



EMBEDDING COMMUNICATIONS SUPPORT IN ADVOCACY STRATEGIES

Foundations that fund advocacy increasingly understand the important role communications play in advancing policy, and many are incorporating communications into their work. But foundations big and small often have limited communications capacity – and what communications expertise they do have isn't always integrated into their advocacy grantmaking strategies. *Strategy Behind the Design of Advocacy Communications Support* is a resource for foundation staff who are grappling with how to design and implement effective communications approaches into their advocacy grantmaking. It draws on lessons learned from four Atlantic Philanthropies cases.

“Successful advocacy campaigns employ sophisticated communications that target anywhere from dozens to hundreds of policymakers and other influential advocates, craft research-informed messages for multiple audiences, and rely on an array of complementary tactics ranging from grassroots organizing to social media engagement.”

STRATEGY BEHIND THE DESIGN OF ADVOCACY COMMUNICATIONS SUPPORT

Atlas Learning Project

Now more than ever, funders need to learn from each other and put effective approaches and strategies into action. *Strategy Behind the Design of Advocacy Communications Support* is part of the Atlas Learning Project, a suite of resources from The Atlantic Philanthropies and other experts in the field aimed to help funders think strategically about how to defend, sustain and advance progressive policy change. With smart thinking, bold action and sustained focus, funders and advocates will be better positioned to succeed in advocacy and policy change.

INTEGRATING COMMUNICATIONS INTO ADVOCACY STRATEGIES

It is important to integrate advocacy communications into grantmaking strategies from the beginning. Funders should consider the following key questions to guide that approach:

- What are your policy objectives?
- What grantees are you considering funding?
- How effectively do those organizations use communications as an integral element of their advocacy work?
- Given your policy objectives and the grantees you have in mind, how do you structure communications supports?
- How will you communicate with consultants and grantees so all have the same understanding of your expectations?

Funders can provide grantees with a support system to maximize the effectiveness of their advocacy communications. These resources can include:

- Consultants who can help grantees develop communications plans and messaging, informed by audience research.
- Template materials, including fact sheets, social media posts and press releases.
- Communications training to help advocacy organizations develop key skills, including media relations, writing and storytelling.
- Ongoing technical assistance with a dedicated partner who learns about the grantee's unique needs and provides tailored support over time.
- Grant funding earmarked for communications activities and staff.

Advocacy communications assessments can help communicators and funders better anticipate grantees' needs. By conducting an advocacy communications assessment, funders can:

- Explore nonprofits' advocacy communications capacity.
- Learn how integral communications is to the organization's advocacy strategy.
- Understand whether nonprofits can actually put communications support to good use.

Supporting advocacy grantees through a centralized hub is one type of model that can improve coordination and message consistency.

- This approach is particularly useful when a grantmaking strategy requires a unified frame to shape how a policy issue is viewed across audiences.
- However, it's important to provide tailored and flexible support when grantees need to deliver different messages to different audiences.

Collaboration between grantees and consultants is more likely to succeed when funders effectively communicate the objectives of communications support.

Requiring grantees to use resources specifically for communications protects valuable resources from reallocation and inspires board members to think more strategically about communications.

To adapt to changing circumstances, it's critical to regularly revisit the design of a communications support system and be responsive to grantee needs.