straight to the
POINT ›

Assessing the Political Environment for Advocacy

Taking into consideration implementers' limited time and resources, the tools in Pathfinder International's *Straight to the Point* Series provide clear, concise guidance on a variety of issues related to program design, implementation, and evaluation.

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ADVOCACY TOOLS

The *Straight to the Point* advocacy tools are intended for organizations that want to include in-country advocacy and public policy work among their programmatic strategies. The tools will lead you through the three essential steps to developing an advocacy initiative.

1 **Setting Advocacy Priorities** will help you take the first step in developing an advocacy initiative— selecting an issue for advocacy.

2 **Assessing the Political Environment for Advocacy** *(this tool)* will help you understand the environment you are working in and the key factors you need to consider as you develop your initiative.

3 **Mapping an Advocacy Strategy** will help you plan a concrete strategy for achieving your goal, including determining your specific activities.

After completing the three tools you will be ready to launch your advocacy initiative.

A critical element of any successful advocacy initiative is a comprehensive understanding of the opportunities that exist for influencing the policy process and the risks associated with them. After using the first tool to select your issue for advocacy, use this tool to help you determine who you are trying to influence, what their interests are, other key actors, and how best to exert influence.

To assess the political environment, you need the following information:

• Current legal situation as it relates to advocacy activities and laws concerning your issue;

• General public's knowledge of and attitude toward your advocacy issue;

• Policymakers' knowledge of and attitude toward your issue;

• Influential actors who have the potential to affect your advocacy issue (individuals, organizations, coalitions, policymakers, government offices, media sources, etc.);

• Influential actors who oppose your advocacy issue;

• Other organizations' advocacy activities related to your issue;

• Formal and informal channels for NGOs to access policymakers and/or participate in the policymaking process;

• Types of information policymakers seek when forming or revising policies.

How to use this tool:

Conducting research and interviews is useful for learning about the political environment, but it is *not* necessary to complete this tool. Most often, the answers can be easily found using your experience and observations in the field, or through debate and discussion with your colleagues. *The best way to complete this tool is in a small group or workshop setting.*

If you find that you do not know the answers to many of the questions asked in this tool, you need to ask yourself if the advocacy issue you identified is really the right issue for you. You need to be realistic about your capacities and potential for success. If you do not know the answers, you can either identify a new issue or search for the missing information. You can find it by conducting a document review and/or interviewing representatives from governments, businesses, or other institutions to find out about programs, plans, and regulations. Sometimes the information you want is easily available, but if your issue is complex or unfamiliar, you should consider getting help from someone more familiar with the policymaking process.

While not necessary, we encourage conducting key informant interviews to help you complete this tool. (You can use this tool as an informal interview guide.) In addition to the people mentioned above, health care providers and members of legal, human rights, and advocacy organizations can provide useful information and help you understand the larger practical and political environment. The interview process can also help you make important connections and build alliances that will strengthen your initiative.

As you answer the questions in this tool, check the appropriate box and make notes on the relevant information in the space provided. If you do not know the answer, check the "?" box and try to find the information elsewhere. Additional sheets of paper, a flipchart, or a computer may be helpful for making notes and recording your answers.

Note: Changes in the political environment (e.g., new risks and opportunities and reactions from the individuals and institutions you are targeting) can affect your advocacy strategy and the range of activities you will conduct. Therefore, you should revisit the *Assessing the Political Environment for Advocacy* and *Mapping an Advocacy Strategy* tools periodically.

Before using this tool, you should be familiar with the following terms and common definitions:

ADVOCACY

Advocacy is a strategy to influence policymakers to make a policy change (e.g., create supportive policies, reform or remove harmful policies, ensure the funding and implementation of supportive policies).

When we talk about advocacy, we do *not* mean information, education, and communication (IEC) activities. Advocacy is not about changing specific practices or even building community awareness or support for an issue or practice. Rather, advocacy

is intended to change opinion about a *policy*—specifically, policymakers' opinions—and achieve a particular policy change. It is often necessary to conduct opinion change activities with the media, community members, religious leaders, and health care providers before conducting advocacy activities. However, these efforts are only considered advocacy activities if the target groups then put pressure on the policymaking process. Additionally, efforts to persuade government offices/ministries/etc. to give funding to your organization's programs are *not* advocacy.

