

## GET READY: BUILD THE BASE FOR EQUITY ADVOCACY



Building on the experiences and expertise of seasoned staff and partners across a range of fields, PolicyLink has identified the essential components of successful equity advocacy efforts. This information has been assembled in Getting Equity Advocacy Results (GEAR): a suite of benchmarks, methods, and tools for advocates, organizers, and their allies to track the results of their equity campaigns.

GEAR offers important benchmarks for advocates to **BUILD THE BASE** for equitable change. Equity advocacy benchmarks can be considered the 'mile markers' in campaigns for policy change. They can be useful for charting the course of a new advocacy effort, providing feedback on the progress of an existing one, and reporting on the success of a completed campaign.

More information on measuring the success of equity advocacy is available online: [www.policylink.org/gear](http://www.policylink.org/gear).

Changing the challenging conditions that affect low-income people and communities of color requires a "grassroots to treetops" approach that connects the experiences of people on the ground with the decisions about policies that shape communities. Any campaign for equity—whether pro-active efforts to change organizational rules, defensive efforts to block inequitable legislation, or strategic efforts to place community leaders in positions of power—must stem from the experience and engagement of those directly affected. Effective

organizing and a strong base of popular support lie at the heart of every successful equity campaign, and are critical as both steps and outcomes for advocacy.

Equity advocacy efforts to **BUILD THE BASE** include four key components: issue identification; community visioning and organizing; initial power analyses; and planning the advocacy strategy. Benchmarks for each of these areas, and guiding questions to navigate them, are detailed on the following pages.

## BENCHMARKS TO BUILD THE BASE

Issue Identification	
Guiding Questions	Equity Benchmarks
<i>What is the problem, and what are the key equity dimensions associated with it?</i>	A salient problem is identified by community residents, leaders, and organizations, and its equity dimensions (e.g., consequences for people of different races, classes, or genders) are understood and illustrated with reliable research (e.g., disaggregated statistical data, community-based research).
<i>Who bears the burden of the inequities resulting from this problem?</i>	Impacts on specific groups, communities, and people most affected by the problem are revealed through traditional research and community-based research (e.g., demographic and economic secondary data, collection of primary information from and by residents, mapping of community trends).
Community Visioning and Organizing	
Guiding Questions	Equity Benchmarks
<i>How central are the people most impacted by the problem to creating a vision and plan for equitable change?</i>	The groups, communities, and people most affected by the problem identify it as a priority for change. Outreach strategies, capacity-building efforts, and information that is appropriate, available, and accessible (e.g., culturally, linguistically, and physically) to them may have furthered their understanding and engagement.
	A visioning process, driven by community dialogue—particularly among those most affected by the problem—produces a collective vision of the community’s future.
	Diverse and strategic stakeholders, including those most affected by the problem, commit to working together as a collaborative to create equitable change.
<i>What supports are available to sustain and strengthen an inclusive and ongoing organizing effort for change?</i>	The collective expertise of the collaborative includes both community leaders bringing authentic community wisdom as well as advisors bringing technical expertise to jointly validate the problem, inform the campaign strategy, and justify policy change objectives.
	Trust between collaborative members is maintained through honest communication between members about their changing motives, goals, and individual and organizational priorities for participating in the campaign for policy change.
	Communication between collaborative members involves regular and timely flow of information.
	Sufficient resources (e.g., financial, human, etc.) are available to support organizing and visioning activities.
<i>How does the leadership of the collaborative demonstrate equity, and how well is that leadership supported?</i>	Leadership of the collaborative includes leaders from the community and reflects its racial diversity and diversity of interests.
	Paths to leadership within the collaborative are transparent, available to, and endorsed by members of the collaborative.
	Leadership of the collaborative has timely access to the research, information, partners, and key informants necessary to advance the campaign.
	Leadership of the collaborative is accountable for and empowered to manage the diverse membership, ensure ongoing member engagement, and oversee conflict resolution.
	The capacity of the leadership of the collaborative to make strategic decisions and difficult choices is continually improving.

## Initial Power Analyses

### Guiding Questions

### Equity Benchmarks

*What aspects of the collaborative contribute to its power to create change?*

There is a strong and ongoing commitment among collaborative members to one another and to advancing the community vision.

The core strategy of the campaign is informed by the knowledge, strengths, and assets of collaborative members, and accelerated by continually building collaborative members' skills and capacities to advance policy change objectives.

Ongoing recruitment of new collaborative members from the community and various fields of expertise brings new energy, fresh perspectives, power, and skills to the collaborative.

*What external factors influence the power of the collaborative to create change?*

Equity analyses, built upon dialogue and learning between collaborative members, reveal the institutional factors influencing the problem, and contribute to the findings from power mapping exercises.

Initial power mapping reveals individuals, organizations, and interest groups that have the power, both formally and informally, to make, influence, or block decisions regarding possible policy change objectives.

Ongoing power mapping reveals how groups, communities, and people that are most impacted by the problem, both within the collaborative and in the community at large, could gain power to advance the campaign.

## Planning the Advocacy Strategy

### Guiding Questions

### Equity Benchmarks

*How do decisions regarding advocacy strategy maximize the effectiveness of the collaborative?*

The governance structure of the collaborative is transparent and designed to strategically leverage the assets of its members to advance the campaign toward the community vision.

The agenda and campaign strategy are transparent and endorsed by members of the collaborative.

Sufficient resources (e.g., financial, human, etc.) are available to support research, communications, and strategic planning activities focused on the campaign.

Agreements regarding decisions and operations of the collaborative are identified and expressed in writing at important times.

*How are research and communications integrated into collaborative planning and implementation operations?*

A clear strategy is established for conducting research, analyzing information, and disaggregating data to inform the equity dimensions of the campaign throughout its duration.

A "feedback loop" directs information regarding decision processes and outcomes efficiently and effectively to members of the collaborative.

The collaborative is committed to monitoring its course and revisiting its understanding of the problem, in order to remain current and effective in its campaign for equity.

The collaborative is committed to implementing and leveraging a strategic communications plan to sharpen its advocacy strategy.

## THE ONGOING ROLES OF ORGANIZING, CAPACITY BUILDING, RESEARCH, AND COMMUNICATIONS TO BUILD THE BASE

Equity is produced when communities are empowered to shape their environments so that they can thrive and prosper. This requires policies that are inclusive of community experiences and engagement, as well as leaders to turn the wheels of change. To get there, campaigns for policy change involve dynamic processes weaving together organizing, capacity-building, research, and communications strategies. In the **BUILD THE BASE** stage, organizing and capacity building ensure that a strong and effective community collaborative gives voice to the needs in the community. Research plays an important role to inform issue selection and campaign strategy, and communications helps with outreach and message alignment. Examples and further information on how advocates engage in these ongoing activities are available in the **GEAR Overview: Tools for Navigating Change**, available online.

## STRATEGIES TO DEFINE AND MEASURE SUCCESS

Effective strategies for measurement and analysis must match the differing demands, resources, and courses of each equity advocacy campaign. The **BUILD THE BASE** benchmarks, which emphasize organizing, capacity building, and research, are well suited for adaptation to surveys, interview protocols, and other participatory evaluation strategies for individual campaigns. Recommendations for using GEAR benchmarks for measurement are available in the **GEAR Guide: Planning and Assessing Success**.

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To learn more, visit: [www.policylink.org/gear](http://www.policylink.org/gear)