



Two Reasons Nonprofits Should Get Involved in Advocacy

Is advocacy activity optional for nonprofits? Not if you care about your mission.

Recent budget battles at the national and state levels have given every indication that they are likely to result in huge cuts to services that will deeply impact nonprofits and their clients. Clearly, nonprofits should be at the table for these conversations. Their front line view of the challenges faced by their clients give nonprofits the clearest perspective on clients' needs and the likely impact of policy changes on their lives.

Here are two great reasons nonprofits should get involved in advocacy.

Reason #1: Social Responsibility

When we don't engage in advocacy, we leave the decisions of our society to those who may not understand our clients' concerns and issues as well as we do. Ideally, everyone engaged with the nonprofit should be aware of their responsibility to raise their voices, write to their legislators, talk to their neighbors, tell their stories, and otherwise use their influence to build an audience for the organization's messages and mission.

Reason #2: Fundraising Strategy

Being involved in advocacy can help you raise More Money for Mission. Here's why.

1. Advocacy provides an excellent opportunity for people to be involved with the mission. A key rule of fundraising is: Involvement goes before investment. If people get involved, they are more likely to give. In our society of busy people, it's important to have involvement opportunities at every level of time commitment. Advocacy involvement might be substantial, or it might entail making just one call or sending one e-mail on behalf of the organization's interests. Simply taking action increases the individual's personal commitment to the organization and the mission. Giving follows.
2. Advocacy engages volunteers in speaking passionately about the mission and convincing others to do the same. This activity is also the essence of "friend raising" – the foundation of successful relationship-based fundraising. People who learn this skill are also the most effective at convincing others to give.
3. Advocacy programs highlight the urgency to take action. As anyone knows who has tried to meet a matching challenge deadline or save an historic building from the wrecking ball, urgency is the key to converting caring individuals into volunteers, advocates, and donors.

When I was executive director of the Bucks County Women's Fund, I helped found the Bucks County Women's Advocacy Coalition – now a group of nearly 50 nonprofit organizations plus 350+ individuals who care about increasing economic self-sufficiency for women in our county. We chose to get involved in advocacy for both reasons given above.

Like many nonprofits, our organization's ability to invest time and resources in advocacy was very limited. We also felt that our ability to impact social change was questionable as a single organization working alone. But working together in coalition we thought we could speak with a more powerful, unified voice about the needs of women, girls, and families. We worked to create a shared women's agenda for Bucks County and build public support for it while working to accomplish specific, measurable change.

There are a number of organizations that are dedicated to advocacy work and very skilled at building coalitions. Perhaps there is one that can help your nonprofit implement a suitable advocacy program.

Here's how you can get started:

1. Identify your most critical issues and plan your advocacy strategy. Organizations like the Center for Lobbying in the Public Interest have resources online to make this easier. www.clpi.org.
2. Find a coalition. You don't have to do it alone. Coalitions can track the issues and opportunities and tell you when action is most critical. They often provide some wording for the letter you should send. You can simply tweak it to reflect your organization's experience and pass it along to your constituents.
3. Invite donors, volunteers, and everyone you meet to get involved in your advocacy efforts. Encourage them to write letters, speak to their representatives, talk to their neighbors, attend public meetings, and more.
4. Convert advocates into donors by inviting them to give as another way to support the mission.

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