POWER TOOL:
Toolkit for Developing Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) Systems for Advocacy

This toolkit has been developed to support CARE staff that are engaging in advocacy and would like resources as they develop Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) systems for advocacy. The toolkit contains five tools that were influenced by MEL tools used by various offices across CARE, including CARE USA, CARE Tanzania, and the Impact Growth Strategy team in Southern Africa. These tools are *resources* intended to support MEL in advocacy and the use of these tools and systems is not required. In fact, each tool should be re-purposed to fit the specific context and advocacy initiative, and some tools will be more relevant to a specific context than others. These tools are all low-tech, user-friendly, and free/low-cost (you just need Microsoft Office) in order to support offices that do not have the financial resources to invest in MEL tools or consultants.

This toolkit contains five tools which are described in further detail below, including explanations and best practices for each tool:

1. Advocacy Logframe and Indicators Guidance, adapted from CARE International: This tool can be used as a template for developing your advocacy logframe and has been adapted for tracking progress towards advocacy goals. This tool includes example indicators related to the most common advocacy tactics, as well as CARE International's Global Impact Indicators.
2. Advocacy Activity Tracker Tool, adapted from CARE Tanzania: This tool is an excel-based spreadsheet which allows teams to easily track their advocacy activities.
3. Reflection Tool: Post-Advocacy Win, adapted from the Impact Growth Strategy team in Southern Africa: This tool encourages reflection and learning following an advocacy win. In the case of an advocacy loss, you can use the CARE/Dalberg Advocacy Strategy Evaluation Tool listed below to identify areas for improvement for future initiatives.
4. CARE/Dalberg Advocacy Strategy Evaluation Tool: CARE USA partnered with Dalberg, an international consultancy firm, to develop a tool that identifies strengths and gaps in an advocacy strategy in the planning, execution, and review stages of the advocacy strategy.
5. Overview of Additional Qualitative Methodologies, developed in partnership with CARE International, CARE UK, and CARE Canada: This tool is meant to provide additional insight on various qualitative methods promoted by CARE International that can be used to help tell your impact story and contribution, such as Outcome Mapping, Contribution Tracing, Outcome Harvesting, etc. These do not replace existing systems or PIIRS, but they complement existing systems by gathering more qualitative data during or after a project, program or initiative.

Things to consider before developing MEL systems:

Before developing your MEL systems, there are a few things to take into consideration:

1. Before considering your MEL tools, you must first have an advocacy strategy and/or theory of change.

A MEL system loses purpose if it is not verifying a theory of change or measuring progress, or lack thereof, towards an advocacy strategy. The CARE International Advocacy Handbook (also available in French and Spanish) can support you to develop a thorough advocacy strategy. For those with less time, you can use this strategy chart adapted by Midwest Academy which is a quick way to identify the key elements of an advocacy strategy. The CARE/Dalberg Strategy Evaluation Tool discussed in further detail below can be useful while developing an advocacy strategy to ensure your strategy has the necessary components.

2. As part of your MEL system, make sure you assign time for periodic reviews to adjust your strategy and tactics and update your MEL systems accordingly.

No matter how much preparation goes into your strategy, advocacy initiatives rarely follow a set plan and anticipated timelines and it is important to acknowledge this by incorporating moments for reflection and learning. Develop a learning plan or timeline for sessions that review the data your team has collected and reflect on lessons learned and changes that need to be made. This plan should be updated regularly. Start with a description of what learning and reflection looks like: who, what, where, when, how, for what purposes and continue to adjust as necessary. There will be instances where it makes sense to review multiple MEL tools at the same time because the data complements each other. An example reflection plan can be found below:

