

The Everyday Advocate

Advancing Key Issues in the Nonprofit Sector

Thanks to the development of advocacy efforts in the United States, nonprofits today take part in decision-making activities, partnerships, and research, all of which further their cause. Advocacy can seem daunting to up-and-coming nonprofit leaders. By discerning the what, why, and how of advocacy, nonprofits working with immigrants/refugees in the United States can further their overall goals on a number of levels.

Advocacy is...

Nonprofit advocacy, broadly, “describes a wide range of individual and collective expression or action on a cause, idea, or policy²” It can surprise aspiring advocates to find differences between advocacy, activism, and lobbying, and it’s important for leaders in the nonprofit world to recognize these differences:

- **Advocacy:** Change-oriented. Often defined as “any action that speaks in favor of, recommends, argues for a cause, supports or defends, or pleads on behalf of others³”
- **Activism:** Action-oriented. Activists set out to manifest social, political, or legal change through protesting or demonstrations.¹
- **Lobbying:** Legislation-oriented. Lobbyists engage lawmakers on specific legislation.¹

While all lobbying is advocacy, not all advocacy is lobbying. The IRS has enacted laws that prevent 501c3 nonprofits from engaging in lobbying, and many nonprofits choose to invest their resources in other efforts.³

Why Advocate?

Nonprofit organizations rely on community support, and advocacy efforts are the best way to mobilize that support. Advocacy benefits both communities and the immigrants/refugees that nonprofits serve by:

- **Generating Visibility and Support:** Immigrant/refugee advocacy raises awareness on specific issues. Local, regional, and national governments better understand how to support legislation and policy for immigrants/refugees.
- **Mitigating Risk:** Nonprofits working with potentially vulnerable migrant groups keep their ear to the ground for risks that may arise from legislation, and advocate for improvement.
- **Providing a Voice:** The nonprofit sector is a tool through which like-minded citizens drum up support for a cause. Additionally, nonprofits serving immigrants/refugees lend a voice to those who cannot advocate for themselves.
- **Building Community:** Many leaders get their start by advocating for issues that draw their passion. Nonprofit advocacy provides an opportunity to meaningfully serve within communities.¹

References + Further Reading

1. Soapbox Engage - [Advocacy Basics Every Nonprofit Should Understand](#)
2. Elizabeth J. Reid - [Nonprofit Advocacy and the Policy Process](#)
3. National Council of Nonprofits - [Advocacy vs. Lobbying](#)
4. [Speaking and Being Heard: How Nonprofit Advocacy Organizations Gain Attention on Social Media](#)
5. [The Refugee Advocacy Lab](#)
6. [Bolder Advocacy - Toolkits for Immigration Advocacy](#)



Better Together?

Advocacy can be undertaken as an individual organization or as part of a coalition. Each have some distinct advantages:

- **Individual:** Single organizations act as community hubs for small events, partnerships, and local policymaking
- **Coalition:** Coalitions advocate for immigrants/refugees on a national scale. Coalitions focusing on immigrants/refugees include the Hello Neighbor Network, the Refugee Council, and the Migration Network Coalition.⁶

Advancing Through Advocacy

Immigrants/refugees need allies who will advocate for them. How can nonprofits impart their message to local communities, leaders, and the world at large?

The Refugee Advocacy Lab identifies three components of advocacy efforts;

- **Communication:** Raises awareness concerning immigrants/refugees on social media, blog posts, press releases, or awareness campaigns. A study conducted by the University of Pennsylvania found the size of an organization’s social network, the frequency of posting, and the number of conversations it joins determines the attention it receives. The work put into communications directly determines what an organization gets out of it.⁴
- **Policy:** Encourages policies which support immigrants/refugees in the United States Policy advocacy can occur by conducting and promoting research on migration and displacement, petitioning, or contributing efforts towards legislation.
- **Partnership:** Partnerships with groups in the private and public sector who share values can expand an organization’s network and amplify key messages and issues. Public and Private partners receive the benefits of good publicity, and expand their own networks.⁵

The Hello Neighbor Network is a coalition of grassroots nonprofits working with refugees and immigrants across the nation. Learn more at: neighbornetwork.io



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