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The Challenge of Assessing Policy and Advocacy Activities:

Strategies for a Prospective Evaluation Approach

Foreword from The California Endowment

During the last few years, The California Endowment has placed increased focus on policy and advocacy work. We believe that for many societal challenges, creating policy change can have a more systemic and lasting effect on improving the health care of Californians than solely funding direct services. However, we have discovered that documenting the impact of the foundation's work in this arena is complex, and the unpredictable nature of the policy environment poses unique challenges to the classic program evaluation strategies honed by assessing direct services.

Therefore, The Endowment asked Blueprint Research & Design, Inc. to gather information from evaluation experts across the country and the foundation's own stakeholders to guide us in developing an understanding about the issues in policy change evaluation, and recommend an approach to strengthening the foundation's public policy change evaluation practice. Via in-depth interviews, stakeholders identified their needs, opinions and priorities around strengthening the foundation's policy change evaluation practice. Interviews with evaluation experts provided advice on conducting effective policy change evaluation in a foundation setting, and identified tools and written reports that might inform the foundation in developing an evaluation strategy.

As we continue to refine our evaluation approach in order to better understand the effectiveness of our grant making, as well as to help grantees improve their own work, we want to share the early learnings from this "state of the field" report. We invite you to share any thoughts and reactions on this important issue.

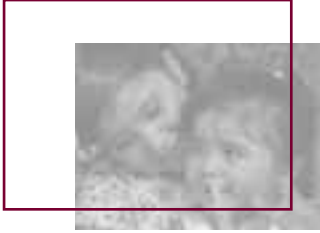**Robert K. Ross, M.D.**
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Funders and nonprofits involved in policy and advocacy work need more effective ways to assess whether their efforts are making a meaningful difference.

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Background and Overview

Introduction

Foundations and nonprofits today face a growing need to measure the outcomes of their efforts to improve society. For the majority of nonprofits that focus on direct services and their funders, measuring impact has moved beyond merely counting the number of people served toward understanding the relevant changes in service recipients' attitudes, awareness and behaviors. Documenting the connections between increased services funded by a foundation and increased social change has been relatively straightforward.

Funders and nonprofits involved in policy and advocacy work, however, often struggle over ways to assess whether their hard work made a meaningful difference. It can take years of building constituencies, educating legislators and forging alliances to actually change public policy. Therefore, foundations, which typically fund in increments of one-to-three years, have difficulty assessing the progress of grantees pursuing policy work. Moreover, foundations often want to know what difference their money made. Yet the murky world of public policy formation involves many players, teasing out the unique impact of any one organization is almost impossible.

During the last few years, a handful of foundations and evaluation experts have been crafting new evaluation methodologies to address the challenges of policy change work. Many more foundations and nonprofits are eager for help. At this moment in time, what methods, theories and tools look promising for evaluating policy change efforts?

Originally prepared for The California Endowment, this paper presents a recommended approach to policy change evaluation. The foundation, one of the largest health funders in the country, is increasingly funding policy change and advocacy work. This research began as an effort to inform the foundation's evaluation planning around those issues. However, The Endowment's goals and challenges are not unique. The analysis

and proposed strategies addressed here should prove useful to a variety of foundations, evaluators and policy analysts with an interest in advocacy and policy change.

The paper is designed to outline an approach to policy change evaluation grounded in the experience of experts and foundation colleagues. (See Appendix A for the research methodology.) This paper first posits three key priorities in evaluating policy change work, drawn from interviews with grantees and staff from The California Endowment on their needs concerning policy change evaluation. It also discusses the challenges inherent in monitoring and assessing these types of grants. It then provides a brief description of the "state of the practice" in evaluating policy change and advocacy work within the foundation community. Because the practice of evaluating a foundation's impact on policy advocacy is fairly new, our review did not unearth a commonly practiced methodology or widely used tools. However, seven widely agreed upon principles of effective policy change evaluation did emerge.

Based upon these seven principles and the advice of national evaluation experts, we recommend a prospective approach to policy change evaluation. Part II of the paper is devoted to outlining this recommended approach. A prospective approach would enable a funder to define

Clarification of Terms

Goals vs. Outcomes – For the purposes of this paper, goals are defined as broader, long-term visions of change, whereas outcomes are the incremental changes that indicate progress toward the larger goal.

Benchmarks vs. Indicators – Benchmarks are the outcomes defined in advance as those the evaluation is monitoring to see change or progress. Indicators are the specific ways in which the benchmarks will be measured. For example, if one of the benchmarks for a project is broader media exposure for the issue, one of the indicators may be the number of earned media pieces in major media outlets.

Theory of Change vs. Logic Model – Theories of change broadly describe a project, linking its activities or strategies with desired outcomes, and in particular describing the how and why of those linkages. Logic models tend to be more graphical in nature and attempt to map out all elements of a program, though they tend not to describe how and why the pieces are interconnected. Logic models are more useful for describing an existing program than they are useful for shaping new programs.

expectations from the start of a grant, monitor progress and provide feedback for grantees on their work as the program is operating. This paper outlines key components of this prospective approach, namely setting up an evaluation framework and benchmarks prospectively, at the beginning of a grant, and then assessing progress and impact along the way. As well, this paper highlights the articles, manuals and expert advice most relevant and useful in developing this prospective approach.

Key steps in a prospective evaluation approach, as discussed in this paper, include:

- Adopting a conceptual model for understanding the process of policy change;

- Developing a theory about how and why planned activities lead to desired outcomes (often called a "theory of change");

- Selecting benchmarks to monitor progress; and

- Measuring progress toward benchmarks and collecting data.

Assumed Priorities for Policy Change Evaluation

To guide the research on strategies for policy change evaluation, Blueprint began by interviewing The Endowment's grantees and staff to understand their needs, challenges and priorities regarding this issue. This stakeholder needs assessment identified three broad priorities for policy change evaluation.[1] It is likely that these priorities are widely shared by other foundations, and our recommended approach to policy change evaluation assumes so.

1. Setting Grant Goals and Monitoring Progress:

When a grant starts, nonprofits and foundation staff need to agree upon goals for the grant. The grantee agrees to be accountable for working towards these goals. Particularly for one-year grants, actual policy change is very rarely a reasonable grant goal, even though it is the ultimate goal for both the grantee and funder. Therefore, grantees and program staff need to identify how grantees expect their work to *contribute* to policy change over the long run, but also identify a grant goal that will demonstrate progress towards the ultimate goal—without holding the grantee directly accountable for changing the policy. Both want milestones that indicate actual change in the policy environment (e.g., increased legislators' awareness of an issue), not just an inventory of activities or process indicators (e.g., number of flyers mailed to legislators). This goal identification process is especially challenging for the grant-making staff and the direct service providers with less experience in policy change work. The challenge is heightened by some grantees' concern that they and the funder will not see eye-to-eye on what is both achievable and impressive enough to be grant-worthy.

[1] Note that these institutional priorities are distinct from the specific needs and desires of individual stakeholders, as identified in the needs assessment.

2. Assessing Impact at the Grantee, Program and Foundation Level:

Both funders and grantees want more effective ways to assess and document their impact. Grantees want to show their funders, donors, colleagues and constituents that they are making a difference. Funders want to document for their board members and the public that their grant dollars were spent wisely. Since actual public policy change takes a long time, both grantees and program officers want methods to assess their contributions as they move along, not just when (or if) a policy victory is achieved. This requires a more sophisticated way to think about impact in the policy arena. Both grantors and grantees need new ways to show how they are building up to or making the environment more conducive to their desired policy change, or laying the groundwork for successful implementation of the policy change—before the policy change actually occurs.

3. Improving Programs and Developing Knowledge about Effective Strategies:

Documenting impact is valuable, especially to the funder and to a grantee that wants to replicate successes and raise more money. In addition to assessing a program's impact, information about what worked and did not work can be valuable to a wider audience. This information can help both foundations and their grantees improve the specific project and identify strategies that can help other advocates increase their effectiveness. Sharing these lessons with colleagues outside the foundation can also serve to strengthen the field of philanthropy by improving

the knowledge base on which grant-making decisions are made. It can even help policymakers in the future, by documenting models of positive and effective relationships with advocacy organizations.

Challenges in Evaluating Policy and Advocacy Grants

For the last 20 years, the social scientific method has served as the dominant paradigm for evaluations in the foundation world. A social services program identifies its change goal and the three-to-four factors or inputs that will stimulate that change. The program, for the most part, assumes there is a direct, linear, causal relationship between the inputs and the desired effect. Evaluation is then about quantifying those factors and measuring the impact.

However, as foundations have directed an increasing proportion of their grant dollars to public policy and advocacy work, they are finding that their traditional evaluation approaches do not work well. The seven key challenges are:

- Complexity
- Role of External Forces
- Time Frame
- Shifting Strategies and Milestones
- Attribution
- Limitations on Lobbying
- Grantee Engagement

The challenges in evaluating policy and advocacy have led both to foundations' reluctance to fund policy and advocacy

work as well as an absence of documented evaluations, even among those foundations that do fund advocacy. The emerging community of practice around policy change evaluation is trying to find strategies to address these challenges.

Complexity

Policy and advocacy grantees are trying to advance their goals in the complex and ever-changing policy arena. Achieving policy change usually involves much more than just getting legislators to change a single law. In fact, effective policy work often doesn't even involve changing a law. It involves building a constituency to promote the policy change—and monitor its effective implementation, once achieved. It often requires developing research to assess the impact of different policy proposals. It requires public awareness campaigns and closed-door deal-making with elected officials. Sometimes, policy success even means the absence of change, when, for example, advocates are tying to stop policy changes they feel would be detrimental. Therefore, the path to policy change is complex and iterative. In determining what actions will create change or how to assess progress, linear cause and effect models are not particularly helpful in trying to understand the nonlinear dynamics of the system.