Reflection Session/Tools to be reviewed	Frequency	Dates for reflection/ review	Participants	Purpose
CARE/Dalberg Advocacy Strategy Evaluation Tool- Execution Stage	Every quarter	January 13, 2018 April 15, 2018 August 25, 2018	Names of all relevant staff	Review this tool to identify the areas for improvement during the execution of our advocacy strategy
Advocacy logframe	Every 6 months	June 15, 2018 December 15, 2018	Names of all relevant staff	Check-in on progress towards advocacy goals and identify any changes that need to be made to strategy
Advocacy activity tracker	Every 6 months	June 15, 2018 December 15, 2018	Names of all relevant staff	To ensure we achieved all planned activities and review where we have invested most of our time

3. Advocacy is a long-term commitment and requires a significant investment of staff and resources.

The Advocacy Capacity Assessment Tool is a free online resource that helps you identify gaps and strengths in the resources and capacity available to implement your advocacy strategy, including staff and funding. By using this tool beforehand, your team can identify needs for investment or re-adjust expectations to align with existing capacity and resources.

Tools for MEL Systems:

1. Advocacy Logframe and Indicator Guidance

DOWNLOAD TOOL

We all know that advocacy is difficult to track because of the constantly changing environment, but it is impossible to identify what is working and areas for improvement without systems to measure and track advocacy initiatives. This logframe template was developed in an effort to offer a systematic process for monitoring performance toward a policy goal over time. As a sample, this template can and should be adapted to best fit your context and MEL needs. A good MEL system can be extremely useful as a tool that holds us accountable and tracks our progress. It helps focus attention on achieving outcomes that are important to the organization and its stakeholder, and it provides a push for establishing key impact goals (long term and medium term) that address these outcomes. It also provides teams with crucial information on whether the strategy guiding the advocacy initiative is appropriate, correct, and adequate to the changes being sought through the initiative.

The advocacy indicator guidance sheet provides a list of example indicators that can be included in the advocacy logframe. These are ***sample*** indicators for some of the most common advocacy tactics and policy change goals gathered from various organizations. Remember, you should add or remove indicators as you see fit for your particular initiative. The indicators are broken down into three general categories: **output indicators, outcomes indicators, and goal indicators.** The breakdown is based on specificity of the indicators, but you can use any of the indicators where you see fit. The Indicator Guidance is intended to provide examples of indicators and should not be considered a strict list. For example, in some contexts, indicators listed as outcomes may be relevant as outputs depending on your advocacy strategy.

Best practices for the logframe:

- **Logframe must align with the advocacy strategy/theory of change**: The advocacy logframe is a framework for measuring and tracking our progress towards the policy changes outlined in the advocacy strategy/theory of change, so be sure that tactics, targets, and policy change goals included in the strategy match with those included in the logframe. This will allow the team to identify the effectiveness of the advocacy strategy and if progress is being made towards the identified goals.
- **Make Goals SMART (Specific, Measurable, Accountable, Relevant, and Time-Bound):** It is important to make sure advocacy goals are as SMART as possible because broad, overarching advocacy goals are difficult to measure. Break down any broad goals into mid-term and short-term objectives in order to better track progress towards the bigger goal.

