

## **Assessing Philanthropy's Role in Policy Change: A Review of the Literature**

### **Introduction**

Foundations are important actors in policy planning networks (Scott, 2014) and policy advocacy arenas (Haddad & Reckhow, 2018; Lewis, 2015; Shanks & SoRelle, 2021; Stokes, 2017). As foundations work to become more strategic actors in their grantmaking processes (Tompkins-Stange, 2016), implications for funders and their grantees (i.e., advocacy organizations) abound. In a context shaped by a polarized society that has multiple policy venues (federal, state, local) wherein various policy advocates (e.g., foundations, nonprofits, community members) campaign for different policy issues and solutions (i.e., education reform), layered on top of high levels of social and economic inequality, which can restrict access to multiple forms of capital (people, financial) needed to advance advocacy efforts, those interested in social change find themselves wrestling with how to make substantive gains to achieve advocacy impact (Flynn et al., 2017; Kernell et al., 2020; Scott et al., 2009; Walker & Oszkay, 2020). Given these realities, funders interested in social change across issue areas have become increasingly engaged with learning how to support nonprofit organizations in their quest for policy advocacy success. The findings from the review of literature included in this paper are designed to assist foundations with thinking through key aspects of the policy advocacy process.

In this review of the literature on policy advocacy and foundations' role in social change, there are several key themes that emerged. These themes are framed specifically for an audience of practitioners working in the foundation sector. First, when working in partnership with a nonprofit advocacy organization, definitions of "success" and "impact" should be defined based on the advocacy context that the grantee is operating in. By contextualizing success and impact, foundations can distribute resources in ways that are designed with the particular (the individual

advocacy nonprofit organization), not the general (all nonprofit advocacy organizations), in mind. Second, “failure” in advocacy requires a re-conceptualization, given the enormous and sometimes insurmountable challenges associated with policy advocacy in the U.S. Failure is prevalent—and should be expected—in policy advocacy efforts, but funders can develop close grantee partnerships to facilitate learning from failures to move forward and recalibrate. Third, on the road to policy goal attainment and impact, foundations should integrate and track multiple measures of success, including intermediary markers of success, that are used to evaluate an advocacy organization’s progress toward their goals. As foundations adopt multiple measures of success for grantees, this enables funders to account (at least in part) for the various organizational forms, including organizational hybrids<sup>1</sup> – those organizations engaged in service and advocacy – that are engaged in policy advocacy today. Finally, foundations (and their partners) that commission evaluations of advocacy organizations or advocacy initiatives should consider incorporating a more expansive evaluative toolkit that goes beyond traditional, quantitative methods of assessing advocacy projects (i.e., field experiments) toward the inclusion of qualitative methods of evaluation. Because linear evaluation efforts are not well suited to evaluating policy advocacy, findings generated from linear evaluative techniques could mislead stakeholders. Therefore, adopting a more expansive evaluative toolkit enables commissioners of evaluation (funders) to develop a more holistic view of the advocacy organization, its leaders, and its impacts in the advocacy arena.

---

<sup>1</sup> Organizational hybridity is a concept that applies both to nonprofit grantees and funders. For example, nonprofit organizations may be considered hybrids if they engage in both direct service delivery and advocacy activities. Organizational hybrids at the nonprofit level may require distinctive evaluative frames given their differences in timeframes, capacity, and ability to exert influence on decisionmakers (Parrish, 2008). Similarly, foundations that may be considered engaging in organizational hybridity may incorporate traditional grantmaking organizations in the form of a 501(c)(3) and 501(c)(4) which allow for greater involvement in political affairs, including elections. (Beaton et al., 2020; Groundswell Action Fund, 2021).

According to metrics compiled by the Foundation Center and GuideStar (2020), there are 119,791 total foundations operating in the United States today. These foundations hold more than 1.2 trillion dollars in assets and give to issues ranging from health, arts and culture, and to education. Notably, 41 percent of foundation giving is aimed towards program development. Policy, advocacy, and systems reform strategies account for 10 percent of foundation funding (Foundation Center, 2020). While funding for policy, advocacy, and systems reform falls just short of funding for general support (20 percent) and funding for research and evaluation (15 percent), policy advocacy organizations and their initiatives remain a top 5 area of foundation giving. As I discuss below, funding allocated toward general support and research can also be used in the policy advocacy process. Thus, understanding how foundations can leverage their vast resources to both support and assess advocacy nonprofits remains an important point of inquiry. Through a review of the policy advocacy literatures, this paper synthesizes themes found in academic articles, popular press material, foundation reports, practitioner briefs, and other relevant sources.

To discuss these topics, this paper begins with a brief discussion of the methods deployed in this paper, including the research questions motivating the project, how sources were selected for inclusion in the literature review, and how these documents were analyzed. Then, I describe how the literature defines key terms such as success, impact, and policy goals. In addition, considerations for policy advocacy failure are explored along with a discussion of alternative framings for policy advocacy failure that funders can use to engage in continuous improvement. Next, given the political context in which policy advocacy occurs, a context that can make achieving policy goals and impact arduous and lengthy, I explore how foundations can identify intermediary markers of success along the pathway to policy advocacy implementation. These

additional markers of success include both quantitative and qualitative indicators that, when incorporated, assist funders seeking to explore multiple measures of success when determining success and impact. Then, I discuss some methodological tools funders can consider as they evaluate nonprofit organizations' advocacy projects and as funders assess their own grantmaking strategies. Finally, I conclude with a discussion on the implications of these findings for foundations, other stakeholders, and future research agendas.

## Methods

### *Research Questions*

As discussed above, across the education sector, foundations are interested in learning how to better support grant recipients in their quest for policy change and impact. Support for grantees involved in policy advocacy is multifaceted, including financial resources that are given, personnel that are allocated to expand capacity, informal and formal guidance that is given to shape policy initiatives, and the creation of communities that grant recipients join to aid them in their quest for social change (Bettis & Pepin, 2019). Given the various provisions offered to nonprofit grantees, funders operating in policy advocacy want to ensure that their resources are distributed in return for social, policy, and political outcomes that align with their priorities (Teles & Schmitt, 2011).

Motivated by these concerns, this literature review investigates the following research questions:

1. How does the literature define success and impact in *policy advocacy*? What are key points of success and impact for stakeholders *throughout the grant cycle/partnership*? What are notable examples of failure in policy advocacy and how/why were these cases defined as failures?
2. What are some examples of quantitative and qualitative indicators of success in policy advocacy used by grantees and funders? What are the strengths and weaknesses of these indicators? How do measures of success, failure, and impact differ *throughout the term of*

*the partnership*, across investment sectors, types of nonprofit organizations, or types of funded projects?

3. What methods for evaluating grantee/funder impact in advocacy and policy change does the literature offer sector stakeholders and how does the literature identify the utility of such methods? Does the utility of an evaluative framework vary and, if so, how?

Importantly, the audience for this review of literature is foundations. While much of the findings and discussion includes important themes for a variety of stakeholders (including external commissioners of evaluation, nonprofit grantee leaders and staff, nonprofit board members, and those community members directly impacted by policy advocacy initiatives), the focus is on funders and their staff members. In the concluding sections of the paper, I provide some insight on how other audiences might examine the contents of this paper considering their positions in the policy advocacy field.

#### *Item Selection and Analysis*

This paper is a synthesis of the literature on philanthropic foundations and their role in policy change. The paper draws from several data sources that were chosen in collaboration with the funder and the project's advisor and was done so iteratively as the paper developed. Moreover, sources that span disciplinary and issue boundaries were included, including those that explore K-12 education, higher education, marriage equality, nonprofit management and organization, and topics in the business and entrepreneurship domains. First are pieces of academic scholarship on the role of philanthropic foundations and elite actors in policy advocacy (e.g., see Reckhow, 2013). Practitioner-based writings were also selected and include contributions from funders and specialists in evaluating nonprofit policy advocacy projects (e.g., Coffman & Reed, 2009). Additionally, a third source of literature includes items from public media outlets (e.g., see Daniel, 2019). Together, the selected source material achieves wide coverage (Boote & Beile, 2005) in the field of policy advocacy and the role of foundations in

achieving policy change. Nevertheless, the synthesis of literature included in this paper is not designed to be fully comprehensive. As Montouri (2005) argues of literature reviews: "The review cannot be exhaustive: It is a map of the terrain not the terrain itself" (p. 377). However, the contents of the paper are selected to emphasize key themes that emerged in my reading of select sources and can help to guide further exploration and future interrogation of the key themes in policy advocacy presented here.

