

## What is Advocacy?

### Definitions and Examples from Reproductive Rights, Health, and Justice Organizations

Effective advocacy enables nonprofits to shape the public debate on important social issues and ensure that underserved communities have a voice in the policies that impact their lives. The term “advocacy” encompasses a broad range of activities (including research, public education, lobbying, and voter education) that can influence public policy. Advocacy is the number one way nonprofits can advance the issues they care about and help bring about systemic, lasting change.

### How is advocacy different from lobbying?

Lobbying is only one kind of advocacy. There are many avenues of advocacy that nonprofits can engage in that do not constitute lobbying. Federal tax law defines lobbying only; “non-lobbying advocacy” is often used to refer to those activities that don’t meet the definition of [lobbying](#).

### What kinds of activities comprise advocacy work?

- ✓ **Organize: Build power at the base.** Advocates for Youth trained and supported [more than 2000 youth activists](#) to help them reach their peers with information and advocacy on their reproductive and sexual health.
- ✓ **Educate Legislators: Provide information on issues.** In order to fight against the vilification of abortion providers, Physicians for Reproductive Health sent letters to Congress to provide accurate information on the work of these physicians.
- ✓ **Educate the Public about the Legislative Process: Introduce communities and constituencies to the legislators who represent them.** Hundreds of advocates gathered in Austin, TX for a [Reproductive Health Care Advocacy Day](#) to talk with legislators about the importance of Texans making their own reproductive health care decisions. When community members have the opportunity to meet legislators face to face and discuss the issues that affect their everyday lives, legislators receive the information they need to represent their communities. Additionally, those communities are empowered to invest more heavily in the outcomes of policy debates, giving them a stronger hand in their own future. *To avoid lobbying, do NOT discuss specific legislation.*
- ✓ **Research: Produce resources that reflect the real story of your community.** Sexuality and Information Education Council of the United States (SIECUS) [released a toolkit](#) to empower primary care providers to educate and counsel their young patients about PrEP, a pre-exposure prophylaxis medication to prevent acquisition of HIV infection.
- ✓ **Organize a Rally: Mobilize for your cause.** National Asian Pacific American Women’s Forum (NAPAWF) gathered with reproductive justice advocates in front of the Indiana Court of Appeals to [show their support and solidarity for Purvi Patel](#) who was unjustly convicted under a feticide law for having an abortion.
- ✓ **Regulatory Efforts: Take action at the agencies.** The Virginia Coalition to Protect Women’s Health encouraged the public [to submit comments](#) to the Virginia Board of Health about regulations that would create unnecessary burdens to abortion access.
- ✓ **Public Education: Educate the community on the issues.** The All Above All campaign launched a [Be Bold Road Trip](#) to educate communities across the country on the importance of ending the bans on abortion coverage for low-income women.
- ✓ **Nonpartisan Voter Education: Inform the electorate on the issues.** [Soy Poderosa \(I am Powerful\)](#) is a civic engagement campaign of the National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health to engage, organize, and lift up the voices of the Latina community and integrates civic

engagement and voter education with their advocacy to build power on the local, state, and national level.

- ✓ **Nonpartisan Voter Mobilization: Encourage citizens to vote.** Unite for Reproductive and Gender Equity (URGE) worked with young leaders to [register and mobilize young voters](#) to go to the polls.
- ✓ **Educational Conferences: Gather, network, share information, and plan for the future.** Every year activists gather in Oklahoma for the [Take Root: Red State Perspectives on Reproductive Justice Conference](#) to work together on the struggles and highlight the strengths of those working towards reproductive justice in the more conservative parts of the country.
- ✓ **Trainings: Healthy and Free TN** hosted a webinar on strategies to [have tough conversations](#) with family and friends on reproductive rights, health, and justice issues.
- ✓ **Litigation: Win in court for your cause or your community.** The Center for Reproductive Rights brought the case, [Whole Women's Health v. Hellerstedt](#), all the way to the Supreme Court to challenge a Texas law that denied women access to safe and legal abortion services by requiring medically unnecessary restrictions on abortion clinics. In June 2016, the Supreme Court affirmed a woman's constitutional right and ability – no matter where she lives – to make her own decisions about her health, family, and future.
- ✓ **Draft a Petition: Demand change.** The Center for Health and Gender Equity (CHANGE) [created a petition](#) calling on governments, international institutions, and the global community of civil society organizations to recognize April 11 as the International Day for Maternal Health and Rights because every woman has the right to dignity, respect, and skilled care during pregnancy and childbirth.
- ✓ **Write an Op-Ed: Share your expertise on an issue.** The National Women's Health Network published an [op-ed in the Washington Post](#) warning against pushing ineffective drugs onto the market that pose serious risks to women's health.
- ✓ **Lobbying: Advocate for or against specific legislation.** 501(c)(3) public charities can engage in a limited but generous amount of lobbying. WV Free organizes a ["Stand with WV Women" Lobby Day](#) to speak to legislators about bills affecting access to reproductive health care.

## 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 coalition with groups whose philosophy and goals resonate with yours. Pooling staff and resources should help all parties involved in the coalition be better equipped to take on campaigns and work for change.
- ✓ **Assess.** Use AFJ's free online [Advocacy Capacity Tool](#) to assess your advocacy skills, identify specific gaps and strategic opportunities, focus resources to strengthen your organization and achieve the best advocacy results possible.

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