

A Funder's Guide to Supporting Advocacy

Te Pūaha o te Ako

What is advocacy?

Advocacy involves making a case for change, to those who can do something about it.

Advocacy can focus on solving a specific problem or a more complex set of interconnected issues. It can act as a vehicle for systems change, through ongoing and larger scale efforts that seek to address root causes and influence policies, practices, resource flows, relationships and connections, power dynamics and mental models.

Key advocacy activities include preparing and presenting the case for change, building alliances, and growing awareness. Getting behind advocacy efforts empowers individuals, groups and communities to drive change

Effective advocacy is informed by:

- community voices and those most affected by the issue
- a deep understanding of context
- expert and trusted advice.

Why should funders get involved in advocacy?

Funding advocacy can lead philanthropy into systems change spaces – influencing public policy, mainstream practices, social norms, and hearts and minds. Advocacy can support a healthier democracy by speaking truth to power, raising marginalised voices and preventing groups exerting power over others, excluding others or being privileged over others. Funding advocacy offers potential for larger scale or more sustained impact, potentially for whole populations.

Funding advocacy can appeal to funders where there is:

- a compelling issue aligned with their vision
- something that can be won or changed
- something to put on the public agenda
- a desire to take a moral or ethical stand on an issue
- a desire to support people with lived experience of an issue to lead.

Funder options for supporting advocacy

There is a wide range of options for funders to engage with advocacy – from indirect engagement via funding the advocacy efforts of others, to direct advocacy and lobbying around issues based on a funder’s knowledge or evidence.

Less direct



More direct



Funding advocacy (including alternative practice)

Funders can provide funding to support the direct advocacy activity of individuals, groups, organisations or coalitions.

There is a wide range of direct advocacy activity that could be supported through funding, including e.g., public awareness raising, petitions or campaigns for change, development of policy alternatives, submissions, engagement with policy makers and elected representatives, litigation.

Advocacy-related funding can also include investing in the development and testing of alternative models of practice.



Grow advocacy capacity

Funders can contribute to more impactful advocacy efforts by investing to support advocacy capability.

This could involve funding coaching or programmes that grow the skills of leaders and organisations – particularly in areas such as strategy, campaigning, and communications and media.

Funders may also have in-house expertise that can be shared with or seconded to community partners to help grow their advocacy capability.



Evidence for change

Funders can commission or invest in research that provides evidence to make a case for change.

Funders may also commission or invest in the evaluation of alternative models of practice and can champion this evidence to decision-makers. Focusing on evaluating models that have been developed through the funder’s direct funding work is a key opportunity.



Collaboration, convening, mobilising

Funders are well positioned to broker collaboration between groups working on similar issues, supporting more joined-up advocacy. This can also include collaboration between funders to direct more resourcing to advocacy efforts.

Funders can also resource or lead convening, which can be an important way of mobilising diverse groups around issues that require collective advocacy.



Direct advocacy

Funders can also directly engage in advocacy activity, seeking to use their own networks, institutional voice and reputation to directly influence decision-making or to shift practice.

This can include funders influencing the practice of other funders, for example by sharing best practice, or by championing the work of groups that they fund to encourage further co-investment to scale up that work.

Direct advocacy can also involve making submissions or engaging with policy makers to provide advice based on evidence collated by the funder.

Cautions

For funders wishing to engage in advocacy, it is important to pay close attention to issues of power, morality, ethics; be clear on who stands to gain or lose from advocacy.

Being ethically-driven means focusing on the ethics and evidence around the issue, and asking, 'What is the right thing for our organisation to do, in terms of our stated vision and goals?'

Understanding what attracts other supporters into an advocacy campaign is also important.

While advocacy goals are usually clear, advocacy funding is often a contribution to what can be a long, unpredictable journey and proving cause and effect from funding advocacy can be tricky. Funders need to acknowledge that there are rarely easy fixes or wins, that advocacy is complex, that flexibility to adapt to changing contexts is needed and to be prepared for failure.

Good practice pointers

Funders should be intentional about the change in the world they want to support and invest in advocacy activity that is aligned with that change. When considering whether to engage in or invest in advocacy, funders should:

- Ensure strong alignment with funder vision
- Be informed by community voice and lived experience
- Build high-trust relationships with savvy and skilled advocates
- Wrap support around advocates, including evaluation support
- Fund learning, training, growth, leadership and connecting opportunities for advocates
- Remain politically neutral, but build relationships with civil servants and decision makers
- Co-fund, collaborate and build coalitions (this also shares costs and risks)
- Ensure user-friendly funding processes
- Take trustees or board members with you and shift awareness and power dynamics by diversifying your organisation
- Cultivate a relational approach, involving respect, humility, honesty and transparency.

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Thank you