Role of External Forces

Numerous players and dynamics outside the grantee organization, such as an opposition organization or the political and economic environment, heavily shape policy and advocacy work. Unlike social services grantees, policy grantees often face players actively working to thwart their efforts. The influence of these external forces is hard to predict and often impossible for a grantee to control. It is more appropriate to hold a direct service grantee accountable for achieving certain outcomes because they have much more control over the key factors that influence their ability to achieve those outcomes—primarily the quality of their program. In contrast, policy grantees can do everything within their control "right" (*e.g.*, generate good media coverage, speak with legislators, provide good research) and still not achieve their goal because of factors such a change in the party in control of the legislature or an economic downturn. In advocacy work, a grantee's efforts can build potential for a policy outcome, but alone cannot necessarily achieve a specific outcome. Change often happens when an opportunity window opens.[2]

Time Frame

The length of time necessary to achieve interim and ultimate goals differs for policy change evaluations. Policy goals usually are long-term, beyond the horizon of a typical one-to-two-year grant. In most cases, there will be little or no actual public policy change in one year. It is therefore inappropriate to measure the effectiveness of most foundations' one-year policy and advocacy grants by the yardstick, "Did policy change?" A more useful question might be "How did the grantee's work improve the policy environment for this issue?" Or "How successful was the grantee in taking the necessary steps toward the policy change?" The field needs new ways

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[2] See Kingdon, J. *Agendas, Alternatives and Public Policies*. HarperCollins: New York. 1995.

to think about appropriate outcomes that that can mark progress toward the ultimate policy goal but are achievable within the time frame of a grant.

Shifting Strategies and Milestones

Since dynamics in the policy arena can change quickly, advocates must constantly adjust their strategies to fit the current environment. In policy change evaluation, it is challenging to choose short-term outcomes and benchmarks at the onset of a grant and measure progress against them because the grantees' strategies may need to change radically over the course of the grant—even as their ultimate policy goal remains the same or similar. This is partly due to the influence of external forces and complexity of policy advocacy, discussed above. It requires discipline, attention and a deep understanding of the issues and the policy environment to craft an approach and a set of goals that are flexible without being merely reactive or haphazard.

Attribution

It is also important to note that most policy work involves multiple players often working in coalitions and, in fact, requires multiple players "hitting" numerous leverage points. In this complex system, it is difficult to sort out the distinct effect of any individual player or any single activity. Isolating the distinct contributions of the individual funders who supported particular aspects of a campaign is even more difficult. In the policy advocacy world, there is no way to have a "control group." Neither the grantee nor the funder can ever measure how the advocacy effort would have played out if the grantee

wasn't there, if a specific activity didn't happen or if one element of funding were missing or allocated differently. Even when an evaluator has the luxury of interviewing all key stakeholders involved in a policy development, there's rarely, if ever, clear agreement on why something turned out the way it did. That can be frustrating to funders who want to pinpoint their influence.

Limitations on Lobbying

Misperceptions regarding the federal guidelines on nonprofit lobbying, as well as a foundation's desire to avoid any chance of regulatory trouble, create challenges when trying to assess a funder's role in advocacy work. Federal regulations constrain foundations' ability to lobby directly and to provide financial support for nonprofits to lobby on specific pieces of legislation (although the limitations are not as strict as many foundation staff and board members believe.) Therefore, nonprofits ask foundations to support other aspects of their policy work, such as public education, research or general community organizing. Traditionally, foundations have wanted grantees to draw very clear lines between their activities related to lobbying for legislation and work supported by the foundation. However, because foundation-supported activities are usually part of an overall campaign for policy change, program officers find it hard to understand the value of the work they supported without understanding how it contributed to the larger policy change goals. In many cases, it makes more sense to evaluate the entire campaign or the work of an advocacy

organization overall rather than the distinct component funded by a foundation. However, many program officers expressed concern that if grantees submit reports that describe how their foundation-funded work fits together with lobbying efforts to achieve policy change, the foundation might get into legal trouble or alienate foundation leadership. Continuously educating the foundation and nonprofit communities of the nature of the relatively generous federal limits on lobbying would help mitigate this problem.

Grantee Engagement

Grantee participation, commitment, enthusiasm and capacity are essential to collecting quality evaluation data. Experienced advocates have many informal systems for gathering feedback about their tactics as they move along, usually based heavily on feedback from their peers, and sometimes based on quantitative measures they have developed internally. However, most policy and advocacy grantees have little experience or expertise in formal evaluation. They have limited existing staff or logistical capacity to collect data. The data an external evaluator might want them to collect may seem burdensome, inappropriate or difficult to obtain, even if they do collect some data in their day-to-day work. Moreover, for many nonprofits, their past experiences with evaluation have often been less than satisfying. Based on these experiences, there is a general concern in the nonprofit field about evaluation. Many feel that evaluations occur after a grant is over and come as an additional, often

unfunded, burden that provides little direct benefit to the nonprofit. Often they never see a final report, and if they do, it doesn't contain information that helps them improve their work, the information comes too late to put it to use, or they have no funding or capacity to act on it.

The Current State of Foundation Practice on Policy Change Evaluation

Foundations have a long history of evaluating the *impact* of policy changes, as exemplified by the many studies on the impact of welfare reform. However, numerous experts noted even three years ago few funders were trying to evaluate their efforts in creating or supporting grantees to *create* policy change. This lack of evaluation was due in part to the challenge in measuring policy advocacy, as discussed above and, in many cases, a desire to keep their involvement in this more politically controversial arena low profile.

There is now an increased desire from a number of funders to engage in a more rigorous unpacking of all the goals and tactics that grantees have used and examine what really was effective in achieving policy change. However, after conducting 20 interviews with evaluation experts and reviewing a broad sampling of relevant reports, we concur with the consensus from a recent Grantmakers in Health gathering of more than 50 funders of advocacy. They concluded that there is no particular methodology, set of metrics or tools to measure the efficacy of advocacy

grant making in widespread use. In fact, there is not yet a real "field" or "community of practice" in evaluation of policy advocacy.[3] The field (such as it is) is composed of a number of individual practitioners and firms who are employing generic skills to design evaluations on a project-by-project basis. There appears to be little communication between practitioners, and there is no organized forum to share their ideas.

In trying to assess the state of policy change evaluation, we were particularly challenged by the lack of written documentation. Despite a substantial amount of practical literature on evaluation, very little of it directly addresses the specific challenge of measuring policy change and advocacy. Much of what is known about how best to approach this challenge exists only in the heads of a few practitioners and researchers. The written documentation lies largely in internal and often informal evaluation reports, which foundations do not commonly share.

It is noteworthy that three of the tools or manuals we identified as most valuable for foundations interested in evaluating policy advocacy were published in the last year. (These are the *Making the Case* tool from the Women's Funding Network, *Investing in Change: A Funder's Guide to Supporting Advocacy* from Alliance for Justice, and the *Practical Guide to Documenting Influence* and *Leverage in Making Connections Communities* from the Annie E. Casey Foundation.)

While practitioners do not share a commonly practiced methodology, there did emerge from our review at least seven widely held principles for engaging in effective policy change evaluation. The prospective approach outlined in this paper is built on these principles.

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[3] McKinsey and Company describes a community of practice as "A group of professionals, informally bound to one another through exposure to a common class of problems, common pursuit of solutions, and thereby themselves embodying a store of knowledge." http://www.ichnet.org/glossary.htm.

Guiding Principles for Policy Change Evaluation

1. **Expand the perception of policy work beyond state and federal legislative arenas.**

   Policy can be set through administrative and regulatory action by the executive branch and its agencies as well as by the judicial branch. Moreover, some of the most important policy occurs at the local and regional levels. Significant policy opportunities also occur during the implementation stage and in the monitoring and enforcement of the law or regulation.

2. **Build an evaluation framework around a theory about how a group's activities are expected to lead to its long-term outcomes.**

   Often called a theory of change, this process forces clarity of thinking between funders and grantees. It also provides a common language and consensus on outcomes and activities in a multi-organization initiative.

3. **Focus monitoring and impact assessment for most grantees and initiatives on the steps that lay the groundwork and contribute to the policy change being sought.**

   Changing policy requires a range of activities, including constituency and coalition building, research, policymaker education, media advocacy and public information campaign. Each activity contributes to the overall goal of advancing a particular policy. Outcomes should be developed that are related to the activity's contribution and indicate progress towards the policy goal.

4. **Include outcomes that involve building grantee capacity to become more effective advocates.**

   These should be in addition to outcomes that indicate interim progress. These capacity improvements, such as relationship building, create lasting impacts that will improve the grantee's effectiveness in future policy and advocacy projects, even when a grantee or initiative fails to change the target policy.

5. **Focus on the foundation's and grantee's contribution, not attribution.**

   Given the multiple, interrelated factors that influence the policy process and the many players in the system, it is more productive to focus a foundation's evaluation on developing an analysis of meaningful contribution to changes in the policy environment rather than trying to distinguish changes that can be directly attributed to a single foundation or organization.

6. **Emphasize organizational learning as the overarching goal of evaluation for both the grantee and the foundation.**

   View monitoring and impact assessment as strategies to support learning rather than to judge a grantee. In an arena where achieving the ultimate goal may rarely happen within the grant time frame, and public failures are more frequent, emphasizing learning should encourage greater grantee frankness. It should also promote evaluation strategies and benchmarks that generate information valuable to both the grantee and funder, increasing grantee buy-in and participation. Finally, the foundation will be able to document more frequent "wins" in learning than in achieving policy change.

7. **Build grantee capacity to conduct self-evaluation.**

   Most advocacy organizations have minimal experience or skills in more formal evaluation methods. To date, most have relied primarily on information feedback from their extensive network of peers to judge their effectiveness and refine their strategies. To increase their use of formal evaluation processes, grantees will need training or technical assistance as well as additional staff time to document what actually happened. This additional work should help the nonprofit become more reflective about its own work, as well as provide more useful information about change to funders.

Prospective evaluation can help a funder monitor progress of a grant and enable the grantee to use evaluation information to make improvements in the project.

Part II: A Prospective Approach to Evaluation

Introduction

Evaluations can be conducted as either backward-looking or forward-looking. A backward-looking—or retrospective—evaluation may collect data throughout the life of a project, but analysis and presentation of findings occur near the end or at the conclusion of a project, generally summarizing the actions, impact and lessons learned from the work. Most policy change evaluations conducted to date have taken a retrospective approach—either of individual grants, initiatives or clusters of similar grants. See Appendix C for examples of retrospective policy change evaluations.

Retrospective evaluations can be very useful for understanding what has happened in policy change. Often, participants are more able to identify in hindsight which events made the most important contribution to change and the influence of environmental issues which may not have been as obvious in the moment. However, retrospective evaluation has several drawbacks. First, findings come after a project is completed, so they have limited value in helping the grantee or program officer refine strategies along the way. Also, there is a natural desire for participants to want to put a positive spin on their work, which inhibits their inclination to remember changes in strategies or aspects that didn't work out as planned.

