

Center for Evaluation Innovation

Four Tools for Assessing Grantee Contribution to Advocacy Efforts

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INTRODUCTION

Advocacy takes place in a complex and crowded political environment with many organizations trying to move policy on the same issue at the same time. Consequently, advocates often collaborate with allies to increase the likelihood that their unified advocacy voices will be heard. Collaborative advocacy work can take many forms, from tightly coordinated campaigns and long-term formal coalitions, to looser networks and one-time partnering on particular tactics.

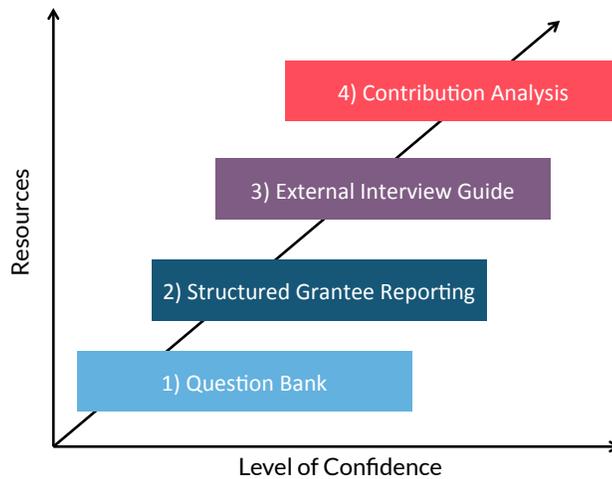
While funders acknowledge and often encourage collaborative advocacy efforts, they are nonetheless responsible for making decisions about which individual organizations they should support within the broader field of advocates, and for judging whether a particular organization should receive funding to advance a particular policy goal. Acutely aware of this competitive funding context, advocates understandably might hesitate to identify the important role that allies and partners play in helping them to advance policy.

Even when they do acknowledge the work of partners, it can be a challenge for grantees to be specific about the unique role they played in an advocacy strategy when reporting their achievements to funders. This can lead to confusion among funders who want to know what a grantee's unique contribution to policy progress has been.

This brief offers four tools that funders might use to get a better handle on a grantee's contribution to an advocacy effort. The tools can be used at both the start of a new grantee relationship or at the end of a grant, after advocacy strategies have been implemented.

TOOL 1 Question Bank	TOOL 2 Structured Grantee Reporting	TOOL 3 External Partner Interview Guide	TOOL 4 Contribution Analysis
Examples of questions and descriptive language to use during the proposal development process or in progress reports	Questions that can be attached to progress report forms to provide a more explicit and structured way for grantees to identify their unique role in and contribution to an advocacy effort	Tips and questions for non-grantees to help you receive meaningful, high-quality feedback about grantee contribution	External evaluation approach to get a more rigorous assessment of the contribution of a specific grantee, coalition, or strategy

As the figure illustrates, the four tools differ on two dimensions—the level of confidence a funder can place in the reliability of the information returned, and the level of resources required to use each tool.



The first two tools—the question bank and structured grantee reporting—involve incorporating questions into common grantmaking processes: proposal development and grantee reporting. They are resource efficient, but they are also lower on the confidence continuum because they rely on self-reported data from grantees.

The third tool—the external interview guide—returns information at a higher level of confidence because it collects data on grantee contribution from an external source. At the same time, it requires more time and effort from funders who do the interviewing.

The fourth tool—contribution analysis—requires considerably more resources than the other three. It is an evaluation approach that requires an external evaluator. It is methodologically rigorous and is a tool that funders or grantees likely would use only when questions about contribution are important to answer with a high level of reliability and confidence.

Each tool is described briefly in the pages that follow. The first three tools include all of the instructions, language, and questions needed to use each tool. The fourth describes the approach of contribution analysis, but ultimately an external evaluator would be needed to administer the tool.

CONTRIBUTION NOT ATTRIBUTION

The word “contribution” is important. Definitively isolating whether a certain policy outcome resulted from a particular grantee’s efforts is difficult at best, and more likely impossible in a complex and collaborative advocacy context. Rather than asking grantees to prove they caused a policy outcome, funders can advise grantees to establish a credible and plausible case that their work played a meaningful role in producing their intended results. It is important for funders to signal that they are not looking for grantees to prove attribution or to claim full credit for policy outcomes.

