How can we monitor and evaluate policy influence?

Toolkit Nº5 | Data collection methods

This toolkit is part of a series addressing the various steps to be followed in the process of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of public policies.

The definition of levels, objectives and indicators of policy influence focuses on **what** will be monitored and evaluated during the M&E effort. Once these decisions are taken, and on the basis of the indicators selected, it is time to decide how the measurement will be carried out, that is to say, with which concrete methods the required information will be gathered.

There are several methods for collection of available data for an M&E process of influence: some are specific to the diagnostic[1] phase, others serve better to monitor and/or evaluate. Some are more appropriate for evaluating products and/or activities; others are more useful to measure impact in the medium and long term. The selection of each one depends on the needs and resources of the organization, on the capacities and interests of those who implement and, of course, on the type of indicators selected.

Additionally, currently available methods must be taken into account (for example, if the organization already carries out a media clipping service, or if it requires certain evaluations from those who participate in

their activities) so as to build on the,. Also, one should consider all concrete opportunities to implement a new method (for example, planned visits to other jurisdictions where focus groups or in-depth interviews with public officials might be carried out).

Useful criteria for selecting the most appropriate data collection methods:

- Cost
- Knowledge and experience of the members of the organization
- Time implied to apply it
- Diversity of information sources
- Existing tools, or planned activities which may serve as opportunities to apply a new tool
- Room to collect information about different types of shifts in conduct, attitudes, interest, knowledge, etc.
- Outside credibility (take into account that, at times it is more convenient to have an external evaluator)
- Type of influence objective

---

[1] See Toolkit N° 2. Step One: Where are we and where do we want to go. In: *How can we monitor and evaluate policy influence?* Buenos Aires: CIPPEC.

Methods for data collection are a systematic approach to information-gathering. While they are being implemented (in the case of medium term monitoring and evaluation methods) periodic reflection meetings about the information generated are recommended in order to analyze progress (or lack of it) and make on time decisions. Changes may be required in some strategies and/or the map of change[2].

Data collection methods according to M&E phases

The table below synthesizes a set of data collection methods according to the different phases of the M&E system. These methods, quantitative as well as qualitative, are the most utilized and may serve as an options menu at the time of selecting which are the most appropriate for one´s own organization.

Diagnostic	Monitoring	Evaluation
SWOT	Interviews with key informants	
		Innovation stories
Revision of written documentation	Questionnaires	Episode studies
Interviews with members of the organization	Focus groups	Most significant change
Surveys	Reports from field workers	After action review
	Participant observation	*Rapid Outcome Assessment* [3]
	Media tracking	
	Impact of commentary	Intense[4] debriefing periods
	Outcome mapping	Indexes of public[5] officials
	Modular matrix	
	Bellwether methodology	
	Public policy tracking	

2   For a description of the Map of Change, see Weyrauch, V. (2012), Toolkit N°3: Design/Establishing the basis for the M&E strategy. In *How do we monitor and evaluate policy influence?* Buenos Aires: CIPPEC, pages 3-4.

3   Methodology developed by Overseas Development Institute (ODI). Available at: http://www.outcomemapping.ca/resource/resource.php?id=268
4   A User's Guide to Advocacy Evaluation Planning. Julia Coffman, Harvard Family Research Project, 2009, page 20.
5   Idem, pp 19.

You can find a complete description of several of these tools in the handbook *Learners, practiotioners and teachers*[6].

Also, the Handbook for Data Collection Tools, companion to: A Guide to Measuring Advocacy and Policy [7] presents a wide variety of interesting methods organized according to the type of results to be measured.

In this Toolkit we focus on three specific tools which are valuable for their specificity and relevance:

Policy tracking

According to Coffman[8], ´this method monitors the progress of policy proposals in the lawmaking process. It determines what policy proposals (e.g., rules, regulations, or bills) have been introduced on an issue and how far they have moved in the policy deliberation and adoption process. Policy tracking also can be used to determine who supports specific policies (e.g., who sponsored or signed onto a bill). If budgets are tracked, this method can determine the amount of funding that an issue has generated.´

Bellwether methodology

According to Coffman[9], ´this approach tracks political will. It determines where a policy issue or proposal is positioned in the policy agenda queue, how decision makers and other influentials are thinking and talking about it, and how likely they are to act on it. "Bellwethers" are influential people in the public and private sectors whose positions require that they are politically informed and

that they track a broad range of policy issues. Bellwethers are knowledgeable and innovative thought leaders whose opinions about policy issues carry substantial weight and predictive value in the policy arena. For example, they might include policymakers, the media, funders, researchers/think tanks, or other advocates.

The method itself involves structured interviews with bellwethers. Two aspects of this process, however—selecting the bellwether sample and setting up the interviews— require a unique "twist" that sets this approach apart from other interview processes.