In contrast, a prospective evaluation sets out goals for a project at the outset and measures how well the project is moving toward those goals throughout the project's life. Unlike retrospective evaluation, prospective evaluation can help a funder monitor the progress of a grant and allow the grantee to use evaluation information to make improvements in its program as the program is in progress. Like retrospective evaluation, prospective evaluation is useful for looking at efforts at the grantee, initiative or program level.

In brief, prospective evaluation involves four steps:

1. Agree upon a conceptual model for the policy process under consideration.

2. Articulate a theory about how and why the activities of a given grantee, initiative or foundation are expected to lead to the ultimate policy change goal (often called a "theory of change").

3. Use the "theory of change" as a framework to define measurable benchmarks and indicators for assessing both progress towards desired policy change and building organizational capacity for advocacy in general.

4. Collect data on benchmarks to monitor progress and feed the data to grantees and foundation staff who can use the information to refine their efforts.

Finally, at the end of the project, all of the progress should be reviewed to assess overall impact and lessons learned.

Benefits of a Prospective Approach

A prospective approach can be most effective in policy change evaluation for several reasons. It will help the foundation's staff and its grantees:

- **Define expectations from the start.** Both grantees and program officers expressed a strong need for guidance in developing more clear expectations about outcomes for policy and advocacy projects from the beginning of a relationship. Prospective evaluation methods set up expected outcomes at the beginning of the project, allowing stakeholders to clarify expectations upfront.

- **Monitor progress.** Program officers stated they want more effective strategies for monitoring the progress of policy advocacy grantees. The prospective approach would help program officers tell if a project is on or off track and enable them to describe to the foundation board what progress has been made, short of actual policy change, which may be years off. A prospective evaluation can deal with the challenge of the long timeframe required for policy change. By showing how short-term outcomes are leading to long-term policy change, a funder can document some impact from its grant making long before actual policy change occurs.

- **Provide feedback to refine projects.** A key priority for grantees and program officers overseeing multiple grants is gathering information to refine their projects and make mid-course corrections in their strategies. As one program officer states, "We wanted evaluation results as they happen, not just at the end. That's what we need to refine our program." A prospective evaluation is designed to provide insights as a project progresses, when it can be used to strengthen a program, rather than just at the end of a grant.

- **Promote grantee engagement in the evaluation process.** Evaluations that are able to provide timely findings

are more useful to the grantee and consequently grantees are more eager to help provide good data. Many grantees mentioned that retrospective evaluations, which often provide information after a program is completed, are rarely useful to a grantee and seem as though they are only for a funder's benefit. Said one, "External evaluations tend to take a long time and for a growing organization, by the time the evaluation was done, we had moved on."

■ **Support program planning and implementation.** The conceptual models and benchmarks for prospective evaluation also help foundation staff and grantees clarify their thinking about how their activities work together to achieve impact. This can increase the program's effectiveness before evaluation data even come in. Explained one grantee, "What I am interested in is evaluation for the sake of strategic development, to inform planning. This is much more valuable, but more difficult, than traditional evaluation that focuses on reporting what happened." In fact, one foundation program officer said the foundation always viewed its efforts to develop evaluation frameworks as supporting both planning and evaluation.

■ **Increase transparency.** By setting goals up front and making them transparent to all parties, prospective evaluation can be more thorough and is less likely to produce a self-serving evaluation. In retrospective evaluation, grantees and funders have a natural tendency de-emphasize or overlook what went wrong and to put a good spin on past events. In fact, participants may not even remember the ways in which goals changed over time.

■ **Promote a learning culture.** Prospective evaluation can demonstrate to grantees how systematic and well-defined feedback can help them improve their practice. Often, it is only through experience that grantees are able to see the usefulness of evaluation feedback. As grantees begin to see the impact of this knowledge, they may make shifts to instill evaluation practice into their organizational culture.

The next section outlines the four basic steps in conducting a prospective evaluation, and includes practical advice with each step, drawn from the interviews with evaluators, foundation staff and grantees.

Step 1: Develop a Conceptual Model for the Policy Process

Prospective evaluation begins with all parties—advocates, funders (and outside evaluators, if used)—developing a clear understanding of the environment in which advocates are going to work, the change that the grantees and the funder want to make in the environment, and how they intend to make that change happen. Explained one evaluation expert, "They need to describe the problem, they need to show data on the problem, and they need to show how they're going to address the problem…. They need to identify the stakeholders they're going to target and why, and the

contextual features that may challenge them and how they're going to address those." This knowledge provides the structure for both planning and evaluation. Evaluation experts and several foundation staff members felt that too many policy projects and their evaluations are hampered by inadequate time devoted to understanding the environment in which people will work and nebulous thinking about the strategies required to make change happen. "When people undertake these initiatives, they start out with rather fuzzy ideas.... It may be the first issue is not the evaluation but clarifying upfront what people are proposing to do," one expert notes. Said another, "Time and again, there's a poor understanding of three things: the context you're working in, how change happens and is sustained over time, and power dynamics. Absent that information, poor planning results."

Stakeholders can begin to understand their policy environment through a process of research and information gathering. For a small project, this may involve something as simple as gauging community interest and reviewing previous advocacy efforts on this issue. For larger projects or initiatives, more detailed research is probably appropriate. Depending on the project and the players involved, the foundation may even want to commission research papers, literature reviews, focus groups or opinion polls. Furthermore, for those less experienced in the policy arena, research can help them comprehend the complexities involved in typical advocacy, policy change and social

change processes. For more experienced advocates, who may already have a comprehensive understanding of their policy environment and the latest research, it can be very useful at this point to articulate and re-examine the assumptions they hold about the changes that are needed and approaches to change that will work best in the current environment.

Understanding the Policy, Social Change and Advocacy Processes

For those foundation staff and grantees less experienced in the policy arena, understanding the environment involves first understanding the basic elements or evolution of advocacy, policy change and social change processes. Funders and grantees with less experience in policy and advocacy work often struggle with understanding the process and where they can play a part. Typically, their definition of policy and advocacy work is too narrow, focusing only on adoption or passage of new policies and overlooking the work building up to policy change and the implementation of the policy once passed or adopted. And as one foundation staff member stated, it is important to "get people not to focus just on legislative solutions, but to identify local and regional advocacy opportunities, identify potential partners and allies." Or as another puts it, "We need to have a broad focus on the continuum of activities that go into the policy world."

> Time and again, there's a poor understanding of three things: the context you're working in, how change happens and is sustained over time, and power dynamics. Absent that information, poor planning results.

Bringing grantees that have traditionally engaged in service provision into policy and advocacy work poses additional challenges. One foundation staff member states, "There are opportunities for policy and advocacy in every grant. [Program officers working with service grantees] couldn't always see that... and then they need help in getting their grantees to see that." Learning the processes of advocacy, policy change and social change helps program officers and grantees understand the potential opportunities available to them to engage in policy and advocacy work. Furthermore, once grantees that have traditionally done more service-oriented work get into policy work, they note that they often struggle with how to characterize their new work within a policy and advocacy framework. In the past, they have laid out their service work in a deliverables framework, specifically stating what will be accomplished by when. This system often does not work for policy activities.

Conceptual Frameworks

Based upon years of experience, researchers and practitioners have developed conceptual models for understanding the complex process involved in advocacy, policy change and social change. These models are simply ways of systematizing and organizing the typical processes and complex details of advocacy, policy change and social change, in the same way an organizational chart systematizes the internal relationships in a business or a city map lays out how the streets are aligned. These models are useful because they:

- Provide a common language among all parties and expand the concept of policy work beyond a narrow focus on legislative change.

- Assist program planners in identifying the numerous levers they can use to effect change. In particular, they help those with less understanding of the policy world (direct service grantees and some foundation program officers) grasp the complexity of the world they're working in and understand how they might best contribute to policy change.

- Help planners understand the typical pathways and timeframes of change to set realistic expectations.

- Determine the process and goals for evaluation, including helping brainstorm potential strategies, activities, outcomes and benchmarks.

- Facilitate comparison across grants and initiatives and sum up impact across grants at the cluster or program level. Frameworks can be useful tools for understanding and aligning different projects when evaluating at a cluster, program or foundation level.

The three conceptual models presented below each describe one particular aspect of the universe of social change and policy change. As seen in Figure 1, the outside square represents social change, which encompasses both policy change and advocacy, but is also broader than either of those. The middle square represents policy change, of which the inner square, advocacy, is a component.

Figure 1. Model of Framework Relationships

Because each of these models has a different focus, thinking through more than one of them can provide a broader understanding of the environment.

These three conceptual models are highlighted because they have the following characteristics:

- Each describes a different aspect of the social change/policy change process.

- They all provide a complex understanding of the world of policy change, getting beyond the simple "lobby for bill 'A'" notion of policy work.

- They are simple enough to be understandable to a wide range of players.

Social Change Model
The broadest level is a social change schema, which depicts how individuals and groups create large-scale change in society.[4] Policy change is viewed as just one piece of a larger strategy for change. Other components of social change include changes in the private sector,

expansion and investment in civil society and democracy (*e.g.*, building infrastructure groups, involving and educating the public), and creating real material change in individual lives.

Policy Change Model
The policy change model focuses on the policy arena and presents the process through which ideas are taken up, weighed and decided upon in this arena.[5] It outlines a policy environment that doesn't operate in a linear fashion and that often involves much time preparing for a short window of opportunity for policy change. The basic process for policy change includes:

1. Setting the agenda for what issues are to be discussed;

2. Specifying alternatives from which a policy choice is to be made;

3. Making an authoritative choice among those specified alternatives, as in a legislative vote or executive decision; and

4. Implementing the decision.

But the linearity of these four steps belies the fact that at any point in time, there are three streams of processes occurring simultaneously and independently: recognition and definition of problems, creation of policy proposals and shifts in politics.

- **Problems** are just conditions in the world that attain prominence and are thus defined as problems. This recognition and definition occurs through the development and monitoring of indicators (*e.g.*, rates

[4] Based on IDR framework, outlined in Chapman, J. and Wameyo, B., *Monitoring and Evaluating Advocacy, A Scoping Study.* 2001.
[5] Based on Kingdon, J. *Agendas, Alternatives and Public Policies*. HarperCollins: New York. 1995.

of uninsured Californians); occurrence of a focusing event—a disaster, crisis, personal experience or powerful symbol that draws attention to some conditions more than others; or feedback (*e.g.*, complaints from constituents).

