

Agricultural Extension in South Asia

Advocacy

Platform: Philanthropy University

Duration: Self-paced (flexible deadlines)

Certification: Yes, it is free



The "Advocacy" course provides learners with the knowledge and tools to develop effective advocacy strategies for their organizations. It covers topics such as understanding political contexts, persuasive techniques, strategic planning, and evaluation methods. The course is taught by Dr. Ruth Levine and Mr. Rakesh Rajani. Dr. Levine, vice president of Just Societies and chief learning officer at the [Packard Foundation](#), is a development economist with over 30 years of experience in global health, education, gender equality, and social protection. Mr. Rajani, president of [JustSystems](#), has 25 years of expertise in civil society organizations and philanthropy.

The course is delivered asynchronously, allowing learners to access material at their convenience. It is designed for beginners, making it an excellent starting point for those new to advocacy. The course is well-structured into six modules, each focusing on a specific aspect of advocacy:

Module 1: Focuses on understanding advocacy within varying political contexts (restrictive, semi-open, open). Learners develop problem statements using direct and indirect causes and explore the Theory of Change, outlining how activities logically and effectively lead to solving core problems.

Module 2: Guides learners in identifying critical opportunities for policy progress and selecting strategies to engage key stakeholders. It emphasizes the role of "framing" in advocacy for maximum impact and introduces the "Smart Chart 3.0" tool for non-profit communication.

Module 3: Discusses the selection of appropriate advocacy tactics and building partnerships that enhance strategic goals.

Module 4: Case studies offer practical insights into advocacy strategies. For example:

- *The Case of the Unaffordable Drugs* highlights efforts to address global inequity in HIV treatment by identifying problems, overcoming systemic challenges, and building partnerships to lower drug prices and improve access.
- *The Case of the Invisible Worker* focuses on advocating for labour rights for informal workers, particularly women, by empowering organizations, enhancing legal knowledge, and amplifying their voices.

Module 5: Highlights the differences between advocacy evaluation and traditional program evaluation. Tools like "Policy Maker Ratings" (developed by the Harvard Family Research Project), "Champion Tracking" (by the Aspen Institute), and "Intense Period Debriefs" (by Innovation Network Inc.) are provided to aid evaluation.

Module 6: Examines the political, legal, ethical, and cultural risks associated with advocacy work. It guides learners in performing risk analysis and developing mitigation plans for advocacy strategies.

Modules include podcasts featuring guest experts, downloadable transcripts, supplementary reading materials, industry-recognized frameworks, evaluation techniques, and PowerPoint presentations.

Each module includes quizzes to assess comprehension and assignments to encourage the application of learning. The assignments are peer-reviewed, fostering collaboration and a sense of shared learning.

The course promotes global interaction among learners. The forums provide a space to exchange ideas, discuss course content, and learn from the experiences of peers from different regions.

To earn a certificate, learners must achieve more than 50% of the total points. Quizzes contribute 15%, and assignments make up 85% of the final grade. Assignments are peer-reviewed and guided by a specific rubric, ensuring fairness and encouraging critical thinking and reflective learning.

The course excels in delivering high-quality information. Lectures often begin with storytelling, making the content engaging and relatable. Case studies and toolkits provide practical guidance. Assignments are designed to help participants apply concepts to their organizations, ensuring relevance and utility. The supplementary resources are particularly noteworthy.

Dr. Ruth Levine and Mr. Rakesh Rajani bring a dynamic and engaging teaching style to the course. They emphasize real-world applications, drawing from their extensive experience in advocacy to make the content practical and relevant. Guest speakers further enrich the learning experience, offering diverse perspectives and case studies that illuminate the complexities of advocacy work.

For me, this course was both enjoyable and intellectually stimulating. I enrolled to enhance my skills and employability, particularly in the context of extension and advisory services. The practical applications of advocacy in influencing policy and raising awareness align with my professional goals.

I recommend this course to extension service providers, academicians teaching extension, and students studying agricultural extension. Advocacy plays a crucial role in promoting policies, programs, and initiatives that address farmers' needs and interests. For academicians, the course provides practical tools and strategies that are highly relevant for preparing future

extension professionals. For students, it broadens their perspective beyond educating farmers about new agricultural practices and technologies. It equips them to actively engage with policymakers, analyse current policies, identify gaps, and propose solutions based on farmer needs and research findings.

This course complements postgraduate and doctoral programs in Agriculture in India, such as Policy Engagement and Extension (2+1) and Facilitation for People-Centric Development (2+1) in the Ph.D. Agriculture Extension Education curriculum; Advocacy and Behaviour Change 3 (1+2) in the Ph.D. Community Science (Extension Education and Communication Management) program; and Unit IV: Advocacy, Ethics, Health, and Social Issues in Organic Farming within the course Concepts and Principles of Organic Farming (2+0) offered in the M.Sc. (Ag) Organic Farming program.

The M.Sc. course emphasizes advocacy for sustainability, resource conservation, and ethical practices in organic farming. The Ph.D. programs explore advanced tools and techniques such as media campaigning, lobbying, and stakeholder engagement, with a focus on driving policy change and conducting quantitative analyses of development policies. In contrast, the Philanthropy University course offers a unique focus on organizational-level advocacy, equipping learners with tools like the Theory of Change, risk management strategies, and evaluation methods. It places a strong emphasis on practical applications, enriched by real-world case studies to bridge theory and practice effectively.

The course significantly enhanced my skills in the areas of policy engagement, especially how to influence policy and raise awareness on rural/agrarian issues. I learned to craft a Theory of Change, build persuasive narratives, and develop actionable plans aligned with organizational goals.

When paired with other reading materials, such as the [Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services \(GFRAS\) Policy Compendium](#) and the [Policy Advocacy for Rural Advisory Services module](#) in the [New Extensionist Learning Kit](#), this course can provide a comprehensive framework for developing impactful advocacy strategies that drive meaningful social and policy change.



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