TOOL 1

QUESTION BANK FOR PROPOSAL DEVELOPMENT AND PROGRESS REPORTS

This tool suggests questions and language to include in written or verbal communications with potential grantees during the early stages of the proposal development process. It also includes examples of questions to use during a later stage of grantmaking, in progress reports, to elicit useful data about grantee results and lessons. The questions ask grantees about:

1. Their allies or partners, and the roles each is playing
2. The **interim outcomes** they expect to achieve or are achieving during the advocacy process. Interim outcomes can help to demonstrate grantees' unique contributions on the way to a longer-term policy win.

Funders are not expected to ask all of these questions; these are just possibilities from which to choose.

QUESTIONS FOR PROPOSALS

ABOUT GRANTEE CONTRIBUTION

The foundation recognizes that achieving advocacy goals can be a long-term process that requires the dedication and hard work of many different organizations. Successful advocates are those who are skilled at reading the political landscape, identifying and aligning with potential allies, and valuing the contribution of other actors in the effort. As a result, we are looking for proposals that clearly describe:

- The roles of allied organizations that are working toward the same advocacy goal(s)
 - How your strategies will complement the work of your allies
 - The specific interim outcomes that your work will aim to achieve while working toward a longer-term win.
1. What other organizations are current or potential allies on this issue? How do you intend to stay abreast of and/or coordinate with their efforts?
 2. What other organizations are key players in this [campaign/coalition/network/effort], and what are the primary roles and strategies they will be using?

3. What are the two to three partner organizations without which you are unlikely to make progress on this issue and why? What unique skills do they bring to the effort, and what target audiences are they poised to influence?
4. What is your organization's unique role in this [campaign/coalition/network/effort], and why is your organization particularly well suited for this role? Examples of roles include:
 - A coordinating and convening role that brings other actors in the effort together
 - A contributing role that brings a unique set of skills to the effort, such as media and communications expertise, grassroots organizing skills, credible research and analysis, etc.
 - A behind-the-scenes role that will join the effort at key moments to lend your influence.
5. What unique skills, influence, relationships, or reputation does your organization bring to the larger field of organizations working on this issue [or in this campaign/coalition/network/effort]?

ABOUT INTERIM OUTCOMES

Achieving advocacy goals can be a long-term process and require the efforts of many different organizations. Interim outcomes can help you determine whether you are making progress on the way toward a longer-term win, and to demonstrate your unique contribution to that progress. Interim outcomes should be closely linked to your advocacy strategies and should focus on how the audiences you hope to influence are beginning to change as a result of your work.

Types of interim outcomes include:

- **Advocacy capacity:** Increase in the skills, leadership or resources to lead, adapt, manage, and implement the advocacy strategy.
- **Media coverage:** Increase in the quantity and/or quality of coverage generated in print, broadcast, or online media.
- **Public awareness:** Increase in public or community recognition that a problem exists and/or the level of familiarity with your solution.
- **Public will:** Increase in the willingness of segments of the public to act in support of your issue or policy proposal.
- **Constituency or coalition growth:** Increase in the number or mix of individuals or organizations you can count on for sustained advocacy or action on your issue.
- **Political will:** Increase in the willingness of decision makers to act in support of your issue or proposed solution.

- **Champions:** Increase in the number or type of high-profile individuals who adopt the issue and publicly advocate for it.
- **Community action (political):** Increase in the actions of community members in support of the issue or proposed solution.

1. Which of these interim outcomes do you hope to see as a result of your organization's work or the work of the [campaign/coalition/network/effort]?
2. Which of these interim outcomes will you play a lead role in securing? Which will you play a supporting role in securing?
3. How will you assess progress on these interim outcomes? [See the attached chart for ideas about indicators and tools for tracking interim advocacy outcomes.]

QUESTIONS FOR PROGRESS REPORTS

ABOUT GRANTEE CONTRIBUTION

What other organization(s) played a key role in advancing this issue and how? How did your work support, build on, or complement the work of other organizations? [Or: How did the work of other key organizations support, build on, or complement your efforts?]