- Creation of **policy proposals** happens both inside and outside government, and a proposal is likely to survive and endure in the policy stream if it seems logical, rational and feasible, and if it looks like it can attract political support.

- **Shifts in politics** occur because of things like political turnover, campaigns by interest groups, developments in the economic environment or changes in the mood of the population.

It is when these three streams come together, in what is termed a "policy window," that policy change happens.

The separate streams of problems, policies and politics each have lives of their own. Problems are recognized and defined according to processes that are different from the ways policies are developed or political events unfold. Policy proposals are developed according to their own incentives and selection criteria, whether or not they are solutions to problems or responsive to political considerations. Political events flow along on their own schedule and according to their own rules, whether or not they are related to problems or proposals.

But there comes a time when the three streams are joined. A pressing problem demands attention, for instance, and a policy proposal is coupled to the problem

as its solution. Or an event in the political stream, such as a change of administration, calls for different directions. At that point, proposals that fit with that political event, such as initiatives that fit with a new administration's philosophy, come to the fore and are coupled with the ripe political climate. Similarly, problems that fit are highlighted, and others are neglected.[6]

Thus, the policy process is at its core an irrational and nonlinear process, where advocates' work is often building their own capacity to move quickly when a policy window opens. This way of thinking about the policy process fits well with how several program officers described how their foundation and its grantees engage in policy work. Said one, "While we are trying to make things happen in the policy arena, right now most often we are trying to respond to those opportunities that arise. Our challenge: how do we get grantee organizations prepared so that they can engage when an opportunity arises? This is different than going straight to advocacy or legal organizations and giving them concrete objectives—like changing a certain policy or enforcing a regulation."

One specific challenge highlighted by this model is that advocates must identify and enter into not just any window, but the right window. They are challenged to stay true to their own goals and act on what the research identifies as the need, rather than being reactive and opportunistic in a way that pulls the work away from the organization's mission.

[6] Kingdon, J. *Agendas, Alternatives and Public Policies*. p. 201.

Advocacy Model

The advocacy model differs from the other two models in that it describes a tactic for social or policy change, rather than the change itself. Furthermore, the model detailed below is one developed for public health advocacy.[7] General models, or models covering other issue areas, may frame the advocacy process differently. The public health advocacy model outlines a process that starts with information gathering and dissemination, then moves to strategy development and finally into action. Each step in the process builds on the previous ones to ensure that the campaign develops well. "For example, motor vehicle injury prevention relies on public health surveillance of fatalities and research on injuries and vehicles (at the information stage). That information is used to identify new or ongoing obstacles to continued declines in motor vehicle injury rates and also means to overcome these obstacles (at the strategy stage). Legislative lobbyists, staffers, and others then attempt (at the action stage) to alter policy by, for example, lowering illegal blood alcohol concentration levels and changing brake, air bag, and car seat performance standards."[8]

While the steps in the advocacy process are laid out linearly, in practice they often all occur simultaneously. Another important distinction in the framework is that it notes that different skills are required at different steps in the process. As it is rare for one organization to be adept at all these different skills, advocacy generally necessitates collaboration amongst stakeholders, each playing different key roles.

Step 2: Develop a Theory of Change

After researching and understanding the environment grantees are working in and potential ways to effect change, the next step is to articulate how a grantee or initiative leader expects change to occur and how they expect their activities to contribute to that change happening. Nearly half of experts interviewed stressed that developing a theory of change is essential in evaluating policy work.

The "Theory of Change" concept was originally developed to guide the process of nonprofit program development. Later, theory of change was also found to be very valuable for program monitoring and evaluation. Originally, a very specific process for nonprofits, the idea of theory of change has mutated and expanded over time. Now its usage is so widespread and varied, the words themselves have a multitude of meanings. For some, theory of change is a rigid, step-by-step process that requires hours of time to develop. For some it is simply a one-sentence description of a program's activities and goals. No matter how it is defined, at its heart, *a theory of change lays out what specific changes the group wants to see in the world, and how and why a group[9] expects its actions to lead to those changes.* The important elements are defining very clearly the end goals of the program and hypothesizing the strategies the group is using to move toward

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[7] Based on Christoffel, K., "Public Health Advocacy: Process and Product." *American Journal of Public Health.*
[8] Christoffel, p.724.
[9] The group may be a single organization, a group of individuals, or a collaboration of organizations.

achieving those goals. Evaluation experts urge those interested in the theory of change idea not to get too caught up in the terminology and focus more on the basic concepts underneath.

A theory of change, no matter what it is officially called, is central to prospective policy change evaluation. In any prospective, forward-looking evaluation, a program's theory guides the evaluation plan. Reciprocally, the evaluation provides feedback to a program as it evolves; it becomes a key resource in program refinement. One foundation staff member notes this relationship in saying, "if we don't know where we want to go and how we are planning to get there, it is hard to evaluate our work."

Developing a theory of change forces clarity of thought about the path from a program's activities to its outcomes. As one evaluation expert states, "A theory of change makes the evaluation effort more transparent and efficient…. It breaks up the evaluation into both process implementation and outcomes. It also forces you to be specific about what kind of change you want in what period of time." The focus that a theory of change puts on outcomes or long-term change is crucial. A program officer from another foundation notes that, "Without a theory of change, use of indicators will lead to activity-driven monitoring."[10] Finally,

> At its heart, a theory of change lays out what specific changes the group wants to see in the world, and how and why a group expects its actions to lead to those changes.

it helps all players develop a common understanding about where they are trying to go and how they plan to get there—be it a single grantee and program officer or members of a multi-organization coalition or strategic initiative.

Practical Considerations in Developing a Theory of Change

Evaluation experts suggest that in successfully developing a theory of change for policy change evaluation, the following issues should be considered:

1. Get Out of Evaluation-Speak

Often the language of evaluation is daunting and mystifying to those who are not formal evaluators. Furthermore, many nonprofits have a fear of or distaste for formal evaluation processes and are reluctant to engage, even if they would welcome receiving useful information about the efficacy of their work. They often say the process distracts them from their work and provides them little that is useful.

Therefore, making a theory of change process accessible and relevant to grantees is essential. The Women's Funding Network has structured its grantee reports around questions that get at key concepts and walk grantees through outlining their theory of change in their grant reports without using technical terms. Key questions in the Women's Funding Network's *Making the Case* tool include:

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[10] Snowden, A. "Evaluating Philanthropic Support of Public Policy Advocacy: A Resource for Funders." p. 11.

- What is the situation you want to change?

- What is the change you want to produce?

- What strategies are you using to make that happen?

- What helps you accelerate your efforts?

- What gets in your way or inhibits your progress?

These questions are part of an interactive online tool that shows a graphic of a small town as a metaphor that may be particularly appealing to less sophisticated grantees. The situation needing change is represented as a collection of arrows impinging on the town. The change the grantee is looking to make is symbolized as a shield protecting the town. Individual strategies are represented as bolstering the shield. This format avoids using evaluation language and its graphical layout is visually appealing and understandable to those not familiar with evaluation. The lack of rigidity in the format also allows the model to account for the complexity and non-linearity of advocacy work.

2. Provide Participants with Good Research

As noted above, research is crucial at the start of any policy change evaluation. In its work on theory of change, the Aspen Institute Roundtable states, "The process will go more smoothly and produce better results if stakeholders and facilitators have access to information that allows them to draw on the existing body of research and current literature from a range of domains and disciplines, and to think more systematically about what it will take to promote and sustain the changes they want to bring about." However, the amount and type of research that a strategic initiative should engage in is different from what an individual grantee might do to prepare for creating a theory of change. An initiative might spend many hours gathering data on its subject area, going over existing research, and possibly commissioning additional research. On the other hand, a grantee may just need to gather community input and review previous actions, being careful to assess those actions with a fresh eye and a clear understanding of both the latest research and the current environment.

> **Without a theory of change, use of indicators will lead to activity-driven monitoring.**

3. Provide Enough Flexibility to Adapt the Model Over Time

The continual shift in environment and strategies is a hallmark of advocacy work. A rigorously detailed theory of change for policy projects will have to be modified frequently, requiring an unsustainable amount of time and energy. Evaluation experts recommend developing a more conceptual, and therefore, more flexible theory of change for policy projects. The theory of change created in the Kellogg Foundation's Devolution Initiative was set up with this challenge in mind.[11] Evaluators designed the basic theory of change to be broad and conceptual, allowing the specifics of the program to change over time while not impeding the evaluation in any significant way. For example, new organizations joined

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[11] Coffman, J., "Simplifying Complex Initiative Evaluation." The Evaluation Exchange. 1999.

the initiative, and new objectives were constructed without major revision of the theory.

4. Move Beyond the Basic Manuals for Policy Change Evaluation

Existing evaluation manuals provide grounding in the basics of developing a theory of change.[12] However, foundations with experience helping policy, advocacy and social change groups develop a theory of change found that the traditional framework advocated by these manuals was too rigid and linear to capture the fluidity of policy and advocacy work.

The Liberty Hill Foundation convened a group of grantees to develop a framework for evaluating policy work. The group began its effort using the formal logic model process developed for service-oriented nonprofits by the United Way. They soon found that the model was not appropriate for nonprofits engaged in advocacy or other broad social change work and ended up adapting it over 10 sessions.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation has developed a guidebook for the evaluation of its grants that uses a theory of change. In developing a theory of change, one exercise the guidebook recommends is creating a simple "so that" chain. The goal of this exercise is to link program strategy with long-term outcomes. The chain begins with a program's strategy. The first step is to answer, "We're engaging in this strategy *so that…*" The chain then moves from short-term outcomes to longer-term outcomes. For example, a grantee might:

Increase media coverage on the lack of health insurance for children
so that
public awareness increases
so that
policymakers increase their knowledge and interest
so that
policies change
so that
more children have health insurance.

The exercise works well when participants have a good vision of what they desire their long-term outcomes to be and what their current strategies are. Participants then can either work forward from their strategies toward their long-term outcomes or backward from outcomes to strategies. Approaching from either direction will allow the participants to clarify the logic that links their work to their desired outcomes.

