

Setting Advocacy Priorities

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.



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** (*this tool*) will help you take the first step in developing an advocacy initiative—selecting an issue for advocacy.
- 2 Assessing the Political Environment for Advocacy** 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.

Your organization may want to work on numerous advocacy issues, but it is important to be very selective. Advocacy efforts often require a lot of time and resources. You are more likely to succeed if you focus on one issue at a time. It is natural to want to speak out about everything that matters to you as an organization—and as individuals—but you also have to consider the resources available to you. Your advocacy issue should always be clearly linked to your organization's mission, programmatic priorities, and strategic focus areas. If it is not, you will not have the authority you need to address it.

Ideally, you should complete this tool in a small group or in a workshop setting because it is very important for advocacy priorities to be debated and discussed.

Identifying Issues for Advocacy

The first section of this tool will help you brainstorm about the advocacy issues your organization is interested in addressing. No more than three issues are recommended. Note that choosing your issue does not just mean choosing the broad topic you want to address (e.g., family planning)—you have to think about specific problems, barriers, and policy-related solutions. To determine your issue, you can begin by identifying the problem you want to address.

Example problem: Lack of access to contraceptives

Next, think about what some of the barriers to solving the problem are. The barrier must be related to guidelines, policies, or laws.

Example barrier: Injectable contraceptives can only be distributed at health facilities.

Then ask yourself what policy change would help remove the barrier. The answer is your advocacy issue. Be as specific and concrete as possible. Ask yourself questions like: Should a new policy be created? Should a harmful policy be removed? Does an existing policy need to be reformed? Does an existing policy need to be fully implemented?

In this example case, what policy change would help increase access to contraceptives? The answer is the advocacy issue.

Example issue: Community health workers (CHWs) are permitted to distribute injectable contraceptives.

One way to increase access to contraceptives might be to raise awareness among religious groups about family planning. This is a good idea, but it is *not* an issue for advocacy. Your issue should be directly linked to a policy change. In this example case, CHWs are not currently permitted to distribute injectable contraceptives, so a policy change is needed. The next two tools in the series will help you determine exactly *how* the change will be made.

Sometimes advocacy will be an appropriate programmatic strategy, but often it will not. This depends on whether or not policies have the potential to help solve the problem.

Evaluating Issues for Advocacy

This section will help you prioritize the issues you identified in the previous section. The tool lists important criteria that you should consider when deciding which advocacy issue to pursue. The criteria take into account: your organization's potential impact on the issue; the effort required to impact the issue; and the importance of the issue to your work. Discuss and debate the criteria as they apply to each of the advocacy issues you identified. Additional sheets of paper, a flipchart, or a computer may be helpful for making notes and recording your answers.

Before setting your advocacy priorities, 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.

Identifying Issues for Advocacy

Choose up to three problems and barriers. Then identify three issues associated with them. **Note:** You do not necessarily have to identify three problems/barriers. For example, you can choose just one problem/barrier and then decide on three potential issues related to it.

	PROBLEM/BARRIER	ISSUE
1		
2		
3		

Evaluating Issues for Advocacy

The criteria below will help you select the best issue for your advocacy initiative. For each potential advocacy issue, consider the criteria and circle **high, medium, or low**. Make brief notes explaining your decision. For all of the criteria, **high is the best rating** and **low is the worst rating**. A good issue for advocacy will receive more highs than mediums and lows.

CRITERIA		ISSUE 1	ISSUE 2	ISSUE 3				
		<i>For each issue, circle High, Medium, or Low.</i>						
1	<p>Policy change needed is clear*</p> <p>For an initiative to succeed, you must know what kind of policy change is needed. If your advocacy issue is not very specific, it will be harder to design a strong strategy.</p> <p>CLEAR (HIGH) SOMEWHAT CLEAR (MEDIUM) UNCLEAR (LOW)</p>	HIGH MEDIUM LOW	HIGH MEDIUM LOW	HIGH MEDIUM LOW				
2	<p>Number of your programs that will be affected by your issue*</p> <p>If you have a lot of programs (or a very large program) that will be affected, it is probably a better issue.</p> <p>4+ (HIGH) 2-3 (MEDIUM) 1 (LOW)</p>	HIGH MEDIUM LOW	HIGH MEDIUM LOW	HIGH MEDIUM LOW				
3	<p>Level of effort required</p> <p>How much of your time, energy, and other resources will be needed?</p> <p>VERY LITTLE (HIGH) MODERATE EFFORT (MEDIUM) A LOT (LOW)</p>	HIGH MEDIUM LOW	HIGH MEDIUM LOW	HIGH MEDIUM LOW				

* **These criteria are particularly important.** As you make your final assessment, pay extra attention to the issues' ratings in the starred categories.

