

STEP 1: PRIORITIZE

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Prioritization is the first step of our 7-step method. As an advocacy professional you might ask yourself: how do I identify and define priorities? Most Public Affairs practitioners have had a problem with prioritization. Often, we have too many issues and too many competing priorities, and invariably insufficient time or resources to deal with even half of them. If everything is a priority, nothing is a priority. Identifying, analyzing, and selecting priority issues is akin to building your home on solid foundations; the campaigns you build require strong foundations in the form of a limited list of carefully selected priorities. In short, you cannot succeed in advocacy without being able to identify and manage a targeted list of priorities.

Prioritization is a critical thinking process that optimizes your advocacy strategy and campaign. It makes certain that you understand the wider context and impacts of issues. It ensures you are adaptable to feedback. It requires hard choices, notably on what you will **not** do and/or what you will delegate to others. Prioritization develops strategic understanding around what are the impacts, what are the actions, what are the activities and how much resource to allocate to what. Last but, far from least, prioritization ensures you are able establish a clear link between your organization and advocacy priorities. Building such links requires you to meaningfully engage with your organization to understand what really matters and makes a difference.

The prioritization process should deliver priorities, but also SMART objectives with measurable KPI.

First, we have **priorities**. Well-executed prioritization is essential. Most notably because it provides the public affairs teams with a point on the horizon, a goal, that will then need to be met. Priorities require rigorous impact analysis covering, at a minimum, potential impacts on your organization's reputation, revenue, and regulatory environment. Impact analysis only works if you have carefully selected indicators for impact and effective means of measuring them. Alongside indicators, you will need to find a tool and a platform for robust dialogue within your organization and with key stakeholders. This dialogue should seek to understand causes and effects, allowing you to define strategies and desired results, and establish common priorities as well as align advocacy and organizational goals. Dialogue builds support and support from within your organization is crucial to success.

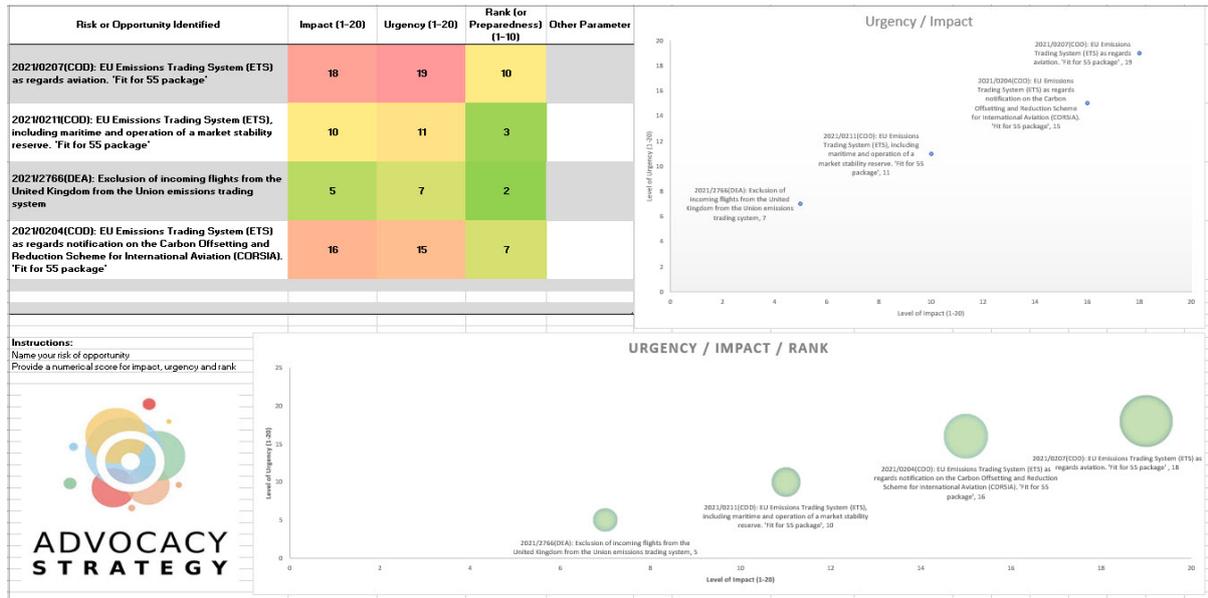
So, what steps should you take when prioritizing?