5. Choose a Process Appropriate for the Level

As stated above, the amount and level of research needed to develop a theory of change differs based on whether the theory is for an individual grant, an initiative or an entire foundation program. This differentiation holds true throughout the theory of change development process. The efforts that an initiative undertakes are different from what an individual grantee should undertake. As seen in the Devolution Initiative example mentioned earlier, an initiative may need a more conceptual model that can be adapted to different groups and over time. As well,

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[12] There are many good resources and guide books on developing a theory of change. Both the Aspen Institute and the Kellogg Foundation have done extensive research on theory of change and provide useful tools on their Web sites. http://www.theoryofchange.org or http://www.wkkf.org. As a starting place to understand the basic concepts for developing a theory of change, these resources are very useful.

the logical steps in the theory may need to be backed up by more solid evidence. Theories developed for individual grantees can be both more specific to their work (less conceptual) and also less detailed in evidentiary support.

Creating a theory of change for an individual grant poses unique challenges, especially as it relates to a funder's overall goal. In creating a theory of change for an individual grant, it will be relevant to understand the funder's goals and strategies in order for the grantee to see how it fits into that plan and the larger environment—that while an individual one-year project may be small, there is value in the contribution to a larger effort. As one evaluation expert states, "Foundations need to express their own theory of change and chain of outcomes and express to grantees where they fit into that chain. A foundation's work is a painting, and the grantees are the brush strokes. Each brush stroke needs to be applied at a particular time in a particular way. If you have 1,000 people applying brush strokes, each has to know what they're a part of." It allows foundations to make it clear that grantees need not position their project as something different or depart from their original mission just in order to fit all of the foundation's goals.

6. Provide Grantees and Program Officers with Support

Many program officers and grantees need advice or technical assistance to develop a good theory of change and associated benchmarks since most have not been trained in program evaluation. For example, with an individual project, a funder might review a proposed theory of change and set of benchmarks or join in on some conference calls. For a multi-organization initiative, the group might engage a facilitator to help them through the process. One evaluation expert who has conducted several policy change evaluations suggests, "The challenge in theory of change is not having a long, drawn-out process. We always conduct a facilitated process. If you want grantees to create a theory of change on their own, that seems very challenging. I don't know how that would work." The Liberty Hill Foundation has provided this support to a cohort of grantees through a peer learning project that included group training sessions and some one-on-one consultations with an evaluation expert.

> "In creating a theory of change for an individual grant, it will be relevant to understand the funder's program-level change goals and strategies and how the grantee fits into that plan."

Step 3: Define Benchmarks and Indicators

Generally, the policy change goals in a theory of change are long-term and can take many years. Therefore, developing relevant benchmarks to track progress along the way is vital to an effective and useful policy change evaluation. A benchmark is a standard used to measure the progress of a project. Defining benchmarks at the beginning of an advocacy effort helps both funders and grantees agree upon ways to assess

the level of progress towards achieving the ultimate policy goal. They serve like milestones on a road trip to tell travelers when they are getting closer to their destination—and when they have veered off course. Indicators operationalize benchmarks, in that they define the data used to measure the benchmark in the real world.

Process Versus Outcomes Indicators

Experts and the research literature distinguish among several types of indicators. One key distinction is between process and outcomes indicators. Process indicators refer to measurement of an organization's activities or efforts to make change happen. Examples include number of meetings held or educational materials developed and distributed. Outcomes indicators refer to a measurement of change that occurred, ideally due in part to an organization's efforts. Examples include quantitative or qualitative measures of strengthened partnerships that resulted from holding a meeting and measures of changed attitudes after reading educational material. Generally, process indicators lie largely within an organization's control, whereas outcomes indicators are more difficult to attribute to a particular organization's work.

To date, many funders and grantees say they have emphasized process indicators over outcomes indicators to monitor policy and advocacy grant activities. Staff without significant policy experience, in particular, said relevant process

indicators are easier to identify. Moreover, they are easier to quantify and collect data on because they relate to activities, which are under the grantee's control. Many of the grantees interviewed as part of the stakeholder assessment also said they found process indicators most useful because they provide concrete feedback relevant to improving their organization's operations. However, a few grantees, who have significant expertise and experience in advocacy work, described process indicators as "widget counting."

While process indicators are a useful tool in grant monitoring, they do not demonstrate that an organization's work has made any impact on the policy environment or advanced the organization's cause. Evaluation experts, as well as funders and grantees, emphasized the need to develop outcomes indicators that would demonstrate the impact of an organization's work. As one program officer leading a policy-oriented initiative put it, "We need to teach program officers how to monitor for *change*...not just monitor activities." Table 1 highlights the difference between a process indicator and a related outcome indicator that might logically follow from the process. Foundations' grant practices can inadvertently steer the focus toward process indicators, because many foundations require evaluation of a time period too short to measure real policy change (outcomes). Recognizing and acknowledging this issue would make the shift to outcomes indicators easier for everyone.

However, it is often challenging to conceptualize relevant outcomes that could show change for policy and advocacy projects, especially to show interim progress short of the actual target policy change or ultimate goal of the advocacy. Grantees and staff need an expanded way to conceptualize the policy and advocacy process—to understand how to talk about the steps that build up to and contribute to policy change. Traditionally, evaluations for direct services have broken down outcomes in a linear fashion. Because policy and advocacy work is rarely linear, these categories aren't always useful in identifying outcomes and associated benchmarks.

In its book, *Investing in Change: A Funder's Guide to Supporting Advocacy*, the Alliance for Justice makes a useful distinction between "progress" and "outcomes benchmarks."[13] Outcomes benchmarks demonstrate success related to the ultimate goal and usually take many years to achieve. Progress benchmarks are concrete steps towards the advocacy goal. The Alliance framework also identifies two types of

Table 1. Process and Outcomes Indicators

Process Indicators (what we did)	Outcomes Indicators (what change occurred)
Number of meetings organized	Increase in proportion of community members exposed to the particular policy issue
Number of flyers mailed	Increased awareness of issue, as measured in public opinion polls
Number of people on mailing list	Increase in the number of people using organization's Web site to send emails to elected officials
Number of officials contacted	Increase in number of elected officials agreeing to co-sponsor a bill
Number of press releases sent	Number of times organization is quoted in the newspaper *Or* Organization's definition of problem incorporated into announcement of a hearing
Prepare amicus brief for a court case	Material from amicus brief incorporated into judge's rulings
Testify at a hearing	Organization's statistics used in formal meeting summary

[13] Alliance for Justice. *Investing in Change: A Funder's Guide to Supporting Advocacy*, p. 37.

progress benchmarks: activities accomplished and incremental results obtained. Activities accomplished (such as the submission of a letter to a legislator or to a newspaper) is analogous to process benchmarks. Incremental results obtained refers to interim accomplishments required to get a policy change, such as holding a public hearing, preparing draft legislation or getting people to introduce a bill.

Capacity-Building Benchmarks

Evaluation experts and funders with significant experience in policy and advocacy work all emphasized the importance of identifying both capacity building and policy change benchmarks. Capacity benchmarks measure the extent to which an organization has strengthened its ability to engage in policy and advocacy work. Examples include developing relationships with elected officials and regulators, increasing in the number of active participants in its action alerts network, cultivating partnerships with other advocacy groups, building databanks and increasing policy analysis skills. Capacity-building goals can have both process or activity indicators as well as outcomes indicators.

These capacity outcomes are important markers of long-term progress for both the funder and its grantees. They indicate growth in an asset that can be applied to other issues and future campaigns. Said

> "We need to teach program officers how to monitor for *change*... not just monitor activities."

one program officer, "We need to take the focus off policy change and encourage more people to think about how they can be players." Said another with a long history in policy work, "Funders and advocacy organizations should work on building bases so that when the policy environment changes due to budget, political will, administration changes— there will be people in place who can act on those opportunities. Our challenge is to get grantee organizations prepared to so that they can engage when an opportunity arises."

Moreover, it is more appropriate to hold grantees accountable for capacity-building goals because they have greater control over them. As described in the earlier section on the challenges in evaluating policy work, a grantee can implement a campaign flawlessly and still fail to achieve its goal due to environmental changes beyond its control (such as key contacts being voted out of office). However, a failed policy outcome can still represent a capacity-building achievement. For example, sometimes advocates are pleased to get a bill introduced, even when it fails, because the debate over the bill increases public awareness on the issue.

Frameworks for Benchmark Development

Benchmarks should grow out of and be selected to represent key milestones in an organization's or initiative's theory of change.

However, many grantees and staff also said it would be very helpful to have a list of potential indicators or benchmarks to consult for ideas so they needn't start with a blank slate. A number of groups have developed frameworks for developing benchmarks relevant to policy and advocacy work. These benchmark frameworks can provide examples of activities, strategies and types of outcomes associated with the policy process. In our literature review, we identified six useful frameworks for developing benchmarks: ranging from a simple model developed by the Liberty Hill Foundation to a framework and compendium of associated examples from the Alliance for Justice. Appendix D compares key aspects of these frameworks.

Using an existing framework to guide benchmark development has several key advantages. First, it allows funders and grantees to build on the experiences of others and, hopefully, reduce the time and effort required. Second, reviewing several frameworks highlights different aspects of policy work—which can both serve as a reminder of key strategies to consider and expand people's notion of what constitutes policy work. Finally, employing one of these frameworks will make it easier for foundation staff to compare progress and sum up impact and lessons learned across grants because they will be describing their outcomes using common categories.

Each of the six frameworks listed below highlights somewhat different aspects of policy work, and may be used in different contexts from the others.[14] In some cases,

policy change is a primary focus, while in others, it is one of several social change categories. Some are most relevant to policy advocacy around specific issues, while others focus on community level change.

- Collaborations that Count (primary focus on policy change, particularly community-level change)

- Alliance for Justice (primary focus on policy change, most relevant to specific issue campaigns)

- Annie E. Casey Foundation (applicable to a range of social change strategies, particularly community-level change)

- Women's Funding Network (applicable to a range of social change strategies, most relevant to specific issue campaigns)

- Liberty Hill Foundation (applicable to a range of social change strategies and a broad variety of projects)

- Action Aid (applicable to a range of social change strategies, particularly community-level change, and a broad variety of projects)

Each framework has distinct strengths and weaknesses. For example, the Alliance for Justice framework includes the most extensive set of sample benchmarks. However, it seems to be more a collection of typical advocacy activities rather than being a coherent theory about how activities lead to change, so it does not suggest sequence or relationship among the different outcomes. In contrast, the Women's Funding Network (WFN) framework grows out of a theory about

[14] Snowden (2004) has an appendix listing many useful examples of potential policy indicators. However, it is not organized around a well-conceived framework, so it was not included in the comparison of frameworks.

key strategies that make social change happen. It was developed through extensive research and experience working with social change organizations around the country. Moreover, it is the basis for an online reporting tool that walks grantees through developing a theory of change and then selecting benchmarks. Using the tool across a set of grantees would help program officers identify trends and sum up impact across grantees. However, the WFN tool itself has far fewer examples of ways to measure those outcomes than the Alliance for Justice or Annie E. Casey frameworks.

