All politics are local
Evaluating city-level policy initiatives from agenda setting to impact

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Evaluating broad, complex policy initiatives is challenging. Policy and advocacy evaluations must contend with dynamic and fluid situations, which are often difficult to untangle. The policy spectrum is a concrete tool that evaluators, advocates, and foundations can use to focus their efforts and assess progress across multiple sites working to achieve common goals. This approach can:

- Provide a common language to articulate the cycle of policy activity—instead of focusing only on a policy "win."
- Underscore that progress isn't always sequential movement, it may mean looping to previous steps.
- Convey the effectiveness and impact of complex policy initiatives within generally short evaluation timeframes, particularly when local context varies dramatically.
- Balance the need for rigor and timeliness so the evaluation remains relevant and useful for real time improvement, while still capturing the longer-term impact of the policy change effort.

Case study: CityHealth Initiative

CityHealth, an initiative of the de Beaumont Foundation and Kaiser Permanente (KP), promotes a menu of 9 policies that help to improve health across the 40 largest cities in the United States. CityHealth's philosophy is that moving policy at a city-level "will help millions of people live longer, better lives in vibrant, prosperous communities". Using a policy spectrum to evaluate the initiative provides a cohesive approach that balances understanding **progress across the CityHealth national initiative with how each** city is advancing policies. CCHE is using the framework to support evaluation of the CityHealth initiative in the 13 largest cites that are served by Kaiser Permanente.

The table to the right walks thru the policy spectrum approach, using key facilitators from the Tobacco 21 policy passage in Denver as a concrete example. In Denver, KP and CityHealth staff are working together to move key policies forward in partnership with local stakeholders.

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Policy spectrum approach

Policy assessment & agenda setting
Defining the issue & agenda
- Understanding political environment
- Researching, analyzing issues
- Identifying strategies & evidence-based solutions
- Setting an agenda with key stakeholders

Policy development
Building political will
- Framing & messaging issues
- Community organizing, convening stakeholders & coalition building
- Building policymaker relationships
- Developing campaigns & outreach
- Generating visibility & public accountability

Policy adoption
Advocating & decision making
- Advocating & lobbying
- Assessing & commenting on proposed policies (publicly and behind the scenes)
- Policy maker decision making & accountability

Policy implementation
Implementing & monitoring
- Monitoring implementation via agency staff / advocates
- Continuous improvement during real world application
- Generating resources for ongoing advocacy & litigation as needed
- Advocating for appropriate funding

Policy impact
Measuring & responding
- Identifying / supporting communities & systems impacted by policy
- Measuring impact
- Identifying benefits, burdens, and unintended consequences

Evaluation methods

Methods to be leveraged in any phase to understand progress, gain various perspectives, identify contribution, elevate actionable areas of improvement, triangulate findings across data sources:

- Joint development and regular review of a living theory of change to ensure common understanding of the full spectrum, including implementation and impact. Include funder and grantee voices.
- Meaningful, tailored reporting on progress based on the theory of change. Pair with internal reflective conversations. Focus on actionable quantitative measures, stories, and examples. Document contribution (vs. attribution).
- After action debriefs that are timely, focused, and action-oriented using techniques that encourage candid communication.
- Internal / external interviews – both opportunistic (rapid cycle feedback) and planned (consistent to gauge change over time).
- Assessment of externally facing content and strategy, e.g. outreach, social media, media coverage, public testimony.

In addition to the overarching methods:
- Monitor resource appropriation & implementation guidance, in context of the regulatory environment
- Identify & leverage existing local data sources, including incorporating community voice
- Understand accountability and implementation agency culture

- Measure impact via secondary data sources
- Develop new data sources, including incorporating community voice
- Calculate projected impacts, if possible, using existing evidence
- Provide publicly visible findings

Denver examples: Key facilitators

Understanding when and how a policy could move forward required strong local relationships. As a health care organization embedded in the community, KP was in a unique position to understand local context. CityHealth raised the policy's profile locally by using their national platform.

Strong coalitions were key if voting action was required to pass a policy. In Denver, the local tobacco coalition coordinated activities including rallies, messaging, and a city council candidate survey. CityHealth provided funding for key coalition leaders. As a health care organization, KP strengthened the coalition's credibility.

A coordinated advocacy message and point person helped to expedite policy passage. CityHealth, KP and other local partners provided technical assistance to support development of a strong policy and to inform evidence-based advocacy messaging.

Monitoring and funding are often not included in policy "wins," but they were in Denver. By hiring another tobacco retail inspector and administrative support, the agency hopes to increase the number of times retailers are inspected and shorten the time for "cease and desist" orders.

Using published data and models, the evaluation projected that a Tobacco 21 policy in a city like Denver could reduce the number of 21-year-old smokers by 15%**. The evaluation could use local data, when available, to assess if intended impact occurs.