

3. How old is your organization in years? _____

(Please use whole numbers. If your organization has been active less than six months, enter "0." If your organization has been active more than six months, but less than one year, enter "1.")

4. How many paid staff does your organization have?

(Please use whole numbers. Enter "0" if your organization has no paid staff. Do not include interns.)

_____ Full-time staff (> 37.5 hours/week)

_____ Part-time staff (< 37.5 hours/week)

_____ Paid consultant(s)

5. How many unpaid staff (volunteers) does your organization have? _____

(Enter "0" if your organization has no unpaid staff. Please do not include interns.)

6. What is the approximate size of your organization's annual budget (in USD)?

- Less than \$250,000
- \$250,000 - \$499,999
- \$500,000 - \$1,999,999
- \$2,000,000 - \$4,999,999
- \$5,000,000 - \$9,999,999
- \$10,000,000 - \$19,999,999
- More than \$20,000,000

7. In which U.S. states and/or territories does your organization work? _____

(Note: A checklist was provided with all 50 states, DC, major U.S. territories (Puerto Rico, Guam), and an “All U.S. States (National)” option).

8. Does your organization also work outside the U.S.?

- Yes
If yes, where? _____
- No

**Section 2
Advocacy**

This section is designed to help us learn more about your organization’s approach to advocacy work.

9. Which of the following policy areas describe the primary focus of your organization’s advocacy work? Select up to three.

- Civil /Human Rights
- Criminal Justice Reform
- Economic Justice
- Employment /Jobs
- Housing /Homelessness
- Voter /Civic Engagement
- Education
- Environment
- Food / Hunger
- Health
- Immigration
- Other

If you selected “Other” please write in the policy area:

10. At what levels does your organization engage in advocacy? Select all that apply. Please select “local” if your organization works within multiple counties in one state.

- Local (City/County level)
- Multi-State
- Tribal
- State
- National / Federal
- Other

If you selected “Other” please describe:

11. How much staff time and resources does your organization invest in its advocacy work?

- A small amount (1 - 25%)
- Less than half (26% - 49%)
- More than half (50% - 74%)
- All or nearly all (75% - 100%)

12. Does your organization have at least one staff person whose job description includes specific responsibilities for advocacy?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

13. Has your organization used any of the following advocacy strategies over the past five years?

Select all that apply?

- Policy analysis and/or research.** Systematically investigating an issue or problem to better define it or identify possible solutions
- Advocacy capacity building.** Investing in your organization's effectiveness and future sustainability by strengthening the skills, resources, knowledge, and practices that lead to effective advocacy over time
- Public awareness campaigns.** Raising recognition among the general public of a policy issue
- Public mobilization campaign.** Influencing individuals and groups to join in action in support of an issue or policy proposal
- Community organizing.** Helping communities and individuals build power to resolve issues of concern and influence policies and practices
- Coalition work.** Creating and cultivating space with other organizations to jointly work on policy issues
- Media advocacy.** Gaining coverage for issues or positions in the media, which may include but are not limited to, social media, television, radio, print and online newspapers and magazines, blogs, etc.
- Protests and demonstrations.** Taking public actions by a mass group or collection of groups of people in favor of or opposition to a cause, policy, or practice
- Voter outreach.** Registering citizens to vote and/or helping to get people out to the polls to vote or practice
- Voter education.** Conveying an issue or position to groups of voters in advance of an election
- Candidate education.** Conveying an issue or position to candidates running for public office
- Policymaker education.** Telling senators, representatives, city council members, or other policymakers about an issue and its impact on their constituents

- Lobbying.** Advocating with policymakers for a specific policy position on pending legislation
- Champion development.** Cultivating high profile individuals, including policymakers, to adopt an issue or policy proposal and publicly advocate for it
- Model legislation.** Drafting legislation consistent with an advocacy position on a policy issue for dissemination to policymakers
- Ballot measures.** Educating and influencing the public on specific ballot measures or referenda
- Regulatory and other administrative advocacy.** Influencing governmental agencies' regulatory and enforcement activities, such as submitting public comments on how a regulation should be implemented.
- Litigation.** Using the judicial system to maintain, further define, and/or change policy by filing lawsuits or civil actions, or by signing onto amicus briefs
- Other.** (Write-in) _____

14. Has your organization's advocacy work changed due to the coronavirus pandemic?

- Yes
How? _____

- No
- Not sure

15. Has your organization's advocacy work changed as a result of the increased focus on racism and the work of the Black Lives Matter movement?

- Yes
How? _____

- No
- Not sure

Section 3

Evaluation Practice

This section examines your organization's evaluation practices, including how you assess your advocacy's effectiveness.

