

Guidelines for Evaluating Non-Profit Communications Efforts

Communications Consortium Media Center

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This final Working Paper is the fifth in a series of papers prepared for the Communications Consortium Media Center's Media Evaluation Project. It summarizes the main findings of the first four Working Papers in the series, and offers guidelines for the evaluation of non-profit communications efforts.

Why Evaluate Public Communications?

Nonprofit groups and foundations are making unprecedented investments in public communications, seeking to educate Americans and mobilize the public in support of social or behavioral change. Are these investments paying off? What makes communications efforts more or less effective? Answers to these questions lie in the emerging techniques of evaluation.

Evaluation offers multiple benefits to nonprofits and foundations investing in communications. It can provide an assessment of an effort's impact. It can also help to ensure that there is an impact by assessing the project's strengths and weaknesses before its launch, and by providing useful corrective feedback during its implementation. Finally, evaluation can provide practical information that is useful to the field more generally – about what works and what does not in the use of communications to effect social change.

Overview

The evaluation of public communications is a developing field. This Working Paper is designed help advance that field. It offers a set of *guidelines* that foundations and non-profit organizations can use when designing evaluations to learn about both their investments in communications strategies and the impacts of those investments.

This is the fifth in a series of Working Papers written for the Communication Consortium Media Center's (CCMC) Media Evaluation Project. The previous four papers, written by experts from the Berkeley Media Studies Group, Harvard Family Research Project and Michigan State University, provide a comprehensive review of current communications evaluation in the non-profit world and the social science of communications strategies. They serve as the research base for this final paper, which was prepared by CCMC.

The next phase of CCMC's Evaluation Project will involve the development of partnerships with foundations and non-profit organizations to apply these guidelines in practice. The original guidelines will be modified after two to three years of "road testing" and a final report will be issued to complete the project.

Note that this Working Paper uses the term "campaign" when referring to communications efforts. Communications efforts are not always called campaigns. They can also be labeled programs, projects or initiatives. In addition, campaigns do not have to be stand-alone entities, nor do they have to be highly formal efforts. In fact, very few communications campaigns stand alone. They can also be an organized set of activities embedded within, or complementary to, a larger set of work plans designed to achieve a common end.

Overarching Evaluation Principles

Building on the research base and practical evaluation experiences outlined in the four prior Working Papers, a set of overarching principles is presented below. These can contribute to more effective communications evaluation and should be more prevalent in this field. They are infused in the evaluation guidelines and suggestions in this paper.

1. There is no "right" or "wrong" way to evaluate communications campaigns. There should be both recognition *and acceptance* of the fact that different evaluation needs and capabilities require different evaluation designs (and that causation is not always the most important question). The evaluation's design, focus, and methods should fit the information needs and available resources of stakeholders in the communications effort.
2. Assessing whether a campaign caused its intended impact is often important, and that is the activity funders tend to focus on, but evaluation for purposes of learning and continuous improvement is also important. At the same time, all sides should recognize that leverage to convince sponsors to invest in campaigns will be enhanced by evaluations that assess causation (which often require higher evaluation budgets).
3. Evaluations, like communications campaigns, need to identify up front their purpose and intended audiences. For example, is the evaluation intended to measure the impact of a campaign? Or is it to provide feedback so the campaign can learn over time from experience? Also, is the target audience for the evaluation the sponsoring foundation, the non-profit(s) implementing the campaign, or both?
4. It is best to design the evaluation early and in conjunction with the campaign. This will maximize opportunities to use the evaluation for both learning and impact assessment.
5. Campaign staff members should participate whenever possible in the evaluation's design as well as its implementation. Campaigners and evaluators both need to understand the existing challenges and opportunities. For example, is the campaign seeking to change public opinion and then induce action by policy-makers? Or is the campaign building upon existing favorable opinion and then mobilizing people to a particular action? Obviously, campaigns to change public opinion are more difficult from the start.
6. Evaluation should push for methodological rigor and innovation whenever possible. It should also acknowledge that more than one evaluation approach (i.e., more than pre- and post-campaign polls) can capture useful information.