Evaluating Issues for Advocacy *(continued)*

ISSUE 1

ISSUE 2

ISSUE 3

CRITERIA

For each issue, circle High, Medium, or Low.

4	<p>Potential for success*</p> <p>How likely is it that you will succeed? If success is unlikely, this is not a good issue.</p> <p>VERY LIKELY (HIGH) POSSIBLE/MAYBE (MEDIUM) UNLIKELY (LOW)</p>	<p>HIGH MEDIUM LOW</p>	<p>HIGH MEDIUM LOW</p>	<p>HIGH MEDIUM LOW</p>
5	<p>Estimated time required to succeed</p> <p>The shorter the amount of time needed, the better.</p> <p>LESS THAN 1 YR. (HIGH) 1–2 YRS. (MEDIUM) 3+ YRS. (LOW)</p>	<p>HIGH MEDIUM LOW</p>	<p>HIGH MEDIUM LOW</p>	<p>HIGH MEDIUM LOW</p>
6	<p>Level of public support for your issue</p> <p>If the public is supportive, your chances for success are higher.</p> <p>SUPPORTIVE (HIGH) NEUTRAL (MEDIUM) OPPOSED (LOW)</p>	<p>HIGH MEDIUM LOW</p>	<p>HIGH MEDIUM LOW</p>	<p>HIGH MEDIUM LOW</p>
7	<p>Level of policymakers' support for your issue</p> <p>If policymakers are supportive, your chances for success are higher.</p> <p>SUPPORTIVE (HIGH) NEUTRAL (MEDIUM) OPPOSED (LOW)</p>	<p>HIGH MEDIUM LOW</p>	<p>HIGH MEDIUM LOW</p>	<p>HIGH MEDIUM LOW</p>

Evaluating Issues for Advocacy *(continued)*

ISSUE 1

ISSUE 2

ISSUE 3

CRITERIA

For each issue, circle High, Medium, or Low.

8	<p>Potential for <i>negative</i> consequences for your organization</p> <p>Will your activities hurt your reputation, decrease your potential for funding, put your staff in danger, etc.?</p> <p>UNLIKELY (HIGH) POSSIBLE/MAYBE (MEDIUM) VERY LIKELY (LOW)</p>	<p>HIGH MEDIUM LOW</p>	<p>HIGH MEDIUM LOW</p>	<p>HIGH MEDIUM LOW</p>
9	<p>Potential for <i>positive</i> consequences for your organization</p> <p>Will your activities improve your reputation, help you get new funding, etc.?</p> <p>VERY LIKELY (HIGH) POSSIBLE/MAYBE (MEDIUM) UNLIKELY (LOW)</p>	<p>HIGH MEDIUM LOW</p>	<p>HIGH MEDIUM LOW</p>	<p>HIGH MEDIUM LOW</p>
10	<p>Financial resources to support this kind of advocacy work*</p> <p>It is essential to be realistic about funding. Without the necessary financial resources, success is unlikely.</p> <p>FUNDS EXIST NOW (HIGH) NEW FUNDS LIKELY (MEDIUM) FUNDS UNLIKELY (LOW)</p>	<p>HIGH MEDIUM LOW</p>	<p>HIGH MEDIUM LOW</p>	<p>HIGH MEDIUM LOW</p>
11	<p>Partners to support you in this kind of advocacy work</p> <p>Having strong partnerships is usually essential to success, especially for larger initiatives.</p> <p>3+ (HIGH) 1-2 (MEDIUM) 0 (LOW)</p>	<p>HIGH MEDIUM LOW</p>	<p>HIGH MEDIUM LOW</p>	<p>HIGH MEDIUM LOW</p>

Evaluating Issues for Advocacy *(continued)*

ISSUE 1

ISSUE 2

ISSUE 3

CRITERIA

For each issue, circle High, Medium, or Low.

		HIGH	MEDIUM	LOW	HIGH	MEDIUM	LOW	HIGH	MEDIUM	LOW
12	<p>Evidence that the issue is important and achievable</p> <p>Do you have concrete experience and/or other reliable information sources indicating that this is a good issue for advocacy?</p> <p>STRONG (HIGH) SOME (MEDIUM) NONE/WEAK (LOW)</p>									
13	<p>Level of importance to your organization as a matter of principle</p> <p>The issue you choose should be in line with your organization's mission and values.</p> <p>VERY IMPORTANT (HIGH) SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT (MEDIUM) NOT VERY IMPORTANT (LOW)</p>									

Review the ratings (**high**, **medium**, or **low**) that you gave each issue. If you gave an issue a lot of **lows** and **mediums**, it is probably not a good issue for advocacy. If you gave an issue a lot of **highs** and **mediums**, it is probably a better issue for advocacy. Once you have selected an issue, you are ready to move on to the second tool—*Assessing the Political Environment for Advocacy*.

What is your issue for advocacy?