



ADVOCACY vs. LOBBYING

What Every 501(c)(3) Nonprofit should know

Both advocacy and lobbying help nonprofits shape public policy. Understanding the difference allows your organization to engage confidently while remaining compliant with IRS rules.

Advocacy

- Educates policymakers and the public about issues affecting your community
- Raises awareness of community needs.
- Focuses on issues and public policy.
- No limits on advocacy activities for 501(c)(3) organizations

Lobbying

- Attempts to influence whether specific legislation is passed or defeated.
- Takes a position on a specific bill or legislative proposal.
- Focuses on specific legislation
- Allowed for non-profits, but must remain within IRS lobbying limits.

What counts as advocacy?

- Educating lawmakers about community issues
- Sharing research, data, and nonpartisan analysis
- Providing technical assistance when requested by a legislative body
- Discussing broad social, economic, or public policy issues
- Updating members about legislation without asking them to act
- Explaining how policies affect the people you serve

What counts as lobbying?

Direct Lobbying

Communicating with legislators or legislative staff that refers to a specific bill AND expresses support or opposition to that bill.

Grassroots Lobbying

Communicating with the public that refers to a specific bill, expresses a position, includes a call to action asking people to contact lawmakers.

Speaking out without losing your 501(c)(3)

You CAN

- Advocate for issues year-round
- educate lawmakers and the public
- Lobby within IRS limits
- Track and report lobbying expenses
- Use your expertise to inform policy discussions

You CANNOT

- Endorse or oppose political candidates
- Support political parties
- Use charitable resources for campaign activity
- Make partisan political statements on behalf of your organization.

Remember the Three Questions:

- ✓ Am I talking about a specific bill?
- ✓ Am I expressing an opinion about it?
- ✓ Am I asking someone to influence lawmakers?

No? *Advocacy*

Yes? *Lobbying*



Need help getting started?

MCCOY's Public Policy & Advocacy team offers customized presentations and trainings for staff, leadership teams, and Boards of Directors on topics including:

- *Advocacy vs. lobbying* | *The Indiana legislative process* | *How nonprofits can engage in public policy* | *Practical advocacy strategies and tools*



Contact MCCOY to schedule a training tailored to your organization's needs.