

## What is Advocacy? Definitions and Examples from LGBTQ Equality Organizations

Effective advocacy enables nonprofits to shape the public debate on important social issues and ensure that underserved communities have a voice in the policies that impact their lives. The term “advocacy” encompasses a broad range of activities (including research, public education, lobbying, working in coalitions, and voter education) that can influence public policy. Advocacy is the number one way nonprofits can advance the issues they care about and help bring about systemic, lasting change.

### How is advocacy different from lobbying?

Lobbying is only one kind of advocacy. There are many avenues of advocacy that nonprofits can engage in that do not constitute lobbying. Federal tax law defines lobbying only; “non-lobbying advocacy” is often used to refer to those activities that don’t meet the definition of [lobbying](#).

### What kinds of activities comprise advocacy work?

- ✓ **Organizing: Build power at the base.** [Advocates for Youth](#) trains and supports over 2000 youth activists each year to help them reach their peers with information and advocacy on inclusive reproductive and sexual health issues, including an LGBT inclusive sex ed curriculum for schools to use.
- ✓ **Educate Legislators: Provide information on issues.** The #BornPerfect advocacy campaign lead by the [National Center for Lesbian Rights](#) was created to secure legislation protecting LGBTQ youth from conversion therapy in all 50 states. The campaign created a toolkit for lawmakers and activists, state by state tracking of laws and legislation, curated stories from survivors, and even engaged in impact litigation defending laws that ban conversion therapy.
- ✓ **Educate the Public about the Legislative Process: Introduce communities and constituencies to the legislators who represent them.** [Equality Illinois](#) planned an Advocacy Day, complete with lobbying training, transportation, box lunch and meetings with state lawmakers. Simply building relationships with legislators w/o discussing specific legislation does not count as lobbying. Equality Illinois is a 501(c)(4) but educational activities can also be 501(c)(3) compliant within limits.
- ✓ **Education public on their legal rights:** [The National Center for Transgender Equality](#) published a [factsheet](#) for students, parents and teachers on students’ rights under Title IX, that prohibits sex discrimination in schools that receive public funds. They also maintain a state specific interactive [site](#) on requirements for updating one’s name and gender marker documents.
- ✓ **Lobbying: Advocate for or against ballot measures.** *Working on Ballot Measures-* In April, 2018, voters in Anchorage, Alaska rejected a discriminatory referenda that would prohibit transgender residents and visitors from existing in public spaces. The key to the campaign success was to center transgender individuals at the heart of the campaign in leadership, ads, and messaging. A coalition of nonprofits, individuals, and businesses joined together to form Fair Anchorage. You can read about their advocacy success [here](#).
- ✓ **Lobby for or against specific bills -** [HRC](#) has partnered with other equality groups around the country to launch a campaign to pass legislation banning conversion therapy in every state. The campaign consists of educating the public, lawmakers, and actively lobbying. Hawaii just became the 12th state to pass [legislation](#).

