



Making Policy Work for You: **One Person, One Voice**

In the wake of corruption scandals and ethical misconduct, the term “lobbying” does not currently enjoy a good reputation. There is much confusion about what is considered lobbying, who can lobby, and what alternatives there are to lobbying. This document is meant to be a short introduction, and for more in-depth information, see the website for the Alliance for Justice at www.afj.org.

What is “lobbying”?

The IRS has a specific definition for lobbying because non-profit groups that are tax-exempt have limits on how much lobbying they can engage in. In order to count as lobbying, “the communication must address specific legislation, which includes bills, resolutions, repeal proposals, referendums or similar items at the federal, state and local level. It also includes specific proposals that have not yet been introduced in a legislative body¹.”

Direct lobbying has three elements, and in order to be considered direct lobbying, the communication must contain all three of these elements. An organization is attempting to “influence legislation” when the communication:

1. is directed to a legislator or his/her staff
2. refers to specific legislation
3. reflects a view on that legislation²

Can I lobby?

YES! According to the Alliance for Justice, **non-profit organizations are not prohibited from lobbying by their tax status**, and most are allowed to spend up to 20% of their overall expenditures on direct lobbying activities. Some federal grants or funders prohibit lobbying as a condition of receiving money, so check with the person in your organization who deals with funding.

Even if your organization cannot lobby, **you can lobby as an individual**. Regardless of your employment or affiliation, individuals are allowed to speak to their legislators or staff and advocate for policy issues as long as they are speaking only for themselves and not for their employers.

What is an “educational visit”?

If you still feel uncomfortable lobbying, you can still visit your legislators! Visits for educational purposes are not considered lobbying. Legislators still need to be aware of issues and programs in their districts and states, and bringing them information is also a very important activity. If this is the type of meeting you’d feel more comfortable doing, mention at the beginning of the meeting that you’re there to educate your member on what projects and issues are going on in the state or district. If the legislator or staff person asks for a policy proposal or for your suggestions on legislation, refer them to Steph Larsen at Community Food Security Coalition for more details. If you know you’re going to do educational visits, you can even take CFSC policy staff contact information along to pass to the legislator or staff person.

¹ Source: IRS Reg. IRS Regulations Sec. 56.4911-1 and Reg. 56.4911-2(d)(1)(ii).

²Source: IRS Reg. 56.4911-2(b)(1)(ii).