



Advocacy Campaigns and  
Embedded Evaluators:

# Lessons Learned



# In 2014, two large advocacy campaigns launched in Pennsylvania: The Campaign for Fair Education Funding (CFEF) and The Pre-K for PA Campaign (Pre-K for PA).

CFEF drew on a broad base of education stakeholders in pursuit of two goals: passing a fair funding formula for use in allocation of the state's budget for schools and increasing the overall amount of funding available for K-12 education. Pre-K for PA focused on expanding the resources available in Pennsylvania for pre-k, concentrating on expanding access to high-quality pre-k.

From 2014 to 2016, TCC Group (TCC) partnered with Pre-K for PA and CFEF to act as their embedded evaluator. For each campaign, TCC's focus was on the quality of strategy, progress on short- and long-term goals, and internal capacity. The TCC team also attended dozens of internal campaign meetings as observers, and worked with each campaign to identify their own learning goals and questions. A mix of informal and formal reports on progress was shared with stakeholders.

TCC's role as embedded evaluators built off of the team's previous experience in the advocacy field. For over a decade, TCC has supported evaluation efforts in many

advocacy campaigns. For example, TCC has provided ongoing evaluative feedback to a national effort to promote nursing that has active campaigns in all 50 states; worked with a global health advocacy group to assess the effectiveness of their efforts nationally and internationally; and has supported the efforts of other advocacy campaigns to assess their capacity.

Working with CFEF and Pre-K for PA has been a rich learning environment for all parties involved. The work has provided TCC Group with the opportunity to confirm trends seen in other evaluations and to develop new insights. This piece shares nine insights from the first two years of work.

These nine lessons are:

- 1 Campaign Staffing and Structure Must be Customized
- 2 Structuring Accountability to the Campaign is Important – but Not Easy
- 3 Data Sharing Helps Learning but Requires a Deep Commitment
- 4 Campaigns Should Focus on Context Beyond Monetary Asks
- 5 Financial Flexibility is Critical for a Successful Campaign
- 6 Thorny Budget Issues May Need to be Confronted
- 7 Winning Can Create Its Own Challenges
- 8 Local Efforts and Statewide Efforts Can Boost Each Other
- 9 Geographical Fairness is Important in a Statewide Campaign

## History & Goals of CFEF

The Campaign for Fair Education Funding (CFEF) was launched in January 2014, with the ultimate goal of ensuring that Pennsylvania adopts and maintains an adequate and equitable system of funding public education by 2016. At the time of CFEF's launch, Pennsylvania was one of only three states that did not allocate funding to school districts based on an accurate enrollment count or consideration of the characteristics of children in the district. In order to achieve the goal of a fair funding formula and adequate overall funding, a broad base of education, business, child advocacy, and labor stakeholders came together to form a statewide advocacy campaign.

The campaign consists of over 50 member organizations that serve as the governing body. These members are committed to ensuring the campaign will be a high priority within their organizations, providing resources to CFEF through formal leadership or in-kind/other contributions, and engaging in relevant campaign activities. CFEF is formally governed by an elected Executive Committee and operates with four programmatic committees: Research, Mobilization, Government Relations, and Communications. CFEF is formally managed by a communications firm that also provides administrative and communications support. CFEF achieved one of its main goals in 2016 when a bill was passed with strong bipartisan (and nearly unanimous) support, ensuring that the funding formula developed by a special legislative commission (with strong input from CFEF) would be used for all new education funding in the state. The last two state budget cycles saw significant increases in education funding (\$200 million in FY16 and \$200 million in FY17), though both fell short of CFEF requests.

## History & Goals for Pre-K for PA

Pre-K for PA was launched in 2014 as an initiative of Early Learning PA (ELPA), a long-standing coalition of organizations that support early learning. Led by ten principal organizations located across the state, the campaign currently has 15,000 individual supporters, nearly 600 organizational supporters, and over 100 Leadership Council members (i.e., grasstops supporters). Pre-K for PA has standing committees focused on mobilization, communications, research, grasstops, and government relations, with each committee being led by one of the principal organizations. The overall campaign is coordinated by one principal organization that takes on the role of ensuring there is active communication and integration across committees.

