How to design a policy influence plan?

Toolkit Nº10

What have we learned? An approximation to monitoring and evaluation of policy influence

This toolkit is part of a series addressing the various components of a public policy influence plan.

1. Diagnostic
2. Objectives
3. Actors and alliances
4. Proposal
5. Strategies and actions
6. Communication plan
7. Resources and timeline
8. **Monitoring**
9. **Evaluation**

Once the influence plan has been designed, it is necessary to define how the actions to reach the proposed objective will be monitored and evaluated.

In this toolkit, the last of the series ***How to design a policy influence plan?*** we introduce the monitoring and evaluation (from here on, M&E) of policy influence. To know the process in depth and the tools necessary to implement it, and to reflect on the best way to generate an M&E culture in an organization, we recommend reading the series H***ow can we monitor and evaluate policy influence?*** also developed by CIPPEC[1].

Defining concepts[2]

Monitoring is the revision of a project´s progress. It consists of a **permanent measurement** of the degree of compliance regarding the execution of planned activities (efficacy) and of available resources with regards to the assigned budget (efficiency).

It involves identification of what is being done in order to influence, and a comparison with what has been programmed. It is a tool which

1 Available at: www.vippal.cippec.org.

2 Weyrauch, V. (2012), **Toolkit N° 1: Why monitor and evaluate influence**. In, *How do we monitor and evaluate policy influence?* Buenos Aires: CIPPEC.

provides highly useful **information** about the project´s advance, with regards to operational decision-making.

Evaluation is a management instrument put into practice to respond to certain questions and provide **orientation** for those in charge of **making decisions**. It also serves to obtain information to determine whether the theories and hypotheses on which the project is based are valid, which aspects were effective, and why.

Generally, its objective is to determine **the relevance, efficiency, efficacy, effect and sustainability** of the evaluated level (be it the organization as a whole, a program and/or a project).

Why is it worth to face an M&E process? There are enough reasons...

The M&E of policy influence is a complex and difficult process, since influence is usually long term, multi-causal and scarcely lineal. Nevertheless, the majority of organizations acknowledge the importance of knowing the impact of their influence efforts, to improve their performance and increase the organizational learning. Investing in a good M&E strategy has several advantages:

- **Accountability**: allows us to provide donors and key decision-makers with a concrete measure of the progress and achievements in comparison with results and impacts projected. Also, it can be utilized as a cost-benefit tool for decision-making regarding financing, among others.
- **Operational management support**: generates feedback for implementation of the programs and projects of the organization.
- **Strategic management support**: provides information about potential opportunities in the future and about strategies which must be adjusted.
- **Knowledge creation**: expands organization's knowledge about strategies which work, in general, under different contexts, and facilitates the development of more efficacious strategies in the future.
- **Empowerment**: increases strategic planning skills of the participants, among which there could be staff members of the program or interested others (beneficiaries among them). This increases acceptance of shared objectives and creates a more propitious environment for future activities to have greater possibilities of positive impact (Woodhill, 2007)[3].

With all of these reasons, why is M&E complex?

One of the complexities associated with the M&E process is the **tension among attribution/contribution**: a lineal correspondence among a policy brief (or another activity such as a public campaign) and a particular policy change or in the climate of public opinion is rarely found. Inasmuch as diverse significant forces exist which intervene and are interposed in any cause-effect relationship that may exist among the different actors who seek to influence policy and governmental decision-making, often it is more realistic to monitor and evaluate influence in terms of effective contributions than in terms of attribution.

The **issue of periods** during which influence can take place is also complex, since the impact is often a long term process and visibility of its results often distances itself from the initiative. Also, the fact that the **policy making process** is not lineal, but are filled with unforeseeable events, also makes the task of monitoring and evaluation complex.

3 *Alternative frameworks for Evaluation: Development of an Evaluation Philosophy for OSI- LAP*, Open Society Foundations, 2008.

Therefore, even though there is an agreement that monitoring and evaluation influence is a practice that can generate valuable institutional learning, often an organization may decide not to make the effort or does not know how to make it concrete, its usefulness, on which type of activities or products to focus in order to implement it, its scale, etc.

Some dilemmas and typical questions regarding the M&E of influence process are:

- What do we understand by monitoring and evaluation?
- What is the purpose of evaluating influence? How can it be carried out?
- What are the expectations of the organization members regarding this process?
- What is the usefulness of an M&E system?
- What type of effective methodologies do similar organizations use?
- How costly is an effort of this nature? How can it be fund?
- What human resources profile are suitable to conduct and implement this type of process?
- Is it about monitoring and evaluating the general impact of the organization, of some of its areas, or of its projects and activities?
- Will the focus be on the process or on the results?

Where to begin?

Figure 2 presents some levels and components which can be evaluated. When experience in this practice is not available, it is better to shape the effort and reflect on how far we can go the first time. In this sense, it is useful to begin with smaller projects or activities and use them as pilot tests for more complex future processes.

Figure 2. Activities and processes to monitor and evaluate

Level	Component
Project	Products
	Activities
	Strategies
Programs	Products
	Activities
	Strategies
Organization	Products
	Activities
	Strategies

Source: Weyrauch (2011).

The tables presented below are an example of the aspects and indicators which might be evaluated regarding some products and activities characteristic of influence processes.

Figure 3. Indicators for frequent products and activities

Focus of evaluation	What can be evaluated	Aspects to evaluate	Indicators (examples)
Outputs	Papers or research reports	* Quality * Clarity * Relevance * Usefulness	* Quotes in legislative sessions * Quality of feedback from external evaluators * Inquiries by policy-makers regarding their content
	Blogs/web sites	* Website browsability * Quality of content * Feedback from relevant actors	* Number and profile of visitors * Number of downloaded documents
	Seminars/events	* Level of assistance * Quality of the debate * Profile of external presenters	* Number and profile of assistants and presenters
Activities	Public policy research and analysis	* Quality * Political relevance * Usefulness	* Use by decision-makers
	Training for decision-makers and other relevant actors	* Quality * Clarity * Relevance * Usefulness	* Number and level of policy-makers
	Getting an issue on the public agenda	* Relevance * Efficacy * Efficiency	* Media coverage
	Promotion of reform in existing policies	* Level of knowledge and interest generated * Opportunity * Efficacy	* Inquiries from policy-makers involved * Quantity of support attained * Visibility
	Technical assistance for implementation of public policies	* Quality * Usefulness * Efficiency * Efficacy	* Degree and reach of policy implementation * Sustainability * Quality and level of bureaucrat participation
	Creation of new networks/ alliances	* Level and intensity of participation * Sustainability * Governance * Relevance	* Number and profile of members * Number of policy-makers who recognize the network over a total percentage of policy-makers * Number of joint actions

Source: Learners, practitioners and teachers (CIPPEC, 2010).

With this guide we conclude the way through the diverse components of a policy influence plan. We hope the road has been attractive. Now the challenge of designing and implementing a plan for your own organizations begins. Good luck!