7. Different evaluation designs have different interpretive boundaries. It is important to understand those boundaries and avoid the temptation to make broad claims of success based on limited data or designs that do not warrant such claims.
8. It is important to be realistic about impact. In commercial marketing campaigns, attitude improvements of one-tenth of one percent are deemed important because they can represent millions of dollars. But sometimes funders of communications campaigns want to see attitudinal shifts of 10 to 30 percent. In response, non-profits sometimes make promises to funders that they cannot possibly fulfill.
9. Sometimes simple things like having a good press list or establishing ongoing professional relationships with key reporters are the most significant measures of success, especially for locality-specific or small-budget efforts.
10. "Values" are important to both campaigns and their evaluation. Typically, non-profit communications efforts put forth information to achieve either behavioral or societal change. However, widely held and deeply entrenched values can often trump useful information (e.g., values about the meaning of "family," "community," "independence" or "self-sufficiency"). Successful communications campaigns must acknowledge the "values vs. information" dichotomy, and evaluation must take this into account when judging impact.
11. Evaluation should be based on sound (and where possible research-based) theory for predicting how the campaign will achieve social change.
12. Evaluation *can* respond to hard-to-answer questions about the value and effectiveness of communication campaigns (e.g., whether information alone can lead to behavior change or whether attention to the social and policy context is also a necessary ingredient; and whether media advocacy can contribute).

Acknowledging the Challenges of Evaluation

Measuring the effectiveness of any communications effort raises serious challenges that should be acknowledged up front. Evaluation of nonprofit communications is still a relatively new field, and emerging evaluation techniques are still grappling with how to deal with the following types of challenges:

- To date, standard and widely accepted guidelines for communications evaluation have not existed in either the for-profit or non-profit worlds.
- Non-profit organizations and the campaigns they implement are often unique, making the creation and adoption of standard evaluating guidelines difficult.

- It can be difficult to disaggregate the impact of communications efforts and their value added from that of other social change strategies being implemented at the same time.
- Public communication campaigns often aim for complex and hard-to-achieve change (e.g., changing public will by affecting norms, expectations, and public support, or changing behavior through skill teaching, positive reinforcement and rewards). Campaigns can also often aim for change at multiple levels of society (community, state, national or international).
- Some methods useful to communications evaluation are too costly for many non-profits (e.g., polling) or may require staff time or expertise that is not readily available.
- Communicators and evaluators don't always speak the same language. Most evaluators don't understand communications theory and practice; communications people don't understand evaluation language or methods. One result is that the evaluation's focus can sometimes be misguided. For example, the evaluation may focus only on "placement" of stories in the media as the primary measure of a campaign's success, ignoring the importance of informing supporters and allies though internal communications efforts such as newsletters, e-mails, briefing calls and meetings.
- The goal of nonprofit campaigns often is to ensure that an organization's efforts to define a social problem and its proposed solution reach the awareness of those who hold the power to allocate resources and choose appropriate policy alternatives. This is a high standard for success, with implications for evaluation design and data interpretation.
- Sometimes communications resources dedicated to achieving an impact are too limited to be effective. Also, sometimes a campaign is not ready to be evaluated.
- Some campaigns seek incremental change. They are implemented in stages, and initial stages may be modest in impact.

Understanding a Campaign's Purpose, Scope, and Maturity

When an evaluation is first being considered, it is important to understand the communication campaign's *purpose*, *scope*, and *maturity* (Appendix A outlines additional strategy elements that are vital to a campaign evaluation). Each of these factors has important implications for the evaluation design.

Purpose

Evaluation should begin with an understanding of the campaign's core *purpose*. It is useful to think about purpose on a continuum, with behavior-change campaigns at one end, and campaigns to change public will and policy at the other. Behavior-change

campaigns seek to modify *individuals'* behavior in order to improve individual or social well-being. Public will campaigns seek to mobilize *popular support and demand* around a given issue, thereby motivating policymakers to react.

Some campaigns can be readily placed on this continuum. Many others are harder to classify because they have multiple objectives: some in the realm of personal behavior, some in the realm of policy change, and some seeking to affect public will as a preparatory step toward policy change.

Factors to consider in identifying purpose include:

- *Dual purposes and the mushy middle.* A campaign may seek to change both individual behavior and public policy, and therefore might fall into the continuum's "mushy middle." Yet, given the relative scarcity of full-time public will or policy campaigns, any public policy component may be enough to land a campaign on the policy side of the continuum.

