

## What is Advocacy? Definition and Examples

### Advocacy Definition

Advocacy for public charities is a broad concept and includes communication about the mission, lobbying for legal changes in public policy, and educating the public, your community, and elected officials about the work of your organization.

Effective communication in the form of advocacy is one method for nonprofit voices to be heard. Advocacy allows nonprofits to advance the issues, increase funding sources, and bring about lasting change for the people and communities they serve.

However, nonprofits need to understand the difference between the various activities associated with advocacy and what is and is not allowed for charitable organizations.

### Advocacy and Your Mission

The broadest form of advocacy is sharing and communicating the mission of the organization to others, an activity sometimes referred to as ambassadorship. **Staff and board members are ambassadors for the organization.** As such, they represent the organization in the community, articulate its mission, and support and defend its

message. Nonprofits communicate the impact of their mission through this kind of advocacy work.

## Board's Role in Advocacy

One of the key roles for a board member is to act as an advocate for their organization. Advocacy means that the board member works to educate the community, including elected officials, and lobbies to advance an issue or public policy to further the organization's mission and collective purpose. Like all nonprofits, public charities are encouraged to be active advocates of their organization's mission

What does the board's role in advocacy look like? Board members engage in advocacy in three key ways, each requiring a basic understanding of how public policy impacts or could impact the organization and those it serves.

To learn more about how boards can leverage advocacy as a way to stand up for the mission and people they serve, visit BoardSource's campaign, [Stand For Your Mission](#).

Also see: [Three Steps to Working With Your Board to Advance Advocacy](#)

## Advocacy and Lobbying for Nonprofits

Nonprofits leverage various forms of advocacy to impact change. Here are some of the most common approaches:

- Public Awareness Campaigns
  - Advocacy groups use media, social platforms, and events to educate the public about critical issues.
- Legal Advocacy
  - Some organizations take legal action to challenge unjust laws or policies through litigation and court cases.
- Direct Lobbying
  - Organizations directly communicate with policymakers to influence laws and regulations.
- Grassroots Lobbying

- This method focuses on mobilizing everyday people to take action to influence laws and regulations.

## Can Nonprofits Lobby?

A common misconception is that nonprofits cannot lobby. On the contrary, for most nonprofits, lobbying is legal and recommended within the limits of the law.

The IRS defines lobbying as “carrying on propaganda, or otherwise attempting to influence legislation.” This means activities that try to influence legislators to pass laws that are favorable or overturn laws that are unfavorable to one’s cause.

To learn more about lobbying, visit our resource on [What is Lobbying](#).

[Learn more about Advocacy and Ambassadorship](#)

**101 Resource | Last updated: April 7, 2025**