

Clarifying the Confusion: Advocacy vs. Lobbying

Advocacy is the general promotion of an idea or cause through education, outreach and/or grassroots organizing. It is an effective way to create awareness about how a community is impacted, either positively or negatively, by public policy and to generate interest in and support among legislators and the public for a particular issue. In general, advocacy activities are not prohibited for nonprofit 501(c)(3) organizations and are a great way to engage policymakers in discussions of issues facing their constituents.

Lobbying, a form of advocacy, involves asking a legislator to take a specific position or support or oppose a particular piece of legislation. Legislation means a bill that has been introduced or a draft bill that may be introduced in any legislative body such as a city council, state legislature or Congress. Lobbying is allowed for nonprofit 501(c)(3) organizations as long as they do not engage in excessive lobbying or spend more than a certain percentage of their budget on lobbying efforts. Nonprofit 501(c)(3) organizations may not, however, engage in promoting or opposing political candidates or parties in any way.

Direct lobbying involves communication with a legislator, legislative staff or body or any covered executive branch or other government employee who may participate in the formulation of legislation. The communication refers to a specific piece of legislation and expresses a view on that legislation. **Grassroots lobbying** is defined as an attempt to influence specific legislation by encouraging the public to contact legislators about that legislation. A communication constitutes grassroots lobbying if it refers to specific legislation, reflects the view on that specific legislation and encourages the recipient of the communication to take lobbying action. This is known as a “call to action.”

The following activities are considered advocacy but **not** lobbying:

- Providing technical assistance or advice to a legislative body or committee in response to a request
- Making available non-partisan analysis, study or research
- Providing examinations and discussions of broad, social, economic and similar problems
- Communicating with a legislative body regarding matters which might affect the existence of an organization, its powers and duties, its tax-exemption status or the deduction of contributions to an organization
- Updating members of your own organization on the status of legislation, without a call to action.

ADVOCACY =
getting the right
information, to the
right people at the
right time, to get the
public health
message across.

Being an effective advocate includes five basic concepts:

1. Be factual, honest and knowledgeable about your subject
2. Be clear, concise and concrete with your message
3. You, rather than someone else, must frame the issue
4. Cheerful persistence - promoting public health is a long process
5. Don't forget to follow up and say “thank you”