Four of the benchmark frameworks specifically call out advocacy capacity benchmarks (Alliance for Justice, Action Aid, Collaborations that Count and Liberty Hill). Capacity benchmarks could easily be added to benchmarks drawn from other frameworks.

Evaluation experts said that developing benchmarks involves a process both of adapting benchmarks from standardized frameworks and creating some very project-specific indicators. The process begins by identifying one or more of the benchmark frameworks that seems the best fit with the project's conceptual model for change. For example, consider a program to get local schools to ban junk food vending machines. Using the WFN framework, one might identify the following benchmarks (*see chart page 31*).

Developing benchmarks that fit into these standardized categories will make it easier to compare progress among groups. For example if a foundation funded 10 community coalitions working to ban vending machines in schools and all of them had benchmarks in these five categories from WFN, a program officer could more easily review the grantee reports and synthesize the collective progress of the group along these five strategies for social change.

After identifying outcomes benchmarks, grantors and grantees together could add capacity benchmarks. They might include:

An Alternate Approach to Creating Benchmarks

An alternative approach to using any of these frameworks is to grow a database of benchmarks by using an online reporting tool to review benchmarks selected by previous grantees. (See Impact Manager from B2P Software. *http://www.b2p.com/*) Grantees using these databases establish benchmarks for their grant and monitor themselves against these benchmarks. In the software program Impact Manager, when new grantees begin the process of establishing benchmarks, they are offered a list of all the previous benchmarks established by other grantees in an initiative or program (or they can create their own). By aggregating this information across many grantees and many foundations, the benchmark options increase dramatically.

Table 2. Example of Benchmark Development from Frameworks

Benchmark Category	Project-specific Interim Benchmarks of Progress
Changing Definitions/Reframing	Change official purpose of vending machines to include providing *nutritious* food for students
Community or Individual Behavior	Get 100 students to submit requests for healthy snack choices into the school suggestion box
Shifts in Critical Mass	Get four of seven school board members to make a motion to hold a hearing on the issue of vending machines in schools
Institutional Policy	School board passes a resolution banning sodas from being sold in school vending machines
Holding the Line	Stopping vending machine lobby from introducing resolution to allow vending machines in junior high and high schools

■ Develop a contact at each school PTA in the community that is concerned about the junk food issue;

■ Develop a relationship with the school cafeteria workers' union; or

■ Acquire and learn how to use listserv software to manage an online action alert network on this issue.

Because of the differences among the available benchmark frameworks and the wide range of activities that fall under policy and advocacy work, we hesitate to recommend that a foundation steer all grantees towards a single existing framework, use multiple frameworks or try to build one framework for all based on these models. The diversity among different foundation grantees means that different models will speak to different grantees.

Practical Considerations in Selecting Benchmarks

When program officers, grantees and evaluation experts provided practical advice on selecting benchmarks, their comments revolved around four themes:

1. Balance Realistic and Aspirational Goals

Selecting appropriate benchmarks challenges grantors and grantees to identify benchmarks that are both achievable

during the grant period and also meaningful enough to show some level of real progress or change. As an example, one expert cited a two-year grant to a group trying to eliminate the death penalty in Texas. "Let's be realistic. The possibility of that happening is zero to negative 100. If you use a chain of outcomes, there are a lot of things that need to happen to get to eliminating the death penalty. So an evaluation needs to look at those intermediate outcomes."

Program officers and a number of grantees felt that grantees themselves often aren't very realistic in setting benchmarks for policy projects. "Almost never will a proposal come in with outcomes or objectives we can use," said one program officer. Grantees said they often felt they needed to promise ambitious goals, beyond what they knew was attainable, in order to win the grant. So long as funding for policy advocacy work remains competitive, nonprofits will inevitably feel it necessary to promise something ambitious and "sexy."

Program officers also felt that most grantees had difficulty articulating those intermediate outcomes for policy projects. This is one reason that sample benchmarks can be useful in generating ideas. Another grantee recommended that grantees and funders make clear distinctions between "setting goals that you can fulfill versus those that are aspirational." Aspirational goals motivate people to stretch and remind them of the big picture, but using them to measure progress can set grantees up for failure.

A few grantees and program officers mentioned concerns about a natural incentive to set benchmarks low, especially on process indicators, in order to ensure they can meet and even exceed them. The incentive particularly comes into play when grantees feel that funding renewal decisions hinge on progress towards benchmarks. Said one experienced grantee, "When I write grants, I am likely to go for things I know I can accomplish because I don't want to come back later and say that I have failed."

2. Consider Tolerance for Risk

Funding policy change and advocacy is inherently a high-risk grant-making strategy in two ways: a) The risk of failure—at least in the short-term—because policy change is so hard to achieve; and b) The risk of being viewed as having a political agenda and drawing fire from politicians and other influential actors who disagree with those goals. As part of establishing benchmarks of progress or indicators of ultimate "success," an internal dialogue about the foundation's appetite for risk would be useful to achieve clarity on its expectations. Failing to achieve a policy change does not necessarily mean a wasted investment if knowledge about how and why the program failed is effectively captured, valued and—ideally—shared with others who can benefit.

Experts noted that if a foundation is inclined to take chances and places value on learning from mistakes, it has a different attitude toward crafting benchmarks of progress than does a foundation more hesitant to be publicly

associated with failed endeavors. More risk-averse foundations will tend to set more manageable and potentially more process-oriented benchmarks, so there is less possibility that grantees fail to achieve designated goals. Embracing risk will both increase learning and provide challenges that could lead to more significant policy change.

3. Have Grantees and Funders Develop Benchmarks Together

Evaluation experts, grantees and foundation staff stressed the value of working together to develop benchmarks—even though it can take longer. The process ensures that grantees and program officers are aligned on their expectations of progress. Grantees also are more invested in reporting on benchmarks they have helped develop and feel serve their needs. On a small project, this process might involve several focused telephone conversations or a half-day planning meeting between a grantee and program officer. For larger initiatives, it may require several meetings with all stakeholders. In such groups, program officers may benefit from assistance from evaluation experts to make the iterative process more useful.

4. Choose an Appropriate Number of Benchmarks

As to the ideal number for benchmarks for a project, there is no consensus. Many evaluation experts emphasized simplicity and selectivity, opting for four or five benchmarks. The appropriate number is somewhat dependent on the grant. For a single organization with a single policy campaign, one or two

process indicators, two capacity benchmarks and two-to-three interim outcomes benchmarks may be sufficient. However, a strategic initiative with multiple grantees will probably require more benchmarks in order for the program officer to assess progress. For example, one expert conducting an evaluation of a multi-partner initiative employed 35 benchmarks. In such situations, this expert felt it was important for all stakeholders to see some benchmarks that reflected their interests. However, these served as benchmarks for the entire initiative. Most grantees were only being asked to track a subset of these 35 most relevant of their work. This allowed individual grantees to demonstrate how their work fit into the initiative's theory of change and how their work contributed to the progress of the initiative without holding them accountable for changes outside their realm of influence.

5. Be Flexible

Finally, all stakeholders stressed the importance of viewing benchmarks for policy projects with flexibility. This requires flexibility both on the part of the funder and the grantee. For multiyear policy grants, prioritized activities and strategies will need to evolve as the policy environment changes. Even in a one-year grant, an unexpected change in the policy environment can quickly render what was once seen as an easily achievable interim outcome impossible. Or it may require a change in strategy that can make even process indicators irrelevant. One grantee provided the following example, "We found out that

the administration doesn't pay any attention at all to a particular guide. We had submitted an extremely specific objective for our grant that said that we would work with these agencies to get them to revise the guide and disseminate those revisions. Now we feel we have to follow through and complete it even though we know it won't be useful." For multiyear initiatives, it may be necessary to revisit benchmarks each year and revise as needed.

Step 4: Collect Data on Benchmarks

Once benchmarks are created, the next step is to develop methods to measure them on an ongoing basis. Data collection is often a challenging and tedious process for grantees. It requires time, energy, money and organization that often feels distracting from the grantees' "real" work. As one grantee states, "The tracking is really tough and it takes a lot of paperwork. That is not the strength of grassroots organizations."

Grantees and evaluation experts recommended several strategies to assist foundations in helping grantees collect data:

1. Help Build Learning Organizations

The most crucial aspect of getting grantees to collect evaluation information is to make sure they value learning in their organization, affirm several experts. If learning is valued, the organization will want to ask questions, gather information, and think critically about how to improve its work. Foundations can support grantees in becoming learning organizations by providing support for grantees to build their internal evaluation capacity. Yet, as one grantee states, "Most foundations are not willing to do what it takes to add evaluation capacity. If they really want to build evaluation capacity, they must do longer-term grants and invest in ongoing monitoring." Grantees need the time, skills and money to collect and analyze data, and then think about the implications for their work. They also need help up front investing in good tools. One grantee notes, "It is most useful to invest in good data collection tools, especially databases, but it's hard to get the funder to support it."

2. Keep It Simple

The complexity of the process for measuring benchmarks should be commensurate with the complexity of the project. If the framework or data collection strategy gets too complicated, it won't get used. The Liberty Hill Foundation spent nine months working with grantees to design a tool to help them evaluate their policy and social change work. The length of time grantees were involved in the process caused them to become disinterested and their participation dwindled. Consequently, the foundation shifted its resources and thus left the grantees to implement the process with limited support. In the end, only one of the grantees chose to implement the process in its entirety. A few others chose particular elements to implement that they found particularly useful to their organization.

