



Advocacy Evaluation and the Principle of “Do No Harm”



New Tactics
in Human Rights

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Many Human Rights Defenders live and work in insecure situations. As important as evaluation of advocacy work is, it also carries the potential to increase the risk of harm in already challenging security situations. Such harm could affect both Human Rights Defenders and other people in their community. Those planning and conducting advocacy evaluation have the responsibility of ensuring that the evaluation work is designed in such a way that risk is minimized. During implementation they should also pay close attention to any warning signs that security has been compromised so that everyone involved remains safe.

Advocacy evaluators follow the same ethical codes that all evaluators and researchers uphold. The most important principle is that of “Do no harm,” (or doing our utmost to ensure that our work never brings harm to others). Online resources on ethical research with vulnerable populations are included below.

In this document, you will find:

- Three important risks to consider in advocacy evaluation.
- Some good practice guidelines for managing risk in advocacy evaluation.
- A “Do No Harm” checklist to apply this guidance directly to an advocacy campaign.

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The following are common risks that activists face in planning and conducting advocacy evaluation.

1

Increased attention on Human Rights Defenders

Advocacy evaluation often requires activists or evaluators to collect information (or data) from people outside of their campaign. This may draw unwanted attention to the work of the activists. Data collection draws even more attention when people asking for information are strangers to a community and / or are in a larger group (possibly including additional researchers and interpreters). For these reasons, those engaged in Human Rights Advocacy Evaluation should pay extra attention to who is collecting data and how the data is collected.

2

Exposing sensitive information

Intentionally or unintentionally sharing information collected through advocacy evaluation could compromise Human Rights Defenders or other vulnerable people. Types of evaluation information might include: names, addresses, telephone numbers, political opinions, and so on. Evaluators must protect these data through storing them securely, **de-identification**, and cautious reporting (as appropriate). Advocacy Evaluators should carefully consider who data

is collected from, what data is collected, how and where that data is securely stored, and how that data is reported.

To “**De-identify**” data means to remove any information that could be used to identify the individual person or group that the data came from, or that the data describes. Identifying information can include experiences, demographics, and other pieces of information besides names.

3

Distress for evaluation participants

The nature of human rights advocacy and activism is such that many Human Rights Defenders, as well as individuals and communities who are affected by Human Rights abuses, have experienced **trauma** and significant losses. When conducting advocacy evaluation we should be careful not to ask highly personal questions about past traumatic experiences. Should someone become very distressed during data collection, we should stop immediately and offer emotional support.

“**Trauma**” describes the emotional responses that many people experience after experiencing an overwhelming or life-threatening event. These responses include lasting feelings of helplessness and isolation, difficulty sleeping, and being constantly alert for danger.

Some good practice guidelines for managing risk in advocacy evaluation

- 1 | **Consult** with all stakeholders (including other campaign members, evaluation participants, funders, professional evaluators) about evaluation safety and risk. Use feedback from stakeholders to improve the evaluation plan.
- 2 | Be prepared to choose **evaluation questions** that minimize the risk to participants and activists. Some evaluation questions will not be safe to answer.
- 3 | Be prepared to choose **data collection** methods that minimize the risk to participants and activists. Some approaches to data collection may not be possible given the security context.
- 4 | Design your data collection approach (both content and method) around the **minimum data** necessary to answer the evaluation questions.
- 5 | Allocate appropriate **funding** necessary to minimize risk posed by evaluation. The need to protect stakeholders from harm might add significantly to the cost of an evaluation.
- 6 | Make sure that everyone involved in the evaluation has **shared understanding** of the risk level of the evaluation project and is committed to making the project as safe as possible.
- 7 | Develop **security guidelines** for all aspects of the evaluation project, including the storage and communication of data and other sensitive information. Ensure that everyone involved in the evaluation understand the security protocols and has the skills and equipment to implement them. Several online security resources for human rights defenders are included below.
- 8 | Be rigorous when **de-identifying** case studies, quotations and data in reports. Have evaluation participants carefully review evaluation reports for safety before they are published.
- 9 | During implementation, pay attention to any **warning signs** that security might have been compromised.
- 10 | It is appropriate to **terminate an evaluation** when safety is compromised. Be prepared to do what is possible to amend any harm caused.

Online Resources

Online resources on ethical principles for research with vulnerable populations.

- [Declaration of Helsinki for Research Involving Human Subjects](#)
- [Global Code of Conduct for Research in Resource-Poor Settings](#)

Online resources on security for Human Rights Defenders.

- [The Holistic Security Manual](#), Tactical Technology Collective
- [Security in a box – Digital Security Tools and Tactics](#), Frontline Defenders and Tactical Technology Collective
- [Workbook on Security: Practical Steps for Human Rights Defenders at Risk](#), Frontline Defenders

The checklist on the following page is designed to help you think through how to reduce risk in an advocacy evaluation project. Add your campaign's own notes on strategies for reducing risk in the column on the right.

Strategies For Reducing Risk

DO NO HARM CHECKLIST	N/A	✓	ADDITIONAL STRATEGIES FOR REDUCING RISK
Is the data I plan to collect strictly necessary to answer the evaluation questions?			
Is there a way I could collect this data without having to engage directly with vulnerable individuals?			
Is there a way that I could collect this data anonymously?			
Are there alternate data collection strategies I can explore that would reduce risk to stakeholders?			
Do I have a secure way of meeting with stakeholders about his evaluation project?			
Do I have a secure way of communicating with stakeholders about this evaluation project?			
Do I have a secure plan for the storage of hard copy data?			
Do I have a secure plan for the storage of electronic data?			
Do all stakeholders understand, and are they committed to, risk management protocols for this project?			
Do I have a plan for monitoring risk throughout the implementation of the project?			
Do I have a contingency plan should the safety of the evaluation be compromised?			
Have I discussed this checklist with evaluation stakeholders and meaningfully incorporated their feedback?			

