

Everyone is an Activist: Building Your Advocacy Muscle with People with Lived Experience, Staff, Volunteers, and Board Members



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Advocacy can be intimidating at times. But impactful advocacy involves the entire community, including everyone in your organization. Learn how to overcome these barriers to action and energize staff, people with lived experience, board members, and volunteers within your agency to get involved in advocacy on the local, state and/or federal levels.



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Advocacy & Lobbying

Lobbying: an attempt to influence specific legislation. Activities that are in direct support of, or opposition to, a specific piece of introduced or proposed legislation.

Advocacy: is the process of stakeholders making their voices heard on issues that affect their lives and the lives of others at the local, state, and national level. It also means helping policymakers and elected or appointed officials find specific solutions. Most nonprofits can and do engage in as much advocacy as possible to achieve their goals.

References: American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry

Advocacy Activities

- ❖ **Inviting Members of Congress or state lawmakers to your hospital, or showing how state or federal funds have been used is not considered lobbying**
- ❖ **Sharing technical advice in response to a question from a lawmaker is not lobbying**
- ❖ **Educating a lawmaker about an issue while not promoting a piece of legislation is only advocacy.**

References: American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry

Lobbying Activities

- ❖ Writing to state lawmakers requesting funding for mental health services in the state budget
- ❖ Writing to your Member of Congress asking that he or she support a specific bill
- ❖ Meeting with a local, state or federal lawmaker in-person to encourage he or she to support or oppose a specific piece of legislation.

References: American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry

Yes, You Are Allowed to Lobby!

In general, no organization may qualify for section 501(c)(3) status if a substantial part of its activities is attempting to influence legislation (commonly known as lobbying). A 501(c)(3) organization may engage in some lobbying, but too much lobbying activity risks loss of tax-exempt status.

Organizations may, however, involve themselves in issues of public policy without the activity being considered as lobbying. For example, organizations may conduct educational meetings, prepare and distribute educational materials, or otherwise consider public policy issues in an educational manner without jeopardizing their tax-exempt status.

References: Internal Revenue Service

Yes, You Are Allowed to Lobby!

If you are a local, state or federal government employee you can lobby as a concerned citizen.

Don't count the time you lobby as work time nor say you represent the views of your employer when engaging with lawmakers.





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Cullen Ryan
Executive Director
Community Housing of Maine

State & Federal Policy and Bill Information

Within your state or region, you can become a resource for your peers.



Builds trust and moves your state or region closer to agreeing and closer to communicating with one voice on policies and bills.



Regular attention and familiarity builds agreement and trust and readies the group for action.

Telling stories is key to localizing policy information

Your job is to help decision makers become experts in your field.



Data helps promote understanding, agreement, and increases believability.



Stories are key to building buy-in and understanding.

Include People with Lived Experience

People With Lived Experience are often the best and most credible storytellers.



PWLE can speak from the heart about their personal experience and help the audience understand how resources directly helped them.

Relationship Work

This is all about relationship work.

Ways to form and deepen the relationship with your Congressional staffers:

