One of the very best ways for a foundation to substantially increase the impact of its grant dollars is to fund groups that advocate in the public policy arena. This was the principal message of representatives of a group of private and community foundations at a meeting convened recently by the Center for Lobbying in the Public Interest.

The multiplier effect of providing grant funds to groups that lobby very often results in the delivery of much more service than the same amount of money granted for funding direct services, according to the foundation representatives. Following are examples.

- In Ohio, **The George Gund Foundation** provides grants to charities to identify and train public policy staff. Sometimes this results in new full-time positions and sometimes it results in dedicating a portion of an existing staff position to policy-related activities. The foundation is currently funding 25 to 30 such positions, with support ranging from several thousand dollars up to $50,000 per position. For food banks alone, the funding of a staff position at Second Harvest resulted in a $6 million budget line item for food banks in Ohio. The Foundation estimates that the public policy positions have resulted in about $100 million in new funds (either through appropriation increases or earmarks) for the funding of human services by the Ohio General Assembly in the last biennium.

- Another example of the payoff in foundation funding of groups involved in lobby and advocacy occurred in 2002 in Minnesota. The governor proposed a freeze in state agency funding to nonprofits, which would have resulted in a loss of over $200 million in grants and service contracts to nonprofits. **The Minneapolis Foundation**, a community foundation, created a partnership with the Minnesota Council of Nonprofits and provided over $100,000 in funding to mount a major media and lobbying campaign. That campaign, “Think Twice Before You Cut Nonprofits,” was highly successful, resulting in a savings of state grant and contract funds for a broad range of community programs and services.

- **The California Wellness Foundation**'s support of groups to prevent youth violence has had a remarkable payoff. Beginning in 1992, the Foundation funded groups advocating reduction of youth access to firearms and increasing funding for youth violence prevention programs. Since then, the number of firearm deaths in California has dropped by 43%, from 5,438 to 3,092, coinciding with a massive increase in the California legislature’s funding for youth crime and violence prevention—from $2 million in 1992 to $370 million now. That funding increase plainly owes much to the vigorous advocacy of Wellness Foundation-supported charities.
FOUNDATION REPRESENTATIVES HAVE THE FOLLOWING ADVICE FOR FOUNDATIONS THAT WANT TO FUND GROUPS THAT LOBBY

Core Operating Support
General operating support from foundations is critically important because it provides flexibility for grantees engaged in advocacy and lobbying. Given the unpredictable nature of the political process, it is important that organizations have the capacity to respond quickly. General operating support provides that opportunity. The provision of core operating support by foundations, since it comes in the form of a general support grant, permits the charity to use the foundation funds for lobbying.

High Leverage
Funding advocacy and lobbying is the highest leverage activity and highest return for dollars invested. But it requires good legal counsel. Get it.

Foundation Staff
It’s important for the foundation to hire foundation staff people who enjoy the “fray” and who understand policy work.

Tell every foundation program officer to look for places where public policy can be used to advance program purposes.

Foundation Trustees
Developing understanding among foundation trustees about the payoff in funding public policy and developing a strong public policy program.

Depth, Perseverance and Credit
Even small grants in the policy arena can have great impact.

Some lobbying victories come quickly, in a year or two. But many policy efforts have to be supported over a long period of time, even as long as ten years. Probably there will be losses before there are wins but you gain knowledge from the losses as well as the wins.

Foundations working in the policy arena must be satisfied with the knowledge that their funding may have played an important role in influencing a key policy change, even when the causation is not clearly visible. Only rarely can a single funder or constituency claim sole credit for its role in a landmark policy change.

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Interested in funding groups that lobby and leveraging your foundation’s grants? Need more information? The Center for Lobbying in the Public Interest can help. Please contact us at 202/387-5048, by email at info@clpi.org or visit our Web site at www.clpi.org.

February 2003