

Introduction: Advocacy, Lobbying and Mentoring Programs

The American Heritage Dictionary defines advocacy as the "act of pleading or arguing in favor of something, such as a cause, idea, or policy." Advocacy, which can include public interest research, public education campaigns, coalition building and community organizing among other activities, becomes lobbying according to the IRS when the activity is used in an effort to influence legislation.

Although there is a significant amount of concern in the nonprofit sector about whether organizations are permitted to engage in lobbying activities, 501 (c) (3) organizations can lobby within generous limits and should make the most of this allowance. As organizations that have a deep commitment and connection to the communities they serve, nonprofits are well positioned to both inform the public sector about pressing issues that their communities are facing and organize the individuals in those communities to make their voices heard. Engaging in advocacy is the only way to ensure that an organization's constituency will have the opportunity to weigh in on public discourse and influence decisions about how substantial resources are invested.

The youth mentoring field is well positioned to participate in this type of activity on behalf of young people. Because the core mission, providing youth with access to positive and caring relationships with adults, requires engaging large numbers of volunteers, who are also citizens and voters, there is great potential to influence policy decisions that impact youth and mentoring programs through direct and grassroots lobbying. Programs also have the ability to engage mentees who can personally speak to the impact that mentoring has had on their lives. Making use of the youth participants as spokespeople not only strengthens the case being made to law makers and administration officials, but also gives young people a unique and powerful opportunity to learn how government functions, the power and responsibility they have to affect change in their communities, all while gaining critical thinking and public speaking skills.

The purpose of this toolkit is to demystify the process by which state government functions and to encourage civic participation by programs and their mentoring matches. By providing information on state government structure, law making and budgeting procedures, along with examples of how mentoring programs engage in advocacy with their matches, it is our hope that more programs will not only actively participate in the policy world, but will be successful in their efforts to influence policy in a way that benefits the youth they serve.

Massachusetts State Government (Adapted From “Massachusetts Facts”- Published by William Francis Galvin Secretary of the Commonwealth)

Like the federal government, the government of the State of Massachusetts has three branches: the Executive, Legislative and Judicial. For the purposes of this toolkit, we will concentrate on the Executive and Legislative branches as they have the authority to determine how state dollars are invested in the Commonwealth through the annual budgeting process.

Executive Branch

The Governor is the head of the executive branch, and his responsibilities include preparing the annual budget, nominating judicial officers, granting pardons, appointing the heads of state departments and the acceptance or veto of each bill passed by the legislature, including the annual state budget or General Appropriations Act. This branch of state government also includes the Executive Office of Administration and Finance and the 14 state departments each led by its own Secretariat. For mentoring programs, the state departments that likely have the most significant impact on their funding are Education, Health and Human Services, Labor and Workforce Development and Public Safety.

Legislative Branch

The Legislature or “The Great and General Court”, elected every two years, is made up of a 40 member Senate and a 160 member House of Representatives. Each branch elects its own leader from its membership. The Senate elects its President, currently Therese Murray; the House elects its Speaker, currently Robert DeLeo. These officers wield tremendous power in their respective chambers, as they have the authority to appoint colleagues for leadership positions, select the chairs and all members of the 26 joint committees, in addition to their rulings as presiding officers. Joint committees of the General Court are made up of six senators and fifteen representatives, with a Senate and House Chair for each committee and must hold hearings on all bills filed. Their report usually determines whether or not a bill will pass. Each chamber also has a separate Rules Committee and a Ways and Means Committee. These are among the most important committee assignments, as the Rules committees have the authority to change policy procedures as well as the schedule for reviewing bills and the Ways and Means Committees is responsible for drafting the original budget proposals for each chamber.

How a Bill Becomes a Law in Massachusetts

Any citizen of Massachusetts with an idea for making a change in a law or creating a new law may turn this idea into bill and file it through a state legislator. Once the bill is drafted and filed, it is assigned to a committee based on the subject matter, for example the current achievement gap bill was sent to the Joint Committee on Education. Once it is in committee, the bill is given a public hearing. After the public has the opportunity to give input on the bill and the committee to learn more about the impact of the bill during the hearing, the committee reports out to the appropriate chamber with a recommendation to pass or defeat the measure.

If the committee gives an adverse report, or recommends that the bill NOT pass, and the recommendation is accepted by majority vote of the House or Senate the bill is defeated. Bills coming from committee with a favorable report, or a

recommendation that the bill pass, must then have three readings in each branch, and are subject to floor debate on the second or third readings.

When both chambers have passed the bill in exactly the same form, it is then “engrossed” or printed for final passage and returns for the vote of enactment. It may be killed by either house, or if the two houses cannot agree on its form it may go to a conference committee which works out a compromise.

Once a bill is enacted by both the House and Senate, the bill goes to the Governor for his or approval. From this point he has ten days to either:

- Sign it and it becomes law (Usually to become effective in ninety days).
- Return it for reconsideration with an Executive Amendment.
- Veto it, requiring a two-thirds vote of both houses to, override or pass it over his or her veto.
- Refuse to sign it. After ten days it automatically becomes law unless the Legislature prorogues, or discontinues its session during that time. If this happens, the bill dies, which is called a “pocket veto”.