The key is to identify the campaign's *end or primary purpose* and not classify it from a cursory review of its characteristics. For example, campaigns might be classified as "public will" simply because they take a universal approach to a problem. Domestic violence or sexual assault-prevention campaigns, for example, often seek to "put the problem in a social context" on their way to achieving policy change. This follows one of the first objectives of a public will focus: "affect perceptions of social issues and who is seen as responsible." Still, campaigns that never make the leap to institutional or policy change should not be classified as public will efforts.

- *Behind-the-scenes purposes.* A campaign may indeed have a policy change purpose – it just may not be public. That is, the campaign's public face may stress individual behavior change while advocates work behind the scenes to change policy.

While the core purpose of many campaigns will be hard to classify, the campaign needs to articulate clearly for evaluators where the effort is on the purpose continuum, and how its activities add up to achievement of its ultimate purpose. (This discussion relates to the paper's next section, about identifying the campaign's theory of change.)

Scope

The second critical factor to understand in planning an evaluation is the campaign's *scope*, as measured by its reach and length. For example, is the purpose of the campaign to affect changes at the local, state, national or international levels? Does it set a chronological deadline for success, or a target number of media placements during a certain period?

Maturity

The third critical factor for evaluation is the *maturity* of the issue and of the campaign that speaks to that issue. For example, campaigns can vary in length from a few days to many decades. As the issues being addressed mature, the campaigns they inspire typically evolve, and can move from a purpose of behavior change to one of changing policy. As this happens, the campaign's non-profit implementers usually become more sophisticated and the information around the issue typically becomes more detailed, thereby improving chances for success.

Mature campaigns are often harder to assess, as effects within a certain time frame or context may be difficult to gauge. The tradeoff is that campaigns tend to become more formal as they mature, with well-defined goals, tactics, materials and structure. Such defined characteristics can make them easier to evaluate (see again Appendix A).

Timing is important to consider within the context of maturity. Pushing for and assessing specific policy change may be premature for an audience that does not see the problem as a significant – or public – one. For example, if a campaign seeks policy change on domestic or sexual violence issues, the public may first need to be convinced that the problem extends beyond a basic victim/perpetrator concept. The issue needs to be framed as one of social responsibility, not just personal responsibility. Only then can advocates rally the public to apply sufficient pressure for institutional or policy change.

Identifying the Campaign's Theory of Change

Many evaluators of complex efforts and initiatives such as communication campaigns now embrace the idea of using an effort's "theory of change" as a guide when designing the evaluation. A theory of change is a representation of what needs to be in place to make a given type of change happen. Here, the "change" refers to a campaign's ultimate purpose, whether it be altering individual behavior or public will and policy. A theory of change identifies key strategies that should be used, and the outcomes each is expected to produce. Once identified, the theory of change acts as a guide for understanding where the evaluation should focus and what outcomes need to be assessed.

Behavioral Change Versus Public Will Campaigns

As the previous section indicated, one of the most important factors for evaluation and for identifying a project's theory of change is understanding the campaign's ultimate purpose, or the type of change being sought. We have named two main types of campaigns.

The first seeks to change individual behavior in order to improve individual or social well-being. It is variously called a public information or public education campaign. Many, if not most, individual behavior change campaigns use a social marketing approach. This now well-known approach is grounded in commercial marketing

techniques. With unwavering focus on the “customer,” it markets behavior change as a desirable event. How the customer thinks and acts continuously shapes the marketing process.

The second type is the public will campaign, which focuses on creating public will for change so that popular pressure will move officials to take policy action. Other terms for this campaign are public engagement or policy change campaigns.

The table below compares these two types of campaigns. This Working Paper comments on behavior campaigns,¹ but focuses on public will campaigns.

| Campaign Type / Goal | Individual Behavior Change | Public Will |
|-----------------------------|--|---|
| Objectives | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> --Influence beliefs and knowledge about a behavior and its consequences --Affect attitudes in support of behavior and persuade to change --Affect perceived social norms about the acceptability of a behavior among one’s peers --Affect intentions to perform the behavior --Produce behavior change (if accompanied by supportive program components) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> --Increase visibility of an issue and its importance --Affect perceptions of social issues and who is seen as responsible --Increase knowledge about solutions based on who is seen as responsible --Affect criteria used to judge policies and policy-makers --Help determine what is possible for service introduction and public funding --Engage and mobilize constituencies to action |
| Target audience | Segments of the population whose behavior needs to change | Segments of the general public to be mobilized, and policy-makers |
| Strategies | Social marketing | Media advocacy, community organizing and mobilization, policymaker outreach |
| Media vehicles | Public service/affairs programming; Print, television, radio, electronic advertising | News media: print, television, radio, electronic |
| Examples | Anti-smoking or drunk driving, use of condoms or seat belts; parenting | Support for quality child care, after-school programming, universal health care, international family planning |

