

Definitions of Policy Involvement

1: Government Relations

1. Lobbying

Lobbying includes the following activities: a) contacting legislators to propose, support, or oppose legislation; b) urging the public to contact legislators to propose, support, or oppose legislation; or c) advocating the adoption or rejection of legislation.

Direct Lobbying: Contacting members of the legislative branch, the executive branch (if they are signing the legislation), or the general public (if a ballot issue is up for vote; when an issue is put to a referendum, the general public becomes legislators) to propose, support, or oppose legislation; or c) advocating the adoption or rejection of legislation.

Grassroots Lobbying: Expressing a view about specific legislation to the broad community, and includes a call to action (asking the community to become involved and contact legislators, or providing them with a mechanism to do so).

Engagement with political campaigns is expressly forbidden for 501c3s.

501c3 lobbying is limited by the insubstantial part test, or the 501(h) Expenditure Test. Four exceptions allow nonprofits to lobby without limits:

1. Self-defense, in the case that legislation affects the survival of the nonprofit.
2. Examinations and discussions of broad social, economic, and similar problems.
3. Requests for technical assistance from legislators for a nonprofit's expertise expressed through invitation from the legislative committee.
4. Nonpartisan research, study, or analysis of a legislative issue that includes a full and fair discussion of all sides of the issue, and is broadly disseminated.

2. Non-Lobbying Advocacy, or Technical Assistance

Contacting Non-Legislators, including special purpose boards, and the general public (when a ballot issue is not up for vote).

Non-Legislative Advocacy, advocating for regulations (which are not laws, but rather rules that govern how a law is implemented), executive orders, the enforcement of existing laws, litigation, and any other type of policy that is not related to particular legislation, or political campaigns.¹

2: Public Policy Awareness

1. Maintain Awareness of Relevant Policy Issues
 - a. Be informed of relevant policy issues; leverage assets with awareness of policy implications
 - b. Focus your mission to align with relevant policy issues
2. Enable Effective Nonprofit Policy Involvement
 - a. Providing training, tools, and resources to nonprofits for interacting with legislators and general policy work, not related to a specific issue
 - b. Providing training, tools, and resources to nonprofits for interactions with the media
 - c. Support and engage policy research and training organizations (e.g. Alliance for Justice, or others)
3. Support Partnerships that Strengthen Policy Capability and Impact
 - a. Connect grassroots organizations with regional or national policy organizations through grantmaking
 - b. Convene nonprofits likely to be affected by similar policy issues
 - c. Collaborate with other foundations to increase policy awareness, and to impact important policy issues

¹ The preceding summary of lobbying definitions comes as a work product of Coro Fellow Erica Munoz-Fitch during her nonprofit placement with the Gateway Center for Giving.