

Blue Shield Against Violence

**Shifting Gears
for
Policy Advocacy**

September 10, 2007

What you told us in the Survey

- **12% state that you don't engage in advocacy activities;**
- **31% state that you are advocacy organizations;**
- **57% identify yourselves as organizations with an advocacy component;**
 - ✓ **of that 88%, only one quarter feels that they have a structure for policy advocacy, and about one third communicates or meets regularly and is actively involved in guiding the organization's advocacy work**
- **88% use networks to advocate for key policy issue**

Why is Policy Advocacy Important?

- Sometimes there's a policy solution to an operational problem
- Working “upstream” supports prevention efforts
- The power of an organization is often measured by not only the quality of its direct services, but by its influence in the policy arena
- In strategic planning interviews conducted for non profits, stakeholder often expect agencies to advocate for issues that affect their clients
- Few institutions are closer to the real problem than community non profits
- Our democratic system needs to hear the voices and experiences of people who are seldom heard

Barriers to Participating in Advocacy

A survey of non-profits conducted by SNAP (Strengthening Nonprofit Advocacy Project) found that:

- Spending time on public policy matters detracted from doing the work that they must do, such as fundraising, running direct service and public education programs, and handling day-to-day crises
- Nonprofits depend on others to influence public policy; they are “participators”
- There is a misunderstanding and fear of the term “lobbying”

Definitions of Public Policy and Advocacy

Public Policy: Decision-making that affects the public realm—laws, regulations, executive orders, judicial rulings, rules issued by elected and other government officials.

Advocacy: Identifying, embracing, and promoting a cause. Advocacy can influence public opinion as well as public policy.

Language Makes a Difference

Lobbying: A specific, legally defined activity that involves stating your position on specific legislation to legislators and/or asking them to support your position. Lobbying is classified as direct or grassroots.

Non-profits are permitted to do some lobbying.

- Often funders restrict you from using their funds to lobby. A resource to learn more: www.clpi.org

Assessing Organizational Capacity

Does your organization:

- **Understand why advocacy is important to meeting your mission?**
- **Have a commitment to advocacy?**
- **Understand the rules governing nonprofit advocacy?**
- **Have a policy on advocacy activities and/or public policy engagement?**

Assessing Organizational Capacity, cont'd

Does your organization have:

- **A governance structure for advocacy?**
- **A decision-making process for advocacy?**
- **A policy agenda?**
- **Dedicated/designated staff for advocacy?**

Increasing Organizational Capacity

Planning for advocacy:

- Starts with a strategic plan and vision
 - It may require re-visiting your mission
 - In your planning, include a hard-nosed assessment of where you are in your effectiveness as advocates, where you want to go, and how you can get there.
- Requires Board support, commitment and involvement
- Requires understanding of the law (it's not that difficult, really!)

Concrete Steps You Can Take

Institutionalize your commitment to advocacy

- **Create a Policy or Advocacy Committee**

Organizational policy

- **How will the policy agenda be set?**
- **How will decisions be made on an ongoing basis?**
- **Have it adopted by the Board of Directors**

