

Pathways To Impact: An International Study Of Advocates' Strategies And Needs

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Our survey of nearly 200 animal advocacy groups in 84 countries explores the diverse approaches taken by farmed animal advocates, focusing on how and why organizations pursue different strategies.

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Image of grassy staircase by Thomas Willmott, Unsplash

Background

Animal advocacy organizations employ diverse strategies to support farmed animals that range from individual action all the way up to large-scale national interventions. Advocates may choose to promote vegan foods to their community, found an animal sanctuary, lobby their governments for strong welfare laws, or petition meat companies to give more space to animals in confinement.

This diversity in tactics creates a need for impact evaluation—while much of the advocacy research [measures the effectiveness of various approaches](#) or develops [related theories of change](#), less attention has been paid to understanding *why* organizations prefer certain strategies, decide to adopt new ones, or stick to what they know.

Using a survey of over 190 animal advocacy organizations in 84 countries and six small focus-group discussions, this study aims to understand the diverse approaches taken by farmed animal protection groups globally, focusing on how and why organizations choose to pursue these advocacy strategies.

Key Findings

1. **Animal advocacy organizations pursue strategies across five major categories, each focusing on a different type of stakeholder.** These are large-scale institutions (governments, large-scale food producers, retailers, etc.), local institutions (schools, restaurants, food producers, hospitals, etc.), individuals (through diet outreach or education), animals themselves (through direct work, such as sanctuaries), and other members of the advocacy movement (through movement support). Figure 2 in the full report provides more detail.

2. **Most organizations (55%) pursue more than one approach, and most advocates (63%) are interested in exploring at least one approach that they're not currently pursuing.** Notably, most organizations conducting direct work with animals (66%) or individual advocacy (91%) would consider trying out at least one type of institutional approach.
3. **Advocates are more open to considering policy advocacy than corporate advocacy, because it has fewer barriers to entry and less stigma.** Some advocates have negative associations with corporate advocacy, as it may involve engaging with organizations strongly misaligned with their values. Corporate advocacy may also require a degree of professionalism and industry expertise that some forms of policy advocacy (e.g., petitions) do not.
4. **Organizations that conduct corporate and policy work tend to be larger organizations that conduct multiple forms of advocacy.** Organizations that focus on corporate and policy approaches are typically larger than those that focus on direct work and individual advocacy, which are sometimes volunteer-led. Larger organizations are also more likely to pursue multiple approaches simultaneously.
5. **Working with local institutions provides advocacy organizations with a stepping stone from individual to institutional approaches.** Local institutional approaches are often seen as a “sweet spot” for small advocacy organizations, offering a balance between scalability and tractability. These approaches are perceived as less resource-intensive than large-scale institutional approaches, and potentially offer an intermediate step for growing advocacy organizations who want to expand individual diet approaches to higher-leverage policy or corporate approaches, and are also compatible with more bottom-up theories of change.
6. **Deciding on organizational approaches is not just an internal process.** While an organization’s mission and available resources are key considerations, external influences, ranging from large international partners and funders to other grassroots community members, also play a key role in advocates’ decision-making process. Formal or informal research, including desk-based secondary research and primary/user research methods like message testing and stakeholder interviews, often informs this decision-making process.
7. **Diverse global contexts restrict the viability of existing advocacy approaches in ways that foreign funders may not understand or anticipate.** Local advocacy organizations may avoid certain advocacy approaches due to local political and cultural obstacles: for example, avoiding meat elimination messaging in favor of meat reduction or corporate advocacy in favor of political lobbying. Balancing the needs of the local context with the expectations of funders and parent organizations often limits the strategic choices of local advocates.
8. **Advocacy organizations may be more willing and able to expand on their existing approaches rather than branching into entirely new approaches.** Many advocates would prefer to scale up existing campaigns to cover additional geographies and species or adopt new media strategies to expand their existing individual messaging rather than adopt entirely new approaches.
9. **Funding is always front of mind for advocates.** Advocates indicate that funding is the most useful type of support, the most common barrier preventing organizations from expanding to more ambitious approaches, and the greatest challenge for current advocacy work. Complex, competitive grantmaking procedures can also be a hindrance that limits the ability of an organization to focus on its work, and concerns about the sustainability of funding may prevent organizations from expanding and diversifying their approaches.