



Evaluating advocacy – a ‘must read’ for all peak bodies

As recently as 2007, published authors in the fields of advocacy and policy evaluation referred to measuring outcomes and effectiveness as an ‘emerging’ field of interest amongst academics, philanthropic organisations, funding bodies and not for profit audiences. There was no universal standard of best practice or methodologies in the field and traditional outputs and outcome measures were a poor fit with policy and advocacy work. In a relatively short period of time, academic research and literature has progressed significantly to achieve a high level of consensus on the principles and theories that underpin the evaluation of advocacy and policy work. Theory-based evaluation is more than the sum of its parts and can also be used to inform and guide strategic planning, the implementation and management of projects, campaigns and advocacy activities. This paper aims to assist Shelter SA members, supporters and stakeholders to discuss the measurement of advocacy and policy work outcomes, and recommends a sound framework to make that possible.

Societal and policy changes are caused by numerous factors involving multiple stakeholders and influences. Change occurs over long periods and it can be difficult for advocacy organisations to show direct cause and effect. Advocacy is a very dynamic activity, the contexts and stakeholders are not static and it is “virtually impossible to name, predict or explain all the variables that might be important” within the change process in advance of commencing a campaign (Reisman, Gienapp, Stachowiak, 2007). As a result, short, medium and long-term outcomes should be used as performance measures to demonstrate progress in real time. Shelter SA has located a credible and reliable tool for evaluating advocacy work in keeping with the academic literature.

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An Online Tool for Advocacy Planning and Evaluation

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The Advocacy Progress Planner

An online tool for advocacy planning and evaluation

You know that changing the world doesn't just happen. It takes planning -- and learning.

- **Meaningful and measurable advocacy:** This tool is designed to give you and your team an at-a-glance look at the ingredients of advocacy efforts. It can guide you to clarify the goal, audience and tactics of your own campaign. Careful planning and strategic learning are two sides of the same coin.
- **Tough questions:** As you move through the tool, we'll ask some tough questions to help you check your assumptions about how change will happen. You'll see your campaign strategy come into focus. And we'll help you set some benchmarks to gauge your progress.
- **Share, collaborate and improve your plan:** You can share your plan securely with colleagues, funders, and coalition partners. Working together, you can improve your logic model - and your advocacy.
- **Check back and learn along the way:** Advocacy rarely goes the way we think it will. You can use your completed Planner over the life of your campaign to guide periodic reviews. Use what you learn to adjust course towards your goals.