16. Who does evaluation within your organization?

Select all that apply.

- We have an evaluator on staff.
- We have staff that include evaluation as part of their activities, but do not have a dedicated evaluator on staff.
- We work with an external evaluator.
- Other. (Write-in) _____

17. Does your organization and/or an outside evaluator assess progress and measure the success of your advocacy work?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

18. If you answered "No" or "Not sure" to question 17, then please proceed to Section 4. If you answered "Yes," then why does your organization evaluate its advocacy? Select all that apply.

- To improve planning and implementation of our advocacy strategies and activities
- To communicate with funders in grant reports and proposals
- To fulfill grant requirements from funder(s)
- To change how we allocate resources
- To help plan future strategies for our policy issues on our organization's advocacy agenda
- To seek out new partners or allies for our advocacy work
- To share information with policymakers and other decision-makers
- To change what policy issues we focus on in our advocacy agenda
- Other. (Write-in) _____

19. When your organization or an external evaluator evaluates your advocacy, what types of questions do you seek to answer? Select all that apply?

- Assessing advocacy capacity.** For example, do we have sufficient staffing and expertise to undertake specific tactics, like media advocacy?
- Assessing the implementation of our advocacy.** For example, how much advocacy did we do? Did we do what we said we were going to do and adapt as needed? What were the facilitating factors and challenges?
- Learning where our advocacy is getting traction.** For example, did our research increase policy-maker support for our agenda?
- Measuring the results of our advocacy.** For example, how effective was our advocacy? Did it achieve what we hoped it would achieve?
- Other.** (Write-in) _____

20. Has your organization used any of the following data collection methods to assess its advocacy work over the past five years?

- After action debrief / review.** After an event, activity, or project, bringing a team together to discuss openly what did and didn't work
- Advocacy capacity assessment.** Using a structured self-assessment tool to identify advocacy strengths and gaps
- Focus groups.** Facilitating conversations with advocates, coalition members, or other stakeholders to capture their perspectives, e.g. how to modify campaign strategy
- Interviews.** Having structured or unstructured conversations with individual stakeholders to collect information, e.g. their perceptions on a campaign's effectiveness
- Network / power mapping.** Mapping the strength and nature of relationships between allies, opponents, decision-makers, coalition members, and other stakeholders
- Policymaker ratings / scorecards.** Assessing policymakers as a group or independently on their support for a policy issue, policymaker level of influence, or advocate level of access to key policymakers

- **Case study.** Conducting an intensive analysis of one or multiple advocacy strategies, coalition work, and/ or policy change efforts
- **Media analysis.** Monitoring and analyzing data from traditional and social media, e.g. coverage of an issue in articles, blogs, on Twitter
- **Outcome analysis.** Collecting evidence of what has changed (“outcomes”), then working backward to determine if and how the advocacy effort contributed to the change (also known as “outcome harvesting”)
- **Surveys and questionnaires.** Administering a set of questions online or in print to capture specific information or feedback from a target audience (includes public polling)
- **Other.** (Write-in) _____

21. Which of the data collection methods was most useful? You can select up to three methods.

- **After action debrief / review.** After an event, activity, or project, bringing a team together to discuss openly what did and didn't work
- **Advocacy capacity assessment.** Using a structured self-assessment tool to identify advocacy strengths and gaps
- **Focus groups.** Facilitating conversations with advocates, coalition members, or other stakeholders to capture their perspectives, e.g. how to modify campaign strategy
- **Interviews.** Having structured or unstructured conversations with individual stakeholders to collect information, e.g. their perceptions on a campaign's effectiveness
- **Network / power mapping.** Mapping the strength and nature of relationships between allies, opponents, decision-makers, coalition members, and other stakeholders
- **Policymaker ratings / scorecards.** Assessing policymakers as a group or independently on their support for a policy issue, policymaker level of influence, or advocate level of access to key policymakers
- **Case study.** Conducting an intensive analysis of one or multiple advocacy strategies, coalition work, and/ or policy change efforts

- **Media analysis.** Monitoring and analyzing data from traditional and social media, e.g. coverage of an issue in articles, blogs, on Twitter
- **Outcome analysis.** Collecting evidence of what has changed (“outcomes”), then working backward to determine if and how the advocacy effort contributed to the change (also known as “outcome harvesting”)
- **Surveys and questionnaires.** Administering a set of questions online or in print to capture specific information or feedback from a target audience (includes public polling)
- **Other.** (Write-in) _____

- **N/A.** (Not applicable)

