01 Engagement

02 Agenda Setting

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04 Implementation

Lived Experience

Lived Experience

Are we getting there?

A tool for identifying evaluation indicators
for social justice advocacy developed by
The Advocacy Initiative

Introduction

This tool is for community and voluntary sector organisations that do social justice advocacy. Organisations that seek to influence the development and implementation of public policy on behalf of the groups they represent.

It is intended to support those doing social justice advocacy to answer one key question: How do we know our advocacy is working? This tool aims to help you and your organisation identify indicators that are relevant to your work.

The tool sets out an 'impact cycle', all or some of which may be directly relevant. You and your organisation are invited to adapt and interrogate the relevance of each of the questions in each phase of this cycle. This tool does not offer a universal framework for assessing the impact of advocacy, but should facilitate specific advocacy campaigns, individual organisations, or collaborations of multiple organisations to take stock of the wider implications of their work.

This tool has been developed through focus group discussions with experienced social justice advocates working across a broad range of issue areas involved in reflecting on advocacy through their participation in The Advocacy Initiative. We are grateful to them for their time, and commitment to enhancing the overall impact of social justice advocacy in Ireland.

What is social justice advocacy?

The Advocacy Initiative understands social justice advocacy to be planned, organised and sustained actions undertaken by community and voluntary sector organisations. The purpose of which is to influence public policy outcomes, with and/or on behalf of the communities they work with, and/or in the broader public interest. Social justice advocacy is informed by experiences of exclusion - poverty, inequality, racism - through the provision of personal advocacy supports, delivering direct services, empowering those experiencing the issues, community development, and by producing research and analysis. Advocates may develop their voice and legitimacy on the basis of one or all of these activities.

The scope of social justice advocacy includes any action (compatible with the values and principle of justice, equality, human rights, human dignity and social inclusion) aimed at promoting or resisting legislative or policy change. Advocacy may be the primary purpose of an organisation, or a small part of its broader work.

See our website www.advocacyinitiative.ie to learn more about social justice advocacy in Ireland, its practice, its effectiveness and how it is perceived in the wider political system.

How does social change happen?

Each social justice advocate and organisation will have their own analysis of how social change happens, and assessment of what they deem to be the most effective advocacy strategies (e.g. insider lobbying, public awareness, demonstrations, etc.).

This tool does not assume any one model of social change, though its use will be informed by such assumptions. It is valuable for organisations to be explicit about their theories of social change and to test these regularly.

Indicators: How do you know when your advocacy is working?

The impact of social justice advocacy is undoubtedly tricky to measure. As advocates we often get caught up in counting output indicators such as how many times we met a Minister or how many people signed a petition or showed up at a demonstration. Outputs can often be called successes and indeed in some ways they are. But what can they tell us about progress towards our overall social justice advocacy goal, or indeed about our broader contribution to social justice? How can we tell if that meeting with a Minister made a difference? This tool aims to support those asking such difficult questions about their own work.

Indicators should allow us to identify progress towards social justice advocacy outcomes and tell us if we are achieving our big picture objectives.

This tool identifies a series of questions. The answers to these questions will help you and your organisation develop indicators relevant to your work. This tool aims to complement other evaluation practices.

Indicators are not neutral, they will reflect values and assumptions regarding social change. Not all of the questions in this tool will resonate with your work, but do take the time to think carefully about each before judging its relevance. Regardless of the particular advocacy strategies that you use, this tool is aimed at helping you develop a bigger picture analysis of the impact (or not!) of those strategies. The questions are generalised, you may wish to adapt them, the more specific and quantified your answers the closer you will be to identifying useful indicators.

What is the impact cycle?

The impact cycle can broadly be described as including five key phases: starting from the lived experience, moving to generating engagement, agenda setting, formal legal or policy change and ensuring implementation. It is through this cycle that experiences of poverty and exclusion can change.