First, at least half the sample should include bellwethers without a special or specific connection to the policy issue being explored. This approach increases the probability that issue awareness or knowledge detected during interviews can be linked to advocacy efforts rather than personal experiences or other extraneous variables. Second, bellwethers should be unaware before the interview begins that interview questions will focus specifically on the policy issue of interest. They are informed about what the interview will generally cover, but do not receive specific details. This approach helps to ensure that bellwethers' responses are authentic and unprompted.

Interviews might begin by asking bellwethers what issues they think are at the top of the policy agenda. Their responses signal whether the advocacy issue of interest shows up on that list, and if so, where, and along with what other issues. Then, questions can get more specific and sound out the bellwethers' familiarity and knowledge of the issue, allowing later content analysis to determine whether advocates' messages surface in bellwether discourse about the issue. This method is repeatable over time if the advocacy strategy takes place over multiple years.

6 CIPPEC (2010): *Learners, practitioners and teachers. Handbook on monitoring, evaluating and managing knowledge for policy influence*, pages 45-62.

7 Organizational Research Services (2007): *A Handbook of Data Collection Tools, companion to: "A Guide to Measuring Advocacy and Policy"*.

8 Coffman, Julia (2009): *A User's Guide to Advocacy Evaluation Planning.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard Family Research Project, page 18.

9   *Idem.*

After action review

The after action review is one of the most simple yet productive tools to evaluate activities and products, and ca be easily applied. It relates to learning after doing. It can be implemented in a wide variety of policy influence actions (from two individuals who leave a brief meeting, to an end-of- project meeting with all its participants).

According to ODI[10], it works by bringing together a team to discuss task, event, activity or project, in an open and honest fashion. The lessons learned can be shared not only orally, but also through a work of systematization and documentation, which enables an exchange with wider audiences. It is not an evaluation; rather, the objective is to improve future projects.

To carry it out, a meeting is organized and immediately recorded after the closing of the project or activity (while memories are still fresh and participants are still available) in which those actors somehow linked with the initiative have participated.

It is useful to create a flux diagram (a graphic representation of data flux through an information system) which states what happened in each stage of the project. The diagram allows for identification of tasks, actions and decisive points and detects which parts of the project were effective and which were less effective. It is also valuable to find the causes and share lessons learned with a view to the future.

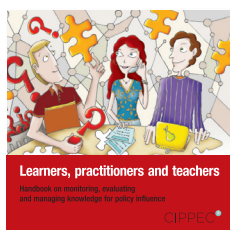## Some helpful questions for a good Alter Action Review:

- What were the proposed goals for this project?
- What plan was devised to achieve it?
- What changes were registered since the project began?
- What went well and why?
- What could have gone better?
- What advice would you give yourself if you were to go back to where you werea at the start of the project?
- What were the two or three lessons you would share with others?
- What is next for you in terms of this project?

---

10 *Knowledge Sharing and Learning: After Action Reviews and Retrospects. Toolkits, January 2009.*

Next Toolkit:
Using knowledge to improve the practice

I need help!

Recommendations for reading or consultations by CIPPEC´s Civil Society Directorate for the M&E of policy influence.

- *Learners, practitioners and teachers. Handbook on monitoring, evaluating and managing knowledge for policy influence,* CIPPEC, 2010. Available at www.vippal.cippec.org.

- *A Handbook of Data Collection Tools, companion to: "A Guide to Measuring Advocacy and Policy",* Organizational Research Services, 2007. Available at: www.organizationalresearch.org.

- *A User's Guide to Advocacy Evaluation Planning.* Julia Coffman, Harvard Family Research Project, 2009. Available at: www.hfrp.org.

- *Knowledge Sharing and Learning: After Action Reviews and Retrospects. Toolkits,* Overseas Development Institute, 2009. Available at: www.odi.org.uk.

- RAPID Outcome Assessment handout, Overseas Development Institute (ODI). Available at: www.outcomemapping.ca.

- Tool: After Action Review (AAR). Available at: www.oneworldtrust.org.

- *Unique Methods in Advocacy Evaluation,* Coffman, J. & Reed, E., 2009. Available at: www.innonet.org.

How can we monitor and evaluate policy influence?

Toolkit Nº 1.
Why should we
monitor and evaluate
policy influence?

Toolkit Nº 2.
How can we monitor
and evaluate
policy influence?

Toolkit Nº 3.
Establishing
the basis
for the
M&E strategy.

Toolkit Nº 4.
Defining how
to measure short,
medium and
long term results.

Toolkit Nº 5.
Data collection
methods.

Toolkit Nº 6.
Using knowledge
to improve
policy influence.

Other series:

How to design a policy influence plan?

Tools for policy influence

Available at www.vippal.cippec.org

**VIPPAL - Linking research and policy
in Latin America**