Once readings were identified, each resource was examined using document analysis and content analysis methodologies (Bowen, 2009). Document analysis is a research process that "yields data...that is then organized into major themes, categories, and case examples specifically through content analysis" (Bowen, 2009, p. 28). Once documents are identified – through the collaborative and iterative process discussed above – they must then be examined to produce "meaningful and relevant passages of text..." that are coded by theme (Bowen, 2009, p. 32). The themes included in this paper were chosen based on the funders' interests as expressed in the research questions.

### **Key Definitions**

#### *Defining Policy Goals, Policy Impact, and Success*

Philanthropic foundations that support policy advocacy-oriented grantee organizations are interested in social change (Teles & Schmitt, 2011). The journey toward policy change is arduous with several challenges erected at various levels of the policy advocacy process (Gonzalez, 2014; Walker & Oszkay, 2020). These challenges include advocating in policy venues at the federal, state, and local levels with a variety of decisionmakers, including the federal judiciary (Scott et al., 2009). Indeed, politicians and legislative authorities are not the sole audience for policy advocates; conversely, actors engaged in advocacy for social change engage

a wide variety of decisionmakers, including politicians, regulatory authorities, and non-governmental personnel with high degrees of influence in a policy domain (Stokes, 2017; Teles & Schmitt, 2011). Additionally, because foundations fund a variety of issue-based nonprofit organizations (Foundation Center, 2020), the kinds of policy-advocacy tools that are deployed can vary across organizations. This includes those organizations that are engaged in direct organizing and field-building (Daniel, 2019; Lewis, 2015;) and those organizations that use research to advance policy change and system reform (Haddad & Reckhow, 2018; Scott et al., 2017); McClure et al., 2017). For example, on research use in policy advocacy, McClure and colleagues (2017) note the following:

Philanthropists and foundations financially support think tanks, interest groups, and nonprofit organizations that align with their...reform agenda. These think tanks often produce fact sheets and opinion articles that are communicated through various media...research by Reckhow and Tompkins-Stange (2015) found that 60% of the experts testifying in front of Congress about education policy reform in 2011 received funding from two foundations, the Gates Foundation and/or Broad Foundation. (p. 7)

Given this advocacy topography, foundations are tasked with defining success for the policy advocacy initiatives they and their grantees pursue. According to Krekoski (2009), success in policy advocacy can simply be defined as “a favorable policy outcome” (p. 7) that advocates achieve during the advocacy journey. While I explore outcomes in greater detail below, it is helpful to note here that outcomes vary depending on the context in which the advocacy takes place, the issue(s) pursued, and the actor(s) responsible for carrying out the advocacy project. For example, advocacy projects designed to reform K-12 education policy at the state level may see a governor's adoption of a reform proposal as evidence of reaching an outcome successfully

(Gonzalez, 2014). Or, advocates that want to see nationwide reform to a wide variety of issues may see “helpful legislation passed or unhelpful laws averted” (National Council of Nonprofits, n.d.) as evidence of success. Of particular importance is the note for foundations to remain flexible when defining success and to do so in close collaboration with their nonprofit partners.

Similarly, Parrish (2008) sees advocacy success as distinct from advocacy impact.

Whereas the concept of success may apply to a variety of functions and processes in the lifespan of the advocacy activity, impact is the broad change one wants to achieve in society as a result of the policy advocacy effort. Coffman (2009) helps to elucidate this distinction further by noting that policy impacts “are the big changes and benefits sought for people, services, or systems as a result of policy change or policy goals” (p. 6). According to Coffman’s (2009) perspective, “policy goals are what the advocacy strategy ultimately is trying to achieve in the policy arena” (p. 6). For example, a policy goal may be the adoption of a federal regulation by the U.S. Department of Education (or other federal agencies) that includes incentives for states (e.g., financial grants) aimed at eliminating segregation in K-12 schools (Scott, 2017). Once the goal is achieved, over time, the policy impact will be that the financial incentives provided by the federal government will have enabled states to “create racially diverse and equitable schools” and that school choice policies nationwide become aligned with the country’s longstanding civil rights aspirations (Scott et al., 2020, p. 4). Success, then, can be measured across the policy advocacy continuum, including noting when success happens at the policy goal and policy impact stages of advocacy.

Importantly, assigning attribution of policy advocacy success can be difficult to achieve. Indeed, Hopkins (2021) notes that assigning direct links to policy impacts is laborious given the “multitude of factors that contribute in different ways and at different times” (p. 3). For

foundations, determining whether or not a nonprofit grant recipient was successful in achieving a policy goal or policy impact can be difficult to do. However, it is not impossible if the methods employed to determine contribution reflect the complexity of policy issue, its advocacy context, and the actors involved at all stages of the advocacy process. Special attention to a nonprofit organization's theory of change and how evidence is gathered iteratively and in multiple forms become particularly important with analyzing a nonprofit's contribution to the various dimensions of policy advocacy success (Hopkins, 2021).

### *Conceptualizing Failure in Policy Advocacy*

The context in which policy advocacy takes place is filled with potential roadblocks that can obstruct an advocacy organization's efforts in advocating for policy change. Navigating between policy venues at different levels of government with a multitude of decisionmakers requires organizations to stay flexible and nimble so that they can respond to contextual shifts that may impede (or accelerate) opportunities to achieve policy advocacy goals. As Robson et al. (2020) observe, organizations that are "nimble" in their respective policy domain(s) may show great promise for foundations engaged in supporting policy advocacy, because "...while [the organization may] have clear policy priorities and aligned agendas, they're able to pivot if and when policy windows open up" (p. 13). While the conditions that support organizational dexterity may be beyond the scope of this paper, it is important to note that such a characteristic may assist organizations in avoiding policy advocacy failure in their quest for policy change.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> Assessing an organization's agility and ability to pivot given conditions that evolve in the policy advocacy journey may be determined as a foundation is building a relationship with a grantee. Research into the system ("system mapping") in which the grantee is operating and aligning that research with a close and careful consideration of the nonprofit's capacity given that system review, may be one way in which foundations can determine a grantee's ability to adjust or course correct to avoid "failure" or address roadblocks that emerge (see Coffman & Reed, 2009).

In policy advocacy, failure can be defined as the inability to achieve a policy goal (Teles & Schmitt, 2011). Failure can happen at different levels, including the organizational level (Bettis & Pepin, 2019) and at the policy advocacy level (Parrish, 2008). Organizationally, nonprofit grantees may lack the necessary funding, governance, culture, or leadership structures that ensure organizational health and sustainability, according to Bettis and Pepin (2019). At the policy advocacy level, when a grantee does not achieve their policy goals, this, too, can lead foundations and evaluators to label advocacy efforts as unsuccessful. For example, Tompkins-Stange (2018) describes the investments of the Gates Foundation in their small schools initiative and their common standards movement. Taking the small schools movement example as an illustrative case, the foundation sought to transform education by eliminating large schools that produced sizeable numbers of students that did not advance to degree completion. Instead, smaller schools, it was believed, would educate students better than their traditional, comprehensive school counterparts. Opponents balked at the movement to create small schools, noting that the "Gates-funded 'small schools' movement" was opposed by some local community members "because it was based on an unproven assumption that more 'options' would foster system-wide competition and ultimately improve school quality" (Trujillo et al., 2014, p. 908). The Gates Foundation would ultimately give more than 1.3 billion dollars to 2600 schools across the U.S. Despite such large investments, assessments showed minimal or null effects in text scores and some small schools performed lower than their larger, comprehensive high school peers (Tompkins-Stange, 2018). The result was the foundation withdrawing support suddenly, leaving some school leaders and community members isolated and many nonprofit grantees, including some that restructured their organizations to align with the Gates Foundation's funding priorities, in a financially precarious position.

