

Principles-Focused Evaluation: A Brief Reference Guide



New Tactics
in Human Rights

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What is Principles-Focused Evaluation?

In Principles-Focused Evaluation (PFE), the principles that guide an initiative are evaluated. This approach was created by evaluator Michael Quinn Patton for initiatives guided primarily by principles. PFE is an approach to evaluation, not a specific set of steps. It can look very different depending on the initiative, the principles, the context, and the people conducting the evaluation.

The brief guide below outlines how Principles-Focused Evaluation is well suited for human rights advocacy and gives some suggestions for how to set up a Principles-Focused Evaluation for your human rights campaign.

What are Principles?

Principles are statements of how human beings should act that apply in a wide variety of situations. There are two main types of principles: Moral Principles and Effectiveness Principles.

Moral Principles



Moral Principles tell human beings how they should act for moral reasons. For example, you may hold the principle, “Intervene when a human rights violation is occurring” **because you believe that upholding a person’s human rights is the moral thing to do.**

Effectiveness Principles



Effectiveness Principles tell human beings how they should act in order to be effective at achieving a certain outcome. For example, you may hold the principle, “Intervene when a human rights violation is occurring” **because you believe that this is the most effective way to protect a person’s human rights.**

For a Principles-Focused Evaluation, principles need to include statements of how to behave. The six principles of Human Rights (Universality, Indivisibility, Participation, Accountability, Transparency and Non-Discrimination) can be used as both moral and effectiveness principles. They can be evaluated in a Principles-Focused Evaluation if they are made into clear statements of how to behave. Please see Appendix A for examples of these statements for Human Rights Principles.

The GUIDE framework on the following page is a way to make sure you develop good principles to evaluate and to guide your campaign.

GUIDE Framework for good principles

The GUIDE framework for principles describes a well-defined principle as:

Guiding (providing guidance)

Useful

Inspiring

Developmental (supportive of ongoing learning, growth, and adaptation)

Evaluable (able to be evaluated)

You can use this framework as a tool for defining principles. For example, if we state a campaign principle of non-discrimination: “Work to reduce inequities in power and resources”, you could use the GUIDE criteria to test it. You could do this by asking member of your campaign, “Is this principle providing our campaign guidance? Is it useful? Is it inspiring? Does it support us in learning, growing and adapting? Is the principle clear enough that we can evaluate it?”

Why would you want to use Principles-Focused Evaluation?

Your campaign is based on shared principles

When groups and organizations are doing their work based on human rights principles, these shared principles are what guide their activism, initiatives and actions, and not necessarily because of a pre-determined outcome that they will achieve. The creator of PFE says that, “Human rights generate moral principles, which can be evaluated for meaningfulness and adherence.” (Patton 2018, p.397) If your campaign sees human rights principles, or other principles, as effectiveness principles (that adherence to those principles leads to some other desirable result) then your campaign could also evaluate those principles for their results.

The way you conduct your campaign matters

In evaluation, often the way in which you run your campaign does not get as much attention as the tangible changes that result from your work. However, when you are working to change society, often the methods you use are an extremely important part of the change. As human rights activists, we look at our actions and their results as part of the process. For example, because we hold the principles of non-discrimination, transparency, and participation, our campaign should operate by empowering people to know and claim their rights.

Your campaign is operating within complexity

Principles-Focused Evaluation was created for initiatives operating within complexity. Complexity, in this context, means that there is not an obvious or agreed upon way to reach your goal.

Complexity is at the heart of human rights advocacy because you are defending human rights within rapidly changing political and social landscapes, and often because your campaign is trying something new that hasn't yet been well-researched or evaluated.



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Steps to Conduct Principles-Focused Evaluations of Human Rights Campaigns



1 Define Principles

The first step in crafting a Principles-Focused Evaluation is to define the shared principles for the campaign. These principles then guide the work of the campaign, as well as its evaluation questions and methods. We suggest that you work together as an organization or a campaign to decide on the principles that guide your work. You can do this in whatever way your campaign makes decisions.

The human rights based framework is a good foundation to use for principles for your campaign. Your campaign could also decide on additional principles together, although we suggest having no more than 5 principles, in order to keep your work focused.

Appendix A includes a table of example statements of human rights based principles as well as space for you to include your own campaign or organizational principles. The table also includes a column for you to mark which principles you have agreed on as a campaign. This ensures that campaign members agree with the principles you are evaluating, which is a necessary part of Principles-Focused work, and specifically Principles-Focused Evaluation.

2 Decide on Principles-Focused Evaluation Questions

Evaluation questions are the starting point for creating an evaluation plan. These questions determine the evaluation's direction. A Principles-Focused Evaluation uses three primary evaluation questions that can be adapted for each specific evaluation. The three primary evaluation questions are:

1. To what extent are the principles meaningful to people involved?
2. To what extent are the principles adhered to?
3. If the principles are adhered to, what are the results?

