How to design a policy influence plan?

Toolkit Nº1

What is an influence plan. Why should we plan

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

What is an influence plan?

An influence plan consists on the definition of a series of components or steps which contribute to specify and define problems, objectives, actions and necessary resources to promote change in public policies. Generally, the plan is embodied in a document which will allow to focus and prioritize time, knowledge and available resources.

Who may influence public policies?

This Toolkit series has been thought out especially, but not exclusively, for members of policy research institutes, civil society organizations, universities, public officials, researchers, communications specialists, development project coordinators, network coordinators, and others, plus members of institutions interested in influencing public policies.

Why planning? We have enough reasons...

The policy making process exists within a changing and highly volatile context. It is complex, and different players intervene, each with their own interests and motivations. Considering this complexity and the reigning chaos in the public policies area (product, among other things, of the numerous players seeking to influence it, the political environment itself, and unexpected events), **what can be accomplished by planning and what are the challenges to be faced within the process?**

Planning Usefulness	Planning Challenges
Allows for: (i) organizing actions (II) more proactive and strategic actions (III) identification of opportunities and synergies with other projects and/or organization programs.	**Organizational culture as a starting point:** every influence plan must be framed within the actual capacity of the organization which desires to influence policies. The most frequent modalities must be noted, the level and capacities of the available resources, how much it has accomplished in other situations, how it manages relationships with other stakeholders, etc. It is also key to ask oneself if know-how is available, contact with relevant players, etc. These factors will allow reflection upon the viability of the plan, or how to adapt it to the reality and existing capacities of the organization.
Ensures a degree of commitment, particularly regarding members´ times and financial resources.	**Organizational/program viability:** to formulate a plan it is **necessary to understand how viable their objectives are, as well as knowing if necessary resources are available to reach them.**
If it is developed through a participative method, it will help in the search for consensus regarding objectives, priorities, responsibilities and anticipated results.	**Flexibility, reaction and ability to adapt capacities:** it is recommended that the plan allows for a considerable margin for action, regarding freeing up human and financial resources, to allow for flexibility and to respond in a timely way to the variant context, opportunities and threats which the juncture presents, and redefine the plan´s general strategies if need be. All this without losing what is strategic and fundamental: **the plan allows for attention to the medium and long term.**
It will contribute to coordination within the organization, since it makes opportunities available to ensure consistency and coherence in communications with the different players.	It must count on directors´ consensus and support: it is important to achieve support of directors´ spheres within the organization, which will grant the plan a higher level of approval from members.
It is a valid tool for assessment of deviation costs; it is useful for decision making regarding new opportunities, and for measuring costs and benefits against the plan.	**Coordination with other organization plans and with the various programs/projects:** it is vital for the plan´s concretion of actions **to line up efforts, actions and times** of each program/project and other institution initiatives, with influence plan actions and times.
It is an instrument allowing for identification of factors facilitating or blocking goal achievement. It is a tool which can generate important institutional lessons in terms of time, resources, knowledge limitations, and establishing mechanisms to focus and prioritize actions.	**Monitor and evaluate (M&E) policy influence:** the design and effective implementation of a M&E plan of the policy influence will prevent **planned objectives from becoming a mere wish list,** for example providing information on progress, in relation to results and levels of impact projected.

Source: CIPPEC, based on Weyrauch, Vanesa and *Weaving global networks* (2006).

Assumptions must be revised before beginning

What is understood by influence?

Before beginning, it is important to achieve consensus with the working team as to what influence is. The concept utilized will direct many discussions, decisions and activities. Achieving an organizational consensus about the meaning of influence will allow for framing expectations regarding the process and results of efforts, and will contribute to mitigate conflicts when evaluating or prioritizing actions. For example, it might happen that within the institutions some members understand influence as the use of evidence on the part of policy makers, others might conceive it as a change in one policy, and others as an appearance in communications media. Each definition will imply, among other things, different decisions when taking action, communicating with other players or assessing the work.

Why influencing public policies?

Another question which must be asked by every group dealing with a design of an influence plan concerns the reasons why the organization participates in a process of design, evaluation and/or monitoring of policies. This exercise will be useful to achieve agreement regarding the objectives which will guide efforts, align actions of the various programs/projects and prevent dispersion regarding the organization´s mission when facing new initiatives. It must be **ensured that every member of the organization who adds value to the discussion is allowed to voice his/her opinion. If the exercise is more inclusive, there are wider opportunities for different members to coordinate and achieve a synergy in their future efforts.**

The basic structure of the plan

Once the meaning of influence has been defined, and progress has been made as to the reasons for wishing to influence public policies, conditions will be set to delve into the design of the plan.

Following the handbook *Weaving global networks* (2006) we present a basic structure for a policy influence plan whose stages will be addressed in greater depth in upcoming guides.

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**

To continue searching!

Reading recommendations by CIPPEC´s Civil Society Directorate to design an influence plan

- *Weaving global networks. Handbook for policy influence;* CIPPEC, 2006. Available at www.vippal.cippec.org.
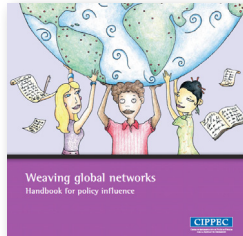
- *Advocacy toolkit. A collection of tools to help plan, implement, monitor and evaluate advocacy;* Save the Children, 2007, pages 3-12.
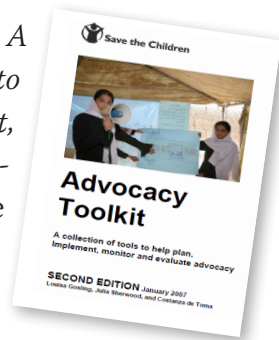
- *Strengthening World Vision Policy Advocacy. A guide to developing advocacy strategies,* Ajoy Datta, Overseas Development Insitute, page 2. Available at www.odi.org.uk.

  In Spanish:
- *Manual para la Facilitación de Procesos de Incidencia Política, (Manual enabling Policy Impact Processes)* A. Mc- Kinley and P. Baltazar, Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA) and Centre for Development and Population Activities (CEDPA) 2005, pages 19-44. Available at www.wola.org.

Next Toolkit:
The policy making process. Analyze the context for effective influence planning.

How to design a policy influence plan?

Toolkit Nº 1.
What is an influence plan. Why should we plan.

Toolkit Nº 2.
The policy making process. Analyze the context for effective influence planning.

Toolkit Nº 3.
Where are we and how far can we go. Identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges.

Toolkit Nº 4.
What we desire. Define influence objectives.

Toolkit Nº 5.
Who should we work with. Define actors and alliances.

Toolkit Nº 6.
How to generate the desired impact. Define the proposal.

Toolkit Nº 7.
How to carry out the proposal. Define strategies and actions.

Toolkit Nº 8.
How to communicate. Define the strategy and key messages.

Toolkit Nº 9.
Who, how much and when. Define resources and timeline.

Toolkit Nº 10.
What have we learned? An approximation to monitoring and evaluation of policy influence.

Other series:

How can we monitor and evaluate policy influence?

Tools for policy influence

Available at www.vippal.cippec.org

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