

## **“Advocacy” vs. “Lobbying”**

The First Amendment “freedom of petition” provision protects the right of individuals to communicate with government officials. This includes lobbying government officials and petitioning the courts by filing non-frivolous lawsuits. Advocacy and lobbying are two terms often used interchangeably, but each plays a different role in influencing public policy.

**Advocacy** focuses on broader public engagement and awareness. It refers to the act of supporting or promoting a particular cause, idea, or policy. It involves raising awareness, educating the public, and mobilizing support to bring about change. Advocates often utilize grassroots organizing, media campaigns, and public demonstrations and meetings to create momentum and generate public pressure.

### Examples of Advocacy:

- A constituent calls his Congressman’s office to express their thoughts about the impact of a federally funded program.
- College students write letters about their student loan debt and send them to their state legislators.
- Individuals submit “Letters to the Editor” in support of a local school board decision to their local newspaper.

**Advocacy Tools include** meetings with local/state/federal legislators; constituent letters, calls, and emails; student letters, calls, and emails; op-eds, “Letters to the Editor;” social media, attendance at legislators’ Town Halls/Tele-Town Halls, invitations to legislators to visit programs.

**Lobbying** involves direct communication and interaction with policymakers, such as legislators or government officials, to influence their decisions or policies in favor of a particular interest or group. Lobbying is more targeted and specific in its approach, aiming to directly influence those in power. Lobbyists are governed by federal and state regulations, which may mandate specific registration and compliance requirements, including the disclosure of their activities and expenditures.

### Examples of Lobbying:

- Meetings and discussions with elected officials and their staff to persuade them to support a specific bill.
- Influencing legislation by negotiating the details of a bill, proposing amendments, or providing information and expertise to the legislator.

**Lobbying Tools include** meetings, calls, e-mails and written communications with legislators and their staff, legislative drafting and substantive subject matter expertise,

social media, contributions to political action committees (PACs) provide additional access to legislators and networking opportunities.

**NOTE: Recipients of federal funds are not allowed to use federal funding to lobby federal, state, or local officials or their staff to receive additional funding or influence legislation. Therefore, TRIO advocates must use non-grant funded resources if they engage in lobbying activities.**

**As employees of federally funded programs, TRIO employees may “lobby” but they must do so on their own time, and use their personal resources, such as cell phones, computers, and stationary. They must be careful not to use work phone numbers as contact numbers, programmatic letterhead, or anything that would imply the action was officially sanctioned by their employers.**

If you have any questions, please contact COE’s Director of Congressional Affairs Owen Toomey ([owen.toomey@coenet.org](mailto:owen.toomey@coenet.org)) or COE’s Vice President for Public Policy Diane Shust ([diane.shust@coenet.org](mailto:diane.shust@coenet.org)).