The campaign's ultimate goal is that every at-risk child has access to high-quality pre-k, and that middle-income families are more easily able to afford high-quality pre-k. Since its inception, the campaign has had great success including: having the incoming governor heavily campaign on the issue of universal pre-k and earning a \$30 million funding increase in 2015-2016 with another \$30 million increase in 2016-2017, though the increases did fall short of the campaign's requests.



## LESSON 1



# Campaign Staffing and Structure Must be Customized

How can a campaign best adapt staffing and infrastructure to fit its work? As the Campaign for Fair Education Funding (CFEF) and the Pre-K for PA Campaign (Pre-K for PA) were gearing up, they took different forms.

CFEF had dozens of actively involved organizations that represented grassroots, membership organizations, associations, unions, businesses, and faith-based partners. This campaign was intentionally broad in membership as it wanted to represent the full range of partners that supported a fair, predictable, and adequate school funding formula. CFEF also chose a staffing structure that included a campaign manager. This structural choice helped set direction and support with implementing decisions for CFEF and provided a clear point-person. When CFEF's campaign manager left, the campaign hired the firm that was doing their communications work as their interim, and ultimately permanent, campaign manager. The firm had strong ties to the Pennsylvania policy world and handled the administrative, communications, and broad monitoring of the campaign. The firm also served a role in the campaign's strategy development.

Pre-K for PA emerged as an initiative of Early Learning PA, a coalition of ten organizations focused on pre-k and early learning that have worked together for decades. For a staffing structure, Pre-K for PA first chose to hire a campaign manager who was more administrative

in function. Eventually, Pre-K for PA did away with the stand-alone campaign manager position. Instead, in its second year, the campaign transitioned to a diversified model of leadership where one principal leads the administrative functions of the campaign (e.g., ensuring that agendas are compiled and that governing meetings are scheduled) while other campaign principals lead the administrative oversight of the five standing committees.

Each campaign found that there was not a specific staffing model that was "best." Instead, the campaigns needed staffing models that not only fit their needs but also complemented existing campaign structures and relationships. This finding supports information in a benchmarking report that highlights how some campaigns use administrative campaign managers; some use campaign managers who function similarly to executive directors, while others choose to be more collaboratively led.<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Locke, K., & Fine, M., Ed.D. (2016). *Effective Strategies to Support Advocacy Campaigns: Considerations for Funders and Advocates*. TCC Group. Retrieved from [http://tccgrp.com/pdfs/Effective\\_Strategies\\_to\\_Support\\_Advocacy\\_Campaigns\\_TCCGroup.pdf](http://tccgrp.com/pdfs/Effective_Strategies_to_Support_Advocacy_Campaigns_TCCGroup.pdf)

## LESSON 2



# Structuring Accountability to the Campaign is Important – but Not Easy

The question about campaign operations overlaps with a larger question of accountability. Given that campaigns are often decentralized, what is the appropriate mechanism of accountability? How can partnering organizations ensure everyone is pulling their weight and benefitting the campaign as a whole? Many of the campaigns reviewed for the previously mentioned benchmarking report utilized memorandums of understanding (MOUs) to delineate roles, responsibilities, and consequences for violations of campaign protocol (e.g., making public comments off-message). In working with CFEF and Pre-K for PA, TCC found that approaches towards accountability differed due to differences in the number of partners, the relationships among partners in each campaign, and the levels of alliances among campaign organizations. In CFEF, while all participants aligned around the need for a fair and predictable funding formula, several groups took opposing views on other matters. In Pre-K for PA, half of the organization had goals that went beyond pre-k and toward a space where the principals had less alignment.

In each of these campaigns, accountability was tied to funding structure. Pre-K for PA applied for funding with a shared workplan. This meant that all campaign members had agreed upon what responsibilities individual organizations had in order to meet the shared grant deliverables. Eventually, Pre-K for PA had the leader of each standing committee be responsible for implementing these shared workplans. This gave the leaders clearly defined accountability for the committee they oversaw.

