

Advocacy vs. Lobbying Cheat Sheet*

#1 : Always OKAY – not lobbying	#2 : Okay for 501c3 without Registering to Lobby (as long as all lobbying activities are cumulatively less than 25 hours per year)**	#3 : Okay for 501c3 to Lobby but requires registration, tracking, & reporting if in excess of 25 hours per year**	#4 : NEVER OKAY (jeopardize 501c3 status)
Research on issue	Communication with elected officials	Communication with elected officials	Give money to political candidates
Holding a non-partisan forum	Calls to action by org to membership/public on issues	Calls to action by org to membership/public on issues	Endorse political candidates
Making a statement that org believes XYZ.	Trying to influence policy	Trying to influence policy	
Example 1: Child Care Vouchers Send an e-blast with information about the state's line item for Child Care Vouchers, inform people that there will be a vote in the Legislature, state that child care is an important issue for org members Make a public statement that org supports local child care non-profit's mission	Staff reaches out directly to lawmakers asking them to support funding. Send an e-blast to members asking them to call their elected officials in support of the funding. Make a public statement that org supports an affiliate non-profit's campaign for ballot measure #23	Spend more than 25 hours a year (combined with other issues): calling elected officials and asking for the increased funding, asking to call their elected officials, campaigning for the vote, ask for an earmark for the funding, etc.	Hold a fundraiser for a candidate that supports line items for increased child care vouchers

*Disclaimer: This information is educational only and should not be construed as legal advice.

**In Massachusetts. For other states, consult your Secretary of State or other lobbying regulatory agency.



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Example 2: Traffic proposal Host a forum debating both sides of the traffic issue. Make a public statement that org does or does not support the traffic mitigation plan	Host a forum supporting only the pro-traffic mitigation plan. Ask members to vote yes on Ballot X to support the town's expenditure on plan.	Spend more than 25 hours a year (combined with other issues): Host a forum supporting only the pro-traffic mitigation plan. Ask members to vote yes on Ballot X to support the town's expenditure on plan.	Make a public statement that org endorses Joe Smith's position on traffic (running for mayor).
Example 3: Small Business Development Promote the Entrepreneur's Weekend	Encourage membership to go to State House with the Chamber of Commerce	Have org staff go to State House with the Chamber of Commerce (difference is more hours)	Non-profit pays for Exec. Dir. to attend a dinner that is a political fundraiser for state senator (director can only pay out of her own pocket)

Links to important laws:

[IRS](#) – for 501c3s

[State Restrictions](#)

[Use of Federal Funds](#) – For federal grant recipients

Gifts – [Federal](#) & [MA State](#) Laws

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