Diversify funding to allocate some resources to advocacy

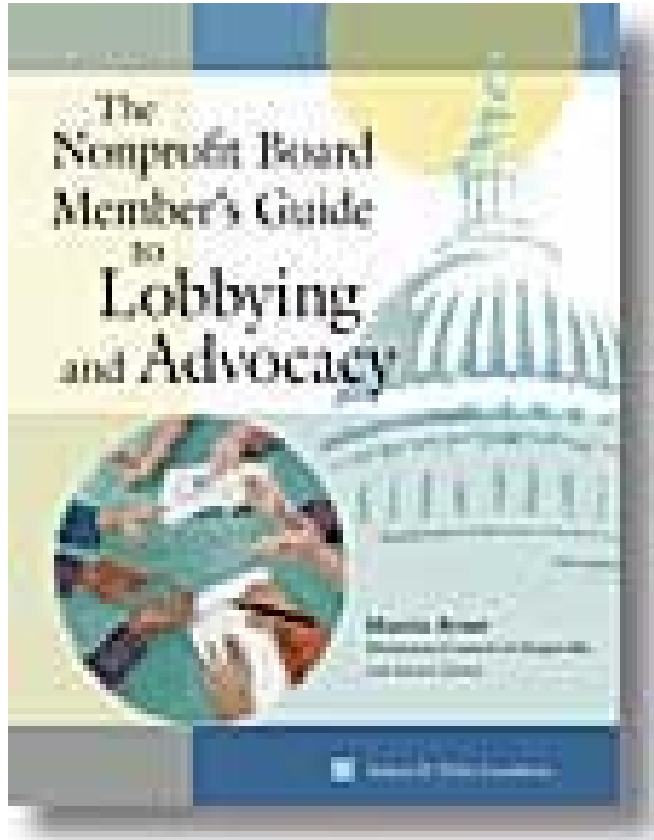
- **Getting more involved in advocacy can actually attract funding**
- **Nonprofits that engage in the public policy process are seen as experts and some donors/funders are attracted to those that are working on issues that they care about through policy change**

Concrete Steps You Can Take, cont'd

Human Resources

- **Advocacy can be a natural extension of the work you already do**
- **Example: A donor letter can be re-worked into a call for action**
- **Designate a point person for public policy beyond just the Executive Director**
- **Make an investment in developing staff, board and volunteer capacity**

For more information



The Nonprofit Board Member's Guide to Lobbying and Advocacy, by Marcia Avner with Kirsten Nielsen

Boards of Directors play a critical role in deciding the approach a nonprofit will take in engaging in the public policy process. This publication compliments *The Lobbying and Advocacy Handbook for Nonprofit Organizations* by providing information that is particularly important for nonprofit boards to consider in the advocacy planning process. Available at the Center for Lobbying in the Public Interest.

www.clpi.org

Web Sites with Lobbying & Advocacy Resources

- California Association of Nonprofits,
<http://www.canonprofits.org/>
- Center for Nonprofit Management, Los Angeles,
<http://www.cnmsocal.org/>
- San Diego Association of Nonprofits,
<http://members.aol.com/sandanlhr/index.html>
- Nonprofit Resource Center, Sacramento,
<http://www.nonprofitresourcectr.org/>
- Resource Center for Nonprofit Management,
Riverside, <http://www.nonprofitresource.org/>

Organizations Strengthening Nonprofit Lobbying, Advocacy and Public Policy Engagement

- Advocacy Institute, <http://www.advocacy.org/>
- Alliance for Justice, <http://www.afj.org/>
- American University Public Affairs Institute www.american.edu/spa/ccps/publicaffairs.html
- California Voter Foundation, <http://www.calvoter.org/>
- Campaign Consultation, <http://www.campaignconsultation.com/>
- Center for Community Change, <http://www.communitychange.org/>
- Center for Lobbying in the Public Interest, <http://www.clpi.org/>
- Development Training Institute <http://www.dtinational.org/>
- Environmental Media Services <http://www.ems.org/>
- Georgetown University-CISVOS, <http://www.georgetown.edu/centers/csvos/>
- Institute for Development Research <http://www.jsi.com/idr/>
- Institute for Nonprofit Organization Management, <http://www.inom.org/>
- Johns Hopkins Institute for Policy Studies <http://www.jhu.edu/~ips/>
- Leadership Institute <http://www.leadershipinstitute.org/>
- Midwest Academy <http://www.midwestacademy.com/>
- National Council of Nonprofit Associations, <http://www.ncna.org/>
- Nonprofit Voter Engagement Network, <http://www.nonprofitvote.org/>
- OMB Watch <http://www.ombwatch.org/>
- The Ruckus Society <http://www.ruckus.org/>
- Social Action and Leadership School for Activists <http://www.hotsalsa.org/>
- The Spin Project, www.spinproject.org/ - media advocacy
- Western States Center <http://www.westernstatescenter.org/>
- Amherst Wilder Foundation <http://www.wilder.org/>
- Virginia Organizing Project, <http://www.virginia-organizing.org/>