

M&E SYSTEMS FOR ADVOCACY WORK

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems for advocacy interventions usually include a number of common elements. The nature of advocacy work means M&E systems need to be designed and implemented differently than in conventional projects. M&E systems for advocacy work should be simple and time-efficient, and should be designed to support ongoing advocacy processes.

Some advocacy interventions require extensive monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems. Others require little or no formal M&E. This depends on many factors, including:

- the duration of the intervention;
- the amount of resources committed;
- whether the work is externally funded or not;
- the number of different stakeholders involved;
- the objectives of the intervention; and
- the type of advocacy activities conducted.

Advocacy interventions vary hugely. Therefore, there is no such thing as a typical M&E system or approach. However, a number of common steps should be considered when developing an M&E system for an advocacy intervention. Many of these steps are the same as those used in any project M&E system. Nonetheless, they may need to be designed and implemented differently.

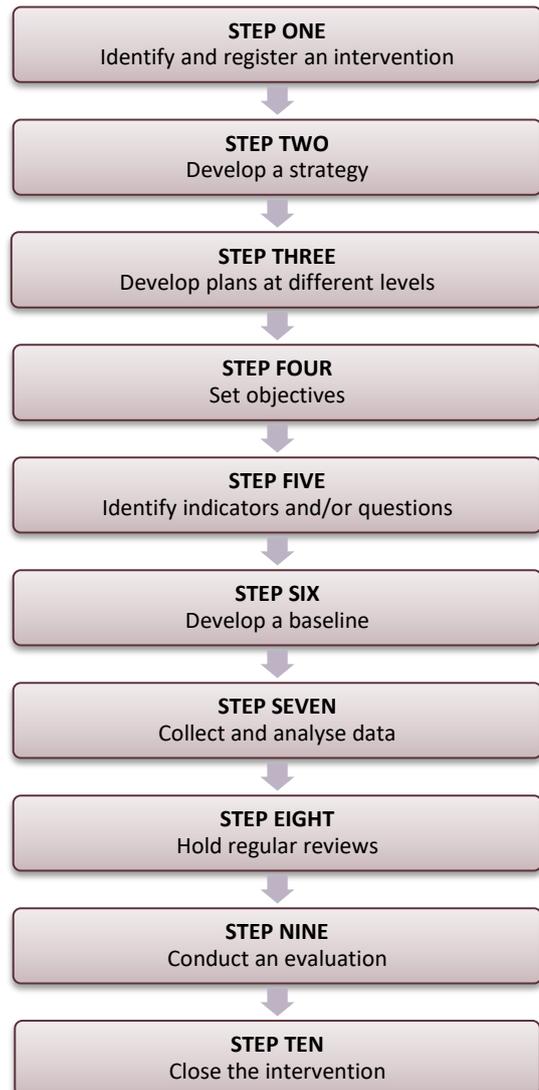
Some of the steps are described in this paper. These are summarised in the diagram opposite. Several of the steps influence, or are influenced by, related disciplines, such as planning, learning, reporting and research. Many advocacy interventions do not need all these steps. And they may be developed in a different order, or iteratively. However, for convenience they have been presented in a logical order. They are designed to provide a checklist of things to consider, even if not all are adopted.

It is important to recognise that if an M&E system is designed at the beginning of a new advocacy intervention, entirely new M&E processes may need to be developed. In these circumstances they should be developed alongside advocacy processes. In advocacy interventions that are already operating some processes will probably already be in place, even if they have not been designated as formal planning, monitoring, evaluation or learning processes. Wherever possible, it is desirable to build on existing processes rather than developing entirely new ones.



Identify and register an intervention: A conventional project usually has a fixed start- and end-point, and is often funded over a specific time period. This is not always true of advocacy interventions. Advocacy work may be

opportunistic; it may be carried out as part of an existing project or programme; and it may evolve over a period of time. It may not be worth developing a separate M&E



system for some interventions. But once it is clear that an advocacy intervention is significant enough in terms of time, resources or potential impact, a formal M&E system or approach should be introduced.

The first step is therefore to make sure the advocacy intervention is registered as a piece of work that requires M&E over its lifetime. This will often happen at the same time as an advocacy strategy is developed (see step 2) although advocacy strategies may cover more than one intervention. Registering an intervention could be as simple as entering key details onto a database or spreadsheet.