¹ The design, execution and evaluation of public communication campaigns is driven to a large degree by theories of behavior change developed by social scientists over the past 30 years. Some of the more important of these concepts are listed in Appendix B.

Evaluation designs necessarily evolve as campaigns move along the continuum from behavior change to public will. For one thing, the unit of analysis changes. Behavior-change campaigns target the individual as the unit of analysis, which can make evaluation easier because the campaign's focus is clearly designated. For example, survey research and other well-developed methods can query individuals about their behavior before and after a communications campaign, or compare individuals in one locale to another that was not exposed to the campaign, and assess the differences.

As the purpose of a campaign moves more toward public will and policy, the unit of analysis broadens to include whole neighborhoods, communities, or populations. Evaluation arguably gets more complicated as this unit grows, particularly as it lingers in the somewhat vague "public will" territory. No standard definition of public will exists, much less agreement on how to measure it. Many evaluations use public opinion as a proxy measure of public will, though the two are not the same (public will requires individuals to *act* on their opinions, at least by expressing them to policy-makers).

Understanding Public Will Campaigns

As mentioned above, public will campaigns seek to motivate public officials to take policy action by creating demand for such action. While public will campaigns have grown substantially more common in recent years, they have a long history, with some of the most successful conducted around the emergence of America as a new nation and during times of war.

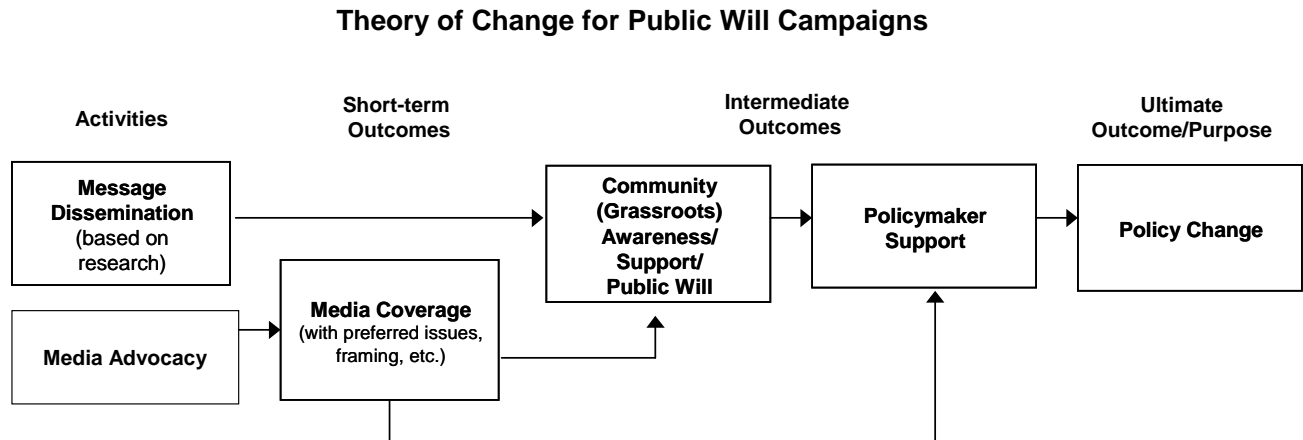
Public will campaigns are now prevalent in many arenas such as public health. Here they often arise in direct response to the perceived shortcomings of efforts to change individual behavior. Many health-related problems have their roots in social or historical factors and therefore require public will or social policy approaches rather than individual behavior-change strategies alone. As a result, the public health community increasingly has turned to efforts to modify the social and policy environment that affects health behaviors. The public and its communities are seen as the mechanisms for change, not just as the site of the intervention.

