



Twelve Lessons on Excellence in Advancing Policy Reform

This brief presents lessons based on TAF's past policy advocacy grantmaking experience. We offer this to guide policy advocates and to stimulate discussion with other grantmakers supporting policy reform.

1. Know what success looks like

[Ensure that the policies considered are clearly linked to preferred outcomes]

Have clear objectives and standards at the outset by which to evaluate the relative merit of policy options. Original objectives become an increasingly important touchstone as an advocacy effort continues over longer time periods, and as more diverse partners with multiple objectives are engaged.

2. Choose your battles

[Ensure that a critical analysis of the viability of the effort is the first task undertaken]

This may mean supporting early, short-term studies; convening stakeholders; undertaking other preliminary assessments; or looking at a range of policy options before investing in a larger issue.

3. Do the homework

[Consider funding research and other relevant exploratory activities]

It is important to see that efforts are supported by high-quality research prepared by reputable organizations. For example, the Ontario coal phase-out campaign was supported by research from the Ontario Medical Association showing the links between coal pollution and public health impacts.

4. Pick your moment

[Seek alignment with existing policy frameworks and leveraging of key milestones or crises]

Heighten the success of policy advocacy by working on issues that resonate with growing public interest – for example, Move the GTHA developed as public frustration with regional traffic mounted, and was designed to leverage key reports and political events, such as the release of Metrolinx's Investment Strategy and the presentation of the spring 2014 provincial budget.

5. Back the right people

[Carefully evaluate leadership and help them build capacity in themselves or their team]

Make an evaluation of the skills and mindset of the leader(s) of the advocacy work a proactive part of the overall feasibility assessment, because success is as often as much about the leaders as it is about the group they work for. And once leaders are identified, help them build their skills as needed. The successful policy advocacy efforts TAF supported were led by strong, passionate and determined leaders who were particularly well-equipped to pursue the policy outcome being sought.

6. Make it broadly relevant

[Promote broad thinking about the implications of the proposed change and the leveraging of this understanding of stakeholders' relationship to the issue to build broader constituencies]

The Ontario coal phase-out was initiated by environmental groups, but was driven forward by support from doctors showing the relationship of coal burning to public health issues. Similarly, the expansion of public transit addresses transportation as a key source of greenhouse gases in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area, but the issue is being driven forward by concerns about quality of life and business productivity being eroded by time lost in traffic. In some but not every case, multi-stakeholder collaboration or “collective impact” approaches can be a powerful tool, strengthening the relevance and efficacy of a new proposed solution or policy. For example, the Ontario Sustainable Energy Association’s advocacy for the adoption of a *Green Energy Act* benefitted from forming an alliance with diverse organizations – including rural and urban groups – interested in increasing the share of renewable energy in Ontario.

7. Listen and co-create

[Ensure policy development is supported by meaningful stakeholder consultation processes]

Policy development is an art of balance, and more successful projects take the time to understand how new proposals can be refined to enhance palatability, reduce negative effects and ensure successful implementation. For example, TAF supported outreach and consultation with building owners to assess the response to the Toronto Green Standard energy-efficiency requirements and developed proposed solar-permitting approaches in cooperation with building inspectors, solar installers, the City Buildings Department and the Province. TAF also supported building-inspector training workshops to help smooth the implementation of the new permitting process.

8. Leave room to move

[Take a developmental approach to evaluating policy work]

Policy positions can/need to evolve over time to take advantage of political opportunities, new information and new situations, and/or to help “on-board” new partners. And a clear picture about the “big win” or truly transformative options may take some time to emerge, as does the trust among diverse stakeholder groups who need to work together to make these changes happen. Keeping plans flexible, while taking stock of the full process of policy identification, policy advocacy and post-policy action, at regular intervals, and allowing for adjustments, can contribute to success.

9. Get the insider view

[Support participation in formal and informal dialogue with policymakers]

Engaging policymakers who are inside the policy development process – through formal and informal channels – helps to build a common understanding and set expectations. This sometimes requires identifying windows when policies, codes or standards are scheduled for review, and organizing policy advocacy around these timelines. It also offers the opportunity to educate public officials about issues they may not be aware of, and to become educated about challenges faced by policymakers and how such challenges can be overcome.

10. See the long game

[Acknowledge the “in for a dime, in for a dollar” syndrome]

Persistence and follow-through characterize many successful policy advocacy efforts. Funders – and advocates – may need to acknowledge early on that a long-term commitment will be required and consider how this impacts their decision-making with respect to their ability to provide continued support over lengthy timeframes (five or more years).

11. Avoid the “race to the starting line”

[Consider extended support into the policy implementation period]

Acknowledging that the “devil is in the details,” the confirmation of a policy objective is often just the beginning of the journey. The Ontario *Green Energy Act* was met with many and ongoing challenges during the implementation phase, and the Toronto Green Standard has been shown to need further support to refine the method by which energy-efficiency standards are applied and evaluated. Continuous improvement to policies, to ensure they are implemented as designed and that areas of policy weakness are identified and improved in subsequent iterations, requires strategic ongoing support, sometimes over multiple years beyond the original policy “win.”

12. Many hands make light work

[Multi-funder collaborations may be needed to ensure adequate support of policy campaigns]

Multiple funders supported the Ontario coal phase-out and the development of the *Green Energy Act*, but planned, coordinated funding collaboration – including joint evaluation of priorities and pooling and co-directing of funds – could potentially offer better support to policy advocates and deeper outcomes for all parties. Also, it models collaboration activity that many funders expect to see from their grantees.