POLICY

A policy can be a plan, strategy, or agenda; program or course of action; human rights instrument; budget decision; piece of legislation; or regulations or protocols/guidance issued by a government, multinational entity, or institution.

POLICYMAKERS

Policymakers are typically government officials or people with formal political power (e.g., parliamentarians, ministers or agency officials, and their staff).

LOBBYING

Generally, lobbying is defined as the work of influencing a specific piece of legislation. So, while lobbying can be part of an advocacy strategy, advocacy work does not necessarily involve lobbying. For example, holding a meeting with a policymaker explaining the benefits of permitting community health workers to distribute injectable contraceptives is *not* lobbying. Encouraging that same policymaker to sign a piece of legislation permitting this *is* lobbying. Often, limitations are placed on NGOs' lobbying activities. Before considering lobbying as part of your advocacy strategy, review your country's laws and policies governing NGO lobbying and advocacy.

Legal Situation

Are there any legal limitations placed on the political and advocacy activities of NGOs, citizens, or the media?

If yes, describe. Also describe what actually happens in reality:

❏ **YES**
❏ **NO**
❏ **?**

Are there government policies, laws, or protocols addressing your issue?

If yes, what are their major components?

❏ **YES**
❏ **NO**
❏ **?**

Are there major policy/law/protocol reviews or initiatives planned or underway that are related to your issue?

If yes, describe:

❏ **YES**
❏ **NO**
❏ **?**

Public Opinion and the Media

Overall, how does the public view your issue?

Describe:

❏ SUPPORTIVE
❏ NEUTRAL
❏ OPPOSED

Overall, how much does the public know about your issue?

Describe:

❏ INFORMED
❏ UNINFORMED

Do you know who the most influential journalists and media sources are?

If yes, describe:

❏ YES
❏ NO

Has news about your issue been featured in the media in the last two years?

If yes, describe (media source, author, perspective):

❏ YES
❏ NO
❏ ?

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Forming Alliances

Have successful advocacy efforts been conducted in recent years? **If yes, why did they succeed?**	❏ **YES** ❏ **NO** ❏ **?**
Have *un*successful advocacy efforts been conducted in recent years? **If yes, why did they fail?**	❏ **YES** ❏ **NO** ❏ **?**
Are other organizations/interest groups currently conducting advocacy or organizing in support of your issue? **If yes, who are they? What are they doing?**	❏ **YES** ❏ **NO** ❏ **?**
Are there active alliances/coalitions that are currently addressing or have the potential to address your issue? **If yes, describe (e.g., members, goals, activities):**	❏ **YES** ❏ **NO** ❏ **?**
Do you know which *specific* NGOs or civil society groups are most widely consulted or have the greatest influence with policymakers on your issue? **If yes, who are they? What is their position on your issue?**	❏ **YES** ❏ **NO**

Opposition

Are there influential actors *inside* the government who oppose your issue? **If yes, describe:**	❏ **YES** ❏ **NO** ❏ **?**
Are there influential actors *outside* the government who have public stances opposing your issue (e.g., community leaders/groups, health/legal professional associations, NGOs, coalitions)? **If yes, describe (e.g., members, goals, activities):**	❏ **YES** ❏ **NO** ❏ **?**

Accessing Policymakers

Overall, how does the government view your issue? **Describe:**	❑ SUPPORTIVE ❑ NEUTRAL ❑ OPPOSED
Overall, how much does the government know about your issue? **Describe:**	❑ INFORMED ❑ UNINFORMED
Do you know who the influential policymakers, agencies, committees, and/or institutions inside the government who can affect your issue are? **If yes, describe:**	❑ YES ❑ NO
Do you know about the formal mechanisms or channels for the public/NGOs to offer input or comment on laws and policies (e.g., hearings, briefings)? **If yes, what are they? How can you participate?**	❑ YES ❑ NO

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Accessing Policymakers *(continued)*

Do you know about informal networks or ways of dealing with policymakers, including accepted forms of political dialogue and proper protocol for approaching them?

❏ YES
❏ NO

If yes, describe (e.g., meetings between NGOs and policymakers, site/community visits):

Do you know what types of information or resources policymakers usually seek when formulating their health policy decisions?

❏ YES
❏ NO

Describe:

Are there any other major actors (individuals, groups, etc.) that have influence with policymakers on your issue?

❏ YES
❏ NO
❏ ?

If yes, who are they? What is their position on your issue?

Additional Comments