CFEF was funded in a less comprehensive manner. While some organizations were funded to participate in the campaign or to take on key elements of work, many were not. Some organizations were funded outside of the campaign infrastructure to work on similar goals, but using a different strategy (e.g., using litigation to bring forward the issue of adequate and fair school funding through the court system).

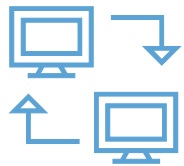
CFEF eventually developed three accountability mechanisms: a shared workplan, a member-contribution structure, and a governing document outlining campaign structure (i.e., roles and responsibilities of the governing body and endorsing members). The shared workplan helped outline responsibilities for individual organizations contributing to the campaign. The member-contribution structure served two purposes: it provided unrestricted funding for lobbying and other activities, and created more accountability for organizations that would need to buy-in to voting membership via funding or committed personnel time. The campaign structure document ensured that roles and responsibilities were clear and explicit for all members.

Other campaigns TCC has worked with had similar examples of structuring accountability. Often, the greater the number of partners involved, the more difficult accountability became. Partners did not necessarily have the relationships, trust, and structures needed to create a culture of accountability.





## LESSON 3



# Data Sharing Helps Learning but Requires a Deep Commitment

The sharing of data can have a synergistic role with accountability. As evaluators, TCC entered into its partnership with each campaign having data foremost on the mind. What quality of data was each campaign collecting and how could this information be used for decision-making and learning? What data were individual organizations collecting and how could this be of aid to the larger campaign? What systems for collecting data made the most sense? These have been the ongoing questions for both campaigns. TCC found that each campaign had a different approach to data. Since Pre-K for PA operates using a shared workplan, TCC was able to create a comprehensive data tracking tool – where virtually any activity or action was logged in a shared data sheet. Eventually, this was scaled back to committee-level data tracking, with information being shared more broadly when necessary. This allowed for the tool to be used for both strategic learning and accountability purposes.

CFEF used fewer shared tracking systems and campaign members had some pushback on reporting on shared data due to policy issues on which various campaign members did not want to share information. Furthermore, there was not a shared campaign workplan on which to base the data system.

Data collection and sharing are ongoing issues for campaign evaluations that track progress rather than solely the end policy state (i.e., a win or loss on the policy front). One solution that has been implemented is to have several different categories of data—some that are captured from campaign members, some that are captured at the campaign level, and some that are gathered external to the campaign or are independently verifiable.



## LESSON 4



# Campaigns Should Focus on Context Beyond Monetary Asks

Including non-monetary asks as well as budget requests in a campaign effort allows campaigns to push their agendas forward during times of limited revenue, which can boost their reputation as reasonable and tactical partners.

When Pre-K for PA sent their budget request to the incoming governor in 2015, they made sure to include some non-monetary regulatory and policy clarification requests. When the governor's office released the budget, it made note of virtually all of the language in the campaign's non-monetary asks. This gave the campaign and the administration useful and relatively easy wins. As an example, Pre-K for PA asked the governor's office to clarify for pre-k providers that they could use funds for transportation and the governor followed up by including language that clarified that this was in fact the case.

CFEF's creation of a weighted funding formula was a different way to approach their context. CFEF worked with expert consultants to craft their own model for a basic education funding formula that could be used as a model for the new statewide formula. CFEF was then able to further leverage their work on this formula by having campaign members testify before the Basic Education Funding Commission (BEFC) on the importance of using a formula like the one the campaign created.

TCC has seen this tactic used successfully in other campaigns. In a global health advocacy organization that TCC partnered with, advocates always made sure



to suggest actions that could be implemented if there is intention, even if money was short. This allowed them to have a greater ability to achieve impact, particularly in counties less likely to have a robust budget for public health issues.



## LESSON 5



# Financial Flexibility is Critical for a Successful Campaign

At one point during the evaluation there was a significant budget stalemate between the Governor of Pennsylvania and the State Legislature. This led to the need to adapt strategies. Thankfully, both campaigns had access to multi-year financial resources that were not tied to exact deliverables or pre-determined messaging. Each campaign was able to engage the funders in conversations around desired strategy shifts, allowing the funder to have some level of approval while still allowing for flexibility of strategies. Furthermore, the multi-year nature of the funding made it easier for each campaign to be patient and wait for the right opportunities to emerge.

