

Intense Period Debrief Methodology:

As a proposed methodology to replace After Action Reviews

Definition

The intense Period Debrief, developed by the Innovation Network, responds to the intensive time constraints advocates commonly face mid-campaign by creating a very brief opportunity for advocates to pause and reflect on their campaign's progress (Coffman and Reed 2009). A debrief interview protocol is used either with a one-time focus group of advocates or in brief individual interviews to capture real time information about how the campaign is proceeding and what is happening behind the scenes in the effort. This may be especially useful after a major event or shift happens in an advocacy work (Lane and Pritzker, 2017).

In contexts (such as COVID-19) where the time pressure is very high, to address the time and bandwidth constraints, the two-pager proposal is about replacing AAR with IDP to capture reflections on course correction, lessons learned and perceptions of impact from a core organizing group.

Purpose

The purpose of Intense Period Debrief is to capture the lessons learned while implementing or shortly after the intervention/strategy. Often, with a complex, multiple partners are involved and each is engaging in a combination of pre-planned and last minute activities that have a collective impact on the outcome. We can learn from purposefully discussing the activities completed, how barriers were overcome, how problems were solved, and the activities that seemed to help versus hinder the process. IDP facilitates engaging key players in a focus group shortly after a policy window to capture the following information:

- The public mood and political context of the opportunity window;
- What happened, and how the campaign members responded to events;
- What strategies they followed;
- Their perspective on the outcome(s) of the period's activities; and
- How they would change their strategies going forward based on what they learned during that period.

This focus group protocol is intended to elicit qualitative information from a group of key players (such as coalition leadership, staff, committees and field organizations) just after a period of intense advocacy activity.

Sample Questions:

1. Briefly describe the context of the recent intense period.

Probes:

- What events triggered this intense period of work?
- Was it related to or leading up to a legislative opportunity? Please explain.
- How would you describe the political context of this period?
- What was the general public mood on [your issue] when these events took place?

2. Describe in detail your organization's response to those events.

Probes:

- How was strategy set? Who was involved at those meetings?
- How was strategy communicated to the broader field? Who was responsible for that communication?

- Beyond strategic decisions, what roles did leadership/committees play during this intense period?
 - Probe for concrete examples

3. Which parts of your organization's response worked well? Which parts could have been improved?

Probes:

- Strategy
- Implementation
 - Coordination, task-sharing, communication, etc.
- Would you say that internal coalition dynamics helped or hindered the execution of strategy during this intense period?

4. What was the outcome of the intense period? Would you term it a victory or a defeat?

Probes:

- As a result of this intense period of activities, what new opportunities have presented themselves for the legislative campaign for [your issue] going forward?
- What insights will you take away from that experience that could inform strategy development going forward?

5. What insights will you take away from this experience that might inform your strategies going forward?

Implementing the tool

Shortly after an important strategy is completed, all of the key internal staff and relevant external partners involved in implementing the strategy should meet for 60 – 90 minutes. During this meeting, one person should be responsible for facilitating the discussion and another person should be responsible for capturing detailed notes. The facilitation should follow the pre-defined protocol, with the questions reviewed prior to the meeting to make sure they align with the type of strategy that was completed. The protocol begins with a discussion of the context of the activity, asks about what strategies were implemented and how, who was involved, perspectives on what helped achieve the outcome and what hindered, and how the strategies should be changed going forward based on the learning of the debrief dialogue. The overall focus is on course correction, lessons learned as well as perceived impact. After the debrief is completed, the notes should be briefly written up with lessons learned in the form of a document which around 5-6- pages.

Sources:

- Data Collection For Advocacy Evaluation: The Intense Period Debrief, available at: http://www.pointk.org/client_docs/File/advocacy/intense_period_debrief.pdf
- The Advocate's Evaluation Toolkit: Intense Period Debrief Overview, available at: <http://tools.sparkpolicy.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Overview-of-how-and-when-to-use-Intense-Period-Debriefs1.pdf>
- Lane, Shannon and Pritzker, Suzanne (2017): Political Social Work: Using Power to Create Social Change, pp.419, Springer
- Coffman, Julia and Reed, Ehren (2009): Unique Methods in Advocacy Evaluation, The California Endowment, available at: <http://www.pointk.org/resources/node/390>

May 2020