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Editorial

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DEAR READERS

As this issue goes to press, the national debate about healthcare reform is in full throat, making our theme of *Advocacy and Policy Change* most timely. We have seen tactics such as shouting down speakers at town halls, advertising campaigns in both old and new media, and punditry from the whole political spectrum.

Given the vigor of the debate and the sometimes-questionable tactics, it is small wonder that many foundations have shied away from supporting advocacy and policy work, not only in health care reform but in other policy areas. However, a growing number of foundations have chosen to enter into the arena with the understanding that in order to change systems and address root causes, they cannot ignore public policy.



The articles in this issue are not designed to convince foundations of the value of supporting advocacy and policy work; instead, they are focused on providing evidence of the effectiveness of such work and tools for doing it.

One of the challenges for foundations that support policy work is demonstrating the impact. Since policy change often is a lengthy and circuitous process, linking foundation support to the ultimate policy reform is quite difficult. In the RESULTS section, **Breihan** describes how sophisticated statistical analysis can demonstrate the linkages, and contribute to learning about which foundation funding strategies were most likely to lead to policy change. Funding local government and funding in regional groups are two promising strategies.

Kreger et al describe how The California Endowment's Community Action to Fight Asthma Initiative was able to foster community action to effect change in the areas of education, housing and environmental policy. The policy changes moved the emphasis from treatment to prevention.

Reporting on another California Endowment initiative, **Hsu et al** focus on the long-term sustainability of community–public health department partnerships to improve health care. While the partnerships were not sustained, the community capacity for policy work was.

Lee et al report the initial results of an initiative to diversify the leadership of community groups working on sustainable food systems. Changes at multiple levels, for individuals and communities, are detailed.

In another issue area, **Pinsonault and Nguyen** examine how an initiative to build the advocacy capacity of organizations that provide direct services to individuals was successful in

creating both policy change and changes in their perceptions of community status for these organizations.

The final article in the results section, by **Sherman and Peterson**, uses the frame of “wicked problems” to describe the strengths and weaknesses of the policy initiatives of two foundations.

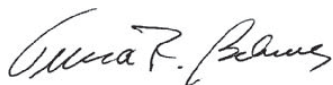
In the SECTOR section, **Morariu and Brennan** share observations about how foundations can support policy work by emphasizing accountability. These two have often seemed at odds; however, when organizations engage in evaluation to get feedback on the impact of their actions, it can be effective in helping them re-aim their policy work.

This topic elicited a larger-than-normal number of articles for our TOOLS section. Four different tools are described. **Stroh** describes how some of the tools and models from systems thinking can be useful in deepening understanding of complex issues. **Campbell and Coffman** share a tool that was developed to help foundations frame their policy work. **Ranghelli's** tool assesses the impact of grantees' work, as well as the foundation's grant-making strategies. **Beer and Reed** developed a tool to assess both grantee and statewide capacity building outcomes.

Philanthropic support of advocacy and policy work is now at a stage where we have the tools to engage in and evaluate it, as demonstrated in this set of articles. Lack of knowledge is no longer a reason not to support it.

As noted earlier, the move towards funding policy work is often the result of reaching a realization that existing rules and relationships (structures, in system-speak) control and constrain the flow of resources. Advocacy groups often seek to change the flow of resources to make them more equitable; the route is through changing policy. However, the beneficiaries of the existing structures may not embrace such policy change. It can become loud and messy. Yet, there is no way around this work if foundations are to truly help the most vulnerable among us.

Do you have a story about policy change work that became contentious? How did you, as an advocate, evaluator or funder, handle it? What advice do you have for others? Log onto our blog at www.foundationreview.org to share your story and your insights.



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