3. Build on Grantees' Existing Data Collection

Pushing an organization to collect more data is challenging if the traditions and culture of the organization work against systematic data collection, as is true in most advocacy organizations. Evaluation experts recommend trying to identify the types of data organizations currently collect and building indicators from there. Another approach is to add data collection in grantee reports, a strategy employed in the Packard Foundation's ongoing advocacy effort to institute universal preschool in California. The evaluator worked with the foundation to modify its grant reports to ask two questions specifically geared to the initiative's evaluation. These questions detailed all the outcomes that the initiative had laid out in its theory of change and connected each with one or more measurable indicators. Grantees were then asked to report on any of the indicators they currently measured.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation also provides enough flexibility to let grantees employ existing data when possible. The foundation has recently implemented a process that designates key benchmarks for a group of initiative grantees, and for each benchmark it identifies several measurement methods. Each outcome benchmark includes two or three options for data collection, falling into categories such as surveys, observations, interviews, focus groups, logs, content analysis or document review. This approach allows the grantee to choose options that it may be currently engaging in or could implement easily, while also learning about other techniques it might choose to employ later on. The Casey Foundation does not yet have enough of a track record with this approach to assess how this data variation will affect the quality of the evaluation—especially efforts to sum up across projects.

4. Draw on Examples Used in Other Studies

In many cases, grantees need to develop measurement strategies and data collection tools from scratch. A useful resource for developing measurement strategies is Annie E. Casey's "Practical Guide to Documenting Influence and Leverage in Making Connections Communities." The Casey guide includes some possible benchmark indicators, strategies on how to gather data to measure those indicators, and even sample data collection tools, although many may seem very specific to that grant program.

Overall, there will likely be differences in measurement needs for individual grantees versus initiatives. While individual grantee data collection might be simple and work within grantees' existing systems, more rigor and data are appropriate at the initiative level. This may mean supplementing data collected by grantees with data collected independently by outside evaluators.

Policy change is a long-term
endeavor so emphasizing a
long-term perspective is key.
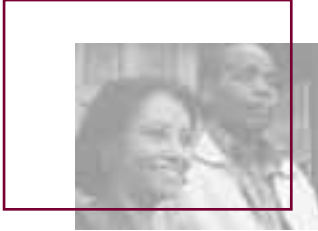
Conclusion

In order for foundations to better monitor and measure the impact of their grants and other activities directed towards policy change, this paper recommends an evaluation strategy based on our synthesis of the current thinking of grantees and funders, as well as experts in evaluating this type of work. Drawing from these insights, we outline a promising approach to prospective evaluation of policy change activities. This approach breaks down into four steps:

■ Agree upon a conceptual model for the policy process under consideration.

■ Articulate a theory about how and why the activities of a given grantee, initiative or foundation are expected to lead to the ultimate policy change goal (often called a "theory of change").

■ Use the "theory of change" as a framework to define measurable benchmarks for assessing both progress towards desired policy change and building organizational capacity for advocacy in general.

■ Collect data on benchmarks to monitor progress and feed the data to grantees and foundation staff who can use the information to refine their efforts.

Also drawing from grantees' and funders' insights, seven principles for policy evaluation emerged:

1. Expand the perception of the outcomes of policy work beyond state and federal legislative arenas.

2. Build evaluation frameworks around a theory about how a group's activities are expected to lead to its long-term outcomes.

3. Focus monitoring and impact assessment for most grantees and initiatives on the steps that lay the groundwork for and contribute to the policy change.

4. Include outcomes that involve building grantees' capacity to become more effective advocates.

5. Focus on the foundation's and grantee's contribution, not attribution.

6. Emphasize organizational learning as the overarching goal of evaluation for both the grantee and the foundation.

7. Build grantee capacity to conduct self-evaluation.

It is important to remember that policy change evaluation is an emerging field of practice and there are still many lessons to be learned. Many elements of the approach recommended in this paper are only beginning to be implemented in the field. Surely there will be new insights to be gained as evaluators and nonprofits have more experience conducting evaluations of this nature.

Furthermore, this is the first report to attempt to think comprehensively about the steps needed in an approach to prospective policy change evaluation. Although it is built on a strong foundation—the stated needs of foundation stakeholders, advice from evaluation experts and foundation colleagues, and written documentation of tools, manuals and previous evaluations— the report will be strengthened and refined through further review and discussion by policy and advocacy organizations, foundations and expert evaluators.

Increased attention to evaluation may raise anxiety among some grantees. Nonprofits will be looking to funders to provide evidence that they are interested in evaluation for learning as well as for

monitoring for accountability and making decisions about renewing funding. Foundations have to be open to what is being learned. That means welcoming bad news—stories of strategies that failed—as well as success stories. It's often the negative stories that hold the most opportunity for learning. This approach also requires building grantee evaluation capacity—to articulate how their activities will lead to policy goals and to collect data to show their progress. Without additional skills and funds to support these activities, grantees will not be able to deliver the quality of data foundations desire. It's important to note, however, that this increased grantee capacity will benefit both parties. Grantees will become more reflective in their work and improve their programs. Funders will receive more useful information from grantees that they can use to document the impact of their work to shape policy.

Policy change is a long-term endeavor, so emphasizing a long-term perspective to program staff, grantees and foundation board members is key. Despite the current enthusiasm for business approaches that feature short-term metrics and impatience if a program is not quickly "hitting its numbers," there needs to be recognition at the board and staff levels of just how difficult policy and advocacy work is and how long it takes. Even achieving some of the advocacy capacity building goals identified in this paper will take time.

The prospective approach outlined in this paper can help make the long timeline for policy work more manageable.
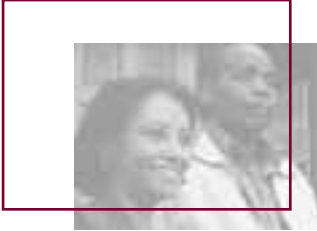
Staying focused on the long term is hard when one can't see any progress. This prospective approach to policy change evaluation will allow funders and their grantees to conceptualize, document and celebrate many successes in creating building blocks towards ultimate policy change goals. It also will highlight the many ways that a foundation's work is increasing the field's capacity to advocate for policies for years to come. This approach will provide information that can make a foundation's policy change work more concrete and progress more observable. A foundation will be able to tell a compelling, evidence-based story for board members and the public on how its investments in policy change work are making a difference.

Policy change evaluation is an
emerging field of practice
and there are still many
lessons to be learned.
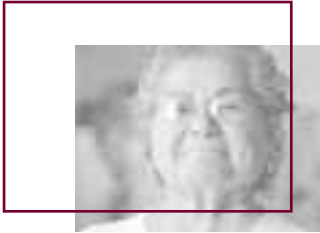
Appendix A:
Methodology[15]

To gather information for this report, Blueprint Research & Design, Inc. engaged in two simultaneous processes: an internal stakeholder needs assessment and an external scan of the field for existing resources. For the needs assessment, the Blueprint team interviewed 42 stakeholders—grantees, staff, trustees and initiative evaluators. These interviews were focused on understanding current policy change evaluation knowledge and practice as well as describing policy change evaluation needs. The interviewees were:

Grantees:

Judith Bell, *PolicyLink*

Nora Benavides, *National Farm Workers Service Center, Inc.*

Alicia Bohlke, *Mercy Medical Center Merced Foundation*

Ellen Braff-Guajardo, *California Rural Legal Assistance, Inc.*

Paul Chao, *Asian American Coalition*

David Chatfield, *Pesticide Action Network North America Regional Center*

Tim Curley, *Hospital Council of Northern and Central California*

Donna Deutchman, *ONEgeneration*

Caroline Farrell, *Center on Race, Poverty & the Environment*

Harold Goldstein, *California Center for Public Health Advocacy*

Gilda Haas, *Strategic Actions for a Just Economy*

Kenneth Hecht, *California Food Policy Advocates Inc.*

Linton Joaquin, *National Immigration Law Center*

Stewart Kwoh, *Asian Pacific American Legal Center of Southern California, Inc.*

Larry Lavin, *National Health Law Program, Inc.*

Wendy Lazarus, *The Children's Partnership*

Molly O'Shaughnessy, *California Safe Schools Coalition*

Jennifer Perry, *Los Angeles County Foster Youth Health and Education Passport*

Carolyn Reilly, *Elder Law and Advocacy*

Carole Shauffer, *Youth Law Center*

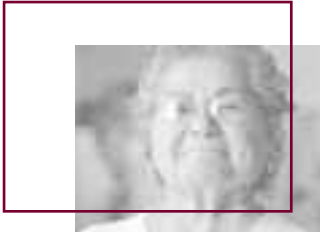Susan Steinmetz, *Center on Budget and Policy Priorities*

Catherine Teare, *Children Now*

Anthony Wright, *Health Access Foundation*

Ellen Wu, *California Pan-Ethnic Health Network*

[15] Organizational affiliations are accurate as of the date of research.

The California Endowment Staff:

Ignatius Bau, *Director, Culturally Competent Health Systems*

Larry Gonzales, *Senior Program Officer, Fresno*

Mario Gutierrez, *Director, Agricultural Worker Health and Binational Programs*

Tari Hanneman, *Senior Program Associate, Local Opportunities Fund*

Laura Hogan, *Director, Access to Health*

Irene Ibarra, *Executive Vice President*

Peter Long, *Senior Program Officer, Children's Coverage Program*

Marion Standish, *Director, Community Health and the Elimination of Health Disparities*

Gwen Walden, *Director, Community Conference and Resource Center*

Barbara Webster-Hawkins, *Senior Program Officer, Sacramento*

Joyce Ybarra, *Senior Program Associate, Local Opportunities Fund*

The California Endowment Directors:

Arthur Chen, M.D.

Fernando M. Torres-Gil, Ph.D.

Initiative Evaluators:

Bill Beery, *Partnership for the Public's Health*

Claire Brindis, *Community Action to Fight Asthma, Clinic Consortia Policy and Advocacy Program*

Michael Cousineau, *Children's Coverage Program, Express Lane Eligibility*

Mary Kreger, *Community Action to Fight Asthma*

Karen Linkins, *Frequent Users of Health Services Initiative, Mental Health Initiative*

Blueprint also interviewed 21 leaders in policy change and advocacy evaluation to get their take on the state of the field and identify promising evaluation strategies and tools. Interviewees were identified by The Endowment and Tom David, one of the field's leading thinkers on this issue. Blueprint then reviewed the published and unpublished reports recommended by these leaders, as well as a number of document Blueprint obtained independently.

