How to design a policy influence plan?

Toolkit Nº7

How to carry out the proposal. Define strategies and actions

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

In this Toolkit we focus on the design of one or more strategies which would allow the organization to promote commitment from other actors to its policy proposal.

Once a solid and consistent proposal has been designed, which answers previously identified policy problems, the organization must think about which are the most adequate strategies to increase support from other actors and, eventually, have it adopted as policy by decision makers.

A general strategy will serve, on the one hand, as a platform on which to decide which activities and actions to carry out and, on the other, to formulate the communication plan which we will address in **Toolkit N° 8: How to communicate. Define the strategy and key messages.**

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5	Strategies and actions
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A **strategy** is a set of activities directed towards the achievement of a concrete objective (Mc Kinley and Baltazar, 2005). It must be clearly linked to the nature of the proposal. It covers key decisions about the following aspects::

• Specific spaces and moments of participation and policy influence.

- Strengths and weaknesses of the organization.
- Opportunities and threats within the political, social, economic context.
- Relevant actors, their interests and motivations, in relation to what has been analyzed in the Stakeholder Analysis[1].
- Prioritize interaction with policy formulators or involve a wider audience.
- Resources to be allocated.

Figure 1 presents the most utilized strategies. It is possible to combine and complement these strategies (for example, according to the stage of the policy in which influence is desired, or the audience which it intends to reach); this will increase opportunities to actively detect and answer the constant changes of the political context. Nevertheless, some organizations may be restricted by available resources or knowledge when implementing different strategies; in this case, it is best to focus its efforts on one.

Figure 1. Most frequent strategies and actions for carrying out the proposal
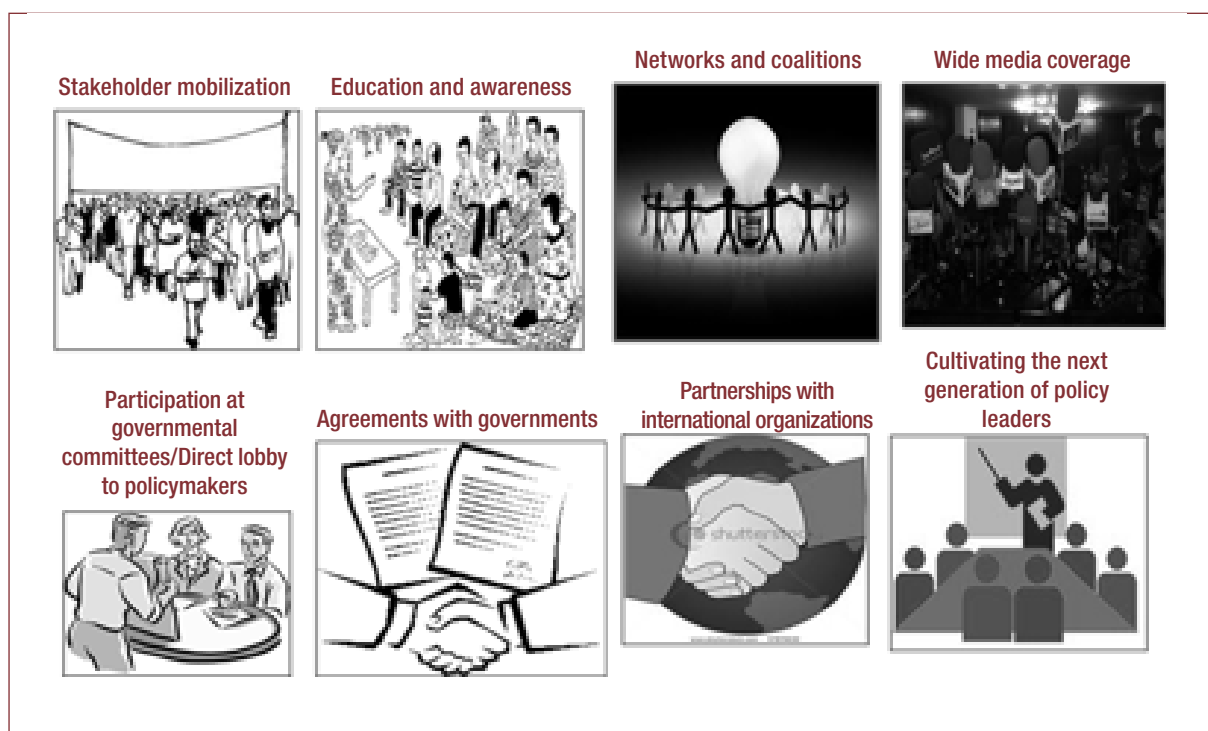
Source: CIPPEC, based on Weaving Global Networks (2006).