Advocates will often cite the importance of financial flexibility in campaign work. Financial flexibility is especially important for campaigns because they are often involved in direct lobbying efforts that few foundations are set up to support. Instead, campaigns very often need to fundraise or charge membership fees to access dollars that can be used for direct lobbying or rely, as these two campaigns did, on in-kind support made by principal organizations that include campaign asks in their own meetings with legislators or lobbyists.

## LESSON 6



# Thorny Budget Issues May Need to be Confronted

Even as the two campaigns were adapting to a budget stalemate, they had to decide whether or not they would take a stand on the issue of revenues. In Pennsylvania, many legislators were reluctant to increase revenues and legislators used the revenue situation as the reason for which they could not support increased funding for pre-k or for K-12 education. Both campaigns supported increased revenues, but neither made statements in favor of, or against, specific ways to increase revenues. For example, members of CFEF would often say, “Find the necessary revenues to fund schools fairly and adequately” without taking a stand on specific revenue sources.

Advocates understand that when their proposals require (or request) changes in budget allocations, the fight can be fierce. This is because there are basically only three scenarios for accommodating budget requests: increasing the overall amount of the budget (e.g., raising revenue); dividing the existing revenue differently; or revenue growth via other means (e.g., an unchanged income tax during a period of rising incomes).

TCC’s work supporting a nursing campaign in all 50 states has shown again and again that budget issues are often a primary obstacle and can stand in the way of (or be used as an excuse by) decision makers who are sympathetic to the requested changes. While some states have found ways to create new revenue (e.g., by introducing an increased fee for licensing which can then go into a pool accessible by nursing organizations), other states have chosen not to increase revenue, and thus struggle with responding to policymakers who may cite budget restraints as a primary obstacle for moving forward on the stated work. While there is no “right” decision, whether or not to take a stand on increasing revenue is likely a discussion that many campaigns (especially those working directly with policymakers) need to address. Moreover, while not an issue for these two campaigns, in some instances funders need to understand that without revenue increases, budget growth specific to a certain issue area may come at the expense of other issues they care about.

## LESSON 7



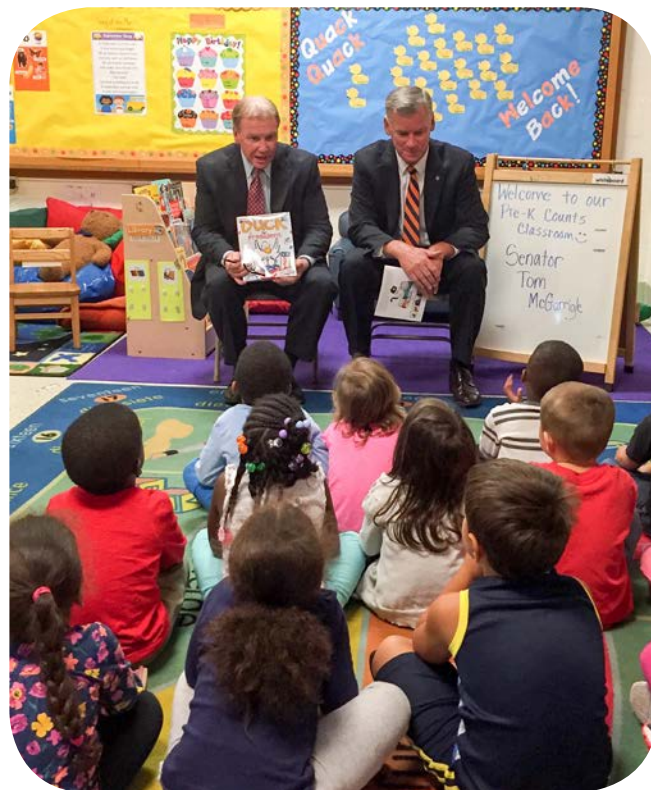
# “Winning” Can Create its Own Challenges

