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Why Should Your Nonprofit Advocate?

Advocacy helps your nonprofit *meet its mission*.

Through advocacy efforts you can help others by, among other ways:

- Preventing loss of resources – you might be able to stop a proposal to slash funding that would hurt the communities you serve;
- Lowering barriers to broaden access to important services – you might be able to increase the staffing for a particular government agency (e.g., instead of being open just 20 hours a week to the public it can remain open for 30 hours, allowing more people to be served);
- Illuminating real community needs – you might be able to shine the light on a particular social problem that has been ignored, allowing policy makers to see the problem and then address it.
- Helping a colleague get in key (literally at the symphony), telling the nonprofits story to a potential funder, talking to a reporter or editor about the organization's impact in the community, and encouraging local civic groups to send volunteers to a local community event (e.g., park or river cleanup).

These are just a few examples of everyday advocacy.

Advocacy helps your *nonprofit survive and thrive.*

- What would it mean if a governmental entity removed or limited your tax-exempt status? Started imposing new fees? Imposed costly and burdensome regulations?
- Convincing local government officials to install better street lighting could increase attendance at your night classes because students feel safer coming and going to your facility.
- Public policy advocacy can also help your organization attract favorable media attention, generating higher visibility leading to increased awareness of your mission and mobilizing your board, volunteers, and donors.

Nonprofit advocacy helps your community *solve problems.*

"Frequently, nonprofits are the only institutions with a view of both the concerns most important to their constituents and the day-to-day realities of how government programs function and impact those constituents."¹ By stepping forward and sharing your special knowledge, you can help solve problems.

Nonprofit advocacy helps your community *avoid problems.*

If nonprofit voices are not heard in the public policy making process because we choose to sit on the sidelines, then who will have complete, unfettered access to policy makers: people concerned about the broad public interest, or entities only wanting to advance their narrow agendas?

Nonprofit advocacy helps give *citizens a voice.*

Standing alone while taking a position contrary to powerful interests with political clout and financial resources can be daunting. Nonprofits serve as the great equalizer, where individuals come together so their voices are amplified. Plus, nonprofits serve as the gathering spot for people concerned about those who effectively have no voice – such as children, the poor, and the disabled who may not

be able to travel to be heard – as well as those who truly have no voice, such as future generations who are not here to talk about the environment or governmental deficits.

Advocacy helps *strengthen communities*.

Nonprofits serve as America's citizenship crucibles and leadership laboratories. Many people learn about compromise, conflict resolution, group processing, teamwork, and leadership by being involved in nonprofits. Sitting on committees, seeing how to make a motion, and learning how to organize support for a position are skills Americans learn through their nonprofits and then apply at their PTAs, while serving on the local parks board, or participating on a citizens' bond committee for local schools. In these and other ways, nonprofits are the common entry point for citizens to learn skills needed to participate in democracy.

Advocacy helps public policy makers who need – and often want – *citizen input*

Popular culture can create false impressions about the public policy making process. Indeed, although a common perception is that legislators don't care, the truth is that most policy makers sincerely want to make the best decisions, and getting the informed views of people in the field is one way to make more informed decisions.