

What Is Advocacy? 2.0

WHAT IS ADVOCACY?

Effective advocacy enables nonprofits to shape the public debate on important social issues and ensure that underserved communities have a voice in the policies that impact their lives.

The term “advocacy” encompasses a broad range of activities that can influence public policy (including research, public education, lobbying, and voter education). Advocacy is one of the best ways nonprofits can advance the issues they care about and help bring about systemic, lasting change.

HOW IS ADVOCACY DIFFERENT FROM LOBBYING?

Lobbying is only one type of advocacy. As such, there are many avenues of advocacy that nonprofits can engage in that do not constitute lobbying, like attempting to influence regulations or challenging laws via litigation. Federal tax law makes clear that lobbying is specific to attempts to influence legislation. On the other hand, “non-lobbying advocacy” is often used to refer to those activities that don’t meet the definition of lobbying because they don’t involve the making of legislative recommendations.

WHAT KINDS OF ACTIVITIES COMPRISE ADVOCACY WORK?

- **Organize.** Build power at the base. Your organization could organize a rally, town hall, or similar event to mobilize community members to speak up and advocate for causes important to your mission.
- **Educate Legislators.** Provide legislators with information on issues of importance to your organization so they can make informed policy decisions.
- **Invite Legislators to Your Facility.** Leave a lasting impression. Invite legislators to visit your facilities because these visits play a critical role in educational and legislative efforts. To avoid lobbying, do not discuss specific legislation.
- **Educate the Public about the Legislative Process.** Introduce communities and constituencies to the legislators who represent them. When community members meet legislators face-to-face and discuss the issues that affect their everyday lives, not only do legislators receive the information they need to represent their communities, but those communities are empowered to invest more heavily in the outcomes of policy debates, giving them a stronger hand in their own future.

- **Research.** Produce relevant resources that reflect the real story of your community and its needs.
- **Regulatory efforts.** Take action at the agency level by influencing rulemaking or regulations.
- **Public education.** Educate the community on the issues that matter most to your organization.
- **Nonpartisan voter education.** Highlight the importance of voting and encourage voter registration. Nonprofits can also educate voters on issues and candidates in a nonpartisan way, and they can provide voters with information about where, when, and how to vote.
- **Educational conferences.** Gather, network, share information, and plan for the future.
- **Training.** Conduct a leadership training to provide individuals with the skills needed to be spokespersons for potential policy reform.
- **Litigation.** Win in court for your cause or your community. Challenge an unconstitutional law.
- **Draft a Petition.** Demand change.
- **Write an Op-Ed.** Share your expertise on an issue and establish your organization as a trusted thought leader.
- **Lobbying.** Advocate for or against specific legislation. 501(c)(3) public charities can engage in a limited, but generous, amount of lobbying.



Scan the QR code for our [Being A Player](#) guide, a user-friendly guide that reviews federal tax laws that govern lobbying by 501(c)(3) public charities.

HOW CAN YOUR ORGANIZATION GET MORE INVOLVED IN ADVOCACY?

- **Educate.** Inform supporters, policymakers, allies, and other interested parties about the current policies and problems affecting your community.

- **Evaluate.** Evaluate your organization’s mission and goals and examine whether current programs involve advocacy as a means to address problems or grievances in the community. If not, how could advocacy play a larger role in your organization’s programs?
- **Collaborate.** Work in coalitions with groups whose philosophy and goals resonate with yours. Together, pooling staff and resources, all parties involved in a coalition will be better equipped to take on campaigns and work for change.
- **Assess.** Use AFJ’s free online Advocacy Capacity Tool to assess your advocacy skills, identify specific gaps and strategic opportunities, and focus resources to strengthen your organization and achieve the best results possible.



Scan the QR code for our [Advocacy Capacity Tool](#).

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