Advocacy Strategy

Background and context: A brief description of the problem that needs to be solved, or the potential opportunity, and how it affects poor or marginalised people. This could include an explanation of the problem, and what is currently preventing change. It might also include findings from any context analysis or situational analysis carried out.

Overall aim: The overall aim of the advocacy intervention, including how it might affect different groups of poor and marginalised people. This is not usually something an advocacy intervention will achieve on its own. Rather, it is the long-term vision the intervention will contribute to.

Advocacy objectives: The specific changes a CSO or coalition is hoping to achieve as its contribution to realising the overall aim.

Advocacy approaches: The different actions that will be taken to influence the advocacy targets. This is a description of the best tactic, or combination of tactics, to employ at any one time to achieve maximum influence. Advocacy approaches could cover, for instance, lobbying, campaigning, direct action, research, media work, technical assistance, capacity building, network development, or any other kind of advocacy activity.

Rationale for engagement: Why the CSO or coalition believes it is important to engage in this issue, and what its own specific or unique contribution might be.

Advocacy targets: A description of the key external stakeholders that have the power to address the challenge (or opportunity) and therefore need to be influenced. This could include targeted institutions and/or named individuals within those institutions.

Allies: A list and description of allies that support the advocacy aim. This might include allies within formal coalitions, those that might collaborate on an ad-hoc basis, or those that could be persuaded to act. It could include, for example, other CSOs, journalists, academics, trade unions, commercial companies, or individuals / departments within central or local government.

Key advocacy messages: The critical messages the advocacy intervention will seek to convey to the advocacy targets.

Opportunities and events: The main political processes, meetings, decision-making moments or events that could be used to promote the advocacy objectives. These could be opportunities that already exist, or they might need to be created as part of the advocacy intervention.

Resources: The human and financial resources needed to implement the advocacy intervention.

Risks: The risks that might prevent the advocacy objectives from being achieved, and possible actions to mitigate those risks.

Monitoring, evaluation and learning: A plan for how the advocacy intervention will be monitored and evaluated, and how this should feed back into future action. Sometimes, this can be written up into a formal M&E plan.

Some CSOs find it useful at this stage to set up a manual or electronic file, or to buy a scrap or log book. For advocacy work, it is important to collect and record information on a continuous basis because the value of information may not be known until much later. The file or scrap book can be used to collect hard or electronic copies of reports, correspondence, media articles, pictures, or any other piece of information relating to the intervention. This kind of evidence is often useful when making assessments of change, or contribution to change, at a later date.



Develop a strategy: Most CSOs running advocacy interventions develop an advocacy strategy. Sometimes this is formally developed and written down. Sometimes it exists only in the heads of advocates. If a formal M&E system is required then it is helpful to have an explicit strategy.

An advocacy strategy describes all the different advocacy actions designed to achieve desired changes, and explains why those actions are expected to be effective given the context, and the organisation's (or coalition's) assets and resources. The purpose is to ensure that advocacy plans are properly thought through, jointly understood and adequately resourced. A set of very simple strategy headings can be found in the box above.

Nowadays, CSOs often choose to develop a theory of change before developing a strategy. This usually covers the intended objectives of an intervention, the potential

contribution of other agencies, and key assumptions about the process. A theory of change is sometimes based on initial research, which may involve processes such as stakeholder analysis, power analysis or gender analysis.



Develop plans at different levels: Some advocacy interventions do not require formal, written plans at all. This is either because the strategy suffices on its own, or because the context is so dynamic that plans are likely to quickly become out-of-date, or because the intervention is small enough not to need it. But CSOs engaged in larger interventions tend to develop plans over different time periods. These could include, for example:

- short-term plans guiding work over a week or a month, or the period leading up to an event;
- longer-term plans guiding work over quarterly or six-month periods; or
- plans intended to guide work over a funding period, or the duration of an intervention.

A key feature of advocacy plans is that they need to be kept flexible, as they will probably need to be adjusted and adapted on a continual basis. Consequently, advocacy interventions are less likely to adopt rigid planning frameworks, such as the logical framework, which attempt to predict deliverables and activities a long time in advance. The most appropriate planning frameworks for advocacy interventions are those that allow CSOs to do two things:

- clearly identify the objectives (outcomes) of the intervention, both for the medium- and long-term; and
- plan activities for the immediate future, recognising that those plans will need to be constantly revisited and/or redeveloped.

