



# Making the Link

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## Measuring Impact: Advocacy Evaluation & Capacity Building

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Grantmakers want to know how effective their grantees are in their advocacy, but are often challenged by how to best evaluate that work.

### ADVOCACY CAPACITY

Developing up-front organizational advocacy capacity is important in the evaluation process. An organization should first assess its staff, knowledge, coalition partners and other resources to determine what may be needed for their upcoming advocacy efforts. For example, to protect social services in the upcoming state budget, it may be important for the organization to develop the knowledge and skills for a strong public relations campaign to ensure that voters and state legislators understand how proposed cuts will affect constituents. Nonprofits can also assess what it would take to develop a strong and flexible organization to achieve longer-term advocacy goals, such as efforts to obtain new policy.

Capacities needed to sustain effective *legislative, administrative, legal, and nonpartisan electoral advocacy* over a period of time are listed here. **No organization should expect to have a high level of capacity in all these areas.** For example, many groups are able to accomplish their advocacy priorities through partnering with others. And each advocacy effort requires a unique mix of the knowledge, skills, resources and operations listed here, with some elements proving unnecessary for particular efforts.

### OPERATIONAL INDICATORS

- **Effective decision-making structures**—Does the organization have a process for making quick decisions related to public policy?
- **Defined advocacy agenda**—Is there a written agenda of advocacy goals and priorities that is shared throughout the organization?

- **Organizational commitment to advocacy**—Does the organization have the resources and patience to carry through on its advocacy priorities?

### RELATIONSHIP INDICATORS

- **Advocacy base**—Is there a network of individuals and groups in place that can be activated to promote the advocacy agenda?
- **Advocacy partners**—Does the organization partner with other groups that can strengthen its efforts?
- **Relationships with advocacy targets**—Does the organization build working relationships with legislators, agency staff and others who make decisions related to its priorities?

### KNOWLEDGE AND SKILL INDICATORS

- **Media**—Is there a system for publicizing the organization's messages?
- **Advocacy strategies**—Does the organization develop its advocacy agenda in the context of political, economic and other environmental circumstances?
- **Research and issues**—Does the organization have knowledge of priority policy and other issues and their effect on its constituents?
- **Implementation capability**—Is there knowledge and skill related to the legislative, administrative, legal and electoral systems and processes?

Through an assessment of its advocacy capacity, an organization can better set goals and incorporate important capacity-building work into its evaluation.

## ADVOCACY EVALUATION

Although there can be different approaches to evaluating advocacy, a crucial first step is to take into account what is common to most effective advocacy work. Developing good working relationships with policymakers or adapting advocacy strategies to accommodate changes in the political leadership are examples of factors that are key to advocacy and, therefore, key to advocacy evaluation.

Evaluation of public policy advocacy work should be consistent with the nature of advocacy and should not be burdensome to nonprofits. Instead, it should be aimed at learning how to work more effectively as well as how to fund more effectively.

One method of breaking down the parts of advocacy evaluation is to set:

- **Goals:** Long-term accomplishments that will advance the organization's mission. A goal might be obtaining a new state policy to provide housing for 75 percent of the state's homeless population.
- **Strategies:** Administrative, legislative, nonpartisan electoral and legal approaches to accomplishing a goal. Goals might be accomplished, for example, through new laws as well as agency enforcement of existing ones.
- **Outcome benchmarks:** Specific activities or accomplishments that demonstrate success in reaching objectives for each strategy undertaken. Possible outcomes might include enactment of specific new legislation or actions by the state housing authority to ensure that public housing units are brought up to code.
- **Progress benchmarks:** Specific activities or accomplishments that demonstrate significant progress toward reaching desired outcomes. Facilitating one hundred comments supporting a position on a proposed administrative regulation or gathering support from the chair of a relevant state senate committee would move an advocacy campaign closer to its goal.

**For more information on advocacy and advocacy capacity and evaluation, please visit <http://www.afj.org/for-nonprofits-foundations/about-advocacy/evaluation-and-capacity-building.html> and <http://www.advocacyevaluation.org>**

**For information on evaluating community organizing, please visit Resources for Evaluating Community Organizing (RECO) at <http://www.afj.org/for-nonprofits-foundations/reco/>**