Experts:

Deepak Bhargava, *Center for Community Change*

Prudence Brown, *Chapin Hall Center for Children, University of Chicago*

Jennifer Chapman, *Action Aid*

Wendy Chun-Hoon, *Annie E. Casey Foundation*

Julia Coffman, *Harvard Family Research Project*

Patrick Corvington, *Innonet*

Tom Dewar, *Johns Hopkins University*

Steve Fawcett, *University of Kansas*

Andy Gordon, *Evans School, University of Washington*

Susan Hoechstetter, *Alliance for Justice*

Mike Laracy, *Annie E. Casey Foundation*

Lauren LeRoy, *Grantmakers in Health*

Laura Leviton, *Robert Wood Johnson Foundation*

Ricardo Millet, *Woods Fund of Chicago*

Andy Mott, *Community Learning Project, NYU*

Gary Nelson, *Healthcare Georgia Foundation*

Lina Paredes, *Liberty Hill Foundation*

Patti Patrizi, *Evaluation Roundtable*

Cathy Schoen, *Commonwealth Fund*

Karen Walker, *Public Private Ventures*

Heather Weiss, *Harvard Family Research Project*

Appendix B:
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Appendix C:
Examples of Retrospective Policy Change Evaluations

The California Youth Violence Prevention Initiative, funded by The California Wellness Foundation, engaged in policy research, public education campaigns and operation of a statewide policy center to reduce violence in California. It is valuable as an example of an evaluation employing a framework for understanding policy change, including intermediate steps to actual policy change. Also, the evaluation uses multiple methods, including interviews, media content analysis and archival document review, to establish the initiative's impact.

> **Source:** Wallack, Lawrence, Amy Lee, and Liana Winett. "A Decade of Effort, A World of Difference: The Policy and Public Education Program of the California Youth Violence Prevention Initiative." School of Community Health, College of Urban and Public Affairs, Portland State University.

State Fiscal Analysis Initiative: This multi-funder initiative focused on creating or supporting organizations in multiple states to analyze state fiscal policies, modeled after the work of the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities at the federal level. In 2003, the Ford Foundation funded the OMG Center for Collaborative Learning to conduct an evaluation, which is not yet complete. This project is the most prominent policy change evaluation currently being undertaken, and the evaluation methodology will likely be instructive for future policy change evaluation endeavors.

> **Source:** Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. http://www.cbpp.org/sfai.htm or Urvashi Vaid, Ford Foundation, (212) 573-5000.

Collaborations that Count, funded by the Ford Foundation, promoted collaboration amongst policy and grassroots organizations in 11 states. The evaluation, conducted by the Applied Research Center, began in the fifth of this six-year initiative. It is notable for its attempt to sum up the work of a variety of distinct projects, taking place in various locations. Also, it provides another framework for organizing outcomes.

> **Source:** "Power, Participation, and State-Based Politics: An Evaluation of the Ford Foundation's Collaborations that Count Initiative." Applied Research Center, April 2004. http://www.arc.org/Pages/pubs/collaborations.html

Appendix D:
Comparison of Frameworks to Guide Benchmark Development in Policy Change Evaluation

Organization	Categories	Focus
Liberty Hill	▪ External—Social Change ▪ Internal—Organizing and Capacity Building	campaign or community
Annie E. Casey	▪ Impact Outcomes ▪ Influence Outcomes ▪ Leverage Outcomes Changes: ▪ Public Will ▪ Funding and Resources ▪ Visibility ▪ Policy and Regulation ▪ Partnerships Services Practices	campaign
Women's Funding Network	Arena of Change: ▪ Definitions/Reframing ▪ Individual/Community Behavior ▪ Shifts in Critical Mass/Engagement ▪ Institutional Policy ▪ Maintaining Current Position/Holding the Line	campaign
Action Aid/Institute for Development Research	▪ Policy Change ▪ Strengthening Civil Society and Building Social Capital ▪ Increasing Democracy	community
Collaborations that Count	▪ Infrastructure Outcomes ▪ Developmental Outcomes ▪ Policy Outcomes	community
Alliance For Justice	▪ Outcomes ▪ Progress Towards Goals ▪ Capacity Building Efforts Cross-Cutting Activities: ▪ Policy Change ▪ Coalition Building ▪ Constituency Involvement ▪ Mobilization ▪ Network Building ▪ Media Advocacy	campaign

Samples	Strengths	Drawbacks
N	Simple to explain. Applicable in wide range of settings. Emphasis on capacity-building goals. Can provide an overlay to framework that includes more detailed categories for external goals.	No examples of benchmarks or strategies.
Y	Provides many detailed examples. Best information on measurement strategies, including sample tools. Recognizes that organizations often cannot attain change at impact level, so creating influence and leverage are significant outcomes.	Focused on community improvement, with policy change as a strategy. Therefore, outcomes not organized in ways most relevant to policy projects. Examples very specific to children and family issues.
Y	Built on theory about what makes change happen that grows out of interviews with grantees. Single tool connects developing theory of change with identifying benchmarks. Written in very accessible format. Included as part of online grant reporting tool that can help program officers look across grantees.	No concept to capture capacity-building outcomes. Policy is viewed as a strategy for social change rather than focal point of process. Fewer examples than other tools.
N	Applicable to wide range of projects. Emphasizes capacity-building.	While this framework can provide guidance on benchmarks, it includes no examples.
Y	Emphasizes capacity-building as well as policy change. Provides examples especially relevant to collaborative efforts.	Difference between definition of infrastructure and development outcomes is fuzzy.
Y	Most detailed set of policy-relevant interim and long-term outcomes.	Not built on theory of how change happens so doesn't draw connections or suggest any order between the outcomes.

Appendix E:
Sources and Details for Benchmark Frameworks

Collaborations that Count

Source: *Power, Participation, and State-Based Politics: An Evaluation of the Ford Foundation's Collaborations that Count Initiative*, Applied Research Center, April 2004.

Benchmark Details:
Infrastructure Outcomes - new structures or processes created, new groups incubated or established.
Examples:
- Provided technological support for collaboration member groups.
- Changed structure from regional to statewide, issue-based coalitions.
- Established organization development funds for groups.

Developmental Outcomes - key leadership training, expanding a group's membership, developing research and analytical frames, and constituent popular education.
Examples:
- Strengthened partnerships with Latino community.

- Held over 100 workshops on tax fairness.
- Held regional power-building meetings.

Policy Outcomes - successfully winning new policies or modifying or blocking policies that did not advance the interests of the collaborative's constituents.
Examples:
- Budget cuts to social programs were limited.
- Defended rights of 1.4 million workers against unlawful workplace termination.
- Prevented increase in sales tax on food.

Annie E. Casey

Source: *Practical Guide to Documenting Influence and Leverage in Making Connections Communities*, by Jane Reisman, Kasey Langley, Sarah Stachowiak, and Anne Gienapp (Organizational Research Services). Prepared for the Annie E. Casey Foundation. 2004.

Benchmark Details:
Impact Outcomes - change in a condition of well-being for individuals and families directly due to/served by the program.

Examples:

- A greater percentage of parents and young adults employed.
- Families access more services and supports.
- A greater percentage of families own their own homes.

Influence Outcomes - changes in community environments, relationships, institutions, organizations or service systems that affect individuals and families, such as changes in issue visibility, community norms, business practices and public will.
Examples:

- Health care providers offer more culturally and linguistically appropriate services.
- The school environment is more comfortable for parents.
- The sense of "neighborhood identity" increases within the community.

Leverage Outcomes - changes in investments (monetary, in-kind) that support "impact" and "influence" changes.
Examples:

- Commercial redevelopment attracts private investments.
- The state government increases spending on subsidized childcare.
- A private foundation provides funds for an early childhood pilot project.

Women's Funding Network

Source: *Making the Case: A Learning and Measurement Tool for Social Change: A Guide for Women's Funding Network Members*, Women's Funding Network, 2004

Benchmark Details:
Shifts in Definitions/ Reframing - is the issue viewed differently in your community or the larger society as a result of your work?

Shifts in Individual/Community Behavior - are the behaviors you are trying to impact in our community or the larger society different as a result of your work?

Shifts in Critical Mass/Engagement - is critical mass developing; are people in your community or the larger society more engaged as a result of your work?

Shifts in Institutional Policy - Has a specific organizational, local, regional, state or federal policy or practice changed as a result of your work?

Maintaining Current Position/Holding the line - Has earlier progress on the issue been maintained in the face of opposition, as a result of your work?

Action Aid/Institute for Development Research

Source: *Monitoring and Evaluating Advocacy: A Scoping Study*, Jennifer Chapman, Amboka Wameyo for Action Aid, January 2001.

Benchmark Details:
Policy Change - specific changes in the policies, practices, programs, or behavior of major institutions that affect the public, such as government, international financial bodies and corporations.

Strengthening Civil Society and Building Social Capital - increasing capacity of civil society organizations, enabling them to continue to work or to undertake new advocacy, and increasing overall social capital, building relations of trust and reciprocity that underpin the cooperation necessary for advocacy.

Increasing Democracy - enlarging democratic space, making public institutions transparent and accountable, expanding individuals' attitudes, beliefs and awareness of themselves as citizens with rights and responsibilities.

Alliance for Justice

Source: *Investing in Change: A Funder's Guide to Supporting Advocacy*, Alliance for Justice, December 2004.

Benchmark Details:

Outcomes - demonstrate success in obtaining results related to one or more of the organization's goals or objectives. Examples:

- Final adoption of strong regulations that enforce new anti-pollution laws.
- Successful leveraging of public dollars.

Progress Toward Goals - tracks the steps taken toward achievement of grantee's advocacy goals. There are two types:

- Key activities accomplished
  — Example: holding a series of meetings with staff from the governor's office.
- Incremental results obtained
  — Request by state agency officials for more discussion of organization's suggestions.

Capacity-Building Efforts - demonstrate the strengthening of a grantee's capacity to achieve advocacy success. Examples:

- Developing relationships with key regulators.
- Motivating members of the organization's network to contact administrative officials.

Audience: Each of these three benchmark categories can be grouped by audience: Executive Branch, Executive Officials (Administrative Agencies, Special Purpose Boards), Judicial Branch, Legislative Branch and Election-Related Activity.

Cross-Cutting Activities: Each of these three benchmark categories could involve the following activities: Policy Change, Constituency Involvement, Network Building, Coalition building, Mobilization and Media Advocacy.