Ultimately, both campaigns were able to claim large wins. Each year since their inception, additional funds were dedicated to the advocates’ causes and a funding formula for K-12 education was adopted. In both cases, the campaigns provided unique and important contributions to these policy wins. For instance, the formula put forward by CFEF helped serve as a model on the formula weights that the Basic Education Funding Commission was exploring, leading to many of the formula elements being the same or very similar. Moreover, CFEF’s research and testimony to the Commission became much of the basis for the final formula. With Pre-K for PA, much of the campaign’s language around monetary and non-monetary requests was repeated nearly verbatim in the governor’s proposed budget. Yet, as the campaigns moved into their second and third years, their successes created new challenges.

First, the struggle to preserve hard-fought gains requires ongoing attention. Second, for the remaining issues, it becomes harder to find political will. Third, initial wins reduce the sense of urgency that campaigns could muster in policy discussions.

Other campaigns TCC has worked with also had moments when they almost became victims of their own success. For example, after securing a major win on transportation reform in the late 1990s, the transportation reform coalitions almost completely disappeared. This meant that the ability to monitor implementation was

almost eliminated and when a new set of policy debates emerged, there was no infrastructure to capitalize on the debates. For some campaigns, transitioning to implementation or maintaining a dual focus on advocacy and implementation may pay dividends in the long-term.





## LESSON 8



# Local Efforts and Statewide Efforts Can Boost Each Other

In addition to the efforts organized by these two campaigns on K-12 and pre-k issues at the state level, there was also local interest in these issue areas, particularly pre-k. For example, in May 2015, Philadelphians supported a ballot measure that created a commission focused on developing a plan to expand pre-k in the city. The city later passed a sweetened-beverage tax that was tied to increasing funding for pre-k. Both of these local actions showed the resonance of pre-k as an important and popular issue. While many individual campaign partners were actively involved in these efforts, the Pre-K for PA campaign strategically decided not to incorporate them formally into the campaign's work. However, there were elements of synergy. Principals of the campaign provided trainings to pre-k providers on the new policies

in Philadelphia while also engaging those providers to become advocates for the statewide campaign. They were able to use their connections to regional groups to keep the campaign informed with progress of the local effort.

In TCC's experience, other state campaigns have had a similar level of friendliness between state and local efforts. For example, TCC worked with an immigrant rights campaign in the western U.S. that did not have the issue of driver's licenses for undocumented residents on their radar screen. But, when licenses emerged as a grassroots issue, they included the demand in their broader set of asks which led to the grassroots immigrant community more actively advocating for the entire set of policies, leading to a win.



## LESSON 9



# Geographical Fairness is Important in a Statewide Campaign

Though campaigns can choose to absorb, work with, or ignore local efforts on similar issues, there is a certain level of cooperation needed geographically to be considered a statewide campaign. For education, in many states, there is a pre-existing tension between urban districts and rural districts. Things as mundane as meeting locations can stoke that tension – are the meetings always in the urban centers or do they truly rotate around the state? Pennsylvania has a similar dynamic with Philadelphia being located in the most urban, but not most central, region of the state.

Though it sounds obvious, a statewide campaign cannot be one in name only. Instead, it has to create opportunities for meetings that happen across regions so that organizations working on mobilizations in one district can synchronize with those in another district, and coordinate with any statewide organizations. The campaigns TCC worked with did this by requiring a geographic spread for their organizational structures and reserving in-person meetings to focus on strategy (instead of updates). Both campaigns also used a teleconferencing system which allowed people in further reaches of the state to call in with a video presence. However, the need for occasional in-person meetings

was seen as essential to both campaigns. To this end, each campaign agreed that instead of rotating meetings around the state, all in-person meetings would be held in the state capitol. While the capitol is not perfectly centered in the state, it has ample meeting rooms and allows all organizations to plan appropriately, as they know all in-person meetings will take place in Harrisburg. When necessary, regional groups could have their own meetings in their region.