Because the Gates Foundation saw that their stated policy goals and policy impacts were not achieved, it may be easy to see such outcomes as failures. Indeed, leaving directly impacted communities disempowered and distrustful of outside influence does not help the foundation in its efforts to achieve policy change. Nevertheless, advocates of learning from investments that do not produce sustainable policy change offer a different frame. Citing Peter Frumkin, Tompkins-Stange (2018) raises the concept of “constructive failure,” wherein “...failure is justified by the knowledge it creates” (p. 123). When a foundation invests in a grantee or policy advocacy initiative that does not achieve its goals, such outcomes are opportunities for the foundation to engage in continuous improvement around its grantmaking structures and supports that it provides for grant recipients. When the Civil Marriage Collaborative – a network of grantmakers collaborating to achieve marriage equality in the United States – experienced setbacks in the form of increasing opposition that led to several state ballot initiatives to ban same-sex marriage, the collaborative embraced the concept of “losing forward.” Losing forward enabled the collaborative to learn from advocacy setbacks and to use these learnings to improve strategies, both among the grantmakers and the among their grantees (Lewis, 2015). Further, Teles & Schmitt (2011) suggest the following on failure:

Even failure to achieve an identified goal can leave energy and momentum to achieve the goal in other ways. The massive push for the Equal Rights Amendment, for example, fell short in its constitutional goals but led to change through the courts that realized much of its larger ambitions. (p. 42)

By “failing” to achieve policy advocacy success using one advocacy form, foundations and their grantee partners can identify newer forms that may yield success in policy goal attainment.

Vucic (2019) concurs, adding that advocacy failure can occur and such outcomes can be used to

“...better understand [the] audience, decisionmakers, and/or the environment [one is] advocating in.” This knowledge can then be used to assemble new plans for advocacy that adapt to the changing landscape of policy advocacy. In the case of the Gates Foundation's small school initiative, several learnings were suggested by Tompkins-Stange (2018), including incorporating a giving frame that accounts for the role of structural racism and poverty, and also to engage with communities by building relationships and offering opportunities for democratic deliberation. These are important lessons that foundations can learn from and incorporate organizationally to inform continuous improvement processes.

### *Failure in Building Relationships*

One key component of mitigating failure in policy advocacy is building authentic relationships. For foundations, this means ensuring that strong relationships are built between the foundation and its nonprofit partners and the communities that will be directly impacted by a policy advocacy initiative. Bettis and Pepin (2019) offer some insight here, noting that, in their study of more than 30 funders, nonprofit leaders and staff, and nonprofit board members, building trusted partnerships was a key takeaway in fostering support for grant recipients. This process involved investing time and resources in ongoing communication during the grant cycle along with sharing with nonprofits new knowledge that the foundation attains when examining policy advocacy activities across all portfolios. By going beyond financial statements (annual reports and financial reports) to determine success and adequacy, foundations open the door to deeper engagement with their nonprofit partners. Policy advocacy and its links to the centrality of relationship building between issue stakeholders and local communities was a key theme that emerged across sources reviewed for this paper (Bettis & Pepin, 2014; Coffman, 2009; Gonzalez, 2014; Parrish, 2008; Tompkins-Stange, 2018). As Foxworthy & Bugg-Levine (2020)

warn, with little connection to the communities invested in by most foundations, “philanthropy risks being out of touch with the people working on the ground to build movements for change.” The necessary relationships to build depend highly on the context in which advocacy is taking place and will vary from one issue to another. Nevertheless, the ability to engage meaningfully and as equal partners (Scott, 2013) in the policy change effort becomes a central tenet of averting various aspects of advocacy failure.

Various dimensions of “failure” among nonprofit organizations seeking to pursue social change may be more common than is preferred. Nevertheless, with the right organizational approach, foundations can take moments when a policy goal or impact is not successfully achieved to engage in continuous improvement processes. Such improvements and learnings can be shared with peer foundations and nonprofit organizations to assist them in developing their own advocacy strategies. When the lines of communication are open, this enables a deeper form of partnership to be attained. While strong relationships alone do not guarantee policy advocacy success, sources reviewed for this paper suggest that the benefits of engaging stakeholders (nonprofit leaders and staff, local communities, and those likely to be directly impacted) as equal partners outweigh the potential costs (time) and can help define advocacy success and impact.

### **Markers of Success**

#### *Prioritizing Multiple Measures of Success*

Foundations that support nonprofits engaged in policy advocacy want to be sure that the investment of financial (and other) resources can be leveraged to achieve a social or political outcome. To ensure that a foundation's resources are invested effectively, funders must account for the full range of success indicators that are available to nonprofits engaged in advocacy work. This includes going beyond determining if a policy goal was enacted. Adopting an investment

and evaluation framework that considers multiple measures of success in the policy advocacy pipeline ensures that nonprofit organizations are evaluated fairly, given the constraints placed on them from the advocacy terrain. As Parrish (2008) alerts: "Just because a grantee doesn't win a policy victory doesn't mean that they've been defeated or unsuccessful" (p. 3).

Table one includes indicators of success that may be of interest to philanthropic foundations. Importantly, the identification of multiple indicators of success is a process that, first, occurs in deep collaboration with the nonprofit organization and, second, varies depending on the advocacy context and the issue pursued.

Table 2 includes both qualitative and quantitative indicators of success. Of particular note are the number and quality of relationships that a nonprofit may build with key stakeholders. Quality may be measured by examining how advocates move stakeholders from being unengaged, to developing their awareness of the policy issue, to creating an ally that is willing to take action when prompted, to progressing stakeholders to the role of a champion that works in support of the advocacy issue without being asked. These indications of quality become important markers or stages to building relationships with key players in the advocacy terrain (Parrish, 2008).

Selecting indicators of success is an involved process and necessarily so. Nonprofit organizations that are involved in policy advocacy will be evaluated and assessed against these indicators and these evaluations can have profound influence on a nonprofit's position in the organizational field, including their ability to attract future funders (Coffman, 2009). Thus, there are several considerations that should be incorporated when determining which markers of success are important to track.

**Table 1: What are multiple measures of success and how do funders identify them?<sup>3</sup>**

Multiple Measures of Success		
Qualitative Indicators of Success	Quantitative Indicators of Success	Sources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number and quality of relationships built with key stakeholders</li> <li>• Outreach conducted in directly impacted communities</li> <li>• Type of communications held with decisionmakers</li> <li>• Number and quality of expert testimony given</li> <li>• Quality of life changes occurring for targeted populations</li> <li>• Personal growth of nonprofit leaders (e.g., skills gained, expertise acquired)</li> <li>• Advocates influence on key policy audiences (e.g., policymakers, the media, voters change rhetoric)</li> <li>• Strength of coalition networks built and the extent of network activity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Passing state ballot initiatives</li> <li>• Passing incremental legislation</li> <li>• Gaining targeted number of co-sponsors (legislators, regulators, decisionmakers)</li> <li>• Number and quality of compelling research produced and disseminated</li> <li>• Number of opposing laws and regulations blocked or averted</li> <li>• New donors accrued and types of donors gained (individual, foundation, corporate, etc.)</li> <li>• Number of champions recruited for the policy issue(s)</li> </ul>	<p>Bugg-Levine, 2019; Coffman, 2009; Haddad &amp; Reckhow, 2018; Lewis, 2015; National Council of Nonprofits, n.d.; Parrish, 2008; Robson et al., 2020; Save the Children, n.d.; Scott et al., 2017; Shanks &amp; SoRelle, 2021; Stachowiak, 2007; Teles &amp; Schmitt, 2011; and Tompkins-Stange, 2018.</p>
<p>Multiple indicators of success are identified through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In-depth conversations with nonprofit grant leaders and staff</li> <li>• A thoughtful consideration of the advocacy terrain, including the geographical context, the political context, or the timeframe in which the issue is advanced</li> <li>• Relationship and trust building between funders, advocates, and the communities that will be directly impacted by policy advocacy</li> </ul>		

<sup>3</sup> The items listed in this chart are necessarily incomplete. The multiple measures of success for a policy advocacy project will vary depending on a range of factors, including the political conditions, the communities served and impacted, and the specific policy issues. Further, “qualitative” and “quantitative” category labels may also have its limitations; there are qualitative dimensions to some quantitative indicators and vice versa. Foundations alongside their partners should apply an analytical lens to determine which indicators are right to track and evaluate.