The success of communications within a public will-building effort frequently depends on a set of inter-connected activities:

- Effective policy research to demonstrate the favorable impacts of the issues being promoted;
- Media advocacy that disseminates policy research and attempts to move the way the public thinks about and reacts to the issues;
- Grassroots activities by supporters that reach and mobilize target audiences one-on-one or in small groups; and

- Contacts with policy-makers one-on-one or in small groups;

With these activities in mind, the theory of change behind public will efforts often looks like the figure displayed below (Appendix B offers additional theories and concepts that may be useful in understanding and defining theories of change for both behavior change and public will campaigns).



Using the Theory of Change

As mentioned previously, identifying a campaign’s theory of change, such as the one above, can be an extremely useful exercise in helping to design the campaign’s evaluation. For example, the theory of change identifies the campaign’s core activities, and the short-term and intermediate outcomes expected on the way to achieving the campaign’s ultimate outcome or purpose. These then provide a useful outline of what needs to be evaluated.

The theory of change can also be used to help set evaluation priorities. While some evaluations will examine all components listed, from activity implementation to short-term, intermediate, and long-term outcomes, others may focus on only one or two components, depending on resources available or the type of information desired. The theory of change can be used as a tool for choosing that focus.

Defining the Evaluation Focus

Four possible types or areas of focus can be used for an evaluation. Depending on resources available and information needs, the evaluation can choose one, two, three, or all four.

1. *Formative* evaluation usually takes place at a campaign’s front end and collects information to help shape the campaign’s activities. For a public will campaign, this might involve measuring issue awareness through public polling or testing of

messages and materials in focus groups, either formally or informally. Sometimes a “meta-survey” or summary analysis of existing polling data can serve the same purpose.

2. *Process* evaluation examines the campaign’s implementation, or the way activities roll out. Process evaluation might count the number of materials distributed, the development and dissemination of messages and materials, and the number of efforts to work with the media.
3. *Outcome* evaluation examines the campaign’s outcomes, which usually means its effects on its target audience(s). Evaluators often use surveys, polling, or more qualitative means of gathering this type of information.
4. *Impact* evaluation examines effects at the community, state, national or international level, or a campaign’s long-term outcomes (including the effects of behavior or policy change). Impact evaluation can also attempt to determine causation – whether the campaign caused the observed impact(s). This type of focus typically requires more rigorous evaluation design methodology, such as experimental or quasi-experimental techniques.

| Evaluation Focus | Purpose | Example Questions |
|------------------|---|---|
| 1) Formative | Assesses the strengths and weaknesses of campaign materials and strategies before or during the campaign’s implementation. | --How does the campaign’s target audience think about the issue? --What messages work with what audiences? --Who are the best messengers? |
| 2) Process | Measures effort and the direct outputs of campaigns – what and how much was accomplished. Examines the campaign’s implementation and how the activities involved are working. | --How many materials have been put out? --What has been the campaign’s reach? --How many people have been reached? |
| 3) Outcome | Measures effect and changes that result from the campaign. Assesses outcomes in the target populations or communities that come about as a result of grantee strategies and activities. Also measures policy changes. | --Has there been any affective change (beliefs, attitudes, social norms)? --Has there been any behavior change? --Have any policies changed? |
| 4) Impact | Measures community-level change or longer-term results achieved as a result of the campaign’s aggregate effects on individuals’ behavior, and the behavior’s sustainability. Attempts to determine whether the campaign caused the effects. | --Has the behavior resulted in its intended outcomes (e.g. lower cancer rates, less violence in schools)? --Has there been any systems-level change? |

Formative Evaluation: Shaping the Campaign

Formative evaluation gathers data or evidence to guide the design of a public communications campaign, including information on ways that issues are framed or how the public thinks about an issue. For campaigns concerned with changing behavior or mobilizing public will, common variables assessed include:

- Knowledge/awareness about an issue;
- Saliency or perceived importance of the issue;
- Media framing, or the terms of public discussion of the issue;
- Attitudes about the issue and behaviors surrounding it;
- Social norms or perceived standards of acceptable attitudes;
- Efficacy, or the degree of a person's belief that she or he has the ability or competence to perform a behavior or affect policy;
- Level of intention to carry out a certain behavior (e.g. contacting a policymaker);
- Skills necessary to perform a particular behavior;
- Incidence of the behavior; and
- Environmental factors affecting the behavior.