Other campaigns TCC has observed rotate meeting locations throughout the state in order to allow for more diverse geographic participation. Others select meeting points in the center of a state, making travel burdens somewhat consistent. In some larger states, geographic regions can have their own leadership structures and report back to larger statewide bodies. This way, regions maintain a level of autonomy to focus on their region's specific priorities, while simultaneously focusing on the larger statewide priorities. Finally, similar to the two advocacy campaigns in Pennsylvania, other campaigns ensure that leadership is comprised of geographically diverse partners in order to make sure the issues and views put forward are reflective of regions across the state.



## Conclusion

Campaigns are dynamic and organic structures with the need to adapt to changes in context and engage varying groups of stakeholders. As the Campaign for Fair Education Funding (CFEF) and the Pre-K for PA (Pre-K for PA) Campaign continue on in their work, both campaigns are actively working on their messaging to capitalize on previous success and continue to push for more funding. Funders are continuing to learn from the campaigns to ensure that it is able to support each campaign in a flexible and helpful manner. As CFEF and Pre-K for PA's embedded evaluators, TCC Group looks forward to seeing how the campaigns continue to structure and approach their work, while providing insights into what the campaigns are learning that can be applicable to those working in the advocacy field.

## A Note from the Funder

Pennsylvania has a long history of advocacy for high quality early learning and K-12 education, with a strong set of organizations pushing for more and better opportunities for children across the state. Here at the William Penn Foundation, we have been long-time believers in the importance of advocacy and were pleased to support the two campaigns discussed in this report. We are also fortunate to have long-term relationships with partners in this work, including the Heinz Endowments and Grable Foundation in Western Pennsylvania, and multiple foundations here in Philadelphia. These foundations have been critical long-time supporters and thought leaders in the fields of early learning and K-12 education.

TCC Group's evaluation brought insights that have informed our approach as a funder along with the advocacy of the organizations we support. In addition to the insights discussed in this report, there are a couple of additional "lessons" that we have learned along the way.

The first is the importance of working collaboratively. Large funders, including William Penn, can be tempted to work alone, since multi-funder collaborations often require flexibility, compromise, and longer time horizons for implementation. However, we know that working collaboratively is well worth the effort. Pennsylvania has a wealth of foundations, including many community foundations, with critical knowledge of local organizations and issues. We have begun to engage in helpful statewide policy discussions with a broader group

of funders, and set up a mechanism for pooled funding for grassroots education advocacy. Over the long-term, we hope these efforts will result in more aligned funding strategies that organizations will be able to navigate more easily.

The second is to find more ways to support diverse advocate voices. Pre-K for PA's efforts to raise the voices of unusual allies – including military and law enforcement leaders – has been a hallmark of the campaign. In the second round of funding for Pre-K for PA, advocates took this a step further and began reaching out to the trusted messengers in communities such as pediatricians, grandparents, kindergarten teachers, principals, and bloggers. In the most recent round of grants for CFEF, we were able to support additional field organizing capacity to focus on rural areas and allow the campaign to think creatively about constituencies that had been overlooked as potential advocates, such as coaches and realtors. We also set aside some support for new allies with unique voices and grassroots student or community groups, to help the campaign better reflect the communities most affected by Pennsylvania's education funding shortfalls. Insights from the evaluation work have been instrumental to these meaningful changes in our approach.





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*The opinions expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the William Penn Foundation.*

## PHOTOS:

PAGE 6: *Commonwealth Media Services*

PAGES 2 (TOP), 7, 8, 11: *The Campaign for Fair Education Funding*

PAGES 2 (BOTTOM), 5, 10: *Pre-K for PA*



## About TCC Group

TCC Group is a mission-driven consulting firm that collaborates with leaders to solve complex social problems. We envision an effective social sector that addresses society's complex problems through a collaborative approach that harnesses the diverse skills, energy, and visions of its stakeholders.

TCC Group has more than 35 years of experience working in the social impact field with companies, philanthropies, and nonprofit organizations. Our unique strength as a firm lies in our ability to assist clients at all stages of development across the interlocking areas of planning, execution, and evaluation. Our approach is data-driven and outcomes-based, draws from the knowledge of in-house program management and evaluation teams, and ensures that our clients develop actionable and measurable strategic goals to communicate effectively with their stakeholders.



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