*Organizational Hybridity and Advocacy Success*

Both foundations and the nonprofits with whom funders partner may operate with and through hybrid organizational forms to achieve policy advocacy outcomes (Beaton et al., 2020; Groundswell Action Fund, 2021; Parrish, 2008; Reckhow, 2020; Suárez, 2020). For nonprofits, Parrish (2008) notes that there are different types of nonprofit (grantee) organizational forms, including those that are pure service, pure advocacy, and service/advocacy hybrids. Importantly, depending on the organizational form, there are conditions that impact how and when nonprofits are evaluated which includes considerations for activity timeframes and organizational capacity. Beaton and colleagues (2020) define hybrids as organizations that are involved in both service-oriented and advocacy-oriented activities. Through a survey analysis of Massachusetts-based nonprofits, they find that nonprofits engaged in service-advocacy hybridity navigate institutional logics that inform how the nonprofits pursue their goals (Beaton et al., 2020).

Institutional logics are the systems of beliefs that exist in an organization field (Haddad & Reckhow, 2018) that “lead an organization to operate in a specific domain, pursue distinct objectives, and engage in particular activities or functions that stem from that logic” (Beaton et al., 2020, p. 374) and these logics can dictate which markers of success a foundation identifies as key to determining success and failure. A service logic, for example, “leads nonprofits to pursue services that augment the public good” (p. 373) and can, in some cases, lead nonprofits to “...supplement [the] government provision of public services” (p. 374). Alternatively, according to Beaton et al. (2020), a political advocacy logic legitimizes the use of lobbying, coalition building, and constituent mobilization in order to “pursue efforts that enhance democracy...” (p. 373); policy logics include these distinct objectives and markers of success. When nonprofit organizations adopt both service- and political logics, deciding which markers of success to

inform policy advocacy success can present several hurdles. First, nonprofits may rely on external organizations to engage in their direct advocacy activities due to personnel capacity challenges. Additionally, because nonprofits operate in a resource-dependent field, those organizations that identify government funding as important to their operations may avoid advocacy strategies that directly involve political activity. Thus, foundations must work in collaboration with nonprofits to determine which logic (or set of logics) nonprofit grantees are operating with as they can greatly expand or constrict the kinds of activities incorporated in the policy advocacy plan.

Funders, too, may adopt multiple organizational forms – hybrids – to achieve policy goals. Indeed, after the Tax Reform Act of 1969 was passed, restrictions on political involvement placed on foundations operating under 501(c)(3) classifications became the new reality (Roelofs, 2003; Shanks & SoRelle, 2021). For example, Reckhow (2020) reports that 501(c)(3) organizations – a legal designation that includes public charities and private foundations (Foundation Center, 2020) – join forces with 501(c)(4) organizations and political action committees by sharing boards, finances, and policy advocacy agendas. These linkages “...create abundant opportunities for wealthy individuals to distribute funds through multiple channels in attempts to influence the political agenda” (Reckhow, 2020, p. 211). Because of the Internal Revenue Service's lack of enforcement mechanisms over the organizational field (Walker & Oszkay, 2020), it can be difficult to track how money is flowing and to what end. Nevertheless, funders incorporate these hybrid linkages to achieve policy success.

For example, Mark Zuckerberg and Priscilla Chan have both the Chan Zuckerberg Foundation (a 501(c)(3) organization) and the Chan Zuckerberg Advocacy (a 501(c)(4) organization) that “acts as the public policy advocacy fund for the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative”

(Ballotpedia, 2021). These organizations work in tandem with the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative, a limited liability company (LLC), and administer grants for education, criminal justice, and science issues. The Walton Family, which through the Walton Family Foundation has given investments to education reform initiatives that support charter school development and growth nationwide (Reckhow, 2013), also created the Walton Education Coalition (a 501(c)(4) organization). The Walton Family Foundation, on one hand, supports charter schools and expansion, while on the other hand, the Walton Education Coalition involves itself when issues of charter expansion emerge in political contests (Reckhow, 2020). Funders are explicit about the need and utility of adopting hybrid forms to achieve their policy goals. The Groundswell organization, co-founded by Vanessa Daniel to invest in women of color-led nonprofits and initiatives, includes both the Groundswell Fund<sup>4</sup> (a 501(c)(3) organization) and the Groundswell Action Fund (a 501(c)(4) organization). On the latter’s website, a link to donate is accompanied with a heading that reads in part: “Unlike a 501(c)(3), 501(c)(4) organizations can resource electoral and political organizing work that’s needed to build grassroots power to hold politicians and decision makers accountable” (Groundswell Action Fund, 2021). The multiple organizational forms funders adopt enable them to stretch their influence in the policy advocacy arena.

These examples show the degree to which organizational hybridity has become a major factor in the philanthropic landscape, specifically leveraged to achieve policy outcomes. While the multiple organizational forms among foundations – given the lack of enforcement mechanisms – require further attention and reflection, foundations can assess how grantees are

---

<sup>4</sup> The Groundswell Fund “strengthens U.S. movements for reproductive and social justice by resourcing intersectional grassroots organizing and centering the leadership of women of color – particularly those who are Black, Indigenous, and Transgender.” The organization does this through grantmaking and other initiatives.

leveraging the various funding sources that are available in their respective fields to achieve advocacy goals.

### *Grassroots Organizations and Indicators of Success*

A recurring theme across several sources included in this review is the importance of grassroots organizations and their role in policy advocacy and social change (Francis, 2014; Gilmore, 2016; Lewis, 2015; Stokes, 2017; Scott et al., 2009; Teles & Schmitt, 2011; Tompkins-Stange, 2018; Walker & Oszkay, 2020). For example, grassroots nonprofits can serve (at least in part) to generate and sustain support at the community level for policy initiatives leading to advocacy success. For foundations interested in social change, grassroots grantees, then, become important partners in the policy advocacy process, depending on the issue being pursued and the nature of the relationship between the grassroots organization and the funder.

Historically, grassroots movements have played pivotal roles in creating and sustaining social change. For example, Francis (2014) outlines the central role that “bottom-up change from organized citizens on the ground” (p. 7) have played in helping to shape American political development. In their analysis, Francis retells the history of a prominent social movement organization, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), that “through a campaign against racial violence from 1909 to 1923, the NAACP was able to impact the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of the federal government in a way that America had never witnessed from a civil rights organization” (p. 25). These impacts included campaigns that sounded the alarm on the acts of violence and the political repression Black people faced, campaigns that brought more people into the movement toward collective action. Additionally, in education in the twenty-first century, Scott et al. (2009) report that parents and community-based organizations actively protested mayoral control of schools in New York City under

Mayor Bloomberg and Chancellor Klein. On the marriage equality front, grantmakers in the Civil Marriage Collaborative noted the centrality of building a broad and diverse grassroots operation in their successful advocacy efforts to achieve marriage equality, an operation that was structured alongside litigation, public education, and research activities (Lewis, 2015). Advocacy successes included the adoption of ballot initiatives in places like Maine, Maryland, and Washington that endorsed marriage equality; the end of enforcement of the Defense of Marriage Act; and Supreme Court rulings, including the 2015 decision that “denying same-sex couples the freedom to marry violates the U.S. Constitution” (Lewis, 2015, p. 16). Ordinary citizens operating through grassroots mobilization, supported by philanthropic donors, played crucial roles in the grassroots campaign.