What unique skills, influence, relationships, or strategies did your organization bring to the larger field of organizations working on this issue [or in this campaign/coalition/network]?

What has been your organization's unique role in this [campaign/coalition/network] and why has it been particularly well suited for this role? Examples roles include:

- A coordinating and convening role that brings other actors together.
- A contributing role that brings a unique set of skills to the effort, such as media and communications expertise, grassroots organizing skills, credible research and analysis, etc.
- A behind-the-scenes role that will join the effort at key moments to lend your influence.
- A "lead voice" role that acts as the public face of a campaign or coalition.

ABOUT INTERIM OUTCOMES

The foundation recognizes that achieving advocacy goals is often a long-term process that requires the efforts of many different organizations. If you have not yet achieved your final goal, we are interested in understanding what interim outcomes your organization and allies achieved during the grant period that signal progress upon which

your organization can continue to build. If you have already achieved your final goal, we are interested in the steps you made and progress you achieved along the way.

1. What interim advocacy outcomes occurred as a result of your organization's work or the work of the [campaign/coalition/network]?
2. To which of these outcomes did your organization contribute most directly and how? For which of these outcomes did your organization play a supporting role?

ASSESSING THE QUALITY OF PROPOSED INTERIM OUTCOMES

A common error when selecting meaningful interim outcomes is choosing ones that do not correspond to the grantee's advocacy strategy. Instead, advocates tend to measure what is easiest to count, regardless of how closely it corresponds to their strategy. For example, if targeted media outreach is not a core part of the grantee's advocacy strategy, it is not meaningful to measure changes in the level or quality of media coverage of an issue. If the grantee proposes one-on-one leadership development with a small cohort of civic leaders, the grantee should first focus on measuring whether the leadership skills and advocacy activities of their direct program participants are, in fact, improving. Clarifying the direct connection between grantee activities and the outcomes they hope to achieve can improve not only the evaluation plan, but also the strategy itself.

High-quality interim advocacy outcomes capture how grantees' specific target audiences are demonstrating increased awareness, will, or action in support of a policy issue, or increased capacity to act on behalf of the issue. Sometimes these target audiences are policymakers themselves. However, advocates often seek to change the awareness, will, and action of other audiences—including other advocacy organizations, community leaders and other influencers, the media, or key segments of the public—as a means to generating increased pressure on policymakers. Focusing evaluation and monitoring efforts first on the audiences grantees are touching directly with their advocacy work can generate useful information about grantee progress even when a policy "win" is not on the immediate horizon.

Ask:

1. Does the proposed outcome correspond with the specific audiences that the grantee's work will affect?
2. Given what you know about the political environment, the work of allies and opposition, and the capacity and reputation of this grantee, is it reasonable to believe that the type and amount of work the grantee has proposed to do will actually result in this change?
3. Are there more 'steps' this audience must go through before they are likely to change in this way? (For example, if there is no basic awareness of the problem among most influential leaders, should we expect to see increased awareness and will before we see them begin to take action?)
4. What kinds of observable indicators might signal that this outcome is occurring?
5. Does the grantee have the resources and capacity to capture quality data on these indicators, or will they require additional support to do so?

TOOL 2

STRUCTURED TOOL FOR GRANTEE REPORTING

Funders can incorporate these structured questions into grantee reporting forms to gather feedback on grantee progress on interim outcomes as well as their contribution to those outcomes.

Achieving advocacy goals can be a long-term process. The eight areas below are different types of interim outcomes that grantees might aim for with their advocacy strategies while working toward a longer-term win.

- | | |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1. Increased advocacy capacity | 5. Constituency or coalition growth |
| 2. Better media coverage | 6. Increased political will |
| 3. Increased public awareness | 7. Development of champions |
| 4. Increased public will | 8. Increased community action |

You are not expected to be working on all of these interim outcomes. For those outcomes that are relevant to your advocacy strategy, and using the indicators as a guide, identify how much progress you (and your partners) have made, as well as your role in contributing to those outcomes.