Below we address, in depth, certain advantages and aspects of some of the strategies mentioned, which must be taken into account.

Education and awareness

Educating and raising awareness in other social and political actors is important, in order to generate or widen their consciousness about a specific subject. Some aspects to take into account are: i) define beforehand the recipients of the initiative, ii) be strategic in the selection of content; must generate identification with the proposal, iii) maximize resources (there is more and more virtual low-cost or free media to access a wider audience), and iv) count on supportive peer assistance on the subject.

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1   For more information about the Stakeholder Analysis, see **Toolkit N° 5: Who should we work with. Define actors and alliances.**

Train policy makers and cultivate a "next generation" of political leaders

Working with, and training decision makers narrows the breach among those who research or act in the "field" and those who implement policies, since it generates working spaces and team reflection. It is a way to communicate and "teach" the available evidence to improve policies as well. Additionally, it is a good strategy for generating confidence and knowledge about the work of the organization, which upcoming leaders may access in the future. Among the aspects to consider are: i) have good knowledge of the timeframes, interests and needs of policy makers, ii) adapt the language and codes utilized in training to that of decision-makers, iii) when designing content, do not lose track of the political dimension of policy issues, so as not to appear ingenuous, iv) train leaders of different sectors –not only the public sector– in order to promote inter-sector alliances for future works, and v) with younger people, it is advantageous to explore alternative, more interactive and dynamic work formats (for example, online courses).

Coalitions, networks and alliances

Working with other actors – for an action, specific event or limited period of time (coalitions and alliances), or in a sustained manner within a timeframe (networks) – presents a series of advantages: i) synergy and cooperation boost the possibilities of achieving an influence objective, ii) it facilitates transfer and knowledge and other resource exchanges among diverse actors, iii) it generates superior strength, consciousness and political capital when positioning subjects in the political agenda, iv) it facilitates reach and sustainability of social agreements, v) it facilitates creativity and risk-taking, and vi) it is a support mechanism on various levels (education of human resources, technical assistance, contact networks, etc.).

However, some issues must be considered: i) all actors must know the fundamentals of teamwork: what values or interests bind them, ii) coalitions or alliances can be achieved with actors working in the same sector or political area, who are interested in the subject, as well as with actors who might be affected by it, iii) it is key to generate alliances with teams of decision-makers who will provide an internal view and possibilities to attain the coalition´s objective, iv) alliances and coalitions require work coordination; they can delay timeframes and consensus, thus delaying the working timeline, v) it is important that all committed actors recognize one project leader, and vi) it is important that the objectives and responsibilities of each member are clear.

Something to think about... Partners?

Owing to the work and effort involved in configurating, coordinating and sustaining an alliance, coalition or network, it is important to define in what measure partners are needed in order to carry out each change. And if they are needed, why? Will they provide knowledge, legitimacy, access to decision-makers or to financing? It is important to be clear about the fundamentals of its constitution. Finally, it is important to reflect on how alliances will be constituted (timeframes, decision-making structure, frequency of dialogue and/or meetings, etc.).

How to take advantage of Web 2.0[2]

Web 2.0 is a combination of technologies and behaviors which allow the following individuals or organizations to:

- Connect with other individuals and organizations.
- Collaborate with those individuals and organizations.
- Create and share content.
- Find, utilize and organize content.

In addition to being utilized as a resource for the communication plan, the **2.0 tools can boost the desired strategy**: social networks like Facebook and Twitter identify potential support or allies, connect with them and establish information channels; send mass e-mails to organization contacts, in order to mobilize actors; online courses on a subject to be established among the various social actors and decision makers, or virtual community debates.

Points to consider

It is important to move from online action to face-to-face actions. Online strategies promote discussions generated by the organization and increase its credibility. If these tools are not relevant to the members of the community to be reached (if they are too difficult to use or, if they require too much time for their use), then they are not the most appropriate strategies.