While evidence of philanthropic foundations utilizing grassroots organizations to achieve positive policy change has been observed, foundations' involvement with grassroots nonprofits also comes with a warning about their usage of and control over grassroots organizations. For example, wealthy donors have been linked to astroturf organizations. In this form, wealthy donors sponsor nonprofits and fund their activities (e.g., paid protesters) under the guise of authentic, community driven advocacy. Astroturf organizations are characterized by “efforts by the sponsor to distance itself from...political activities by masquerading the nonprofit as an independent effort...” (Walker & Oszkay, 2020, p. 514). These organizations (e.g., Families for Excellent Schools, Students First, Educators4Excellence, or Students for Education Reform) stand as opponents to those “grassroots groups that are run by educators, parents, or students” (Anderson & Cohen, 2018, p. 137) working to enact policy change.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, evidence suggests that nonprofit organizations, given their resource dependence, can be susceptible to

---

<sup>5</sup> See Anderson and Cohen (2018) pp. 137 – 138 for examples and further explanations.

interference from philanthropic foundations and donors (Francis, 2019; Kohl-Arenas & Francis, 2020). The concept of movement capture, defined as "...the process by which private funders leverage their financial resources to apply pressure and influence the decision-making process of civil rights organizations" (Francis, 2019, p. 278), is helpful in demonstrating how philanthropic foundations and other donors can encourage nonprofit leaders to alter their missions, visions, and activities to align a funder's priorities, given their enormous influence. Kohl-Arenas and Francis (2020) further develop this concept and add that, "According to this capture framework, funders are self-interested actors that can exploit their elevated financial position by linking provision of funds to the pursuit of new goals or by shifting the salience of existing agenda issues. This moderating role," the authors argue, "does not come to funders by accident, but is rather a central philanthropic tenet." Robson et al. (2020) draw alarm to similar occurrences, noting advocacy projects and organizations must be "careful to ensure that [sponsored] projects are mission-aligned...since philanthropic funding can create strong incentives to take on work that can distract from an organization's key goals and priorities" (p. 86). Returning to the NAACP, we can see how this capture framework may unfold.

After the NAACP's founding in 1909, among the first priorities for the organization was to eradicate lynchings that occurred throughout the country. "From the viewpoint of the NAACP," Francis (2019) writes, "before the organization could appropriately address other problematic areas of civil rights such as voting, labor, and housing, it was necessary to focus on ending lynching (p. 276) and mob violence so that African Americans could live and enjoy the benefits of their struggle" (p. 277). However, the Garland Fund used its financial resources to shift the organization's agenda from racial violence work to education. By 1925, sixteen years after its founding, the NAACP was in need of additional financial resources. It was during this

time of limited funding capacity that the Garland Fund “tied the biggest donation the NAACP had ever received” (p. 279) to a shift in the NAACP’s policy agenda toward education. While this example emerges from the twentieth century, contemporary examples abound, including the Gates Foundation’s small school initiative which encouraged resource-dependent education nonprofit leaders to adjust their missions and organizational activities to position themselves favorably for grants only to have the Foundation withdraw its support for the initiative abruptly (Tompkins-Stange, 2018).

To reiterate, the point in explicating the concept of movement capture is to note the important role that foundations can have in effecting the activities, goals, and outcomes of nonprofit grantees that are engaged in policy advocacy. This influence, built into the relationship between foundation and recipient, can have coercive consequences that require nonprofits to align themselves with a funder in ways that compromise their organizational integrity and independence. This influence, if not checked, can impact which measures of success are identified, how grantees are evaluated, and how sustainable nonprofit grantees may be in the future. Further, the policy goals initially pursued may also suffer failure as nonprofits shift their focus elsewhere to stay viable for grants in a resource-dependent field. How, then, do foundations avoid this coercive influence? This paper does not propose to share all of the strategies, but it is important to offer a few. First, foundations must see nonprofit organizations as equal partners (Scott, 2013) and expand funding pools to include a more diverse array of nonprofit organizations. This includes all nonprofits, including those led by people of color. Indeed, evidence suggests that “grassroots organizations headed by people of color [are viewed as] inherently risky. Despite their critical role leading social movements, women of color face especially significant barriers to funding” (Foxworthy & Bugg-Levine, 2020). Indeed, Daniel

(2019) notes that, in 2016, just 0.6 percent of foundation giving was targeted to Black and Indigenous Women of Color. Further, citing Echoing Green and the Bridgespan Group, sector stakeholders observe that early-stage white-led organizations raised \$20 million more than early-stage Black-led organizations (Foxworthy & Bugg-Levine, 2020). Moreover, practitioners note that Black-led organizations have average revenues that are 24 percent smaller than those of their white counterparts and that the unrestricted assets of Black-led organizations are 76 percent smaller than those of white organizations (Dorsey et al., 2020). Thus, funding nonprofits as equal partners, with an exacting focus on funding those leaders and communities that are directly impacted by social change agendas, is imperative.

Second, foundations must build trusting relationships with grant recipients. This requires going beyond merely providing funding, but rather seeking to build rapport and authentic connections, efforts that take time (Dorsey et al., 2020). Because the deep partnerships require time, foundations supporting grassroots organizations should understand that policy advocacy operates in decadal time scales and, therefore, requires long-term funding commitments that go beyond single year grants (Stokes, 2017). Finally, to establish oneself as an honest broker that can build confidence in the communities served by a foundation's grants, funders must be aware of efforts to support reformist<sup>6</sup> organizations whose missions and advocacy activities may contradict the more transformative aims of the populations served by a policy advocacy effort (Kohl-Arenas & Francis, 2020). These are just a few of the actionable steps that foundations can take to support grassroots organizations as equal partners.

---

<sup>6</sup> For example, Kohl-Arenas & Francis (2020) question whether "a majority of funds and programs support reformist or palliative programs..." that do not upend the status quo. When foundations are engaged in justice work, for example, the authors raise concern that big philanthropy has tended to support efforts aimed at reform instead of those organizations focused on abolition.

Foundations interested in policy advocacy goals and impact must adopt multiple measures of success and must do so jointly in full partnership with grantees. Doing so enables the funder to track the full range of activities a nonprofit may pursue, not just the final goal – goals that often may not be achieved due to the evolving political and advocacy environment. When supporting nonprofit organizations, funders should inform themselves about the organizational structures of the nonprofits, noting which logics the organization may be operating under as logics can either expand or restrict organizational activities and, thus, impact the policy goals and the intermediary markers of success that are on the pathway to goal attainment. Grassroots organizations appear to be central in achieving success in policy advocacy initiatives for social change, depending on the issue context. Nevertheless, while grassroots advocacy can be a key feature of an advocacy project, funders must be aware of the influence they wield over these (and other) nonprofit organizations and take the time to build credible and authentic relationships. Doing so requires long-term investment strategies and rapport building that sees nonprofit organizations and the communities they serve as equal partners. Only then can the full range of success indicators be determined.

### **Evaluating Advocacy Projects**

Foundations that award grants to nonprofit organizations engaged in policy advocacy look for strategies to evaluate nonprofit grantees' experiences in pursuing their goals. The task of evaluating or assessing goal achievement and policy impact is an arduous one that requires significant resources and investments of time, personnel, and expertise. Given a set of policy goals, policy impact objectives, and related outcomes, along with the multiple measures of success that inform an advocacy plan, measuring an advocacy project's outcomes requires an expansive evaluation framework. This expansive evaluative framework concedes that policy

advocacy is tough and necessarily entails multiple evaluative tools that are used to examine how and where a nonprofit organization has experienced success or challenges on their journey.

Sector stakeholders “defines advocacy as ‘a wide range of activities conducted to influence decision makers at various levels.’<sup>7</sup> In essence, advocacy is about influence: changing minds, reframing arguments, and inspiring social movements...” (Parrish, 2008, p. 2). Advocacy evaluation, then, is “a form of trained judgement” that requires “...deep knowledge of and feel for the politics of the issues, strong networks of trust among the key players, an ability to assess organizational quality, and a sense for the right time horizon against which to measure accomplishments” (Teles & Schmitt, 2011, p. 39) all of which must be applied given the particularities of the advocacy issue. Thus, what methods are available to funders to engaged in advocacy evaluation?

First, foundations interested in determining whether or not a nonprofit grantee has experienced success have traditionally relied upon theories of change evaluations, but such strategies are limited in policy advocacy. As Forti (2012) notes, “the typical approach to a successful measurement strategy in direct service – developing a (linear) theory of change and measuring in increasingly rigorous ways until you can prove your model’s effectiveness – simply doesn’t work in most advocacy contexts.” While Hopkins (2021) suggests that contribution analysis enables theories of change to be analyzed when seeking to assign links to policy impacts, Walker and Oszkay (2020) argue that measuring inputs and outputs does not work in advocacy evaluation because linear pathways to outcomes rarely exist. Concurring, Teles & Schmitt (2011) add that controlled experiments that assess theories of change are not adequately suited for policy advocacy evaluation because “...advocacy, even when carefully nonpartisan

---

<sup>7</sup> Parrish does not provide a citation.

and based in research, is inherently political, and it's the nature of politics that events evolve rapidly and in a nonlinear fashion..." (p. 39). Additionally, according to Walker & Oszkay (2020), a policy advocacy effort that experiences success in one context under one set of conditions may not work in a different context with different factors. Theories of change evaluations that do not account for the variability in policy advocacy processes become inadequate when faced with these realities.