- *Qualitative indicators*: which are capable of capturing a wider range of potential change.
- *Progress markers*: which may be developed as a group of different behavioural changes that might be influenced by an advocacy intervention.
- *Questions*: which can be much broader, and are capable of identifying not only qualitative change, but also how and why changes are (or are not) happening.

As Teles and Schmitt (2011) state, “*successful advocacy efforts are characterised not by their ability to proceed along a predefined track, but by their capacity to adapt to changing circumstances.*”



Set objectives: A set of objectives is normally developed as part of a strategy or plan. The objectives (sometimes known as advocacy outcomes) are the hoped-for changes resulting from an advocacy intervention. Because of the

unpredictable nature of advocacy work it is sometimes useful to set objectives across different time periods: for example a month, 6 months, a year, 3 years, etc. In order to set clear objectives it is important to know:

- what is currently going wrong, or needs to be improved, or what opportunities could be taken;
- what must stop, what change(s) are being sought, and/or which alternative solutions need to be adopted; and
- which changes the organisation(s) carrying out the advocacy intervention can realistically influence over the given time period.

There is often a wider, long-term goal, which may be dependent on the actions of many different organisations, as well as changes in the external environment. However, it is important to set objectives that a CSO can reasonably expect to influence, in addition to longer-term goals.

It may also be useful to set objectives at different levels. For example, if a CSO has a long-term objective of changing a policy, it might choose to set interim objectives such as getting an issue onto the agenda, changing discourse around the issue, or changing opinions.

Equally, as outlined in the M&E Universe paper on M&E of advocacy, many CSOs choose to set objectives relating to the supporting environment for advocacy. This might include enhancing the capacity of supported CSOs or communities to carry out advocacy work, increasing the democratic space available for CSOs, or increasing cooperation between different agencies working on a similar issue.



Identify indicators and/or questions:

CSOs are often tempted to start developing quantitative indicators as soon as objectives have been defined. Quantitative indicators may be useful in some advocacy interventions, especially

when capturing simple outputs or deliverables. But they are not always the most appropriate vehicle for tracking change. Other possibilities include:

- are rarely set to capture impact at the individual level (i.e. people or communities who may be affected by a policy change);

Sometimes CSOs do not need to identify any indicators or questions at all. Instead, changes, once identified, can be mapped directly onto the objectives in a strategy or plan, or a change element in a theory of change. It is also important to remember that many changes resulting from advocacy work are unpredictable, and therefore cannot be known in advance. This area is covered in more detail, with examples, in the associated M&E Universe paper on ‘Monitoring advocacy activities’.



Develop a baseline: A baseline is developed in most conventional projects. They are normally designed to be followed up at a later stage (sometimes called an endline) to investigate the impact of an

intervention. But in most advocacy interventions change has multiple contributors. This means that it may not be possible to attribute changes to the intervention anyway. A baseline can sometimes be useful in advocacy interventions, but it might be done in a different way, and for a different purpose.

When planning an advocacy intervention, or when developing an advocacy strategy, a lot of research and analysis may be undertaken to assess the current situation. This often covers information such as who is opposing or supporting an issue, who stands to gain or lose from different advocacy outcomes, what are current attitudes towards an issue, what existing capacity there is to support, defend or sustain any change, etc.

This kind of analysis is (or should be) carried out to help shape an advocacy intervention, not because it is useful for M&E. But once the research and analysis has been done it may be useful to gather together existing information and develop a narrative baseline. The baseline can then be updated at regular intervals during the advocacy intervention to provide a **rolling baseline**. This means a baseline that is constantly updated, rather than one that is developed at the start of an intervention, and is then used to compare change at the mid-point or at the end.

Therefore, if an advocacy intervention has a budget to carry out a baseline (which is rare) the money is often better spent attempting to understand the context, and thereby providing a framework for learning, rather than to provide a basis for later measurement. Partly because of this, it is important to recognise that baselines for advocacy work:

- are rarely based on large surveys; and
- rarely involve extensive data collection exercises, other than those needed to plan an intervention.

If advocacy interventions are designed well there should be ample evidence to develop and communicate the baseline situation without resorting to additional work.

There are, of course, exceptions. For example, if one of the purposes of an advocacy intervention is to increase public knowledge of an issue then it may be useful to conduct a baseline survey beforehand to accurately assess existing knowledge. Or if seeking to expand CSOs' involvement in an issue, a baseline may be developed around the number of CSOs involved in an issue, and the nature of their involvement. But these are generally the exceptions rather than the norm.



Collect and analyse data: Ongoing monitoring is an essential and integral part of advocacy work. In order to do a good job in fast-changing environments, advocates need to know what is changing in the environment

around them; what external events are influencing their advocacy work; who else is working on an advocacy issue; how well activities are being implemented; how problems and challenges are evolving; what opportunities are becoming available; and whether the actions they are taking are having the desired effect. Good advocates will regularly collect and analyse data that can answer these questions whether they see it as M&E or not.

Much of this information can be acquired as advocates go about their routine work – discussing issues with people on an informal basis, observing actions at meetings and events, reading media reports, etc. In addition, there is a large array of available tools and methodologies for monitoring advocacy work. The majority of these are simple templates – electronic or manual forms used to record data, usually consisting of standard questions or headings. For example:

- A media tracking form might include space for recording the dates and publications when an issue is covered in the media, and a brief description of the coverage.
- A policy tracking form might cover details of discussions around individual policies, including descriptions of who is supporting / opposing the policy.

These tools (or templates) become more and more useful as the size of an advocacy intervention increases. In small interventions, with only one or two staff, it may not be necessary to do much beyond making a few notes for personal use. But in large interventions, potentially spread across many organisations and localities, there is a greater need to ensure that information is properly stored and categorised so it can be communicated to others.

Many standard M&E tools and methodologies can also be employed for specific advocacy purposes, such as attempting to identify the contribution of an organisation

or advocacy intervention to an advocacy outcome. Some of these are covered in the paper on 'M&E tools for advocacy work'.



Hold regular reviews: Unless it is being run by an individual, or a very small team working in isolation, it is almost always useful to hold regular reviews throughout an advocacy intervention.

These could be weekly, monthly, quarterly or even longer, depending on the size and length of the intervention. Reviews might also be scheduled after particular events, or periods of intense activity (sometimes known as after action reviews). CSOs often see the reviews as formal opportunities to assess how well an intervention is proceeding, and what needs to change. They also provide an opportunity to ensure that information and decisions are regularly recorded. This might be useful later on if there is a large, formal review, or evaluation, or if a CSO wishes to learn lessons across a range of advocacy interventions.

Reviews always include internal advocacy staff, but might also include stakeholders from outside the organisation or group implementing the advocacy intervention. These could include partner organisations, staff of allies, targets of advocacy work, or those on whose behalf the advocacy intervention is being run (O'Flynn 2009).

Reviews may be held at different levels. For example, regular reviews of local-level advocacy work may then feed into wider reviews across a national or regional advocacy campaign. Reviews may be partly based on formal M&E information acquired throughout an advocacy intervention, but will almost certainly also draw on knowledge acquired by different stakeholders as they go about their normal work. Reviews are often based around a set of questions. Some examples of potential questions are in the box below.

Potential questions for reviews

1. What progress has been made against advocacy objectives?
2. What was the contribution of the advocacy intervention to any change?
3. Are people changing their behaviours in line with what was expected / hoped for?
4. What has changed in the external environment?
5. What other actors have played an important or critical role over the last period, and how?
6. What lessons have been learned over the past period, and how should these be applied?
7. Which initiatives worked well, and which didn't?
8. What challenges were faced, and how (if at all) were they overcome?
9. What revisions are needed to the advocacy strategy (e.g. allies, targets, approaches, timings, events)?
10. Are the advocacy tactics / messages still the right ones? If not, how should they change?

CSOs usually find there is a clear value in holding discussions during a review. In addition, there are at least two potential formal outputs from the review process. One is the documentation of any changes to the advocacy

strategy, plans, objectives or indicators. The other is a record of the review. This is done for two main purposes.

- Firstly, to enhance communication between different stakeholders. This is particularly important in larger advocacy interventions.
- Secondly, to ensure that there is a record of ongoing findings and adaptations. This will be useful for new staff engaged in an advocacy intervention, or people who may wish to evaluate the intervention at a later point.



