

Organizational Capacity and Readiness Reflection

This reflection tool is designed to help your foundation reflect honestly on its current capacity and readiness to engage in advocacy, policy, and lobbying work. There are no right or wrong answers — the goal is to surface where your organization already has strength to build on, and where intentional development is needed.

How to use this reflection: For each statement, mark the box that best reflects your foundation's current state. For beginning, in progress and complete, the following indicators will help in making the right selection:

- **Beginning:** The appropriate internal and external stakeholders that are involved in the actions needed are identified.
- **In progress:** Planning to reflect, research or develop recommendations is happening.
- **Completed:** The sentiment reflected in the statement is completed through one of the following actions: formal approval by the appropriate internal stakeholders, agreed upon understanding among the appropriate individuals in the organization, or processes to conduct actions reflected are developed and formalized.

Then respond to the reflection prompt at the end of each section in your own words. Complete this individually or as a team — many foundations find it valuable to compare perspectives across staff and board.

Assets, Resources, & Relationships

Statement	Not Started	Beginning	In progress	Completed
We have a clear picture of our foundation's monetary and non-monetary resources relevant to advancing policy work.				
We understand our relationships with elected officials, policy organizations, and other funders working in the policy advocacy ecosystem.				
We understand who sees our foundation as a trusted voice on specific policy issues.				
We have identified other stakeholders funding or doing policy work in our community.				

Reflection: What assets or relationships are you/your organization not yet using to their full potential?

Internal Expertise & Staffing

Statement	Not Started	Beginning	In progress	Completed
Staff and/or board members understand the basic differences between advocacy, policy, and lobbying.				
We have someone internally who can serve as a point person for policy and advocacy engagement.				
We know what skills or capacity we would need to build or bring in to do this work well.				
Our board is informed about, and supportive of, this type of engagement.				

Reflection: Where are your biggest internal knowledge or capacity gaps?

Grantmaking Influence & Funding Mechanisms

Statement	Not Started	Beginning	In progress	Completed
We understand the range of funding mechanisms available (direct grants, pooled funds, general operating support to advocacy groups).				
We know whether we want to create a dedicated grant program, contribute to a pooled fund, or support existing advocacy organizations.				
Our current grantmaking practices could evolve to support advocacy and policy work without a complete overhaul.				
We understand how to use grantmaking to complement — not replace — our own organizational voice and influence.				

Reflection: What would your ideal funding mechanism for this work look like

Mission Alignment & Risk Tolerance

Statement	Not Started	Beginning	In progress	Completed
Our mission and values clearly support engagement in policy and advocacy work.				
Our board has defined risk tolerance across financial, regulatory, reputational, mission, and operational area				
Our board and leadership have developed processes to determine the organization's approach to managing and mitigating risk.				
We can articulate why this work matters to our donors and community, in language that resonates.				
We have alignment between staff, leadership, and board on the foundation's role in this space.				

Reflection: Where might mission alignment or risk tolerance still need to be discussed further?

Legal & Compliance Readiness

Statement	Not Started	Beginning	In progress	Completed
We understand the IRS definitions and thresholds relevant to lobbying activities.				
We have selected or formally evaluated the 501(h) election option				
We are clear on the legal parameters for funding lobbying, including grassroots lobbying.				
We know when and how to seek legal guidance before engaging in or funding this work.				
We have a process for tracking lobbying activities				

Reflection: What legal or compliance questions do you still need processes for?

Infrastructure & Systems

Statement	Not Started	Beginning	In progress	Completed
We have (or are developing) internal policies outlining our approach to advocacy and lobbying engagement, including funding.				
We have risk management protocols to assess legal, reputational, and financial risk.				
We have — or plan to build — an evaluation and learning framework for advocacy investments.				
We have flexible funding mechanisms that allow rapid response when policy opportunities arise.				

Reflection: Which process or system is most urgent to build next?

Decision Making

Statement	Not Started	Beginning	In progress	Completed
We have criteria for evaluating a policy engagement opportunity.				
We have an understanding of what actions regarding policy engagement involve board approval.				
We have defined the different levels of policy engagement for our organization.				
We have our criteria, process and levels of engagement formalized in a process document.				

Reflection: Who in your organization is or will be involved in decision making?

Donor & Stakeholder Engagement

Statement	Not Started	Beginning	In progress	Completed
Residents most affected by the issues we work on help shape our policy priorities, not just respond to them				
We view donors as potential partners in advocacy, not just funding sources.				
We have a communication strategy for explaining our advocacy work to stakeholders.				
We are prepared to engage policymakers directly if opportunities arise.				
We know how we would respond to questions or pushback about our involvement in policy work.				

Reflection: Who are the key stakeholders you most need to bring along?

Evaluation & Learning

Statement	Not Started	Beginning	In progress	Completed
We have a way to define and track meaningful outcomes for policy and advocacy work..				
We are prepared to learn from setbacks as well as successes.				
We have identified how this work fits into our broader organizational approach to learning.				
We know how we will communicate results — internally and externally — of our advocacy work.				

Reflection: What would success look like for us one year from now?

Reflections

- Look back at where you have the most marks for each section and corresponding question. Reflect on what might be the factors in why you selected not started instead of beginning, or in progress instead of completed.
- Identify your one or two sections where you have a lot of “not started marks to prioritize deeper work on.
- Review your reflection responses and look for common themes across sections. Share results with your board or leadership team to gauge their perspective and discuss where to lean in or do more learning.
- Set one concrete next step for the next 90 days.

Sources

- **Organizational Readiness Assessment:** https://www.buildingmovement.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Organizational_Readiness_Assessment_Tool.pdf
- **Urban Institute, Policy Change Toolkit for Community Foundations:** <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/policy-change-toolkit-community-foundations>
- **Alliance for Justice, Philanthropy Advocacy Playbook:** <https://afj.org/resource/philanthropy-advocacy-playbook/>