To capture the full range of a policy advocacy project's activities, evaluators must move beyond traditional, quantitative assessment designs. Qualitative methods become imperative evaluation tools to assist commissioners of evaluation (funders, external evaluators) with determining when and how nonprofit advocacy groups are successful. This is particularly true for organizations advocating for policy change in sectors that are not easily "hacked," but are ripe with deeply structural factors, including segregation, poverty, and racism such as education (Tompkins-Stange, 2018). The incorporation of expansive methods may include in-depth interviews, focus groups, ethnographies, surveys, document analysis, and observations (Coffman & Reed, 2009; Coffman, 2009; Lewis, 2015; Walker & Oszkay, 2020). Once an expansive methodological toolkit is developed by evaluators, knowing at which point in the advocacy process to deploy these methods becomes the next challenge.

### *Sample Evaluative Designs*

My review of sources yielded several evaluative designs that may be incorporated in an assessment of a nonprofit organization engaged in policy advocacy activities. Table two identifies three key evaluative strategies that foundations (or designated commissioners of evaluation) may utilize to determine policy advocacy success.

Bellwether Reviews<sup>8</sup> enable an evaluation of a broad range of policy issues and are especially designed to assess political will or the level of support for a policy issue. Under this strategy, first, evaluators select the categories of bellwethers – actors who “are gauges of future trends or predictors of future events” (Blair, 2007, p. 29) – that may include policymakers, members of the media, think tanks, and the business community. Second, evaluators and subject matter experts select the sample encompassing one half of participants who have no direct expertise or direct connection to the policy advocacy issue being investigated. Rather, bellwethers are generally knowledgeable about issues that are on the policy agenda (Blair, 2007). Then, after the interviews are set up so that participants are unaware of the specific policy issue that the interview will focus on, the interview is conducted and focuses on questions like “what issues they think are at the top of the policy agenda” or how do participants predict will be a likely course of action on a given policy issue. The data gathered from the interview can then be used to assess policy advocacy initiatives already in progress or to determine success after an initiative has been completed. Importantly, bellwether interviews may be conducted repeatedly, particularly if the policy advocacy project requires multiple years of activity (Coffman, 2009; Coffman & Reed, 2009).

Intense period debriefs (IPD) may also serve as a useful tool when determining success in policy advocacy. An IPD may be deployed in state and federal venues and are used to “tell the story of what happened behind the scenes” (Coffman & Reed, 2009, p. 7) and is generally utilized after a policy window or when there has been a period where high levels of activity occurred around the policy issue under examination. Through in-depth interviews or focus

---

<sup>8</sup> See Parker (2011) for an in-depth review of the Bellwether application to the David and Lucille Packard Foundation’s Preschool for California’s Grantmaking Program.

groups, key groups, individuals, and others that operate in the myriad “‘spheres of influence’ around decision makers” (Coffman & Reed, 2009, p. 7) respond to questions that seek to determine what events catalyzed the intense period, the elements of an organizations strategy that worked well or could be improved, and what learnings were gleaned that can assist in continuous improvement (Coffman, 2009; Coffman & Reed, 2009).

**Table 2: Sample Evaluation Designs**

Method	Description	Use
Bellwether Reviews	Bellwethers are individuals whose perspectives are influential on the policy advocacy issue and these reviews can be repeated over time	Best suited to track political will, and can be used with policymakers, funders, members of the media, researchers/think tanks, other advocates in the network, and other stakeholders across a broad range of political issues
Intense Period Debriefs	IPDs gather in-depth data and real-time information on key shifts in policy advocacy	Tracks what occurred during a policy window opening by targeting key groups, individuals, and stakeholders that occupy different positions in the advocacy terrain
System Mapping	Designed to assess organizations, including individual organizations or relationships among multiple organizations or actors	Informant interviews and network analysis conducted to codify how an organization’s network is structured, including how people, groups, or institutions are connected and the strengths of those connections

System mapping is designed to aid evaluators in learning the terrain in which advocacy projects take place. While Bellwether and intense period debrief techniques appear to be rare in their adoption, various degrees of system mapping were found across several readings assessed under this review (Coffman, 2009; Coffman & Reed, 2009; Forti, 2012; Robson et al., 2020; Vucic, 2019). Systems mapping involves creating visual maps of the environment in which an

organization(s) works to achieve its goals. Through interviews and network analysis,<sup>9</sup> these maps identify the individual parts and connections within the system and how these parts are expected to change, given some set of policy goals and outcomes. Whereas logic models and theories of change tend to rely on linear trajectories, systems mapping concedes that “changes in relationships or connections in a complex system” (Coffman & Reed, 2009, p. 8) are inevitable and, therefore, may be better designed to capture a holistic view of the range of possible strategies required to achieve policy outcomes, key actors involved in the terrain, and potential roadblocks to success. Moreover, the kinds of reviews of an advocacy terrain under system mapping are not limited to the start of an advocacy project. Shifts in the political environment, sudden shocks to financial resources, or movement among nonprofit leaders, any of which can occur midcourse in policy advocacy, may require altering the map of the system. Seeing evaluative tools as multi-pronged and deployable at multiple stages can ensure advocacy success.

Importantly, when engaged in policy advocacy evaluation, identifying the key stakeholders to interview along with knowing the relevant questions to ask is essential. Those conducting evaluations must have intimate knowledge of the field in which an advocacy organization under evaluation is operating. Teles and Schmitt (2011) note that grant officers in foundations must be highly informed on their grantees' work and understand how grant recipients conduct their core activities. Systems mapping, for example, becomes an instrumental design technique given this mandate. Importantly, different nonprofit leaders require different forms of expertise. For example, foundations that support nonprofit leaders of color or leaders from other historically marginalized backgrounds must be knowledgeable about the context in

---

<sup>9</sup> Coffman and Reed (2009) define network analysis as a “technique that explores whether connections or relationships exist between people, groups, or institutions, as well as their nature and strength” (p. 8). See also Haddad and Reckhow (2018) and Ferrare and Reynolds (2016) for examples of this method's use in examining philanthropic relationships in higher education and K-12 education, respectively.

which those leaders and their organizations are working. Adopting a more expansive evaluative frame that scans the advocacy environment (at different stages of the project's journey) assists foundations with building an intimate knowledge of the advocacy issue, noting which goals are achievable and how to measure a grantee's advocacy success.

The racial dimensions of the philanthropic sector raise questions about how foundations can achieve authentic relationships and build intimate knowledge of the terrains in which advocates work. Given the current landscape of philanthropic foundations, the potential for a racial mismatch between funder and community is ever-present. Foxworthy and Bugg-Levine (2020) report that 76 percent of full-time staff members and 88 percent of foundation executives are white. Daniel (2019) concurs, noting that philanthropy as a sector is “overwhelmingly controlled by middle- to upper-class white people,” creating opportunities for bias to pervade the grantmaking and evaluation processes. Although these numbers may be changing, “With little diversity in leadership, or personal relationships to the communities served by most foundations,” Foxworthy and Bugg-Levine (2020) warn, philanthropic foundations surrender opportunities to create connections with broad and diverse citizens working to create social change. For example, among organizations in Echoing Green's Black Male Achievement program, revenues of organizations led by Black people were 45 percent smaller than those organizations led by white people “and the unrestricted net assets of the Black-led organizations [were] a whopping 91 percent smaller than the white-led organizations’ – despite focusing on the same work” (Dorsey et al., 2020, p. 11). With people of color placed on the margins in the grantmaking process, and with foundation staff overall being nonrepresentative of the communities directly impacted by some policy advocacy issues, the ability to conduct sound evaluations, including system mapping, may be compromised.

