

Dos and Don'ts for 501 (c) (3) Lobbying

November 2006

Nonprofit organizations play a valuable role in shaping public policy and are encouraged to take part in improving government programs and policies through lobbying. Some nonprofits are hesitant to lobby because they do not know what they are permitted to do. Below are some, but not all, of the “dos and don'ts” and resources where you will find more information about each one.

Dos:

- *Lobby.* Lobbying is legal and Congress has regulations governing nonprofit lobbying activities.
- *Advocate.* There are no limits to the amount of non-lobbying advocacy activities you can do.
- Determine how your organization should measure its lobbying activity. Your organization can elect to measure lobbying activities under the provisions of the 501 (h) bill which provides precise lobbying measurements and a significant amount of lobbying expenditures.
- Conduct voter registration and nonpartisan “Get Out the Vote” efforts.
- Join the Alliance’s coalition of advocates to work on year-round advocacy campaigns. Contact Sarah Kahn at 202-942-8259 or skahn@naeh.org for more information.

Don'ts

- Do not think that lobbying is only done by professional lobbyists. Lobbying by nonprofit organizations results in better policy – helping organizations achieve their mission.
- Do not use federal funds for lobbying at the state or federal level. A local funding match cannot be used for lobbying purposes either.
- Do not participate in any political campaign on behalf of or in opposition to any candidate for public office.
- Do not begin lobbying without talking to ALL of your funders. For instance, public and private foundations can fund lobbying projects but follow certain rules. For foundation advocacy information visit the Alliance for Justice at <http://allianceforjustice.org/foundation/>.
- Do not miss out on the chance to work with the Alliance to lobby and advocate for policies and programs impacting homeless families and individuals.

Resources:

- Alliance for Justice, www.afc.org .
- The Center for Lobbying in the Public Interest, www.clpi.org .
- Internal Revenue Service, <http://www.irs.ustreas.gov/> .
- The National Alliance to End Homelessness, *Nonprofit Lobbying Guide*, www.endhomelessness.org/section/policy/advocacy