A Case Study in Offering Testimony and Technical Assistance to Congress: Families for Kids Grantees Appear Before the Ways and Means Committee

Relevant Federal Lobbying Regulations:

- **Lobbying** is virtually any advocacy activity aimed at influencing a “legislator’s” vote on specific legislation.

**Public Policy Problem and Advocacy Goal:** Between 1993 and 1999, The W.K. Kellogg Foundation mounted an extensive foster care and adoption reform initiative called Families for Kids, to help kids stuck for years in foster care find loving permanent homes. The same five desired outcomes guided reforms in all 11 Families for Kids implementation sites: one year to permanency for every “waiting” child, one stable foster care placement, one family-friendly assessment, one caseworker or casework team, and comprehensive support for families. In 1997, as many Families for Kids grantees were seeing significant adoption reform results in their states, Congress was grappling with legislation that would speed the placement of foster kids into permanent homes in all 50 states.

**Principal Advocacy Strategies:** Invited testimony, outreach to policy leaders, coupled with a variety of communications materials funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

**Case Study Vignette:** The House Ways and Means Committee invited a group of Families for Kids grantees to appear before it and share information about the five desired outcomes and the many different ways Families for Kids reforms were achieving these outcomes. The issue of how to support permanency as a value and hasten permanency for foster children was of central concern in crafting new federal legislation.

**Public Policy Outcomes:** Families for Kids grantee sites were able to dramatize the importance of permanency and demonstrate through their own results that more rapid progress in removing intractable barriers and increasing adoptions was possible. Congress later passed major national permanency legislation that bore in its language and goals clear resemblances to Families for Kids desired outcomes.

**Advocacy Lessons for the Future:** Major investments in Families for Kids communication materials and media education also helped to change the terms of the debate about foster care, adoption and permanency. While before Families for Kids, children languishing in foster care were largely invisible to the public, policy leaders, and other influencers, during and after Families for Kids, sympathetic coverage of “waiting children” became commonplace. Media and communications activities helped to create a climate of opinion favorable to legislative reform and enhance the effects of Families for Kids outreach to policy leaders.
Definitions

- Testimony Requested in Writing: If a legislative body specifically requests in writing that representatives from a nonprofit appear before it and present information, this activity is not counted as lobbying even if the information ultimately influences specific legislation.