Evaluating nonprofit organizations engaged in policy advocacy is not an easy task. Foundations looking to determine if nonprofits have been successful in their policy advocacy pursuits must adopt research strategies that go beyond standard theories of change and logic model assessments that rely on quantitative metrics. Alternatively, qualitative methods, such as interviews, focus groups, and observations, used in tandem with document analysis, quantitative survey research and other methods, provide for fuller perspectives on a nonprofit's advocacy journey. Research into a nonprofit's advocacy success does not occur singularly at the end of a policy advocacy project; conversely, strong evaluative designs incorporate evaluation at different points of the grant cycle. Foundation staff that are intimately knowledgeable of the advocacy terrains in which nonprofits conduct their work may be better positioned to identify specific policy goals to set, to ascertain intermediate and multiple markers of success, and to engage in continuous improvement both at the foundation and nonprofit levels. Importantly, when funding advocacy initiatives, foundations must be aware of the mismatch between the knowledge they hold as an organization and the expertise community members possess.

### **Implications and Conclusion**

The findings presented in this review of literature suggest several important themes for foundation officials to ponder as they support nonprofit grant recipients engaged in policy advocacy. First, key definitions help to guide how foundation staff can orient their approach. Policy goals are the outcomes that advocates seek to achieve in a policy arena. These include regulations adopted or legislation passed. Policy impacts are the benefits that a population accrues as a result of achieving a policy goal. Success is broadly defined as attaining a favorable outcome because of a policy advocacy initiative. While failure could be defined as an unsuccessful attempt at achieving a favorable outcome, the review of literature offered in this

paper suggests that pure policy advocacy failures may be reconceptualized as learning opportunities that enable foundations to engage in continuous improvement. A fundamental concept in defining policy goals, impacts, success, and failure is to do so in close collaboration with grant recipients and to remain aware of the power and influence foundations wield in the grantmaking process when identifying, measuring, and evaluating nonprofits against their goals.

Second, multiple markers of success are necessary to incorporate in a partnership with nonprofit grantees and should be identified with the organizational structures and logics of each stakeholder in mind. Focusing solely on the end policy goal or outcome as the single measure of success of an advocacy effort distorts the important work that is done by advocates along the way. Moreover, support for grassroots organizations involved in advocacy may require additional scrutiny, given foundations' power and influence which has sometimes been used to (a) redirect organizational activities in coercive ways or to (b) disguise the involvement of elite sponsors. The centrality of identifying these intermediate and multiple markers of success in collaboration with nonprofit leaders and communities should be underscored. Third, when seeking to evaluate the degree to which a policy advocacy initiative has experienced success in the advocacy terrain, foundations must adopt a more expansive evaluative framework that moves beyond a reliance on quantitative measures of success and toward measures of success that include qualitative ones. To capture the fullness of a nonprofits experience in the advocacy journey, evaluative designs should incorporate both quantitative and qualitative methods to tell a fuller story of the advocacy project's journey. In order to determine the markers of success that will be evaluated, foundation staff must develop deep knowledge of the landscape in which advocates are working. Beyond institutional expertise, a deeper knowledge of the communities that will be directly impacted by a foundation's involvement in the advocacy work requires

foundations to rethink who they hire, who is promoted, who they fund, and how to approach the grantmaking process when there is a mismatch between foundation staff or program officers and the communities they hope to serve.

From this review of the literature on policy advocacy, several implications for future research and practice emerged. First, further interrogation of the role of race and power in the philanthropic ecology is necessary. For example, future studies can explore the topics presented here using frameworks that incorporate an explicitly race conscious approach to reviewing literature. Second, while community-based organizations (CBO) undoubtedly play critical roles in the policy advocacy process (Scott et al., 2009), the degree to which some CBOs are truly representative of the communities they serve requires further investigation. Third, research use as a form of policy advocacy received a cursory treatment in this paper, but it is increasingly clear that research use in higher education, K – 12 education, and other policy domains, is a tactic deployed by foundations to achieve policy advocacy outcomes (Haddad & Reckow, 2018; Lewis, 2015; McClure et al., 2017; Scott et al., 2017). Future research would explore these areas in greater detail.

The role of foundations in policy advocacy can be one of a critical partner working alongside nonprofit leaders and communities toward common goals. Indeed, there is evidence of foundations working in partnership with nonprofits and communities to achieve substantive policy wins. However, there is also evidence to the contrary, demonstrating coercive and racialized philanthropic practices that can leave directly impacted communities disempowered. Policy advocacy initiatives, then, must be approached with caution and authentic relationship building must be prioritized at every step of the policy advocacy process.

## **Funding**

Funding for this report was provided by Grantmakers for Education Learning, Evaluation, and Data Impact Group and the Society for Research on Educational Effectiveness.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank SREE advisor, Dr. Sarah Reckhow, for her feedback and guidance throughout the lifespan of the project. Additionally, thanks to Dr. Janelle Scott and Dr. Travis Bristol for their support.

## **References**

- Anderson, G., & Cohen, M.I. (2018). *The new democratic professional in education: Confronting markets, metrics, and managerialism*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Ballotpedia. (2021). Chan Zuckerberg Advocacy. Retrieved from: [https://ballotpedia.org/Chan\\_Zuckerberg\\_Advocacy](https://ballotpedia.org/Chan_Zuckerberg_Advocacy)
- Beaton, E., MacIndoe, H., & Want, T. (2020). Combining nonprofit service and advocacy: Organizational structures and hybridity. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 50(2), 372 – 396.
- Bettis, A.J., & Pepin, S. (2019). Strengthening support for grantees: Four lessons for foundations. *The Foundation Review*, 11(3), 96 – 104.
- Blair, E. (2007). Evaluating an issue’s position on the policy agenda: The Bellwether Methodology. *The Evaluation Exchange*, 13(1 & 2), 29.
- Boote, D.N., & Beile, P. (2005). Scholars before researchers: On the centrality of the dissertation literature review in research preparation. *Educational Researcher*, 34(6), 3 – 15.
- Bowen, G.A. (2009). Document analysis as a qualitative research method. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 9(2), 27 – 40.
- Bugg-Levine, A. (2019). ‘Color Blind’ assessments of grant proposals don’t work. Here’s a better idea. The Chronicle of Philanthropy. Retrieved from: <https://www.philanthropy.com/article/color-blind-assessments-of-grant-proposals-dont-work-heres-a-better-idea/>
- Coffman, J. (2009). A user’s guide to advocacy evaluation planning. Harvard Family Research Project. Retrieved from: <https://archive.globalfrp.org/publications-resources/browse-our-publications/a-user-s-guide-to-advocacy-evaluation-planning>

- Coffman, J., & Reed, E. (2009). Unique methods in advocacy evaluation. Los Angeles, CA: The California Endowment. Retrieved from:  
[http://www.pointk.org/resources/files/Unique\\_Methods\\_Brief.pdf](http://www.pointk.org/resources/files/Unique_Methods_Brief.pdf)
- Daniel, V. (19, November 2019). Philanthropists bench women of color, the M.V.Ps of social change. And we all lose out. The New York Times. Retrieved from:  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/19/opinion/philanthropy-black-women.html>
- Dorsey, C., Bradach, J., Kim, P. (2020). Racial equity and philanthropy: Disparities in funding for leaders of color leave impact on the table. The Bridgespan Group. Retrieved from:  
<https://www.bridgespan.org/bridgespan/Images/articles/racial-equity-and-philanthropy/racial-equity-and-philanthropy.pdf>
- Ferrare, J.J., & Reynolds, K. (2016). Has the elite foundation agenda spread beyond the gates? An organizational network analysis of nonmajor philanthropic giving in K-12 education. *American Journal of Education*, 123(1), 137 – 169.
- Flynn, A., Holmberg, S.R., Warren, D.T., & Wong, F.J. (2017). *The hidden rules of race: Barriers to an inclusive economy*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Forti, M. (2012). Measuring advocacy – Yes We Can!: Five measurement strategies that enable rapid course correction and continuous improvement. Stanford Social Innovation Review.
- Foxworthy, R., & Bugg-Levine, A. (2020). How to avoid excuses that prevent grant makers from aiding Black-led organizations. The Chronicle of Philanthropy. Retrieved from:  
[https://www.philanthropy.com/article/How-to-Avoid-Excuses-That/249070?bc\\_nonce=qv9p9zu06upboze360rrg&cid=reg\\_wall\\_signup](https://www.philanthropy.com/article/How-to-Avoid-Excuses-That/249070?bc_nonce=qv9p9zu06upboze360rrg&cid=reg_wall_signup)
- Francis, M.M. (2014). *Civil rights and the making of the modern American state* (pp. 1 – 28). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Francis, M.M. (2019). The price of civil rights: Black lives, white funding, and movement capture. *Law & Society Review*, 53(1), 275 – 309.
- Gilmore, R.W. (2016). In the shadow of the shadow state. *The Scholar & Feminist*, 13(2), 1 – 2.
- Gonzalez, G.M. (2014). Challenging the spectacle: A case study on education policy advocacy. *International Journal of Leadership and Change*, 2(1), 19 – 27.
- Groundswell Action Fund (2021). Retrieved from: <https://groundswellactionfund.org/>
- Haddad, N., & Reckhow, S. (2018). The shifting role of higher education philanthropy: A network analysis of philanthropic policy strategies. *Philanthropy & Education*, 2(1), 25 – 52.

