

The NH Center for Nonprofits’
Public Policy and Advocacy Standards of Practice and Procedure

I. Vision

It is our vision that the nonprofit sector of New Hampshire will have high-quality, easily accessible capacity building resources, a variety of consistent opportunities for learning, and the support needed to sustain strong leadership that adapts creatively to change. As a result, the people, communities, and the environment of New Hampshire will thrive.

II. Mission

The NH Center for Nonprofits strengthens and gives voice to the state’s nonprofit sector through leadership, collaboration, and learning opportunities.

III. Purpose of Public Policy and Advocacy

- To build the capacity of the nonprofit sector in New Hampshire to monitor and take action on public policy issues which affect the sector;
- To educate the public on the importance of New Hampshire’s charitable nonprofit sector; and
- To promote public policy that allows local and state-based nonprofits to thrive and serve their communities

IV. Public Policy and Advocacy Guiding Principles

Advocacy

Advocacy is an important responsibility of the nonprofit sector. Advocacy is a vehicle through which nonprofits engage in the democratic process. Advocacy helps nonprofits to achieve their missions, increases their civic engagement, and advances a more just and civil society.

- The Center seeks to strengthen the advocacy activities of the sector.
- The Center supports building the capacity of nonprofits to advocate.
- The Center supports nonprofits having a voice on public policy matters.
- The Center seeks to bring business and government partners together for relevant dialogue and potential shared activities toward shared goals.

Accountability

Nonprofits serve the community and must function with integrity and efficiency. Nonprofits must serve as a trusted resource to policy makers, the press and the public.

- The Center supports an appropriate level of government regulation and enforcement to protect the public's interest while upholding the integrity of the nonprofit sector.
- The Center promotes the highest level of accountability within the sector.
- The Center encourages policies that strengthen the management capacity of nonprofits.

Tax Policy

Taxes finance government programs and services, many of which are delivered by nonprofits. Tax policy can serve as an incentive for giving to charitable organizations.

- The Center supports policies that protect the tax-exempt status of nonprofits.
- The Center supports tax policies that are likely to increase charitable support for the sector.

The Essential Role of Government and Its Partnership with the Nonprofit Sector

It is the duty of government to provide for and promote the safety, prosperity and general welfare of its citizens. The nonprofit community is dedicated to the same goals of public service and must be a leader in advocating for policies that recognize and support the fulfillment of this primary mission of government.

- The Center supports activities that strengthen the partnerships between nonprofits and government at all levels, i.e. federal, state, county & local.

Charitable Giving and Volunteerism

Appropriate public policy goals recognize and support the importance of volunteer service and private philanthropy in improving the quality of life in New Hampshire communities

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- The Center supports increasing the number of volunteers.
- The Center supports effective utilization of volunteers.
- The Center supports effective and ethical fundraising and increased charitable giving to the sector.

V. Scope of Activities

The Center’s public policy and advocacy work advances nonprofit missions and capacity through:

- Research and analysis
- Education and information dissemination
- Training and consultation
- Direct lobbying
- Grassroots training and mobilizing
- Convening and organizing
- Media advocacy
- Leadership development
- Network, alliance, and coalition building nationally and locally
- Resource development.

VI. Structures for Establishing the Center’s Public Policy Positions and Priorities

Board of Directors: The Center’s Board of Directors has the final authority to approve public policy positions. The Board may initiate policy issues with the Center staff (Executive Director and Director of Advocacy) at any time. Staff present proposed issues and positions in writing to the Board for consideration and decision-making in a timely manner. When issues require legislative action, every effort is made to consider those issues prior to the legislative session.

Public Policy Cabinet: The Center’s Public Policy Cabinet is the primary forum for idea development, discussion, recommendations to the Center’s Board, and mobilization of nonprofit support for the Center’s public policy agenda. The Center’s Public Policy Cabinet is convened by the Director of Advocacy. At least two Board members shall be members of the Center’s Public Policy Cabinet. The Center’s Public Policy Cabinet meets at least once each fall prior to the legislative session to deliberate public policy issues and advocacy strategies. The Cabinet meets other times as necessary for the primary purpose of information sharing, ongoing shaping of positions and message on emerging policy issues, and organizing and refining strategies.

Rapid Response Team: The Rapid Response Team (RRT) exists to direct Center decisions on policy issues and strategies when time is of the essence and there is no reasonable opportunity to consult with the full Board. The RRT will inform the Board of its actions as soon as possible. The RRT includes Center Executive Director, Board Chair, Director of Advocacy, and two board members who also serve on the Advocacy Committee. Any of the

RRT members can convene a phone or meeting of the RRT. RRT members will share all phone numbers and contact information and agree to be available for consultation as much as possible on an ongoing basis.

Messengers: The Center's Executive Director, Board Chair, and Director of Advocacy are authorized to speak or appoint spokesperson(s) on individual public policy issues. On controversial or emerging issues, and those gaining high levels of attention in public dialogue, the Board Chair and Executive Director will work with the staff and the Advocacy Committee to identify the most appropriate spokesperson on the issue and the content of key messages. Board members are important messengers for the organization and are urged to be as engaged in this work as possible. Final authority for identifying spokespersons on difficult or high level public issues rests with the Executive Director (or designee) and Board Chair (or designee.) Board and staff should work in close coordination with the Director of Advocacy and the Executive Director to ensure that all messages are consistent and accurately reflect the Center's position.