You need to use a tool to gather and organize key information from your business. This tool should then inform your advocacy strategy. In gathering information for each identified issue, you should measure at least two or more of the following indicators:

- Impact: What will be the commercial / reputational / regulatory impact of an issue?

- Urgency: What is the likelihood it will happen? / When is it likely to happen?
- Influence: What are our chances of influencing it?
- Positioning: What is our current positioning on this issue (i.e., absent to leader)?

The impact analysis data should then be mapped out visually. For example, using our [Excel template prioritization map](#) we can generate the matrices below:



Use our free tool to make your own prioritization visual:

<https://www.advocacystrategy.com/approach/step-1-prioritise/>

Undertaking a rigorous impact analysis of your key issues and creating accompanying visuals will strengthen discussions within your organization and ensure they are more fact-based and more relevant for them (and you). It will facilitate decision-making on where to invest resources and energy as well as help you decide which issues you want to lead and ensure you maintain focus.

For successful issue prioritization we propose three rules for your priorities:

1. Focus your resources on no more than three must-win battles for the year to come;
2. Build no more than three must-win battles for the coming years (i.e. longer term issues that need work now);
3. Review priorities every three months to, amongst others, make sure they are still aligned with the organization.

Secondly, the prioritization process should translate priorities into **objectives**. An objective is an incremental and realistic step towards a larger goal or vision; it is not a general goal. Objectives are supported by outcomes and outputs, which seek to bring about the change and ultimately achieve

your goals. Your objectives should be the result of a combination of outcome (i.e. change x or y) and outputs (i.e. events, meetings). Limited resources mean fewer objectives. Good objectives must focus on outcomes and not outputs. They must focus on impact and not on quantity. They must be tied to your organization's objectives and consider return on investment.

All advocacy activity and campaigns require well-thought-out, stress-tested, internally aligned and externally realistic objectives. Setting objectives is a planning process. There are two cornerstones to defining objectives for advocacy success. Firstly, you must translate priorities into SMART objectives with accompanying KPIs. Secondly, you must ensure these are aligned and cascaded so everyone knows what they are doing and when they are doing it. Objectives, outcomes, activities should all have a several KPIs that help you track progress towards objectives and goals.

We strongly believe that successful advocacy is built on the most robust foundations: priorities, objectives and KPIs. Setting and agreeing clear priorities (with mechanisms to adapt such as scoreboards) will give you focus and space to work. Building realistic yet challenging SMART objectives will help you manage expectations and maintain clarity on pathways to success. Finally, selecting the right KPIs will ensure you have a clear pathway that pays equal attention to the outcome and the process. We all have limited resources. We need to use them wisely on priorities that will have the greatest impact for your organization.

In summary, our main recommendations for prioritization are as follows:

1. Make sure you have a robust process to identify, analyze and order your priorities. Try our [free tools and exercises](#) on priority mapping including our [excellent heat map](#). You need a process to do this.
2. Look to visualize your priorities. This is crucial to communicating them to your team and organization. Visualizations keep you focused and make it easier to explain to others.
3. Consider how you delegate, or deliver, your priorities through trade associations, consultants, or other partners you work with. Resources are limited, focus is essential, and there is strength in numbers.
4. Use your priorities and objectives as a basis for the planning process, working backwards to define outcomes, outputs, and resources, always coupling these to several KPI. Consider using a scoreboard to ensure your team have a shared overview of the strategy and progress.
5. When considering the priority's level of urgency and your capacity to influence it, remember that early engagement is a key factor to success. Use free or paid legislative trackers for timelines of the political and policy-making processes. Align your strategy and maintain a clear overview of the process.

In future posts we'll be exploring each of the subsequent 7 steps to clearly define their purpose, but also to identify the key knowledge, skills, tools, and deliverables contained within them. To further explore our 7-steps of advocacy method as well as our free advocacy tools, including our [free advocacy assessment 7-step snapshot report](#), please visit: www.advocacystrategy.com