Hopkins, L. (2021). Tools and tips for implementing contribution analysis: A quick guide for practitioners. Center for Evaluation Innovation. Retrieved from <https://www.evaluationinnovation.org/publication/tools-and-tips-for-implementing-contribution-analysis/>

Kernell, S., Jacobson, G.C., Kousser, T., & Vavreck, L. (2020). *The logic of American politics* (9<sup>th</sup> edition). Thousand Oaks, CA: CQ Press.

Krekoski, E. (2009). Nonprofits and policy advocacy: Learning from success. Edmonton Social Planning Council. Retrieved from: [www.edmontonsocialplanning.ca](http://www.edmontonsocialplanning.ca)

Kohl-Arenas, E., & Francis, M.M. (2020). Movement capture and the long arc of the Black freedom struggle. HistPhil. Retrieved from: <https://histphil.org/2020/07/14/movement-capture-and-the-long-arc-of-the-black-freedom-struggle/>

Lewis, D. (2015). Hearts and minds: The untold story of how philanthropy and the Civil Marriage Collaborative helped America embrace marriage equality. Proteus Fund. <https://www.proteusfund.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Hearts-and-MindsCMC-Publication.pdf>

McClure, K.R., Frierson, L., Hall, A.W., & Ostlund, K.L. (2017). Philanthropic giving by foundations to higher education institutions. A state-level social network analysis. *Philanthropy & Education*, 1(1), 1 – 28.

Montouri, A. (2005). Literature review as creative inquiry: Reframing scholarship as a creative process. *Journal of Transformative Education*, 3(4), 374 – 393.

National Council of Nonprofits (n.d.). Evaluating advocacy. Retrieved from: <https://www.councilofnonprofits.org/tools-resources/evaluating-advocacy>

Parker, S. (2011). Evaluation of the David and Lucile Packard Foundation's Preschool for California's Grantmaking Program. Evaluation Innovation: <https://www.evaluationinnovation.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/RT-PackardPre-K-Teaching-Case.pdf>

Parrish, S. (2008). Measuring influence: Advocacy evaluation challenges and success. Innovation Network. Retrieved from: [http://www.pointk.org/resources/files/advocacy\\_eval\\_series\\_grantstation.pdf](http://www.pointk.org/resources/files/advocacy_eval_series_grantstation.pdf)

Reckhow, S. (2013). *Follow the money: How foundation dollars change public school politics*. New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press.

Reckhow, S. (2020). Politics, philanthropy, and inequality. In W.W. Powell & P. Bromley (Eds.), *The nonprofit sector: A research handbook* (3<sup>rd</sup> edition, pp. 208 - 226). Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Reckhow, S., & Tompkins-Stange, M. (2015). *"Singing from the same hymnbook": education policy advocacy at Gates and Broad*. American Enterprise Institute. Retrieved from <http://www.aei.org/publication/singing-hymnbook-education-policy-advocacy-gates-broad/>

Robson, K., Squire, J., Kaplan, M. (2020). Making education everyone's business: Three studies of successful education advocacy. Bellwether Education Partners. Retrieved from: [https://bellwethereducation.org/sites/default/files/Bellwether\\_BizAdvocacyBFA\\_FullReport\\_Final.pdf](https://bellwethereducation.org/sites/default/files/Bellwether_BizAdvocacyBFA_FullReport_Final.pdf)

Roelofs, J. (2003). *Foundations and public policy: The mask of pluralism*. Albany, NY: State University of New York.

Save the Children. (n.d.). Monitoring and evaluating advocacy. Retrieved from: [https://www.open.edu/openlearncreate/pluginfile.php/128097/mod\\_resource/content/1/onitoring%20and%20evaluating%20advocacy.pdf](https://www.open.edu/openlearncreate/pluginfile.php/128097/mod_resource/content/1/onitoring%20and%20evaluating%20advocacy.pdf)

Scott, J., Lubienski, C., DeBray-Pelot, E. (2009). The politics of advocacy in education. *Educational Policy*, 23(1), 3 – 14.

Scott, J.T. (2013). A Rosa Parks moment? School choice and the marketization of civil rights. *Critical Studies in Education*, 54(1), 5-18.

Scott, J. (2014). Foundations and the development of the U.S. charter school policy-planning network: Implications for democratic schooling and civil rights. *National Society for the Study of Education*, 114(2), 131 - 147.

Scott, J. (2017). The problem we all still live with: Neo-Plessyism and school choice policies in the post-Obama era. In I.C. Rotberg & J.L. Glazer (Eds.), *Choosing charters: Better schools or more segregation* (205 – 220). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Scott, T., Debray, E., Lubienski, C., La Londe, P.G., Castillo, E., Owens, S. (2017). Urban regimes, intermediary organization networks, and research use: Patterns across three school districts. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 92(1), 16 – 28.

Scott, J., Siegel-Hawley, G., Debray, E., Frankenberg, E., & McDermott, K. (2020). An Agenda for restoring civil rights in K-12 federal education policy. National Education Policy Center. Retrieved from: <https://nepc.colorado.edu/publication/restoring-civil-rights>

Shanks, D., & SoRelle, M.E. (2021). The paradox of policy advocacy: Philanthropic foundations, public interest groups, and second-order policy feedback effects. *Interest Groups & Advocacy*, 10(2), 137 – 157.

Stachowiak, S. (2007). Pathways for change: Six theories about how policy change happens. Organisational Research Services.

- Stokes, L. (2017). How can foundations change public policy? The case for funding grassroots NGOs. *HistPhil*. Retrieved from: <https://histphil.org/2017/07/05/how-can-foundations-change-publicpolicy-the-case-for-funding-grassroots-ngos/>
- Suárez, D. (2020). Advocacy, civic engagement, and social change. In W.W. Powell & P. Bromley (Eds.), *The nonprofit sector: A research handbook* (3rd ed., chapter 20). Stanford, C.A.: Stanford University Press.
- Teles, S., & Schmitt, M. (2011). The elusive craft of evaluating advocacy. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*.
- The Foundation Center (2020). Key facts on U.S. nonprofits and foundations. Retrieved from: <https://www.issuelab.org/resources/36381/36381.pdf>
- Tompkins-Stange, M.E. (2016). *Policy patrons: Philanthropy, education reform, and the politics of influence*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Tompkins-Stange, M. (2018). Too big to fail: “Big Bet” philanthropy and constructive failure at the Gates Foundation. In J.P. Greene & M.Q. McShane (Eds.), *Failure up close: What happens, why it happens, and what we can learn from it* (pp. 123 – 132). New York: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Trujillo, T.M., Hernández, L.E., Jarrell, T., Kissell, R. (2014). Community schools as urban district reform: Analyzing Oakland's policy landscape through oral histories. *Urban Education*, 49(8), 895 – 929.
- Walker, E.T., & Oszkay, Y. (2020). The changing face of nonprofit advocacy: Democratizing potentials and risks in an unequal context. In W.W. Powell & P. Bromley (Eds.), *The nonprofit sector: A research handbook* (3<sup>rd</sup> edition, pp. 507 – 520). Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Vucic, R. (2019). The road to measuring advocacy success. *Independent Sector*. Retrieved from: <https://independentsector.org/news-post/the-road-to-measuring-advocacy-success/>