

Identifying and accessing ‘champions’

Time: Generally takes 1-2 hours for one project.

Resources: Requires three large pieces of flip chart paper, marker pens, sticker dots (30) and 3-10 people participating.

What is the purpose: Works best when an AIIM map (Tool 1), policy influence plan (Tool 2) and the knowledge broker spectrum (Tool 3) have already been completed.

To identify and access ‘champions’ to help advocate for your cause. These should draw heavily on the stakeholders listed in the upper right quadrant (high alignment, high interest) of your AIIM map (Tool 1).

How to do it:

Policy Influence Activities	Potential champions	Support for champions

Table 3: Accessing Champions Tool

The steps:

1. Ensure everyone in your team understands what we mean by identifying ‘champions’ for your project. A champion is generally a persuasive advocate of a belief, practice, programme, policy or technology, who can influence and facilitate change in others. A lot of research on evidence-based policy-making has shown that having champions can make a real difference.¹
2. Place one piece of flip chart paper on the wall or somewhere accessible and appoint a scribe. Create a table as above (Table 3).
3. Your group should decide what the project needs help with in terms of policy influence. Discuss what barriers you are facing that could be improved by better access and influence. Be specific and break these ideas into activities for your project. Examples might include: influencing a particular policy-maker, gathering public support for your project (which motivates policy-makers to respond to the issue), approaching the media to encourage them to represent the issue more positively, or helping to get your project director access to certain networks or forums.²
4. Write these activities on the flip chart paper in a list (Column A).
5. Place a second piece of flip chart paper on the wall, or somewhere accessible. This is your ‘potential champion map’.

¹ Flodgren G. et al, (2011) *Local opinion leaders: effects on professional practice and health care outcomes (Review)*, Cochrane Collaboration, Issue 2011:8, John Wiley & Sons, Ltd. <http://apps.who.int/whl/reviews/CD000125.pdf>

² Be sure that these are not activities you could do yourselves, if you had the time and resources. Have a meaningful discussion in your project about whether these are activities and opportunities you should be prioritising. Do you have someone in your team who is a natural networker? One excellent tool for determining the skills set of your team and composition of skills is here: <http://onthinktanks.org/2011/06/20/what-kind-of-policy-entrepreneur-are-you/>

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6. With reference to your policy objective, get everyone in the team to list all the champions they can think of - writing each one on a post-it note. You should try to select champions that you already know and have a relationship with. Try to be realistic about the likelihood they will spend time and energy advocating for your cause. The types of people to consider as champions include individuals who are already considered 'opinion leaders' in your sector, or especially influential or skilled. Try to think of champions from different spheres of influence. For example, for the advocacy of a public health issue, consider including a political leader, a health sector leader, a practitioner and a community member. Having multiple champions can help facilitate and institutionalise change at multiple levels.
 7. Now use the sticker dots to categorise the post-it notes on the potential champion map. If you do not have sticker dots, then coloured pens or symbols can be used. The sticker dots symbolise power or influence. If an actor has a lot of power over policy change in the local mental health sector, place three sticker dots on the post it note with their name. If they have medium influence, place two dots on the post-it note with their name. If they have limited influence, place one dot (though you should then consider whether they are really a champion). These should help you to prioritise whom to focus your energies on.
 8. Discuss which champions might be most appropriate to help with particular activities on the first piece of paper. Use the dots to guide this discussion. Allocate champions from your 'potential champion map' into Column B of your table on the first piece of paper.
 9. Think about what support you can provide to champions to enable them. Evidence shows that champions operate best with a small amount of financial assistance.³ Fill this into Column C.
 10. Discuss who in your team is best placed to approach the champion and request their involvement in supporting your cause. How much do they know about your project? Do you know anyone who is a friend of this champion who could begin the discussion on your behalf?

After this exercise:

Once you have approached and involved your champions there are three things you can do to help them be successful for you. Firstly, consider what realistic chance you have of creating an informal network of these champions, once they are involved. How might you convene it? Champions are more likely to be effective when part of an informal network of support.⁴ Secondly, try to involve champions in developing your advocacy work plan, and carefully assess the time frame needed to achieve the intended outcomes. Certain goals, especially those linked to policy change, may require a longer duration of advocacy than others. Thirdly, if possible, try to provide financial support for champions (such as a stipend and travel expenses) and talking points or other materials to implement advocacy activities.

Other resources which provide advice on how to select and access champions to advocate for your project in the broader policy realm: Engaging innovative advocates as public health champions, by FHI360
<http://www.fhi360.org/resource/engaging-innovative-advocates-public-health-champions>

³ <http://www.fhi360.org/resource/engaging-innovative-advocates-public-health-champions>

⁴ Ibid.



This tool is part of a [Global Mental Health Policy Toolkit](#) created in response to a report titled [‘Global Mental Health from a Policy Perspective: A Context Analysis’](#) produced by the [Research and Policy in Development \(RAPID\) team at the Overseas Development Institute \(ODI\)](#) for the Mental Health Innovation Network (MHIN). For more details visit: www.mhinnovation.net/