Guiding Principles for Evaluating Advocacy Grantmaking
Developed by Atlantic Philanthropies

1. *Expectations should reflect that advocacy to achieve policy outcomes can be a long-term process.* Evaluation plans should be realistic and expectations should be aligned with the grant's timeframe. Foundations and advocates shouldn't expect or promise multiyear outcomes with single-year grants.

2. *Traditional program evaluation designs often are not appropriate for advocacy efforts.* Evaluation approaches need to adjust to the differences between advocacy work and other types of programs or services (e.g., advocacy strategy often evolves). Designs that require interventions to remain static or that use comparison groups typically are not a good fit.

3. *Applying more evaluation rigor to advocacy evaluation does not mean prescribing a specific approach.* It means getting clearer about evaluation audiences, uses, outcomes, and measures.

4. *Evaluation is most beneficial when it is integrated into advocacy strategies.* Evaluation that is part of advocates' day-to-day work helps them reflect, in real time, on their strategies to assess whether they're working and where midcourse corrections are needed. This is particularly important for advocacy, which often evolves without a predictable script. Evaluation that assesses results retrospectively or only a project's conclusion is less helpful in this field.

5. *Both internal and external evaluation can be appropriate for advocacy grantmaking.* Because of their organizational size and resources, evaluation for many advocates requires internal monitoring and tracking of key measures rather than external evaluation. In the advocacy field, external evaluators are commonly used for several purposes—helping advocates design their internal tracking systems; assessing advocates' influence on key constituencies (e.g., policymakers, media, business, voters); or assessing larger scale collaborative efforts involving multiple organizations working toward a similar policy purpose.

6. *Both quantitative and qualitative data are useful.* Judgments about the "best" kinds of data to collect should be based on the evaluation's primary audience and how they want to use the evaluation results.

7. *The end goal—policy change—should not be the only outcome of interest.* In addition to informing policy, much advocacy work has a larger set of outcomes in mind. Outcomes related to the broader advocacy strategy are as important to assess as the policy change itself. Also, assessing a range of outcomes ensures that the evaluation does not unfairly conclude that the whole advocacy effort was a failure if the policy was not achieved.

8. *Sometimes advocacy strategies shift, and the evaluation should prepare for those shifts.* Evaluations need to build in flexibility, so that when a strategy changes or a critical event occurs, the evaluation can adjust with it.

9. *With policy outcomes, contribution is more important to demonstrate than causation.* Advocates are one of many factors affecting policy outcomes. It is more important to sort out and build a credible and defensible case about advocates' unique contribution to the policy process than it is to expect them to prove that their work definitively *caused* a policy outcome.

10. *Context is essential to interpreting advocacy evaluation results.* The same result on the same measure may mean success for one advocacy effort but disappointment for another. What measures are chosen and how they are interpreted depends on the organization doing the advocacy and its experience with advocacy, difficulty of the issue given the current policy and economic climate, and the advocacy strategy.

11. *Advocacy grantees often are new to evaluation and have evaluation capacity needs.* We can't expect grantees to do evaluation if we don't pay for it and help them acquire the tools and skills needed to do it.

Consider these questions:

1) Do you agree with each principle? What changes or additions would you suggest?

2) Are advocates/the advocates you fund "ready" for these principles? Would they have any problems applying them?

3) Are foundation's leadership and Board members "ready" for these principles? Would their application be problematic in your foundation?