



Session Three: Advocacy



Advocacy

Advocacy at the Board Level



What is Advocacy?

Advocacy is simply the public support for a particular cause or policy. It is a powerful way to leverage the important mission work that your organization. Nonprofit advocacy is not about partisan politics or political candidates. Advocacy is about educating decision makers and the public about the mission of your organization and how policy decisions may help or hurt those your organization is serving.



Why Advocate?

Public Policy can play a positive role in making the world a better place and it can help nonprofits make important advances that create the lasting change that nonprofits work towards.



Advocacy is really telling the story of your organization's mission and why you do the work you do.

Advocacy can be...

1. **asking your community's zoning board for permission to have a farmer's market in an underserved neighborhood.**
2. **requesting a parking variance to allow for a meal truck to serve homeless people in a park**
3. **arranging a meeting with an elected official and educating them about the value of a job training program that uses public funding**
4. **partnering with government agencies to use a public building for a youth program**
5. **convening community leaders at times of natural disaster or human crisis to develop solutions for the community and promote healing**

Source: <https://standforyourmission.org/advocacy-your-nonprofit/>

The organization's role in advocacy

Board's Value

1. Inform and Activate Your Network: Help inform and activate organization's network in support of important policy issues.



- Helping elevate the visibility of these efforts by leveraging board members personal influence and networks
- Serving as a unified organizational voice

2. Research Impact of Policy Issues: Analyzing how specific policy issues impact or would impact the community you serve.



- Supporting the investment in research during budgeting and planning
- Helping to identify and connect with donors or funders that may help underwrite research

3. Educate Policymakers and the Public: Educating policymakers, media, or general public about how an issue or piece of legislation is impacting the communities you serve.



- Leveraging personal networks and influence to reach decision makers
- Serving as an influential community voice with decision makers

4. Join Forces to Create a Louder Voice: Bringing community leaders together to jointly identify community needs and challenges and build shared priorities for public policy change.



- Identifying and connecting with community leaders and organizations with diverse spheres of influence
- Helping to overcome challenging power dynamics or turf issues that may exist between organizations

Nonprofit Engagement in Advocacy



I thought nonprofits were not allowed to advocate?

It is not uncommon for board members and other nonprofit leaders to misunderstand the law as it relates to nonprofit engagement in advocacy. The truth is, as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, you have a legal right to advocate. And – when your mission and the people you serve are depending on you – you have a responsibility to do so.

But not all advocacy is the same, and there are some important things to know and understand.

Legislative Lobbying: All types of nonprofits are allowed to educate policymakers, the media, and the public about issues that are important to their mission, as long as it doesn't include information about specific candidates or pieces of legislation. It's this type of advocacy that is the primary focus of nonprofits.

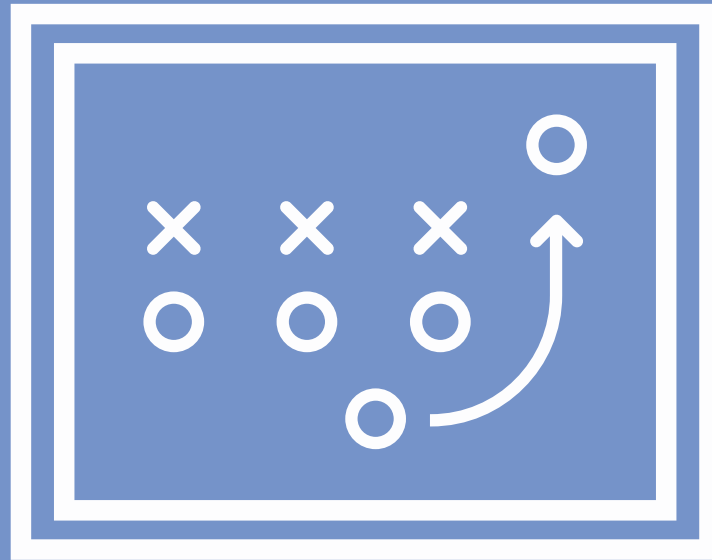
Elections & Electioneering: Lobbying means working for or against a specific piece of legislation or ballot measure. Most nonprofits are allowed to engage in a limited amount of legislative lobbying, which can be a very important way to advance – or protect – your organization's mission and impact. When there's a big decision being made that will affect your mission, you have a right and responsibility to weigh in.

Educate and Inform: Nonprofit organizations may engage in nonpartisan voter registration, education, and turnout activities. However, supporting or opposing a specific candidate (or set of candidates or a political party) is never allowed for 501(c)(3) organizations.

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The Board's Role in Advocacy

Three Critical Board Roles



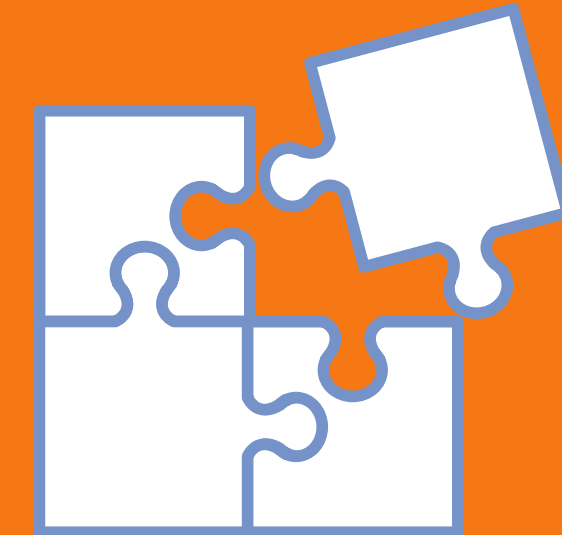
Strategy

- Understand how the policy environment could impact the organization's work.
- Build strategies that seize public policy opportunities and address public policy threats.
- Leverage advocacy as a way to "get things done."



Budget and Resources

- Understand your organization's budget and any public funds that may be vulnerable if public policy shifts.
- Prioritize resources to support strategic engagement in advocacy, e.g., coalition membership or staff time.



Personal Engagement

- Leverage your influence and networks in support of the organization's advocacy efforts by making calls, setting up meetings, etc.
- Attend meetings with decision makers and law makers together with organization staff.
- Participate in group advocacy efforts, such as lobby days or congressional hearings.

Let's hear from an expert

Mary Ingham