Lived experience:

Social justice advocates start and end with their analysis of poverty and inequality. They may support individuals, provide services, empower local communities to impact decisions that affect them, or conduct research, but ultimately their advocacy 'asks' emerge from an analysis of real issues and experiences. This is the particular contribution these organisations make to democracy, and without them marginalised voices are not heard.
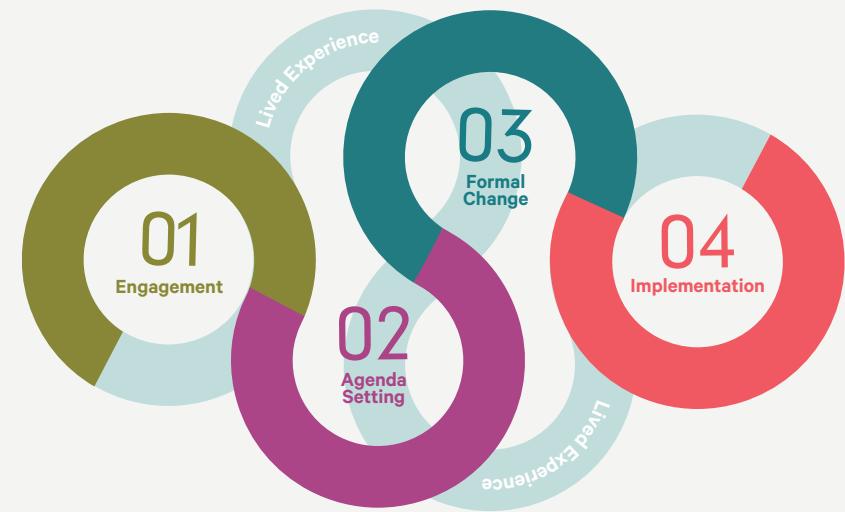
01. Engagement:

Advocates will seek to engage those communities and individuals who experience exclusion and disadvantage. They will also seek to engage a broader constituency of people who believe that a fairer and more just society is possible, building a range of allies and supporters.

02. Agenda Setting:

Social justice advocates often find themselves focusing on issues that are largely absent from the public and political debate. Their role is to get these issues into the public sphere and on the agenda of policy-makers. Often this will rely on their 'engagement base', but there are many ways in which such organisations seek to agenda set.

03. Formal Change:

Often the advocacy objectives are identified as policy or legal changes, and the ultimate indicator of success is whether such a change has happened. Achieving policy change relies on building engagement, and ensuring that the issue is on the agenda, but there are many specific strategies to convert those activities into a formal response, whether that is providing drafts of legislation, or using UN or EU processes.

04. Implementation:

Social justice advocates are frequently faced with the challenge of implementation. Law and policies are adopted but not fully put into practice. Consequently their work can focus on realising the benefits of a specific formal change that has been achieved. A change in the law will have little impact on the lives of those experience exclusion unless it is implemented in a meaningful way.

Implementation in turn brings the advocate back to assessing what change has been achieved for those experiencing poverty and exclusion.

Advocacy strategies will not always neatly follow this cycle. For example an organisation may use insider leverage to go straight from its analysis to achieving legal and policy change, without engaging in substantial agenda setting. Others may focus their objectives solely on engagement and agenda setting in the longer term, their issue may be particularly unpopular and require sustained support building. There may not be a direct link between your engagement and agenda setting activities and formal policy change, often another factor intervenes and an opportunity arises to insert your analysis into the decision-making process.

The framework on the following pages presents a series of questions with reference to this 'impact cycle'. The cycle is broadly divided into two key areas: achieving change (external) and building the conditions for change (internal). This provides a mechanism for thinking about whether you directly generated a specific change, or if something else happened.

At the bottom of the framework you are invited to consider whether there are counter-indicators that would help you understand the blocks that are getting in your way. What is stopping you?

Reviewing your advocacy strategy

Answering these questions will help you develop indicators for your advocacy. This process may lead you to review your advocacy planning, strategies and tactics. You may want to review your advocacy strategy, by addressing bigger questions such as:

- Is our advocacy goal still relevant? Are we asking for the right things?