Each strategy implies a universe of dynamic and interactive relationships which must be maintained: when they are developed with efficacy, they allow the team to constantly re-adapt its strategy, thus achieving greater consensus. Additionally, they allow a more precise

evaluation regarding the viability of reaching the influence objective.

Once the design strategy has been selected, the working group can invite the various members of the organization to contribute with ideas to develop specific activities, analyze whether it is possible to link planned strategies with planned activities (relating to the proposal), provide innovative ideas, etc.

Later, there must be an analysis as to whether necessary resources for the working team to implement the selected strategy can be counted on (human resources, knowledge, communication tools, contacts, experience, etc). If these are not available, the possibility of acquiring them can be evaluated; or, failing that, there should be a reformulation of the selected strategy in order to execute it on the basis of available resources.

Do we need assistance to improve strategy quality?

A useful tool for strategy development is peer assistance. It is a simple process in which individuals who work on a project invite other team workers to a meeting or workshop in order to search for new knowledge or points of view. It implies learning before doing (learning process before carrying out a task, activity or project facilitated by peer assistance). That is to say, someone with experience in effective strategy development within (or outside) the organization may be found to collaborate in the formulation of the proposal.

Aside from a simple consult, peer assistance is a process which needs time, which works best if the individuals involved know and trust each other. The proposal path is tracked, the context is taken into account, and a series of questions are formulated which those being assisted must consider in order to better polish and improve their strategy.

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2   For more information: *Impact 2.0 iGuide: New mechanisms for linking research and policy*, Association for Progressive Communications (APC), 2011. Available at: http://www.apc.org

When thinking of actions, it is recommended that the following be explained in detail:

1) **Human resources:** Who within the organization will be responsible for the leadership of each activity, how much time (in weekly hours) will they dedicate to it? Is it enough? Will they need support in the communications area (if there is one)?
2) **Financial resources**: Are there funds available to support the proposed activities? Can they be obtained?
3) **Timeline:** Details of when the activities will take place.
4) **Links and contacts:** With whom will the organization work, or who will it try to commit through its activities?

When building this activities map, the working team must detect other actions which may need leadership and require an extra commitment on the part of the team, whether they will need help in other areas of the organization, or if, eventually, they will need to subcontract other resources for the detailed project. With a more complete view, the team can also detect the breach among existing resources and those necessary to implement the strategy in an integral manner.

In addition, the activities map allows the team to identify synergies or a potential lack of coordination with other members of the organization. After consulting with the members and debating with the team, they may propose, adjust or polish the proposed activities, and elaborate – as a result of this process – the draft of a working plan.

This working plan should detail the activities and available resources, and the duration of the process. These issues will be dealt with in greater detail in **Toolkit N° 9: Who, how much and when. Define resources and timelines.**

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, pages 78-80. Available at www.vippal.cippec.org.
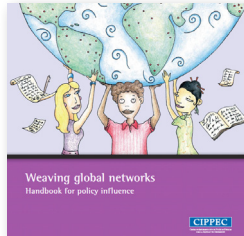
- *Impact 2.0 iGuide: New mechanisms for linking research and policy,* Association for Progressive Communications (APC), 2011. Available at: http://www.apc.org.

- *ABC of Knowledge Management,* NHS National Library for Health, (2005). Available at: www.library.nhs.uk.

- *Advocacy Matters: Helping children change their world. An International Save the Children Alliance guide to advocacy,* Save the Children, 2007, pages 116-122. Available at: www.savethechildren.org.uk.
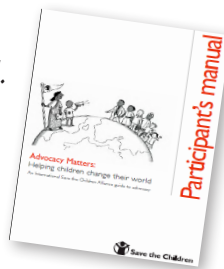
- *Do you need a coalition?,* in Continuous Progress. Better Advocay through evaluation. Available at: http://fp.continuousprogress.org.

- *Policy influence: campaigning alliances pros and cons,* Toolkits, Overseas Development Institute, 2009. Available at: www.odi.org.uk.

In Spanish:
- *Handbook for the faciliation of policy influence processes,* A. Mc- Kinley and P. Baltazar, Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA) and Centre for Development and Population Activities (CEDPA), 2005, pages 179-189. Available at www.wola.org.

Next Toolkit:
How to communicate. Define the strategy and key messages

Other guides from the series:

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

VIPPAL - Linking research and policy in Latin America