

## Investing in Change: The Importance of Supporting Advocacy

When a foundation gives money directly to a program that provides community services, the impact is seen immediately: low-income children receive a new educational program or a charity hospital can provide health care to individuals in need. Supporting advocacy is a little different. The impact may be harder to see and measure at first, but changes in public policy are often a precursor to the meaningful, long-term success vital to tackling larger community challenges. Supporting advocacy is, quite simply, one of the most powerful tools available to foundations for creating change.

Recognizing the importance of this tool, many public and private foundations support advocacy. What's more, foundations may engage in advocacy themselves, within certain defined parameters. While foundation leaders have varied reasons and methods for supporting and engaging in advocacy, the common thread is the recognition that advocacy is essential for success, no matter the goal.

### Supporting Advocacy is Important

The term "advocacy" encompasses a broad range of activities that can influence public policy. From research and public education to lobbying and voter education, advocacy is about using effective tools to create change. There are so many compelling reasons to embrace advocacy as a crucial element in an overall funding strategy:

**Supporting advocacy is a way to leverage the impact of available funds.** Foundations that support nonprofit public policy work stretch their grant dollars and see more far-reaching results from their financial contributions. Leveraging funds is particularly important in an era of stringent cutbacks in state and federal assistance.

*"If advocacy can save one percent of the state budget on housing, medical care, or other services, that means millions of dollars towards those services. Support for public education, advocacy, and lobbying can have great benefits while the same amount spent on direct services could not sustain programs over time."*

- Emmett D. Carson, President and CEO of Silicon Valley Community Foundation, former President and CEO of The Minneapolis Foundation

**Supporting advocacy is an investment that can lead to systemic change.** Public policy work is an effective strategy for bringing about systemic, long-lasting change that can affect large segments of the population for long periods of time.

Sometimes the direct service needs of entire communities can be reduced by advocating for fairer policies. The Rockefeller Family Fund has played an important role in advancing economic justice for women, including paid sick days. Associate Director Lisa Guide says *"We asked ourselves: How do we use our dollars to jump start investment in areas that will make a difference in women's lives? ... It just takes time, and we're not going away."*

**Supporting advocacy helps a foundation achieve its mission and helps nonprofits reach their goals.** Most foundations include in their missions a broad, long-term goal to address significant areas of need in the community. Advocacy is critical in addressing most of these societal improvements.

For years, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation invested in technical research on climate change. Over time, the foundation recognized that to have a meaningful impact on the issue it had to support public policy education and even lobbying campaigns. *“It’s not enough to develop technical solutions,”* according to Hewlett president Larry Kramer. *“You have to engage in some kind of advocacy work if you want to see anything actually happen.”*

**Supporting advocacy strengthens the voice of the underrepresented and provides policymakers with information they need to know.** Organizations that work directly in communities, providing direct services to underserved individuals, have the opportunity to be champions for those they serve. Those most affected by government policies must be the ones guiding what is needed, identifying what the obstacles are, and weighing in on what does or does not work when it comes to addressing these issues. Too often, however, the constituencies that are the most affected are underrepresented or silent in public policy. Through grantmaking, foundations can strengthen those voices in policy debates. Armed with the right tools, nonprofits can use advocacy to advance their causes and lift up the voices of individuals in the communities they work in.

*“Philanthropy has to recognize that community power, voice, and advocacy are, to use a football analogy, the blocking and tackling of winning social change.”*  
- Dr. Robert Ross, President and CEO of The California Endowment, making the case that addressing long-term problems by mobilizing the community through organizing and advocacy is extremely effective.

**Supporting advocacy bolsters a foundation’s unique role in bringing together diverse members of the community.** The work of foundations is carried out at the intersection of government, educational institutions, business, the media, and other groups. As a result, foundations involved in public policy are in a unique position to convene players in the broader community to work for the common good.

*“Whether it’s the cuts to the state budget or a federal government shutdown, philanthropy has to step up and do more. We should be considered an important player and thought partner—but we also cannot fill all the holes. Today the focus is public education, but who knows what all of these foundations will be working on in 2020 now that they know how to get things done.”*  
- Jennifer Esterline, Consultant for the Texas Education Grantmakers Advocacy Consortium

## Advocacy in Action

No matter the method, advocacy is essential to improving life for all Americans. There are many ways that nonprofits and foundations can engage in advocacy.

Here are a few examples of advocacy in action:

- *Organizing: Build power at the base.* The Future of Nursing Campaign for Action organizes leaders in nursing in various states. For example, the [Missouri Action Coalition](#), which is affiliated with the campaign, works to create a robust base of nurses engaging in issue advocacy.
- *Research: Create resources that reflect the real story of your community.* The Center for Digital Democracy released a [report](#) titled “YouTube, Big Data, Big Brands = Trouble for Kids and Parents” to educate families about the ways YouTube markets to children using the YouTube Kids app.
- *Regulatory Efforts: Take action at the agencies.* Consumer Action has [pushed](#) the U.S. Department of Labor to update a rule on fiduciary duty that would require investment brokers working with investment accounts to act in the best interest of their clients.
- *Lobbying: Advocate for or against specific legislation.* The National Wildlife Federation, in coalition with other organizations, worked in Montana to [defeat bills](#) that would have harmed bison in the state. All nonprofits are permitted to lobby. 501(c)(3) public charities can engage in a generous but limited amount of lobbying.

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