BOLDERADVOCACY

What is Advocacy?
Definitions and Examples

Advocacy is defined as any action that speaks in favor of, recommends, argues for a cause, supports or defends, or pleads on behalf of others. This fact sheet offers a look at how advocacy is defined, what kinds of activities comprise advocacy work, and what kinds of advocacy projects several tax-exempt groups are currently leading.

How is advocacy different from lobbying?

Lobbying is only one kind of advocacy. Not all advocacy is lobbying but all lobbying is advocacy.

What kinds of activities comprise advocacy work?

The following list of advocacy activities is not exhaustive. Each activity includes an example of a recent, concrete action on the part of active nonprofit groups around the country. The list and examples can serve to motivate others and suggest ideas for future advocacy on all fronts and in all kinds of struggles.

- **Organizing: Build power at the base.** Center for Intercultural Organizing in Portland, OR organizes the immigrant and refugee communities in their area. These meetings enable immigrant leaders to mobilize their constituencies and build power in their communities.
- **Educate Legislators: Provide information on issues.** NARAL Pro-Choice Wisconsin offers fact sheets on its Web site for distribution to state legislators so that they will be aware of issues facing women who seek abortion.
- **Educating the Public about the Legislative Process: Introduce communities and constituencies to the legislators whose represent them.** Utah Issues: Center for Poverty Research and Action sponsors an annual Citizens Day during which the organization's members and other Utah residents come to the state capitol to meet their legislators and learn about the legislative process. When communities have the opportunity to meet legislators face to face and discuss the issues that affect their everyday lives, not only do legislators receive the tools they need to represent their communities, but those communities are empowered to invest more heavily in the outcomes of policy debates, giving them a stronger hand in their own future.
- **Research: Produce relevant resources that reflect the real story of your community.** California Immigrant Policy Center released the report "Immigrants and the U.S. Healthcare System" to dispel myths and present realities in the state of California.
- **Organizing a rally: Mobilize for your cause.** Casa de Maryland, along with allied organizations, rallied in Washington, D.C. in April 2013 to raise awareness of the need for comprehensive immigration reform and an end to deportation.
- **Regulatory efforts: Take action at the agencies.** CASA of Maryland, Inc. has pushed for the state Motor Vehicle Administration (MVA) to comply with existing laws and to stop discriminating against driver's license applicants on the basis of ability to prove legal residency.
- **Public education: Educate the community on the issues.** Rights for All People in Denver, CO periodically holds community forums on state and federal immigration issues.

- **Nonpartisan voter education: Inform the electorate on the issues.** CARECEN of Los Angeles, CA encourages civic participation in the Latino and immigrant community, and educates the public about how to participate more fully in elections and civic life.
- **Nonpartisan voter mobilization: Encourage citizens to vote.** In 2012, the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (ICIRR) began an ambitious campaign to register and mobilize tens of thousands of new immigrant voters in the suburban counties surrounding Chicago.
- **Educational conferences: Gather, network, share information, and plan for the future.** National Council of La Raza (NCLR) holds an annual conference where NCLR's affiliate organization and other groups convene to discuss issues and strategies affecting the Latino community in the U.S.
- **Training:** The United States Student Association (USSA) holds Grassroots Organizing Weekends (GROW) training sessions that teach successful strategies and skills for direct action organizing on issues related to students.
- **Litigation: Win in court for your cause or your community.** El Centro Humanitario para los Trabajadores in Denver, CO operates a legal program that assists workers in the recovery of thousands of dollars in unpaid wages each year.
- **Lobbying: Advocate for or against specific legislation.** All nonprofits are permitted to lobby. 501(c)(3) public charities can engage in a generous but limited amount of lobbying. The Florida Immigrant Coalition (FLIC) works at the state level to pass a bill allowing undocumented high school graduates in Florida to pay in-state tuition rates.

How can your organization get more involved in advocacy?

Educate. Inform your organization about the current policies and problems affecting your community.

Evaluate. Evaluate your organization's mission and goals, and examine whether current programs involve advocacy as a means to address problems or grievances in the community. If not, how could advocacy play a larger role in your organization's programs?

Collaborate. Work in coalitions with groups whose philosophy and goals resonate with yours. Together, pooling staff and resources, all parties involved in the coalition should be better equipped to take on campaigns and work for change.

The staff of Alliance for Justice's Bolder Advocacy offers many tools for tax-exempt groups. Please see our Web site, www.BolderAdvocacy.org, for more details.

Good Luck!

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