

# Lobbying vs Advocacy: What's the Difference?

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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 policy makers find specific solutions to persistent problems. Most nonprofits can, and do, engage in as much advocacy as possible to achieve their goals.

Lobbying, on the other hand, involves activities that are in direct support of or opposition to a specific piece of introduced legislation. While nonprofits can engage in some lobbying, the IRS has strict rules about how much of a nonprofit's budget can go toward these activities. There are also prohibitions on any use of federal funds for lobbying.

*Different organizations have different levels of comfort with advocacy and lobbying activities and may operate with different expectations. It's always best to talk with your supervisor or board of directors to ensure you understand your organization's advocacy guidelines.*

## Examples of Advocacy vs. Lobbying

### Advocacy

- Telling your legislators how a state or federal grant your organization received has helped your constituents.
- Educating a legislator about the effects of a policy on your constituency.
- Inviting a legislator to visit your organization so that he/she may see firsthand how federal or state funding or policy affects day-to-day operations and the difference it makes.
- Providing technical assistance or advice to a legislative body or committee in response to a written request.
- Making available nonpartisan analysis, study or research.
- Providing examinations and discussions of broad, social, economic and similar problems.
- Communicating with a legislative body regarding matters that might affect the existence of the organization, its powers and duties, its tax-exempt status, or the deduction of contributions to the organization (the "self-defense" exception).
- Updating the members of your own organization on the status of legislation, without a call to action.

### Lobbying

- Asking your legislators to vote for or against, or amend, introduced legislation.
- Emailing a "call to action" to your members urging them to contact their legislators in support of action on introduced legislation or pending regulations.
- Preparing materials or organizing events in support of lobbying activities.