- Is our 'ask' still potentially transformative? If it is a short-term fix, how does this serve our broader goals?

- Are we still clear about how our advocacy strategy contributes to broader social justice?

- Are we perceived as a credible, legitimate and politically independent voice?

- Has our argument (evidence base) stood up to challenge?

- Does our case stand up in terms of financing and resource implications? Is it achievable?

- Are we clear about the dominant rationale for existing policy choices?

- Has our power analysis proved accurate?

- Have there been unintended consequences (positive or negative)?

- Is there a specific advocacy opportunity? Is the timing right?

- Does our ambition match our skills, resources and time?*

*The Advocacy Initiative developed an online tool, **www.assessyouradvocacy.ie**, which supports organisations to take stock of their advocacy capacity and identify areas where it needs to be strengthened.

IMPACT CYCLE

Do we need to review our advocacy strategy?

Lived Experience

- Do we have headline data relating to the issue we are concerned with (e.g. EU SILC, NESC well being indicators)?
- Have the numbers of complaints/appeals to official bodies changed?
- Is there a change in the demand for 'remedial' services (state, private or voluntary sector)?
- What do those who experience these issues say about the current realities?

Building The Conditions For Change (Internal)

- Is there increasing attention and concern about our issues?
- Did we contribute greater awareness and engagement with our issue?

Achieving Change (External)

- What has driven change?
- Did we impact change or did something else happen?

01 Engagement

- Are the stories of those experiencing the issues heard through our advocacy?
- Who is giving us feedback about our advocacy?
- Are we hearing from those who experience the issue?
- Who else is talking about our issue, raising it?
- Are our allies (networks, collaborators) supporting our advocacy directly or mindfully complementing it?
- Are we being contacted by 'the public' about our issue?
- Are we developing online engagement with our issue (website views, social media statistics)?
- Do we have an increasingly wide 'supporter base'?
- Have we developed 'champions' for our issue? Who are they?

04 Implementation

- Has the provision of services changed? What are the changes?
- Are their new structures to oversee and account for implementation?
- Are politicians held to account for implementation? When and how often?
- Is there an increased investment of resources (financial and human)?
- Are new 'norms' emerging for how our issues is dealt with?
- Is our issue less likely to 'drop off' the agenda?

03 Formal Change

- Is there a formal political commitment to changing the law? When?
- Has the law or policy changed as a result of our advocacy?
- Are there court cases that challenge the current system?
- Have there been formal positions/statements by external bodies such as the EU and UN?

02 Agenda Setting

- How often is our opinion sought out by a range of policy makers and political parties?
- How have we impacted the agenda of any committees or formal structures that we are members of?
- What feedback or questions have we got about our formal policy submissions?
- How often is our work significantly cited in other sources (policy papers, academics, research agencies)?
- How often are we present in the media (traditional and social)? Is this presence strongly relevant to our advocacy goal?
- How often are we asked to speak at important external events on this subject?
- Do we see our language and framing reflected in the public debate?
- Is our issue formally 'on the agenda' of policy-makers?

Counter Indicators

- Have there been direct negative legal, policy developments?
- Are the indirect blocks, including developments in other policy areas that undermine our objectives?

Counter Indicators

- Is our advocacy incompatible with political interests and agendas?
- Is there increasing hostility towards our issue?
- Is our advocacy ignored or disregarded?
- Are there other voices that dominate the public debate?
- Is there organised counter-agenda setting either resisting our agenda or pursuing its own?
- Are there competitors we could work with rather than against?

IMPACT CYCLE

Do we need to review our advocacy strategy?

Lived Experience

**Building The Conditions
For Change (Internal)**

**Achieving
Change (External)**

01 Engagement

04 Implementation

02 Agenda Setting

03 Formal Change

Counter Indicators

Counter Indicators

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

Margaret Mead

The Advocacy Initiative

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