- ✓ **Organize a rally: Mobilize for your cause.** OutYouth in Austin, TX, created a campaign called [#TakeMyHandTexas](#) and a button that allies could wear to let transgender youth know the wearer would accompany the youth into any gendered space or even out for a cup of coffee. This campaign has enabled allies to join the cause and start conversations. Civil rights leaders, transgender parents and LGBT advocates — joined by Reps. Joseph Kennedy III (D-Mass.) and Donald McEachin (D-Va.) — [rallied before the U.S. Supreme Court](#) in opposition to two Trump nominees, one with a history of anti-LGBT legal work, the other with a history of black voter suppression.
- ✓ **Regulatory efforts: Take action at the agencies.** [Raising Women's Voices](#) provides funding and technical assistance to place women and LGBT members of the community on policy making panels for ACA marketplace health. Their main focus has been to ensure health plans explicitly do not discriminate against women and LGBT patients and have adequate culturally competent, inclusive providers in each network. Although RWV is a for-profit corporation, they are certified socially responsible by a group of nonprofits, and this type of activity is generally 501(c)(3) appropriate. Your organization can also organize leaders and members of the community to submit comments to propose regulations.
- ✓ **Nonpartisan voter education: Inform the electorate on the issues.** [The National Center for Transgender Equality](#) has created a Voting While Trans Checklist to provide resources to transgender voters about voting and name/gender markers on identification documents and poll lists.
- ✓ **Nonpartisan voter mobilization: Encourage citizens to vote.** [The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force](#) created a “Queer the Vote” campaign to educate voters on the issues and implement a “pledge to vote” postcard campaign to roll out at Pride events around the country.
- ✓ **Trainings: Trainings: Host a webinar or in-person training or conference.** [Beyond Bold and Brave](#) was founded to increase the visibility of Black/African Descent Lesbians in communities, and each year hosts an annual conference for community members and allies. A conference presents unique opportunities to engage supporters, network, and partner with coalitions or sponsors to help offset the cost of the event and support the important work your organization conducts.
- ✓ **Litigation: Win in court for your cause or your community.** NCLR and GLAD joined together to file a [lawsuit](#) challenging the President’s executive orders banning transgender members from serving in the military. 501(c)(3) organizations can sign amicus briefs, joining lawsuits as well as initiating them. Many nonprofits also use social media to share legal victories.
- ✓ **Draft a Petition: Demand change.** MoveOn is circulating a [petition](#) to ask Congress to support the Equality Act, which would add the terms “gender identity” and “sexual orientation” into federal laws that protect against discrimination in housing, public accommodations, employment, education, federal funding, credit decisions, and juries. [The Family Equality Council](#) has created an Inclusive Schools campaign to ensure inclusive schools for LGBQ families. To further their campaign, they have created the following tools for their members to use within their communities: Back to School Tool; Creating Transgender Inclusive Schools manual; Letter templates to Elementary and Middle/High Schools for families to raise the issues surrounding inclusive schools; and Book Nook a resource to recommend LGBTQ inclusive books within school classrooms and libraries. MoveOn Civic Action is a 501(c)(4), but petitions can also be 501(c)(3) permissible.
- ✓ **Write an Op-Ed: Share your expertise on an issue.** NCTE and The Leadership Conference jointly wrote an [op-ed](#) on President Trump’s judicial nominees and the threat they pose to LGBT equality. Sometimes one group will write a letter and others will “sign on” to show strength in numbers.

- ✓ **Research: Produce relevant resources that reflect the real story of your community.** The National Center for Transgender Equality conducted and published a [Transgender Discrimination Survey](#), full of facts and figures to inform the public, media, activists, judges, and policymakers alike on the well-being, discrimination, and violence faced by transgender individuals in the US. Activists have been successful in using these statistics to persuade judges to seal the records of clients seeking a name or gender change to protect their safety from an increased risk of physical harm due to their identity.
- ✓ **Work on Judicial Nominees** - Equality Texas (a 501(c)(3)) and their coalition partners won a huge victory for all Americans when the coalition's research and advocacy helped bring about the withdrawal of President Trump's nominee, Jeff Mateer, to the federal bench. You can see an example of their advocacy tweets @EqualityTexas

### **How can your organization get more involved in advocacy?**

- ✓ **Educate.** Inform your organization about the current policies and problems affecting your community.
- ✓ **Evaluate.** Evaluate your organization's mission and goals, and examine whether current programs involve advocacy as a means to address problems or grievances in the community. If not, how could advocacy play a larger role in your organization's programs?
- ✓ **Collaborate.** Work in coalition with groups whose philosophy and goals resonate with yours. Pooling staff and resources should help all parties involved in the coalition be better equipped to take on campaigns and work for change. [The Connection](#) is a great resource for organizations wanting to work on projects with other community organizations.
- ✓ **Assess.** Use AFJ's free online [Advocacy Capacity Tool](#) to assess your advocacy skills, identify specific gaps and strategic opportunities, focus resources to strengthen your organization and achieve the best advocacy results possible.

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