

TYPES OF POLICY ADVOCACY

Youth Advocacy 101

Before we learn about types of policy advocacy, let's explore what it means to advocate.

Advocate: Speaking up about your needs and wants and the needs and wants of others. Sharing your ideas for improving services that will help you and others thrive.

Policy advocacy: Speaking out to influence public policy, which includes laws, regulations, funding and other decisions or actions of governments to address public issues or achieve societal goals. Policy advocacy includes working to shape how services are delivered and resources are allocated.

ADMINISTRATIVE ADVOCACY

Administrative advocacy aims to influence the formation, application or change of a rule, guideline or procedure created by a government agency (not legislators) to explain how a law will be carried out or enforced. These policies are not laws themselves, but they affect how laws are implemented in everyday practice. Administrative advocacy occurs at all government levels — federal, state and local.

- **Example:** Asking the director of your state's independent living program to make sure there are youth advisory board members present when policy decisions are being made that affect young people in foster care.

LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY

Legislative advocacy is about making your voice heard and taking action on behalf of yourself or others, such as educating lawmakers about research on older youth in foster care.

- **Example:** Legislative advocacy can involve making phone calls, writing letters and posting on social media about a particular issue.

BUDGET ADVOCACY

Budget advocacy uses strategic approaches to influence decisions made by authorities affecting how budgets are developed, managed and allocated.

- **Example:** Asking the director of a children and family services department to increase the amount of money allotted to programs for transitional living assistance for youth in foster care.

POLICY ADVOCACY IN ACTION

Policy advocacy work can take many forms.

- **Educating:** Much of advocacy, including policy advocacy, involves educating audiences through research and gathering data; doing outreach to inform peers, partners or decision makers; strategically sharing your story to help audiences understand why a change is needed or how it will improve outcomes for youth; publishing or distributing reports; and holding community conversations or town hall meetings.
 - **Example:** When you gather data about older youth in foster care and share it to educate child welfare policymakers, you are participating in policy advocacy work.

- **Lobbying:** Another form of civic participation is lobbying. Lobbying is defined as activity intended to directly influence legislation (city, state or federal) or to influence an election's outcome.
- **Example:** *Telling voters or policymakers what position to take for or against a bill, or what candidate to support.*

It's important to know the difference between educating and lobbying.

As a young leader interested in improving child welfare services, it's important for you to know the difference between lobbying and policy advocacy that is only for the purposes of educating.

You may have an opportunity to work with a Jim Casey Initiative network site, a foster care youth advisory board, a state child welfare agency or a nonprofit foster care service organization. Many of these organizations are subject to special restrictions on policy advocacy activity and particularly any engagement in lobbying. There are usually internal rules asking workers and volunteers to refrain from partisanship, such as political or electoral endorsements — or legal restrictions that forbid or limit lobbying for certain policies. The rules vary by state, jurisdiction, company and type of nonprofit.

Always make sure you understand what guidelines apply to your advocacy work by discussing it with your organization's leaders.

NONPROFITS AND LOBBYING: WHAT THE INTERNAL REVENUE SERVICE (IRS) RULES SAY

For charitable nonprofit organizations (the 501(c)(3) organizations that have tax-exempt status because they serve the public), there are special rules about political activity.

- **They can't focus too much on lobbying.** Nonprofits that are tax-exempt are not allowed to spend a big part of their time or money trying to influence legislation (that's called lobbying). Nonprofits may do some lobbying, but it cannot be a big part of their work or they could lose their tax-exempt status.
- **What counts as "legislation"?** Legislation means new laws or changes to laws, decisions that come from Congress, state legislatures or city councils — such as acts, bills, resolutions or confirmation of appointed office — or decisions by voters on matters such as a referendum, ballot initiative or constitutional amendment. Legislation does not include administrative rules, guidelines or procedures created by a government agency (not legislators) or decisions by the courts.
- **What counts as lobbying?** If a nonprofit reaches out to lawmakers (or tells people to do that) to try to get a law passed, changed or stopped — that's lobbying. Encouraging the public to support or oppose a specific bill also counts as lobbying.
- **How can tax-exempt organizations influence public policy?** Nonprofit organizations may educate the public and policymakers by hosting informational events or sharing data or personal stories to help people understand a topic, as long as they are not asking people to support or oppose a specific law.