- **Include baseline data and mid-line/end-line targets, when relevant:** Since advocacy is a long-term process, baseline data and targets can be useful for determining how far your team has come and if your team is where you wanted to be at a certain point. Depending on the objective/outcome/output, baselines and mid-point/endline targets may not be relevant, but when they are, they can help capture milestones and track progress towards the ideal outcome. These can be thought of as reference points (baseline and targets) to show change or progress. The indicators will be used to provide a point of comparison as the initiative progresses. For example, if you are conducting an advocacy campaign with an ultimate goal of increasing the number of districts implementing Policy X from 4 to 8, then it is important to capture that baseline and endline target to complement the overarching goal of 'increasing the number of districts implementing Policy X'.
- **Define a time period for the MEL logframe:** Advocacy initiatives often last many years, so make sure the advocacy logframe represents the current set of tactics and policy goals you are addressing. Although the impact level/long-term goal can be something you would like to see in ten years, any long-term advocacy strategies should include smaller stages or medium term impacts (1-2 years) in order to have a relevant MEL system as oppose to a system that cannot be filled out for another 10 years. To complement the longer-term goals, identify the activities and milestones that will help get you to the long-term goal in smaller stages. Whether aligned with the calendar year or a political cycle (such as two years to align with Parliament if your target is Parliament members), the logframe should focus on the elements of the advocacy strategy relevant for that period. Remember, you can develop a new logframe after the decided time period. For example, if your team has program funding for two years then develop a logframe for the next two years, and if the program continues your team can develop a new logframe that builds on the previous one and likely towards a similar goal.
- **Develop a plan to review the logframe during the advocacy initiative, and include all relevant team members:** Make a review plan that includes completing the logframe during the execution of the advocacy initiative, reviewing/sharing the findings with the relevant team members, and updating the advocacy strategy, if necessary. The logframe should be reviewed at the mid-point of an advocacy initiative at the very least in order to identify progress towards the policy goals. By reviewing the tool *during* the advocacy initiative rather than *after*, you are able to identify progress (or lack thereof), areas for improvement, and what is working and can then update your strategy/tactics based on these findings. Schedule a 'reflection session' and invite all relevant team members to discuss the findings and identify any next steps, such as updating the strategy, investing more in the most effective tactics, removing ineffective tactics, etc. After finalizing the logframe, determine how frequently the logframe will be filled and reviewed (quarterly, every 6 months, end of year, etc), and the process for sharing the findings and updating the strategy if necessary.
- **Make indicators SMART (Specific, Measurable, Accountable, Relevant, and Time-Bound):** The indicators should be SMART, particularly specific and measureable, otherwise it will be difficult to populate the logframe.
- **Consider how you will collect the information:** Indicators must be measurable in some way since they indicate if progress has been made, but we often forget to consider *how* we will measure the indicators because we are focused on *what* the indicators should be. Identify who is responsible for populating each indicator as well.
- **Be realistic:** When determining the indicators, make sure you consider your existing resources, particularly staff capacity. It is important to select indicators your team can actually populate. Ask yourself, "Can the team collect this information?" Certain indicators are particularly labor intensive, such as monitoring political discourse, media tracking, etc. so it is important to keep indicators realistic and manageable otherwise they are pointless.

2. Advocacy Activity Tracker Tool, adapted by CARE Tanzania

DOWNLOAD TOOL

Advocacy consists of a series of activities and tactics that are implemented in order to achieve a policy change of some sort. Thus, capturing the activities as they relate to the advocacy initiative is a crucial step for a MEL advocacy system. By capturing the activities, you can identify how much you have done towards an advocacy goal, what has worked and what hasn't, and determine if your team needs to adjust the tactics.

The Advocacy Activity Tracker Tool, inspired by a tool used by CARE Tanzania, is a low-tech approach to capture the activities related to your advocacy initiative(s). The reference page provides guidance on the various columns and samples for each category. The main elements of the activity tracker tool are:

- **Author** - Name of CARE Staff filling the form
- **Date -** Date of activity
- **Activity:** The type of activity. This list should be developed based on the key activities/tactics identified in your advocacy strategy such as meetings, events, awareness raising campaigns, etc. Examples of activities are included in the reference page.
- **Participants:** Name of primary target of activity. Depending on your advocacy, you can also have groups rather than individuals (Ex. Ministry of Health, Private sector actors, UN agency, etc). This should align with the targets identified in your strategy, and your team should agree on the level of detail that should be listed out (the individual's name, the position, etc).
- **Category:** The category options will vary by office. Each office should develop a list of categories that relate to their advocacy engagement. By having a set of established categories, you will be able to easily filter through the tool. If the team engages on multiple issues, then the categories can be the various sectors the office advocates on such as FNS, child marriage, maternal health, etc. If the country office only engages on one issue but various elements of an issue such as FNS, this can be the various elements of the issue such as nutrition, gender empowerment, land rights, etc. Examples of categories are included in the reference page of the tool.
- **Description:** A detailed description of the activity