Conduct an evaluation: Depending on the size (or impact) of an advocacy intervention, it may be useful or necessary to carry out a formal evaluation. This could be during a longer advocacy intervention, or at the

end. It could be similar to a large, formal, internal review, or it could involve independent or semi-independent evaluators.

There are many different types of evaluation. These are covered extensively in a separate part of the M&E Universe. However, it is important to note that advocacy evaluations may be carried out for slightly different reasons from other kinds of evaluation. In particular, because advocacy work is so dependent on context, there is often less potential for replicating lessons or recommendations across different interventions.

Another difference is that evaluations carried out on standard social development interventions often attempt to identify the impact on targeted populations. Advocacy evaluations, on the other hand, focus more often on policy-level change, or on changes that precede or support policy change (e.g. changes in public support for an issue, changes in advocacy capacity, changes in democratic space). They may also focus on assessing *how* an advocacy intervention

supported any change. However, when conducted by CSOs they rarely go beyond policy-level change to assess the long-term impact on peoples' lives (Coffman 2014).



Close the intervention down: CSOs that conduct many different advocacy interventions need to have a process through which they can agree to stop monitoring an intervention. The danger otherwise is a continually increasing

register of advocacy interventions, all needing to be regularly reviewed. M&E of an intervention may cease:

- when the objectives have clearly been achieved;
- when no further, major work is planned through the intervention; or
- after a fixed interval (i.e. some advocacy projects are funded for specified periods)

After closure, no further review meetings are usually held. However, it is still possible to carry out a post-intervention evaluation or impact assessment. And if further evidence comes to light then it can always be recorded, and used to review any findings and conclusions.

The last step is sometimes to write a final, concluding report. Ideally, this includes a critical and informed assessment of change, and contribution to change, backed up by evidence, with an assessment of the contribution of others, and any uncertainties involved. If the advocacy intervention has been evaluated it may make sense to draw this final assessment from that evaluation. Otherwise it should be based on reviews conducted throughout the intervention, along with any supplementary evidence.

If CSOs are engaged in multiple advocacy interventions, these concluding reports can be used to form a library of cases that can help CSOs demonstrate accountability for their advocacy work, and learn across multiple cases.

Some Do's and Don'ts of Advocacy M&E

Do...	Don't...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a clear theory of change and/or strategy at the start of an intervention, or once you realise it will involve significant work. • Be clear about what you can realistically achieve through your advocacy before developing an M&E system. • Base M&E processes on existing processes if possible. • Investigate unexpected changes as well as expected ones. • Simple monitoring well, such as assessing the quality of your activities and outputs (deliverables). • Record and log concrete evidence of change wherever possible. This includes stories, examples and anecdotal evidence. • Be clear about responsibilities for M&E, particularly in large campaigns, or those involving many actors. • Keep it as light as possible! 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retain objectives, indicators or questions past the time when they are useful. Instead, change them or remove them as often as necessary. • Forget to concentrate on what is happening around you, and what others are doing, as well as on what you are doing. • Forget to hold regular reviews, and to use those findings to make decisions. • Feel you have to 'prove' change or contribution to change. Advocacy M&E often involves developing plausible arguments based on the available evidence. • Ignore the subjective assessments of staff, partners or beneficiaries. Over time, these may evolve into rigorous qualitative findings. • Over-sell or under-sell your achievements. Try and be as honest as you can with your assessments.

Further reading and resources

The next paper in this section of the M&E Universe – ‘Monitoring advocacy activities’ – looks at how to develop indicators and questions for different advocacy activities, such as lobbying and public campaigning. Other papers deal with assessing contribution to advocacy outcomes, and M&E tools used for advocacy work.

A paper in the ‘M&E systems’ part of the M&E Universe deals with M&E systems in general, and covers many additional issues that are common to M&E within advocacy interventions and more conventional projects. A paper in the ‘M&E Functions’ section looks at the different types of evaluation that are available. All these papers can be accessed by clicking on the links below.



Jenny Ross has developed a tutorial and online video, explaining how to develop and use a theory of change for advocacy and campaigns. This is available from the BOND website at <https://www.bond.org.uk/resources/theory-of-change-for-advocacy-and-campaigns>.

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