Typical methods used for formative evaluation include polling and focus groups, to provide baseline information about these variables within a targeted audience. More informal and less costly methods can also be used. For example, media framing is often measured by examining the content of media coverage for a period of time to see how particular campaign messages are included or ingrained in the terms of debate.

Process Evaluation: Measuring Implementation

Process evaluation is mostly concerned with measuring a campaign's implementation, or whether planned activities have been carried out. Process evaluation often assesses:

- Types and number of campaign materials developed;
- Campaign material dissemination;
- Media advocacy implementation;

- Target audience outreach; and
- Attempts to sustain campaign efforts.

Because this approach measures effort as opposed to effects, campaign staff can often collect data for a process evaluation with little help from an external evaluator. The evaluation usually requires a simple tracking system to count activities, materials, or other efforts related to a campaign's implementation.

Outcome Evaluation: Measuring Effects

Outcome evaluation measures changes in intended short-term, intermediate, or long-term outcomes. These may include changes in:

- Beliefs, attitudes, and behavior within a target audience;
- Earned media coverage and media content;
- Television use of public service announcements or video news releases;
- Web site traffic, including services that assess hits to a site, visitor navigation patterns, who visited and how long they stayed;
- Public support for an issue;
- Public action in support of an issue;
- Policymaker support for particular positions; and
- Policy change.

Common techniques for measuring these variables include polling, surveys (including the "rolling" sample surveys used in political campaigns), media clipping and content analysis, and direct-response tracking (numbers of people using an 800 number, mailing in a coupon, visiting a Web site). Methods can also include brief or in-depth case studies among target audiences.

Note that policy change in connection with a public will campaign can be difficult to measure. While policies themselves are not difficult to track, understanding the contribution of the campaign to policy shifts can be challenging. Some evaluators examine shifts in conjunction with specific indices of related efforts or activities, such as communications to legislators, participation in hearings, and the like. The caution, however, is that policy change may or may not result from communication campaigns.

Historical, contextual, or other factors may “trump” the effects of communications efforts (e.g. the September 11 tragedy).

Impact Evaluation: Measuring Longer-Term Change or Causation

Impact evaluation assesses the longer-term effects of behavior or policy change, or identifies whether a case can be made that the campaign caused any social or policy change. Impact evaluation may assess:

- The causal relationship between the campaign’s activities and its outcomes;
- Longer-term outcomes as a result of behavior or policy changes (e.g. lower cancer rates, less violence in schools); and
- Systems-level change, as in the creation through policy change of new institutions, procedures or groups.

The most rigorous research designs, such as experimental ones, allow for more definitive conclusions about the impact of a campaign. They require random assignment of target audiences to “treatment” and “control” groups or conditions, and require evaluation or research expertise to implement. It can be difficult and expensive to create a control group of individuals from the target groups who have not been reached in some way by the campaign. Quasi-experimental designs, which do not require random assignment but do require a comparison or comparison group, face similar challenges. While experimental or quasi-experimental designs are not essential, it is very difficult to establish the case for causation without them, or to say definitely whether outcomes are the result of the campaign or would have occurred anyway.

Matching Evaluation Methods With Outcomes

Methods commonly associated with communication campaigns and used to measure specific outcomes have been mentioned throughout this paper. The table below summarizes this information by matching common campaign outcomes – for both behavior change and public will campaigns – with the methods that can be used to assess them.

| Outcome | Methods |
|---|---|
| Campaign Activity Implementation | <i>Event/Activity Tracking, Case Studies:</i> A tracking and account of press conferences, media briefings, editorial board appearances, TV news placements, radio talk show bookings, etc., as outlined in the campaign's strategy |
| Institutional Capacity | <i>Event/Activity/Staff Tracking:</i> Monitoring key leaders' use of the Internet to assess improvement in their communications skills, better use of technologies and their integration of communications into the overall strategies of the campaign. |
| Media Coverage | <i>Media Tracking and Issue Trend Analysis:</i> Counting media placements in coverage of an issue at specific time points during project implementation. |
| Media Framing | <i>Media Content or Framing Analysis:</i> A review of the content and framing of media coverage around campaign-related issues (usually for a sample of media coverage in target markets) to determine how issues are presented and messages used |
| Awareness, Attitudes, Saliency, Behavior Change | <i>Polling:</i> Public or target-audience polling, preferably at points before, during, and after campaign implementation, to establish trends in public reactions to campaign-related messages and issues |
| Public Will | <i>Surveys, Polling, Website Tracking, Direct Response:</i> tracking the actions of organizations connected to the campaign and of their members for evidence of increased membership or volunteer presence, voting patterns, public support and demand, and public willingness to inform or participate in the policy process. |
| Policymaker Support | <i>Policymaker Surveys, Policymaker Tracking:</i> Surveying policymakers' reactions and support for campaign-related issues, tracking of bills sponsored, votes on legislation, etc. |
| Policy Change | <i>Policy Tracking:</i> Monitoring specific policies related to the campaign's issues. This is often difficult to connect definitively to the campaign, but changes can be tracked and correlated to campaign activities. |

