UTILIZE A STRATEGIC MIX OF TACTICS AND ACTIVITIES

Many nonprofits will begin reading this resource guide with the misinformation that nonprofits cannot lobby. By the end of the guide, you might be convinced that you can only lobby. Of course, neither is the case. While we hope you are convinced of the importance of lobbying and your ability to do it well, be sure that your legislative advocacy toolkit includes a range of tactics and activities, including:

Direct Lobbying
To advocate for or against particular legislation. Remember to stay vigilant even after a bill has been passed or defeated.

Grassroots Lobbying and Organizing
Remember that a nonprofit’s power is its people. Engage your constituents and others in your advocacy efforts to show the strength and diversity behind your cause. Engaging the grassroots is the ultimate example of nonprofits as vehicles for democratic participation.

Administrative Advocacy
Influencing the rules and regulations that shape a law as it is implemented. Many nonprofits put all of their advocacy efforts into the legislative basket—remember that you have tremendous opportunity to shape a law’s impact even after it has been passed.

If you supported the law, work with agency officials to make sure it is implemented promptly and as intended. If you opposed the law, work with agency partners to delay implementation and amend it within the legal limits.

Coalitions and Alliances
Nonprofits do not have to go it alone. Working in coalition offers a way to lend your voice and resources to a cause that reflects your mission, without overextending any one group’s resources. It also allows nonprofits to present a unified front, rather than be pitted against each other in policy—and particularly budget—debates.

The most effective coalitions have clear goals and roles, as well as members representing diverse constituents. Remember that working in coalition also requires resources, especially time. But the return on investment can be greater than working alone.

Media Advocacy
The media (newspapers, radio, TV, Internet, etc.) can be a powerful tool for reaching decision-makers as well as the general public. In this way, the media can help you shape public opinion, which in turn influences policymakers; it can also help you reach and influence policymakers directly.

Nonprofits can generate both free and paid media. If you become a source and help local reporters on their stories when they need you, they will be more likely to cover your story when you need them. Also, write letters to the editor and op-eds to express your view on a key policy issue. When necessary, buy ad space to ensure that your message is included in media outlets that reach your key audiences.

Voter Education
As part of your grassroots organizing efforts, be sure to regularly inform the public (i.e., voters) about your cause. Informed voters can be your greatest advocates with their elected officials. Also, creating an ongoing relationship with the public, rather than sounding the alarm only when policy issues are “hot,” helps create a culture of engagement in your community and a nest of support for your organization and its mission.

You can find more information as well as links to experts on the above topics at www.clpi.org