Lessons from Evaluating Electoral Campaigns

American Evaluation Association
November 15, 2019
501(c)(4) Universe

- Social welfare missions
- Most (c)(4)s do not engage in political activities

81,000 Registered 501(c)(4)s

4,500 Some kind of political activity

- Issue focused, partisan activities
- Affiliated orgs: (c)(3), PACs

Margaret Post, Clark University
Elizabeth Boris, The Urban Institute
“It’s the combination of the two components—issue-based advocacy and ability to engage in the political process—that makes (c)(4) organizations particularly potent in shaping policy outcomes.”

—Alliance for Justice
501(c)4 as Part of a Strategy and Ecosystem

The Advocacy Strategy Framework, Center for Evaluation Innovation
Outcomes: Beyond the electoral and legislative WINS
“Power properly understood is nothing but the ability to achieve purpose. It is the strength required to bring about social, political and economic change.”

- Martin Luther King, Jr.
How do organizations translate their experiences in each phase into capacity changes and additional tactical and strategic modifications?

**Building Power**
*Capacities*
What types of capacities are needed and built in both the organization and the field (e.g., scope and scale of members, coalition partners, expertise, resources, skills, and capacities related to grassroots organizing, electoral organizing, and legislative and administrative advocacy)?

**Exercising Power**
*Arenas & Strategies*
Where and how is power directed with regard to targets (legislative, administrative, judicial, electoral, cultural, and economic) and actions and activities (e.g., legislative advocacy, administrative and systems change advocacy, lobbying, grassroots organizing and base building, legal advocacy and litigation, electoral advocacy, research and policy analyses, and communications and messaging)?

**Having Power**
*Outcomes*
What are the outcomes of power (e.g., issue and candidate campaign victories, policy and systems changes, narrative change, and shifts in political dynamics)?

**Expanding Power**
*Growth*
How do the wins and losses affect the individual, the organization, and the field/infrastructure (e.g. new community leaders, perceptions of the organization as a power broker, a threat, and/or a go-to; the growth of the organization’s base and membership, and geographic reach; and growth of the field with regard to number of partners, constituencies, and capacities)?

**Reflection and Recalibration**
How do organizations translate their experiences in each phase into capacity changes and additional tactical and strategic modifications?
“We are an organization that very strategically picks when to endorse candidates and when to put muscle behind those endorsements, and then we work to make sure you keep your word. If you don’t, we will endorse someone else next time.”

—Michelle Tremillo, Texas Organizing Project

“Mass incarceration was a clear issue identified by our base. We shifted full scale into putting all this energy into getting Kim Foxx elected to make change on these issues. Now we are shifting that electoral energy back into the issue work to engage the folks that worked on the election into a longer-term campaign on support and accountability of Kim Foxx.”

—Will Tanzman, The People’s Lobby
ELEMENTS OF HIGH CAPACITY 501(c)(4) ORGANIZATIONS

Credibility
- Credibility and reputation with allies, political elites, elected officials, funders, and opponents.

Winning campaigns
- Ability to combine successful political strategy with campaign management skills that yield victories.

Engaged constituency
- Ability to recruit, engage, and maintain a constituency for and beyond campaigns to demonstrate power for strengthening democracy.

Sustainable organizational design & infrastructure
- High functioning management and operations system that supports a strategic vision for political change.

Influence & accountability
- Ability to influence legislative outcomes by making claims, wielding power, winning policy change, and holding elected officials accountable.