Considering the Budget

Of course, the actual budget of a communications campaign is important to consider when designing an evaluation. The rule of thumb is that the evaluation budget should comprise at least five percent of the total campaign budget, but such resources are not always available, particularly when the campaign budget is small to begin with. This Working Paper suggests five budget gradations for evaluation, and the type of evaluation that might be expected for each:

- Up to \$5,000: A simple focus on process evaluation and one easy-to-measure outcome, such as a simple count of media coverage in specific newspapers.
- Between \$5,000-\$15,000: A focus on process evaluation, evaluating one or two outcomes. The evaluation might include a systematic tracking of communications events and media participation. Case studies are also common at this level.
- \$15,000-\$50,000: A focus on process and outcome evaluation, assessing two or more outcomes (usually short-term or intermediate outcomes). The evaluation might include an examination of media coverage, a brief survey among the campaign's target audience, or analysis of institutional readiness.
- \$50,000- \$300,000: A focus on formative, process, and outcome evaluation, with the majority of outcomes assessed. The evaluation might include an analysis of changes in behavior, public will or policy.
- \$300,000 and above: A focus on all four types of evaluation. Evaluations at this level may be able to use a more rigorous approach (e.g., an experimental or quasi-experimental design) to assess causal relationships between the campaign and its impacts. The budget could also accommodate polling for both formative and outcome evaluation purposes.

Conclusion

This Working Paper suggests that evaluating media campaigns is often a multi-phase effort, with no single "roadmap." However, numerous guideposts can be observed, as detailed here.

The paper's objective has been to give foundations and non-profits a realistic set of guidelines to use as they evaluate communications efforts. It is important that members of the evaluation community have a realistic overview of what can and cannot be expected as they seek to assess communications projects in the non-profit arena.

The next steps will be for CCMC to work with interested foundations and non-profits to apply these guidelines to assess ongoing communications efforts. This will enable CCMC, foundations and the non-profits to judge the effectiveness of the guidelines suggested and to modify them where necessary.

CCMC would like to thank the authors of the first four Working Papers. In addition, CCMC wishes to thank the Carnegie Corporation, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation for their support for this project.

Appendix A

Vital Elements of a Communications Strategy

Every campaign should display these vital elements before an effective and useful evaluation is designed (with the exception of formative evaluation, which can inform their development):

- A clearly stated objective or goal for the campaign;
- Activities that seek to further the objectives;
- An agreement on the audience/target audience(s) the campaign intends to reach;
- A well-articulated set of messages;
- Clearly identified spokespeople to deliver the message;
- A timeline for the campaign; and
- Adequate resources to implement the campaign.

Appendix B

Communication-Related Theories and Concepts

An understanding of common social science theories related to communications can aid in the understanding of campaigns and their theories of change. Theories and concepts are divided among the categories for which they are most relevant – public will and behavior change campaigns.

Public Will Campaigns

Agenda-Building

Political science theorists use the term “agenda-building” to describe the process through which some issues emerge and gain prominence in the media, society and the political process of debate and decision-making.

The scope and intensity of the problem are two factors in development of the issue. The third is visibility, which is typically triggered by an event and championed by “initiators” or public interest leaders.

Examples of potential triggers include involvement or death of a celebrity (such as the AIDS deaths of Arthur Ashe or Rock Hudson), a train wreck, an act of terrorism, a hurricane, a strike or an accident. The nuclear accident at Three Mile Island, for instance, led to media coverage that shut down plans across the county for new nuclear power plants.