VII. Procedures for Establishing Public Policy Positions and Priorities

- **Be alert to Guiding Principles** (Section IV, above)
- **Issue Selection Criteria**

The Center's public policy agenda includes three types of issues:

- 1) Nonprofit concerns: These include issues that directly affect the nonprofit infrastructure, status and operation of nonprofit organizations. This may include protection of lobbying rights, tax exempt status, postage rates, and incentives for charitable giving, design of IRS Form 990, and an array of state and federal regulations. The Center is a key leader on issues in this category.
- 2) Issues that impact nonprofit activity areas: Issues in this tier impact nonprofits and the people they serve, usually in a particular activity area. Such issues include funding for nonprofits, welfare and human services reform strategies, and health care reform. The Center is occasionally the leader on such efforts but most often works with nonprofits and coalitions that have experience, expertise, and are positioned for leadership on these issues.
- 3) Broad public issues: Issues that have broad implications for the overall well being of New Hampshire citizens and our communities include work on sound fiscal policy and quality of life issues.

- **Issue selection procedure:**

In general, the Director of Advocacy provides briefing information and recommendations on proposed positions to the Executive Director, Advocacy Committee and Board of Directors in a timely way. The Board will be provided with a written proposal for the policy position

prior to any Board meeting at which a policy-related decision is slated for action. Adequate time will be allowed for board deliberation at or prior to Board action. In proposing policy positions, staff and Board examine what is already introduced that is important to the sector, what does the Center anticipate will be introduced that is of importance to the sector and New Hampshire communities, and what new initiatives the Center wants to introduce in the best interests of the sector and the State. See below for key criteria for issue and position selection.

The Board and staff will deliberate the nature of the Center's position on each proposed policy. That deliberation should be based on the intended impact of the proposed policy on nonprofits, the community, and sound fiscal policy.

Once the Center's Board evaluates a proposed position and makes a decision about that position, staff will activate work plans to advance the issue as effectively as possible. The Board will receive timely updates on progress on the issue and will be invited to participate in the policy shaping process.

Each approved policy position will be publicly available in written form and with an appropriate rationale to ensure clarity and consistency of message.

Issues and public policy positions that have been approved by the Board continue to be part of Center's public policy agenda unless action is taken to revise or revoke them.

Key criteria for issue and position selection:

1. Relevance:

- How much does this issue matter to Center members? That is:
- Does this issue affect the interests of the nonprofit sector in a significant way?
- Does this issue affect the people nonprofits serve in a significant way?

2. Fit:

- Is the issue consistent with the Center's mission and vision?
- Is it likely to be supported by the preponderance of Center members?
- Can the Center add value to the policy debate?

3. Potential:

- Is there likely to be action on this issue?
- Is there adequate legislative leadership and interest?
- Does this issue provide an opportunity to strengthen the position of the sector?
- Will the proposed policy effect the desired change?

4. Consistency:

- Is the position consistent with existing Center positions?

5. Credibility:

- Will the Center be able to contribute value to the policy debate on this issue?
- Will the Center be perceived as a stakeholder and valuable source on this issue?
- What is Center's role in advancing this position?
- Do we have a track record with the issue?
- Do we have expertise in the issue area?

6. Capacity:

- Do we have adequate knowledge, resources, and alliances to do this work well?
- Will this prevent the Center from accomplishing other policy goals?
- Where does this issue fit in the Center's public policy priorities?

7. Concerns:

- Who will oppose the Center's position or role on the proposed issue?
- What is the impact of taking this position on other alliances and positions that are important to the Center?
- What is the consequence of the Center failing to act?

VIII. Decision Making Process

In situations where the public policy initiative or issue is similar to or the same as one that the Center has previously addressed (Low Risk), **staff will re-state The Center's position and notify the Board.** Where an issue is unique and overall common sense requires a position be taken, staff will, in the exercise of its sound discretion, take the appropriate position and will notify the Board.

Where an initiative or issue has been addressed previously by the NCNA (National Council of Nonprofit Associations) or other state associations but not the Center, and where that issue is unique and overall common sense requires a position be taken, staff will, in the exercise of its sound discretion, take the appropriate position and will notify the Board. Otherwise, in situations where an initiative or issue has been addressed previously by the NCNA (National Council of Nonprofit Associations) or other state associations but not the Center (Medium Risk), **staff will provide that position to the Board's Advocacy Committee for consideration and decision. The Advocacy Committee will notify the Board.**

In situations where neither the Center nor NCNA (or other state associations) has addressed the issue (High Risk), **staff will recommend a position to the Advocacy Committee for**

their consideration. The Advocacy Committee will then make a recommendation to the Board. This process will also be used in situations where the issue/initiative is **controversial, sensitive and/or has broad or deep impact**, in the judgment of either staff or board members.

Only the Executive Director or Board President is authorized to speak or appoint spokesperson(s) on behalf of the Center.

Fast Track Authority: Senior Management of the Center (Executive Director and Director of Advocacy) has Fast Track Authority on public policy issues only in the following ways:

- **No Position is Taken**

Center staff may make phone calls, sign on to letters, or create and distribute information/letters referencing general or specific public policy issues, when no position is taken on the issue or when balanced analysis is offered or when an established general policy is reiterated.

- **A Position is Taken**

Center staff may make phone calls, sign on to letters, or create and distribute information/letters taking a position on an issue only when the issue clearly meets all or most of the key criteria and is a “Low Risk” issue or an issue which has been subject to the complete decision-making process above.

We gratefully acknowledge both Minnesota Council of Nonprofits and Maine Association of Nonprofits for providing the policies and guidelines that form the basis of these Standards of Practice and Procedure.

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