If you are just starting Principles-Focused Evaluation, we suggest answering these questions in the order above: starting first with Question 1 (meaning), then Question 2 (adherence). If your campaign is evaluating one or more effectiveness principles, and your evaluation shows that your campaign is adhering to those principles well, then your campaign can move on to Question 3 (results). Decide with your team on which questions you want to answer.

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3 Decide how you will answer each Evaluation Question

The design of your Principles-Focused Evaluation can be done in a large number of different ways. The best evaluations will adapt to best serve the information needs of the people who use your results (campaign members, allies, funders, etc.) and to the context in which you are living and working. A good evaluation will also provide high quality data to answer your evaluation questions and assess the achievement of specific outcomes. For more resources on designing advocacy evaluations, try [Guidance for a More Manageable Human Rights Advocacy Evaluation](#) and our [External Resource List](#).

For most activists, the most feasible way to begin the PFE process is to set aside some time to reflect as a campaign at set time points at the beginning, middle, or end of each campaign phase. Sometimes it will make the most sense to focus on one principle at a time, or one evaluation question at a time during these gatherings. During this time you can:

1. Decide on which moral and/or effectiveness principles you share as a campaign.
2. Document observations that might answer your evaluation questions, and plan how to gather additional data needed to support your observations.
3. Discuss findings related to your Principles-Focused Evaluation questions and what adjustments you will make to the campaign based on that information.
See Appendix B at the end of this guide for some questions you can use to facilitate Principles-Focused Evaluation data collection.

4 Allow space for (and document) new principles, outcomes, and questions.

Sometimes when you are reflecting as a team it will be clear that you have achieved an outcome you did not expect, that you are not asking all the right evaluation questions, that you need to change a principle, or that the method you are using is not working well to evaluate your principle. This is all part of the Principles-Focused Evaluation process and how evaluation can support your campaign's learning.

When you make a campaign decision to change course, make sure to document: (1) The date of the decision, (2) the people involved in the decision, and (3) the evidence to support the change. This information is important to document for your evaluation's credibility, and is useful for your campaign to remember and celebrate your journey.

English Language References and Resources:

Patton, M. Q. (2018) Principles-Focused Evaluation – The GUIDE. New York: Guilford Press.

Tamarack Institute. (Producer). Principles-Focused Evaluation Webinar: Featuring Mark Cabaj and Michael Quinn Patton [Video webinar]. Retrieved from <http://www.tamarackcommunity.ca/library/webinar-principles-focused-evaluation>

Patton, M. Q. (2017, Nov 26). Principles-Focused Evaluation by Michael Quinn Patton. Retrieved from <http://aea365.org/blog/pfe-week-principles-focused-evaluation-by-michael-quinn-patton/>

Appendix A. Example List of Campaign Principles

Campaign: _____ **Date:** _____

Campaign members present:

(use initials or first names)

Others present:

(use initials or first names)

Human Rights Based Campaign Principles	Adopted by Campaign (Yes or No)
<p>Universality: Recognize that all human beings are entitled to human rights, simply by virtue of being human.</p>	
<p>Indivisibility: Recognize that if a right is violated, it necessarily affects that person and other people's ability to exercise that and other rights.</p>	
<p>Participation: Include those experiencing human rights abuses in how decisions are made regarding protection of their rights.</p>	
<p>Accountability: Put mechanisms in place to hold institutions and individuals accountable for the protection of human rights.</p>	
<p>Transparency: Share campaign information and decision-making processes in the best way to increase knowledge and understanding for rights-holders.</p>	
<p>Non-Discrimination: Work to reduce inequities in power and resources.</p>	
<p>Empowerment: Respect rights-holders' choices in claiming their rights.</p>	

Appendix B. Possible List of Questions to use in Campaign Principles-Focused Evaluation Discussion

Discussion Question	Evaluation Question
1. How has the principle of (“Participation” ¹) impacted or inspired your work on this campaign during this phase?	Meaning
2. When have you heard the principle of (“_____”) referred to in your work on this campaign? a. How was it referred to? b. Who was talking about it?	Meaning
3. For the principle of (“_____”), what did we last agree was a good indicator of living out this principle in our campaign? a. (for each indicator) What evidence do we have for where we are on this indicator?	Adherence
4. For the principle of (“_____”), what evidence do we have that we are adhering to this principle in our campaign? a. For each piece of evidence, how would we prove that this is truly happening?	Adherence
5. For the principle of (“_____”), what evidence do we have that we are NOT adhering to this principle in our campaign? a. For each piece of evidence, how would we prove that this is truly happening?	Adherence
6. For the principle of (“_____”), how would we rate our campaign’s adherence to this principle? (vote with your fingers: 1 = we are not living out this principle at all to 5 = we are living out this principle extremely well) a. What reasons do you have for your rating?	Adherence
7. What could we do as a campaign to better live out the principle of (“_____”) in this next phase?	Adherence

¹Switch in your own Principle for “Participation” here and for the blank lines in the other questions.

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Discussion Question	Evaluation Question
8. In this next phase, what would be an indicator of living out this principle well? b. Vote or come to consensus on best indicator for living out this principle happening?	Adherence
9.	
10.	