Building an agenda requires skillful recognition of the elements of a conflict or problem. The first is the degree of specificity – the extent to which the example can be philosophically writ large, using concepts like equality or racism. The second is the significance of the issue, or the number of persons affected. The third parameter is temporal relevance, or the longevity of the issue. The fourth dimension is complexity (with simpler issues typically having more salience). The final parameter is precedence, or the perceived newness of the issue.

Agenda-Setting

Scholars have developed models of opinion formation and change. One is the idea that the media act as gatekeepers, determining what topics receive coverage and giving saliency to certain information, thereby influencing political and social developments. Thus, the media act to set the agenda for policy debate.

Framing

The way issues are packaged – by means of carefully designed words and phrases, visual clues, and selection of symbolic communicators – affects how the public thinks

about those issues. Framing influences the perception and interpretation of media consumers and politicians alike.

The power of framing can be seen in the way the following competing phrases set up the debate of a controversial social practice. Is it “female circumcision” or “female genital mutilation?” Is it “learning disabilities” or “learning differences?” Is it “energy conservation” or “energy efficiency?”

Priming

The media’s focus on some issues and lack of it on others moves the public mind. What is the frequency of media attention? And what priority do the media give to a particular focus?

Social Capital

Social scientists theorize about the role of individuals’ or groups’ “social capital,” or the power of their personal relationships in public will campaigns. They note the utility of such ties in influencing policy decisions, allocating resources and influencing media coverage. So, for example, when advocates began organizing a movement for a cigarette tax increase in California that passed as Proposition 99 in 1988, one of their first contacts was California Assembly Member Lloyd Connelly, a respected politician with considerable social capital and influence. Connelly helped forge connections between new groups, lobbyists, and influential individuals. It was partially due to this networking that the Coalition for a Healthy California was created.

Social Problem Construction

For many social scientists, the critical dynamic in social change movements is social problem construction. Here a problem or issue is defined, labeled and “typified” as a “framework” for target audiences so as to give it saliency. Terms such as “child abuse,” “elder abuse,” “missing children,” “learning disabilities,” or “domestic abuse” did not even exist before the second half of the 20th century, so those conditions were not generally recognized as social problems.

Even “wife-beating” had low saliency at the beginning of this era. It was believed to be a rare event and therefore an individual problem. On the heels of the civil rights movement, however, advocates for battered women began to raise the issue as affecting a significant portion of the population. Research data were cited to demonstrate its pervasiveness. Public will campaigns helped elevate the saliency of the issue and trigger social change: domestic abuse was criminalized, police procedures changed, shelters were established for battered women, and so on.

Spiral of Silence-Media Priorities

The media acts as arbiter of consensus by legitimizing certain beliefs and attitudes for those who wish to know what the mainstream is. This has the effect of muting the public expression of ideas considered unpopular. One of the most important functions of the media, in this model, is their role as the predominant source of cues about majority opinion. For example, if individuals perceive that their opinions on a controversial topic

are shared by a majority or are gaining momentum in the public sphere, they will feel confident expressing those views in public. On the other hand, if individuals perceive that their opinions are held only by a minority or are discredited or unpopular, they may be reluctant to express their views publicly. Public debate alters as a result.

Behavior Change Campaigns

Health-Belief Model

In this model, healthy behaviors are a function of a feeling of being personally threatened by a disease and a belief that the benefits of adopting the protective health behavior will outweigh the perceived costs of it.

Social Cognitive Theory

In this theoretical construct, behavior change is a function of motivation and an individual's belief that he or she has the skills and abilities to perform the behavior, under various circumstances.

Social Marketing

The concept of social marketing uses many of the concepts of standard commercial marketing, including the 4 P's – products, price, places and promotions – to market new behaviors and social concepts. The caution here is that the promotion of “ideas” is not the same as the promotion of “products.”

Stages-of-Change Model

This theory holds that an individual's behavior can be seen as a progression through a series of stages – pre-contemplation, contemplation, preparation, action and maintenance (or continuation of the behavior). In applying the theory, designers of communications campaigns seek to determine what stage the target audience members are in and how to move them to successive stages.

Theory of Reasoned Action

This influential theory posits that behavior is primarily determined by the individual's attitude toward the behavior, and by the person's judgment that people important to him or her feel the behavior should be performed.