

Tips for Being a Civically Engaged Citizen: Advocacy vs. Lobbying

Given the importance of policy in relation to public health, it makes sense that public health and prevention officials often want to provide their knowledge in relation to specific issues that intersect with their professional work. This is a great opportunity to model what being an engaged community member can look like to others within your community. But it is important to understand what (1) the difference is between advocacy and lobbying, (2) what is allowed within one's professional role, and (3) what is allowed as a private citizen. This document aims to provide insight and tips for professionals who are interested in either advocating or lobbying for specific concerns related to their profession.



What is advocacy?

Although there are multiple definitions of advocacy, a few are provided for reference:

- While all lobbying is advocacy, not all advocacy is lobbying. Advocacy is any action that speaks in favor of, recommends, argues for a cause, supports, or defends, or pleads on behalf of others. It includes public education, regulatory work, litigation, and work before administrative bodies, lobbying, nonpartisan voter registration, nonpartisan voter education, and more.
- Advocacy is the act or process of supporting a cause or proposal.

What is lobbying?

Lobbying, on the other hand, has a very narrow definition. It is the act of communicating with decision makers (to include elected officials and staff, voters on ballot measures, etc.) about existing or potential legislation, and urging a vote for or against said existing or potential legislation. Boiled down, the following three components are required to be considered lobbying:

- Communication with decision makers
- Actual legislation
- Asking for a vote

Although not all-inclusive, the following provides some insight into the activities that are seen as **advocacy vs. lobbying**:

General Advocacy	Lobbying
<p>Sharing best practices and success stories, including model legislation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Making available nonpartisan analysis, study, or research - Examining or discussing broad, social, economic, and similar problems 	<p>Attempting to influence specific legislation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Advocating for the adoption or rejection of legislation - Writing lobbying materials that support a position or specific recommendation. - Preparing arguments in support of your position
<p>Updating an organization’s members on the status of legislation, without a call to action.</p>	<p>Contacting legislative staff in support or opposition to specific legislation (i.e., direct lobbying).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Including time for preparing and planning
<p>Providing technical assistance or public advice to legislative body in response to a written request (e.g., hearings).</p>	<p>Urging the public to contact legislative staff in support or opposition to specific legislation (i.e., grassroots lobbying)</p>
<p>Communication about matters affecting the existence of a tax-exempt organization (the “self-defense” exception).</p>	<p>Strategy or coalition meetings that coordinate lobbying activities about specific legislation.</p>
<p>Coalition building.</p>	
<p>Providing comments or research on administrative/agency rules or regulations.</p>	

When lobbying as an employee at an institution of higher education, specifically in the areas of public health and prevention (for the purpose of this document), it is of utmost importance to understand what employees can and cannot do within their official roles as opposed to what they are able to do as private citizens.

Official Role as an Employee		Private Citizen
Can do	Cannot do	Can do
<p>Ensure administration of the institution are aware of potential legislation and how it could impact the institution.</p>	<p>Use institution email, phone, social media, etc. to reach out to legislators and ask them to vote in a specific way on legislation.</p>	<p>Use personal email, phone, social media, etc. to reach out to legislators and share personal opinions.</p>
<p>Share educational information via institution email, phone, social media, etc. (i.e., available resources).</p>	<p>Use work time or institution-owned computer and/or technology.</p>	<p>Reference time spent within the related field.</p>
<p>Educate policymakers and the public about evidence-based policy (i.e., tobacco free campuses have been shown to have lower rates of tobacco use).</p>	<p>Institute a call to action for the institutional community to vote a specific way on legislation.</p>	<p>Identify self as a constituent of the legislator being contacted.</p>
	<p>Reference place of employment and/or title in any communication to legislators.</p>	<p>Share personal opinions on personal social media (with no reference to place of employment within the post).</p>

Missouri Partners in Prevention serves as a technical assistance provider for colleges and universities in Missouri on issues such as substance use, violence prevention, and mental health. The purpose of this document is to provide higher education professionals, specifically in the areas of public health and prevention, education about the differences between advocacy and lobbying, and should not be construed as legal advice. The information provided on this document does not, and is not intended to, constitute legal advice; instead, all information, content, and materials available on this document are for general informational purposes only. Information on this document may not constitute the most up-to-date legal or other information.