

Assessing Advocacy

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Extracts from 'Work Justice', a case study of the campaign by Uniting Justice to influence Industrial Relations legislation in Australia. An edited version will be available online <http://www.thechangeagency.org> from August 2006.

Impact assessment of advocacy is like standing in a court of law: one makes a plausible case with the aim of being believed.¹

Assessing advocacy work is notoriously difficult. There is a small but growing body of literature on this topic, all of which is agreed on the complexity of the task. For example, ActionAid lists the following challenges to meaningful assessment:

- Finding causal relationships is almost impossible;
- Compromise versus victory (leading to subjective judgements about extent of success);
- Campaign goals tend to shift over time, making original goals irrelevant;
- Advocacy happens at multiple levels which may or may not support each other (and may contradict);
- Attribution is difficult as advocacy tends to happen in coalitions using a combination of strategies;
- Policy work is a long-term process;
- Accumulation of knowledge and 'laws' hindered by lack of repetition; and
- Advocacy is a conflictual process.²

This theme is picked up by the California Endowment, who note that social research is quite weak in this area of policy-changing, compared to assessing policy impacts. As a result, there is no particular set of tools, models or frameworks to measure the efficacy of advocacy in widespread use, or indeed even much documentation in the area. They did find the small number of people working in the area held a set of common principles including the need to

- Expand the perception of policy work beyond legislative arenas
- Build an evaluation framework around a theory about how a group's activities are expected to lead to its long-term outcomes
- Focus on the steps that lay the groundwork and contribute to the policy change being sought
- Include outcomes that involve building capacity to become more effective advocates
- Focus on contribution, not attribution
- Emphasize organizational learning as the overarching goal of evaluation.³

Both documents suggest that an assessment framework that asks questions across a number of dimensions of potential outcomes can facilitate a more comprehensive assessment of the benefits and costs of a campaign. As Chapman and Wameyo write:

A campaign's success is frequently evaluated against a single short-term goal, such as winning immediate legislative or policy victories ... Incorporating other dimensions of success, such as gains in the strength of grassroots organisations or increased opportunities for civil society to get involved in future decision making, allows a more complete analysis and understanding of a campaign's effectiveness and potential for long-term impact.⁴

They then proceed to discuss a number of useful assessment frameworks, each with its own logic and thus strengths and weaknesses. The IDR Framework is a helpful basis for assessing advocacy work because it considers outcomes in three dimensions:

1. Policy – the degree to which specific policy goals were achieved (eg. amendments), as well as process outcomes such as media exposure

¹ Alex Bush, quoted in Jennifer Chapman and Amboka Wameyo, *Monitoring and Evaluating Advocacy: A Scoping Study*, ActionAid, London, 2001, p29. Available online at <http://www.actionaid.org/wps/content/documents/Scoping%20advocacy%20paper%202001.pdf>

² Chapman and Wameyo, *op cit.*, pp7-8.

³ Kendall Guthrie, Justin Louie, Tom David and Catherine Crystal Foster, *the Challenge of Assessing Policy and Advocacy Activities: Strategies for a Prospective Evaluation Approach*, California Endowment, Los Angeles, pp7-12

⁴ Chapman & Wameyo, *op cit.*, p13

2. Civil Society – the degree to which individual, organizational, and societal capacity was strengthened for future advocacy, including through building better coalitions and empowering grassroots mobilisation
3. Political Space – the extent to which channels are opened for future gains, including relationships with key government and parliamentary figures and enhanced or lost public profile and sympathy.⁵

This framework can provide the basis for a simple fill-in form in which evaluators specify outcomes in each of the three dimensions. For example:

Dimension	Impact
1. Policy	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legislation • Implementation of policy • Media 	Change in public policy, program, practice or behaviour
2. Civil Society / Capacity Building	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual • Organisational • Networks and relationships formed • Relationships lost or hurt 	Strengthen and expand civil society's capacity, organisation, accountability & clout (power), expand members' skills, capacities, knowledge, attitudes & beliefs; and increase overall social capital, reciprocity, trust and tolerance
3. Political Space	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationships with government or political figure improved • Relationships with government or political figure damaged • Impact on public profile 	Increased democratic space, expand participation & political legitimacy of civil society, as well as accountability and transparency of public institutions

Table 1: Advocacy Assessment Form Using IDR Framework⁶

Using this framework, one can see that questions need to be asked about a range of outcomes beyond the simple legislative victory/defeat. In this study of the Uniting Church campaign against the WorkChoices legislation, I derived the following questions to ask of the staff involved:

1. Policy Dimension

- a. What legislative changes were won that we were advocating for?
- b. Were any Senator's minds changed (that we know of) which we might have been a part of?
- c. How much media coverage did we get? Of what quality and what sympathy?
- d. In retrospect, were our strategy and tactics appropriate and as effective as possible?

2. Civil Society/Capacity Building

- a. Was individual capacity of the staff built or lost in the process? How?
- b. Was the capacity of church members to understand and appreciate the legislation and our campaign increased? Go beyond outputs to outcomes (may not be possible as we don't have any ways to measure this)
- c. Has the organisational capacity improved for the future?
- d. How did the organisation cope with the campaign?
- e. Were networks and alliances improved or weakened? What practical effects will this have?

3. Political Space

- a. What politicians have we improved our relationship with? What specific practical effects might this have?
- b. What politicians have we alienated and lost ability to meet constructively with? What specific practical effects might this have?
- c. Has the Uniting Church gained 'political space' as a result of the campaign?

⁵ Chapman & Wameyo, *op cit.*, p15

⁶ *Ibid*, p13 (amended to make relevant to this study)