

Campaign Evaluation

Flying by the seat of your pants may be a good idea if you're Superman, but it's generally not recommended in professional marketing campaigns. If you can't say whether your campaign worked, you also can't say whether you should run it the same way next time, or even whether it was money well spent. Although many organizations are reluctant to spend money on evaluation, evaluations are a good investment for two reasons. First, you make donors happy if you can demonstrate that your campaign succeeded, thus making them more likely to donate in the future (nothing breeds success like success). Second, even if your campaign wasn't effective, an evaluation allows you to learn and improve, and ultimately, move public opinion on your issue. Better yet, share your learnings with other organizations to improve communications across the LGBT movement.

Evaluation Principles

Like everything else, tie the campaign evaluation to your objectives. Since objectives generally fall into one of two camps—changing thinking (attitudes, beliefs) or changing behavior (votes, mobilizations)—an evaluation will measure one or the other.

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Be realistic about the potential impact of your campaign so you don't set yourself up for failure. In commercial marketing campaigns, attitude shifts of 1% are important, but advocacy campaign funders often want to see attitude shifts of 10% to 30%. You can expect big, well-funded campaigns to do bigger and better things than small campaigns with a limited budget.

Evaluation methodology and performance expectations should be adjusted accordingly. Sometimes simple things like creating a good press list or establishing ongoing professional relationships with key reporters are good measures of success for very small budget efforts.

Ask yourself, did the campaign:

- Advance advocacy goals?
- Change behavior?
- Raise money?

Measuring the Effectiveness of Your Communications Campaign

Measurement Type	Purpose	Example Measures
Campaign Activities	Measures campaign activities and coverage. Gives an idea of how well the organization stretched its budget, but it doesn't measure whether or not the communication was effective.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How many people did the campaign reach? • What materials and brochures were put out? • What was the value of earned media? • How many media stories were produced?
Creative Effectiveness	Measures how well people remember the campaign but doesn't measure whether or not it moved public opinion.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How well does the campaign do on measures of aided and unaided recall? • Can people articulate what the campaign was about? • Did the campaign increase awareness of its key issue?
Outcomes (Behavior and Attitude Change)	Measures whether or not behaviors or attitudes changed as a result of the campaign. Considered the ultimate measure of success but is costly and time-consuming to do properly. Usually requires surveys or polling.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has there been any change in beliefs, attitudes or social norms? • Has voting behavior changed? • Has policy changed?

- Build relationships with influential people?
- Reframe the issue?

Typical Evaluations

Campaign evaluations look at three different types of measures. What did the campaign do (activities, coverage)? How effective was the creative (recall, awareness)? And, what was the final outcome (changes in thinking or behavior)?

Evaluation Methodology

Each measurement type uses different methodology. You can measure campaign activities relatively easily, while measuring outcomes is more difficult.

Campaign activities. Campaign staff can measure campaign activities with little help, simply by collecting data. The evaluation usually requires a simple tracking system to count activities, materials, or other efforts related to a campaign's implementation.

Creative recall and recognition. The most popular measure of creative effectiveness is its ability to be remembered. For example, researchers may see how many people are able to spontaneously recall the ad when questioned. Some argue that this measure isn't worthwhile because an ad may be memorable—but completely ineffective. However, we believe it's an appropriate (though incomplete) measure since it also doesn't matter how compelling the message is if nobody remembers it.

The two basic types of memory testing are unaided and aided recall. Unaided recall testing asks respondents to recall an ad without giving any memory prompts (e.g., "Do you remember seeing any ads on gay and lesbian issues in the past month?"). Aided recall asks respondents if they're familiar with an ad while providing prompts (e.g. "Do you remember seeing an ad asking you to vote no on Amendment X, and featuring a construction worker?").

Outcomes (behavior and attitude change). Determine overall campaign effectiveness by measuring shifts in target audience attitudes or behavior. Do a poll immediately before your campaign launches and compare it to one done right after your campaign wraps up (see "[Quantitative Research](#)"). For comparison purposes, phrase questions identically in both polls. Is there an increase in the percent of people who support your issues (and who have also seen your campaign)? If so, your campaign was probably effective.

Polling can tell you:

- If your audience heard the message
- If the message affected your audience's thinking about your issue
- If the message evoked a positive or negative response
- If the message changed people's behavior
- To what degree change occurred

It's not sound methodology to do a single post-campaign poll that asks people whether their opinions have changed in the last two months. Cognitive science shows that people can't accurately judge how they felt two months ago; they can only accurately judge how they feel right now.

Note that attitudes can also change for reasons totally unrelated to your campaign. Conduct pre- and post-campaign polls in a second "control market" to determine whether external factors are skewing your results. Make sure the control market has similar demographics to the original market, but hasn't been exposed to the campaign. Here's how this works.

Let's say you run a large campaign in San Francisco promoting the idea of a surcharge on dirty fuels to fund clean energy innovation. However, just as your campaign wraps up, gas and energy prices go through the roof. Before the start of your campaign, 48% of people in San Francisco supported the surcharge. At the end of the campaign, only 40% of people supported it. In Denver, where nobody saw your campaign, support

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Tip: For campaigns with very large media buys, some organizations run a mini version of the campaign in a small, inexpensive media market. They then use pre- and post-campaign polling to test the campaign's effectiveness before launching it to a larger, more expensive geography. This testing approach is expensive as it involves full ad production, media buys, and survey research. However, it can save money in the long run for multimillion dollar efforts such as the "Let California Ring" campaign.

for the surcharge went from 46% to 31%. If we only had data on San Francisco, we might conclude that the campaign wasn't effective. However, support in San Francisco dropped by 8%, while support in Denver (where the campaign didn't run) dropped by 15%. This suggests that the drop wasn't attributable to your campaign. If anything, your campaign helped limit the drop.

While survey research is a great way to evaluate your communications campaign, it's also relatively expensive. It's also only useful if a significant number of people were exposed to your campaign (you can't expect a measurable change in public opinion if you only reached 1% of the population). If you have a smaller campaign, this type of evaluation is likely more than you need.

A Word on the Challenges of Evaluation

If you've ever been in a long-term relationship, you know how difficult it is to get your sweetie to change. It's hard enough to agree to a setting on the thermostat—but now imagine asking your sweetie to rethink his or her entire political belief system. Further imagine that instead of being able to sit down and have a civilized conversation, you had to change your sweetie's thinking with a single print ad taped to the bathroom mirror. Sound like a challenge? So are communications campaigns on social issues.

We need to be realistic about what communications campaigns can achieve—and how quickly they can achieve it. Social advocacy campaigns often aim for complex and hard-to-achieve change such as changing beliefs, public norms, or behaviors. Campaigns also often aim for change at multiple levels of society (individual, community, state, or national). To affect change, they must define a social problem and its proposed solution, and reach the awareness of those who hold the power so they will allocate resources and choose appropriate policy alternatives. This is a high standard for success.

Given these standards, we issue this cautionary paragraph: Television and other media outlets help persuade people one way or another when they must make a decision—about who to vote for or what to buy. However, on social issues, media outlets can only take your campaign so far. Even the best paid television spots won't instantly change views that have been deeply held for many years. When the issues you address touch core values (e.g., reproductive freedom, the death penalty, or LGBT equality) expect to face firmly entrenched opinions. Communications campaigns can help change the lens through which people see an issue, but it's unlikely you'll see a significant attitude shift from a single campaign.