1. Increased advocacy capacity Increase in the skills, leadership, or resources to lead, adapt, manage, and technically implement the advocacy strategy.	How much progress has occurred in this area since the start of your grant?			
<i>Indicators of advocacy capacity</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Clear leadership on the advocacy strategy has emerged. ● Partners know and understand the advocacy strategy. ● Partners have increased <i>knowledge</i> about advocacy, mobilizing, or organizing tactics. ● Partners have increased advocacy <i>skills</i> (e.g., talking to the media or decision makers). ● Groups affected are involved in advocating for the solution. ● An increased ability exists to monitor or evaluate the advocacy strategy. ● Increased resources or funding is available for advocacy 	A lot	Some	Very little	Not relevant
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	What was your role in helping to achieve the progress?			
	Key	Contributing	Limited (Partner responsibility)	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
<i>If you played a "Key" or "Contributing" role, briefly explain your role. If "very little" progress has been made, please explain why.</i>				

In the reporting form, the question structure displayed above for the first interim outcome would be repeated for the remaining seven outcomes:

<p>2. Better media coverage Increase in the quantity and/or quality of coverage generated in print, broadcast, or online media.</p>	<p>3. Increased public awareness Increase in public or community recognition that a problem exists and/or familiarity with your solution.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Targeted media outlets are covering the issue. ● The issue is being covered in targeted media with some regularity. ● The issue is usefully framed in targeted media. ● The issue is being discussed on social media. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Broad recognition exists that a change is needed. ● The issue is widely discussed. ● Solving the issue is a priority.
<p>4. Increased public will Increase in the willingness of the public or segments of it to act in support of your issue or policy proposal.</p>	<p>5. Constituency or coalition growth Increase in the number of individuals you can count on for sustained advocacy or action on your issue.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Clear opinions on the issue exist. ● Favorable attitudes toward the policy solution are present. ● Groups affected by the issue are supportive of the policy solution. ● Community members believe their action on the issue will lead to change. ● Belief exists that the proposed policy solution will result in meaningful change. ● Community members are willing to act in support of the proposed solution. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● New or nontraditional partners have been recruited to the advocacy effort. ● Groups or organizations are coordinating their advocacy work. ● Groups or organizations are delivering consistent messages. ● Groups or organizations are ready to mobilize or act on the issue.
<p>6. Increased political will Increase in the willingness of decision makers to act in support of your issue or proposed solution.</p>	<p>7. Development of champions Increase in the number of high-profile individuals who adopt the issue and publicly advocate for it.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Relevant decision makers understand the issue/recognize the needed change. ● Relevant decision makers perceive the issue as important. ● Relevant decision makers believe the proposed policy solution will result in meaningful change. ● Relevant decision makers think the proposed policy solution is technically feasible. ● Relevant decision makers are willing to act in support of the policy solution. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● High-profile champions have been recruited to support the issue. ● High-profile champions are publicly supporting the issue (e.g., speaking in public forums).
<p>8. Increased community action (political) Increase in the actions of community members in support of the issue or proposed solution.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Community members are attending advocacy events. ● Community members are contacting decision makers to express their points of view. ● Community members are participating in policy-related forums. 	

TOOL 3

EXTERNAL INTERVIEW GUIDE

Often the best source of information about a particular organization's contribution to policy progress is other players in the field. Informal interviews with a handful of other advocates, influencers, or even decision makers who witnessed the unfolding of an advocacy effort can yield insight not only about the perceived effectiveness of particular grantee or group of grantees, but also about key relationships, niches, potential partners, and barriers to greater progress.

Interviews might be the best strategy for understanding grantee contribution when you:

- Are uncertain about whether a grantee has been an important contributor
- Question whether a grantee's self-reported information about their contribution is reliable or honest
- Need more information before making a significant funding decision.

Guidance follows on how to select interviewees, set up the interview, and structure the questions to improve the quality and usefulness of the information gathered.

INTERVIEWEE SELECTION CRITERIA

If time allows for more than one interview, select a combination of interviewees who represent different perspectives or roles in an advocacy effort, such as a:

- Lead organization in the coalition
- Partner who received (or provided) support or other resources from the grantee
- Organization coordinating its work with the grantee.