Best practices for the activity tracker:

- **Establish a defined list of activities and categories:** Develop a set list of activities for staff to select from. This will allow you to easily filter and consolidate the data and will protect the information from becoming difficult to manage at a later point. Without a defined list, staff will make up their own activity names and categories and you will not be able to easily search through or consolidate the activities.
- **List of activities should align with the advocacy strategy/theory of change:** The list of activities should align with those identified in the advocacy strategy and/or theory of change. If there is a difference between the activities being implemented and those identified in your advocacy strategy/theory of change, then that is a sign that there is a disconnect between the team's actions and the strategy.
- **Ensure team approves the list of activities and categories**: Before finalizing the list of activities/categories in the strategy, make sure the individuals who will be implementing the activities and filling the form reviews and approves the list of activities and categories. It is important that the activities accurately portray the team's work otherwise the tool will be difficult for them to use. If there isn't buy-in from the people who need to input data into the tool, the likelihood of them using it significantly decreases and thus makes the tool useless.
- **Be flexible and proactive, add activities as necessary**: Advocacy doesn't always follow the plans we set, and sometimes we adopt tactics we didn't plan in order to respond to a changing environment. When this happens, make sure you update the tool's reference sheet to include the new activities. The list should be updated regularly to make sure it continues to reflect the team's work.
- **Clearly designate responsibilities and timelines**: We know how difficult it can be to get data inputted when people are so busy, but it is still extremely important to track our activities so we can analyze this information at a later date. Make sure everyone knows *who is responsible* for filling in this tool, and *when they are responsible* for filling it out. While some staff will fill it out on an on-going basis (right after the activity), others may prefer to input all their activities all at once at the end of the week or month. Let the staff input activities according to their preference, but set a hard deadline to ensure activities are inputted by a certain date. At CARE USA, we require staff to have all activities inputted by the last day of the month. This allows staff to input the data at their convenience while establishing a deadline to ensure the MEL team has the data we need to track our work.
- **Excel features such as drop-down menus and 'sort and filter' are your friend:** You can control the range of data being inputted by creating drop-down menus for the activities and categories. This will restrict staff from creating their own activities/categories, which will protect the data from becoming unwieldly. This is important for when you consolidate the data for review since it will allow you to easily filter data. Guidance on how to create a drop-down menu is included on the reference sheet of the tool.
- **Develop a plan for reviewing the data**: Data collection should be purpose-driven. Identify *how* this data will be used, *when* it will be reviewed, and *who* will review it. Be sure to share findings with those involved in the data collection process so they can see that the information is actually being used.

3. Reflection Tool Post-Advocacy Win

DOWNLOAD TOOL

This tool was originally developed by the Southern Africa Impact Growth Strategy team to identify gaps between policy adoption and policy implementation, but it has been adapted into a learning and reflection tool following an advocacy initiative. Whether small or large, advocacy wins are rare and when a win happens, we often move onto the next task without taking a moment to reflect on what worked well and what didn't. For those with limited time, this reflection tool is a quick way to ask yourself and your team critical questions about the advocacy win that can be used to improve future advocacy initiatives.

Best practices for the reflection tool:

- **Host a reflection session for everyone involved:** The reflection tool should be filled by all the team members involved in the advocacy initiative, and not just one person. Rather than having staff fill the form individually, invite relevant staff members to meet and use this document to facilitate the discussion on what was achieved, what worked well, and what didn't. This has the added benefit of being a discussion where people can raise and discuss their perspectives, and it also ensures many people are involved in the discussions regarding how to improve future advocacy initiatives.
- **Include internal challenges, not just external challenges:** While we often think of external challenges when it comes to achieving an advocacy success, there are also internal challenges that can have an impact on the operations such as a slow procurement process, lack of clarity in responsibility, limited staff capacity, lack of communication/coordination between different teams/departments, etc. While this can be a bit sensitive, it is important to raise such challenges otherwise they will not be addressed. The benefit of raising internal challenges is that they are likely a bit easier to address than external challenges outside of our control!
- **Circulate the findings widely, and make them easily accessible:** Once you capture all the feedback from various staff members, circulate the filled form or the main findings widely. This ensures that the knowledge doesn't stay with one person, which is a common issue we face in a large organization. As CARE aspires to be a learning organization, it is important to share learnings widely so others can apply the learnings in their context. Find creative ways to share these findings such as group discussions, infographics, PowerPoints, etc. Also, make sure the document is saved in a place that is easily accessible for all staff members and not just saved on one person's computer.
- **Develop an action plan for addressing any challenges that were raised, including any internal challenges:** Discussions to surface any challenges or areas for improvement are only useful if there are steps taken to address these issues. Identify individuals or a team to develop an action plan for addressing any challenges that were raised. It is likely these same challenges will come up in the future, so it is important to develop a plan to address them before you face those challenges again.

4. CARE/Dalberg Advocacy Strategy Evaluation Tool:

DOWNLOAD TOOL

CARE USA partnered with Dalberg, an international consultancy firm, to develop a tool that identifies gaps in an advocacy strategy in the three main phases of an advocacy initiative:

1. **Planning** and designing an advocacy strategy
2. **Executing** and implementing an advocacy strategy
3. **Review** stage following completion of an advocacy strategy, including unsuccessful advocacy initiatives

The tool has three separate sheets (one for each phase), and the various questions per phase identifies weaknesses in the strategy based on a scoring system. Once your team answers the questions on the relevant sheet, you can evaluate each answer by providing a score of 1 to 5. By scoring each answer, you can identify specific areas for improvement and enhance your advocacy strategy for the relevant phase.

Best practices for the strategy evaluation tool:

- **Invite key staff to fill the tool together:** Invite staff from the different teams involved in the advocacy initiative to participate in filling the tool, particularly when evaluating the execution phase. Similar to the reflection tool, this document can facilitate critical discussions on what is working and what needs to change. The diversity in perspectives will ensure various challenges are raised, and ideally addressed.
- **Identify a timeline for evaluating your advocacy strategy:** Things in the advocacy world move quickly and unpredictably, and we often forget to take a moment and reflect on our strategy. As part of your advocacy strategy design, schedule regular meetings to utilize the execution sheet of this tool in order to identify any necessary changes. With your team, determine how frequently these meetings will occur. Ideally, your team should re-evaluate the advocacy strategy every four to six months.
- **Design an action plan for weak areas:** This tool diagnoses weak spots in your advocacy strategy, but the most important piece is the follow-up to address these weak spots. If you receive a score of 4 or less for any question on the execution page, identify what needs to be done to receive a higher score and identify clear tasks and responsibilities for strengthening the weak spots that are revealed through this tool.
- **Use this as a learning tool after an advocacy loss:** Reflection after an advocacy loss is just as valuable, if not more so, than reflection after an advocacy win. This tool can help enable us to change strategy or tactics for the next round of advocacy.

5. Overview of Qualitative Methodologies for Measuring Advocacy

DOWNLOAD TOOL

The many elements of an advocacy initiative can be a challenge to capture, and a simple MEL framework does not always help us understand how and why change happened. In order to understand the process of change better, CARE has begun to explore various theory-based methods such as Outcome Mapping, Outcome Harvesting, Most Significant Change and Contribution Tracing which are methodologies that test theories of change and provide more information on how and why change happened. The **CARE International MEAL (Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, and Learning) Guidance Document** reminds us that MEAL systems should track qualitative and quantitative changes at impact and outcome levels in order to understand how and why change happens, and if and how CARE is contributing to significant and lasting change. Theory-based methods can help explain what worked (planned or unplanned), how it worked, and why, especially in complex contexts.

This tool provides a summary of the four methods CARE has begun to explore and how it can best be used for advocacy initiatives. Additional information on each tool, when and how to use them and the type of information they produce can be found here.