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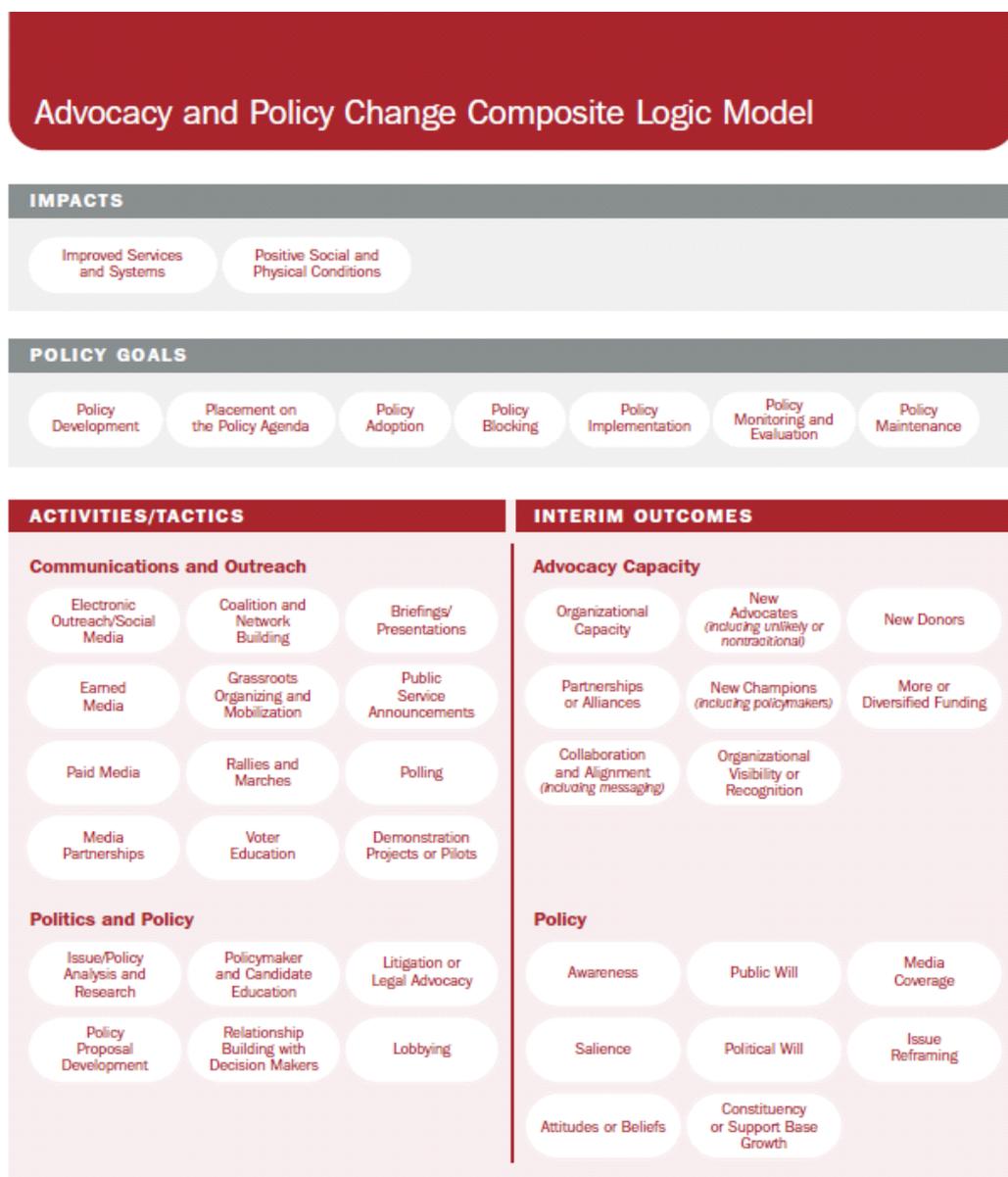
This tool is developed from Julia Coffman's Composite Logic Model and is a project of the Aspen Planning and Evaluation Program (APER) at the Aspen Institute. It was made possible with support from The California Endowment and The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.

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The Advocacy Progress Planner (APP) <http://planning.continuousprogress.org/> is an online evaluation tool based on high quality research by the Aspen Institute. The Aspen Institute is an educational and policy studies organisation based in Washington, DC – some of the language used in

the APP is American, however this is not a barrier to using the tool in Australia. The APP was developed using Julia Coffman’s Composite Logic Model. In addition to evaluation, the APP provides an excellent process for continuous learning and quality improvement. A valuable feature of the APP is that funder and organisation can both securely access the online planner to review and comment on its content with their own username and password at any time. Attributes of APP include:

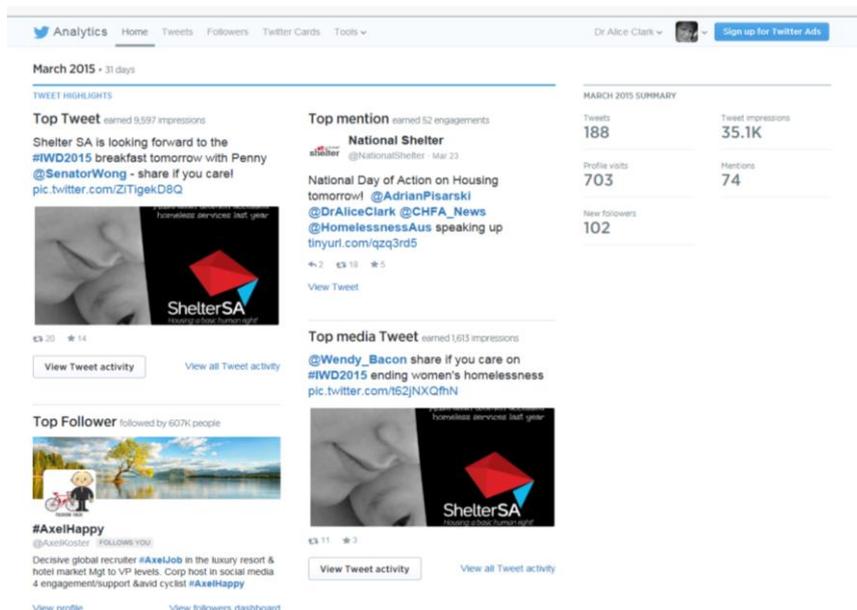
- It is evidence-based and theory driven;
- Shows real time progress reporting and evaluation;
- Allows for measurable, agreed-upon benchmarks;
- Supports continuous learning and quality improvement;
- Can accommodate multiple users; and
- Assists in the strategic planning process.



The APP incorporates the theory of change referred to in the literature on evaluating advocacy and policy work. The theory relates to a conceptual model for achieving a collective vision. The policy framework for Shelter SA’s work includes the State Strategic Plan, Department for Communities and Social Inclusion Strategic Plan 2013-2016 and the Shelter SA Strategic Plan. These plans contain high-level strategies and outcomes that reflect profound, aspirational changes in society. The social change model also reflects desirable large-scale change in social conditions including but not limited to poverty, health, education, employment, child protection, housing and homelessness. If we are to work towards effective and responsive service systems, policy change is fundamental. The advocacy of peak bodies incorporates a range of methods to work towards social and policy change that are constantly changing and growing, they are highly contextual, relational and include the following activities:

- Framing the issue;
- Developing alliances and strategic relationships;
- Gathering and disseminating data through research and community engagement;
- Raising public awareness; and
- Increasing political support.

The APP includes the use of modern technology, in particular social media, recognising this form of sharing information and messages as an important advocacy tool. Traditionally, peak bodies share information well within their stakeholder group however, Shelter SA is increasingly reaching out to new audiences through social media, which is a cost and time effective medium. There are other benefits around social and electronic communication which have in-built analytical tools that can effectively demonstrate the metrics attached to them such as Google Analytics, Twitter Analytics, LinkedIn and Facebook Insights. Paid memberships are losing currency as the only reflection of the representation, reach, impact and physical numbers of an organisation’s supporters. Shelter SA tweets for example, earn an average of 50,000 impressions every month and one Facebook post shared in July 2015 reached over 8,000 people. It is important for advocacy groups to think about the number of supporters they have for a particular idea, message or campaign as well as the member organisations who formally join, through paid memberships.



When governments fund advocacy and policy work through peak bodies they are making an investment in civil society. Peak bodies contribute to the development of community infrastructure and can draw out public opinions to assist their work towards social change and policies that will benefit citizens. Governments must be able to measure the effectiveness of their public spending. When clarity and focus on impact is strong, we can create mutual understandings and expectations, good communication and accurate evaluation. Shelter SA looks forward to sharing our evaluation work as it is specifically designed for policy and advocacy organisations, like peak bodies.

Shelter SA welcomes any comments or feedback on this discussion paper. We invite you to contact us with an **expression of interest to attend a workshop** where we will share with you how the APP works, the way we have applied it to Shelter SA and explore how it can be used by your organisation. Please email us sheltersa@sheltersa.asn.au to save your place and more details will be announced in the near future.

Bibliography

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