22. Which of the following data collection methods has been least useful? You can select up to three methods.

- **After action debrief / review.** After an event, activity, or project, bringing a team together to discuss openly what did and didn’t work
- **Advocacy capacity assessment.** Using a structured self-assessment tool to identify advocacy strengths and gaps
- **Focus groups.** Facilitating conversations with advocates, coalition members, or other stakeholders to capture their perspectives, e.g. how to modify campaign strategy
- **Interviews.** Having structured or unstructured conversations with individual stakeholders to collect information, e.g. their perceptions on a campaign’s effectiveness
- **Network / power mapping.** Mapping the strength and nature of relationships between allies, opponents, decision-makers, coalition members, and other stakeholders
- **Policymaker ratings / scorecards.** Assessing policymakers as a group or independently on their support for a policy issue, policymaker level of influence, or advocate level of access to key policymakers
- **Case study.** Conducting an intensive analysis of one or multiple advocacy strategies, coalition work, and/ or policy change efforts

- Media analysis.** Monitoring and analyzing data from traditional and social media, e.g. coverage of an issue in articles, blogs, on Twitter
- Outcome analysis.** Collecting evidence of what has changed (“outcomes”), then working backward to determine if and how the advocacy effort contributed to the change (also known as “outcome harvesting”)
- Surveys and questionnaires.** Administering a set of questions online or in print to capture specific information or feedback from a target audience (includes public polling)
- Other.** (Write-in) _____

- N/A.** (Not applicable)

23. Who uses results and findings from evaluations of your organization’s work? Select all that apply.

- Executive staff (CEO/ED)
- Managerial staff (e.g. policy/advocacy directors)
- Non-managerial staff (e.g. policy/advocacy coordinators)
- Board of Directors
- Funders
- Policymakers
- Partner organizations
- Other (Write-in) _____

Section 4 Advocacy Evaluation Resources

This final section asks for your input on what types of resources would help your organization evaluate its advocacy work.

24. Has your organization encountered any of the following challenges with regards to evaluating your advocacy work?

- Limited staff time
- Insufficient financial resources
- Limited staff knowledge, skills, and/or tools
- Insufficient support from organizational leadership
- Insufficient support from organizational staff
- Not knowing where / how to get started with evaluation
- Managing funder expectations and/or reporting requirements
- Measuring our unique impact (as one of many actors contributing to policy/systems change)
- Lack of evaluation tools that fit my organization's work
- Other (Write-in) _____

Optional. How has your organization addressed any of the above challenges? For example, are there specific resources you have found useful? Please describe. _____

25. Looking at the following list of advocacy activities, for what types would you like more support with advocacy evaluation? Select up to five activities from the list below.

- Public awareness campaigns.** Raising recognition among the general public of a policy issue or position
- Public mobilization campaign.** Influencing individuals and groups to join in action in support of an issue or policy proposal
- Community organizing.** Helping communities and individuals build power to resolve issues of concern and influence policies and practices

- **Coalition building.** Creating and cultivating space with other nonprofit organizations to jointly work on policy issues
- **Media advocacy.** Gaining coverage for issues or positions in the media, which may include but is not limited to, social media, television, radio, print and online newspapers and magazines, blogs, etc.
- **Protests and demonstrations.** Taking public actions by a mass group or collection of groups of people in favor of or opposition to a cause, policy, or practice
- **Voter outreach.** Registering citizens to vote and/or helping to get people out to the polls to vote
- **Voter education.** Conveying an issue or position to specific groups of voters in advance of an election
- **Candidate education.** Conveying an issue or position to candidates running for public office
- **Policymaker education.** Telling senators, representatives, city council members, or other policymakers about an issue and its impact on their constituents
- **Lobbying.** Advocating with legislators (policy-makers) for a specific policy position on pending legislation
- **Champion development.** Cultivating high profile individuals, including policymakers, to adopt an issue or policy proposal and publicly advocate for it
- **Model legislation.** Drafting legislation consistent with an advocacy position on a policy issue for dissemination to policymakers
- **Ballot measures.** Educating and influencing the public on specific ballot measures or referenda
- **Regulatory and other administrative advocacy.** Influencing governmental agencies' regulatory and enforcement activities, such as submitting public comments on how a regulation should be implemented.
- **Litigation.** Using the judicial system to maintain, further define, and/or change policy by filing lawsuits or civil actions, or by signing onto amicus briefs
- **Advocacy capacity building.** Investing in your organization's effectiveness and future sustainability by strengthening the skills, resources, knowledge, and practices that lead to effective advocacy over time

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Thank you.

