

What is Advocacy? And How is it Different from Advocacy

“Full participation in government and society has been a basic right of the country symbolizing the full citizenship and equal protection of all.”

-- Charles Rangel

Former Representative Rangel (D-NY) is referring to one of the five basic freedoms under the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution that states “Congress shall make no law respecting...the right of the people peaceably to assemble and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.” In other words, the freedom of association and the right to advocate for public policy, including legislative lobbying.

I’ve sensed growing frustration from mosquito control professionals who feel as though they have no control over the laws and regulations that affect them every day because they are worried speaking up will be considered lobbying. Lobbying gets a bad rap. You have the right to speak (and not to speak) if you are an American citizen. If you are an international member, you too benefit from our advocacy in the United States, because if we look good, you look good - by association.

Legislative and Regulatory (L&R) advocacy is a primary benefit of your American Mosquito Control Association (AMCA) membership, and is financially supported by the Sustaining Members. Advocacy is necessary to achieve our mission, which is *“to provide leadership, information, and education leading to the enhancement of health and quality of life through the suppression of mosquitoes and other vector-transmitted diseases, and the reduction of annoyance levels caused by mosquitoes and other vectors and pests of public health importance.”* To squash fears of getting involved and/or supporting the Association’s efforts in this area, I will be as transparent as possible about how the Association manages L&R.

Our membership consists of many public employees who have lobbying restrictions under state and federal laws. However, non-profit organizations or local government employees are not prohibited from aiding in advocacy. Investing in advocacy through the Association helps your organization avoid legal issues related to lobbying because Sustaining Membership dues are calculated based on your organization’s budget (small budget = small fee). Federal law mandates your organization cannot spend a significant amount of your budget on lobbying. By purchasing a Sustaining Membership in AMCA, you get a lot of advocacy for your buck without worrying about overspending on lobbying.

While all lobbying is advocacy, not all advocacy is lobbying. Advocacy is any action that speaks in favor of, recommends, argues for a cause, supports or defends, or pleads on behalf of others. It includes public education, regulatory work, litigation, work before administrative bodies, lobbying, nonpartisan voter education, and more.

Direct lobbying is defined as communication with a legislator, an employee of a legislator or legislative body, or any covered executive branch or other government employees who may participate in the formulation of legislation. Communication refers to a specific piece of legislation and expresses a view on that legislation. It’s okay to lobby, but public officials should know the limits set by their state or employer.

The Association relies on the expertise and experiences of our members to advocate for public health mosquito control. Then, if we identify a need for changes in the laws, AMCA uses a registered lobbying firm to strategize, create content, and communicate directly with policymakers to influence legislation. The lobbying firm is paid a retainer each month. For that retainer, highly qualified personnel in Washington, D.C. pay close attention to actions involving public health pesticides and alert AMCA leadership when a new law, regulation, or lawsuit might impact our members.

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Examples of Advocacy

- Providing information about who is affected, number of people served, budget or proven impacts, and accomplishments.
- Using social media to get the word out about a cause/issue
- Meeting with a government official to explain how a particular problem/issue is affecting a particular group or organization
- Paying dues to the Association
- Receiving information on legislative issues
- Providing technical expertise in support of lobbying
- Conducting or attending general meetings
- Gathering information or doing research for legislation
- Expressing a position about the legislative goals of the Association
- Providing basic information about a particular organization or issue
- Providing information about who is affected, number of people served, budget or proven impacts, and accomplishments.
- Inviting legislators to visit your site and get firsthand knowledge of your service and its impact
- Providing a fact-driven pamphlet to the public about a particular topic
- Giving a fact-driven presentation about a topic to a legislator

Examples of Lobbying

- Asking your member of Congress to vote for or against, or to amend or introduce, particular legislation
- Providing value judgments or asking people to take a particular stance
- Emailing members of your group asking them to contact their member of Congress in support of or opposition to legislation or pending regulations
- Generating an online petition asking members of your organization (direct lobbying) or members of the public (grassroots lobbying) to contact their legislator(s) to support or oppose particular legislation
- Contacting government officials, members of congress, or employees of the legislature to affect legislation including letter-writing campaigns, phone calls, or face to face meetings
- Writing legislation or suggesting legislation
- Suggesting public vote one way or another on a particular referendum or initiative
- Suggesting the public support or oppose a political candidate

Examples of AMCA advocacy:

Issue paper statement on Endangered Species Act (ESA) Considerations - “The current risk assessments failed to incorporate the best available science. Actual risk should be the universal standard, not problematic assumptions based on outdated data and exaggerated use patterns. The AMCA does not question the need for ESA, but clearly recognizes that the current interpretation and implementation of its contents needlessly jeopardizes the health of humans and wildlife by restricting mosquito control methods.”

Issue paper statement on enhancing vector control capacity – “\$4.5 billion in additional annual funding is needed for CDC, state, local, tribal and territorial core public health infrastructure to pay for such essential activities as disease surveillance, epidemiology, laboratory capacity, all-hazards preparedness, and response; policy development and support; communications; community partnership development; and organizational competencies.”

Example of AMCA lobbying:

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In June, letters were sent to Members of Congress from AMCA's lobbying firm McDermott, Will and Emery (MWE), asking them to fully fund the [Kay Hagan TICK Act](#) and the [SMASH Act](#). MWE created the content of the communications, and within the emails they suggested legislators reach out to their local mosquito control professionals for details (advocacy/education) on how the citizens would benefit from the legislation.

The bottom line; nonprofit organizations like AMCA have every right to express their views through lobbying legislators and mobilizing their supporters. If we do not express our views, an important voice will be missing when the policy is formed. Lobbying is perfectly legal as long as you're not investing a significant amount of time or money into it. If you do a lot of lobbying, make sure you are filing the proper paperwork with your state and/or the Internal Revenue Service.

Tips for staying in the advocacy category, just in case:

- Lobby on your own time
- Do not ask the general public to contact their legislator about specific legislation
- Do not ask policymakers for action on a specific piece of legislation
- Share communications that are prepared by a registered lobbyist, not your own.
- Support AMCA through Sustaining Memberships and let someone else do the dirty work

Advocacy is a complicated issue, but the act of telling our policymakers how to write and change our laws is at the very heart of our democratic system. Thank you to AMCA leaders of the past for recognizing the importance of L&R and setting up the current system. Thank you to the members of the L&R Committee and our Sustaining Members for supporting AMCA's mission and protecting the future of mosquito control.

<https://constitution.congress.gov/constitution/amendment-1/>

<https://www.councilofnonprofits.org/federal-rights>

<http://www.nln.org/docs/default-source/advocacy-public-policy/ten-reasons-to-lobby-for-your-cause-pdf.pdf?sfvrsn=0>

<https://ethics.od.nih.gov/topics/lobbying.htm>

<https://lobbyit.com/advocacy-vs-lobbying-understanding-difference/>

<https://www.councilofnonprofits.org/advocacy-vs-lobbying>

<https://washingtontonservicecorps.org/media-leg/education-lobbying/>

www.irs.gov

https://lobbyingdisclosure.house.gov/amended_lda_guide.html

<http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/documents/Toolbox/General%20Lobbying%20Rules%20for%20NonProfit%20Orgs%2008%2014%2008.pdf>