Also consider interviewing one or two outside actors "targeted" by the advocacy effort, such as a:

- Government official
- Organizational leader
- Community leader.

If time allows for only one interview, try to locate the actor who is best positioned to have a view of the whole advocacy effort over time, and who witnessed multiple actors' efforts on the policy issue.

Be mindful that advocates often compete for funds, and that negotiation between allied advocates can be contentious. Other advocates' opinions about a grantee's contribution may be affected by the extent to which they perceive that grantee helped them achieve

their own policy goals. This is why it is important to gather more than one perspective whenever possible.

Remember that the “behind the scenes” work of advocates, as well as any contentious negotiation or conflicts between advocates, may not be visible to external actors. Consequently, external actors are more likely to be able to comment on the advocates’ perceived influence and reputation among target audiences than on the advocates’ ability to effectively partner.

INTERVIEW SET-UP

When contacting potential interviewees, ideally, do not reveal that you are seeking information about the contribution or role of a particular organization. Instead, explain that you seek their opinions about an advocacy effort as a whole (e.g., “I’d like to ask you some questions about policy progress on reproductive rights in the past two years.”) This approach will allow you to get an overall sense of the policy landscape and whom the interviewees believe were the most important players without first “priming” them to talk about the grantee that most interests you. Remind interviewees that what gets said will be confidential.

INTERVIEW STRUCTURE & QUESTIONS

Interview structure affects the quality of the information received. The interview should begin with broader questions about the advocacy landscape and then narrow toward more specific questions about the role and contribution of many players, and finally to questions about the grantee.

1. What would you say are the most significant advances related to [policy issue X] that have occurred over the past few years?
2. To what do you attribute this progress? Who or what are the primary causes of this progress?
3. What are the primary reasons that more progress on [policy issue X] has not occurred?
4. *If interviewing a fellow advocate:* What role did your organization play in advancing this issue?
5. What other organizations or individuals have played a significant role in moving [policy issue X]? Who are they key players and what role or contribution did they make?

6. Now I'd like to ask you some specific questions about [Grantee's] work on [policy issue X]. How would you characterize [Grantee's] reputation? What are they most known for among other advocates? Among decision makers or other audiences?
7. *If interviewing a fellow advocate:* Can you describe how you worked with [Grantee] on this issue? What was their role in the effort?
8. *If interviewing a fellow advocate:* Did you experience challenges working with [Grantee] on this issue?
9. How would you describe the unique skills, influence, or relationships that [Grantee] brought to this effort? What unique contributions have they made to progress on this issue?
10. Thinking about the future of [policy issue x], what role do you think [Grantee] is best positioned and able to play?

TOOL 4

CONTRIBUTION ANALYSIS

This tool is a formal evaluation approach that requires an experienced external evaluator to implement.

Contribution analysis is a rigorous evaluation approach that determines whether a credible and plausible case can be made that an advocacy effort contributed to its policy-related outcomes or impacts.¹ It is retrospective, conducted after policy results already are observed.

The process has six iterative steps.²

1. Mapping advocacy results using a logic model, outcomes chain, or similar approach.
2. Gathering existing evidence on those results.
3. Exploring alternative explanations for the results to determine if they might provide a better explanation of the observed results than the advocacy effort being examined.
4. Developing a “performance story” that lays out the context, planned and actual accomplishments, lessons learned, and main alternative explanations for the results, along with why those alternative explanations should not be accepted.
5. Seeking additional evidence where alternative evidence cannot be discounted or where the contribution argument is questionable.
6. Revising and strengthening the performance story where possible. If this cannot be done, either more evaluation work is required or the conclusion is that a plausible and defensible case *cannot* be made that the advocacy effort contributed to the observed results.

¹ Mayne, J. (2008). *Contribution analysis: An approach to exploring cause and effect*. Rome, Italy: Institutional Learning and Change Initiative.

² Mayne, J. (2001). Addressing attribution through contribution analysis: Using performance measures sensibly. *The Canadian Journal of Program Evaluation*, 16(1), 1-24.