Center for Nonprofit Excellence

Advocacy Guidance

Adopted December 2010
Revised August 2013
Revised June 11, 2019

Advocacy is an important tool to help nonprofits advance their missions, increase their funding sources, and solve community problems. Advocacy for Center for Nonprofit Excellence (CNE) could fit across a risk continuum from educating community stakeholders and public officials about our work; to educating about the sector, and how to effectively invest in it; to facilitating individual and collective action on issues that impact the entire sector; to taking a public position on those same issues. This policy clarifies for staff and the Board of Directors whether and when CNE will engage in advocacy.

Guiding Principles

- Board and staff have an advocacy role to build awareness and understanding of CNE.
- It is part of CNE's mission, in addition, to advocate for the interest of the nonprofit sector via public education and research, provided the message is in support of “effective” nonprofits. In some cases, CNE may want to support legislative lobbying, primarily at the local, regional and state level, in support of the nonprofit sector.
- CNE succeeds by educating those with influence, building a network of stakeholder support, and developing nonprofit “champions”.
- The role of CNE is that of an “honest broker” to promote the sector and to serve as a link to connect nonprofits with the public and private sectors as appropriate, and as capacity allows.
- The Board has a unique role to play in advocacy, lending credibility, enhancing networks, and demonstrating enthusiasm for the mission.
- Where CNE engages in efforts to solve community-wide issues and promote community health, it does so as a facilitator, group convener, and cross-sector educator and connector to build healthy collaboration.
- CNE will not sign on to public policy positions of our members unless the positions fully align with CNE's mission and our role as an advocate for the sector. For policies that do not fully align, but have the potential for sector wide impact, we will look for opportunities to educate nonprofits about the issues behind the policies and how they can take action.

Criteria for Action

The Board of Directors and staff have developed a set of questions to guide future decisions about when to engage in advocacy:

- Does the advocacy fit within the legal parameters for 501(c)(3) organizations?
- Does the advocacy fully align with CNE’s mission and our role as an advocate for the sector? Will it build awareness of CNE, promote sector interests, or facilitate an effective effort to advance community health?
Is CNE uniquely positioned to play this role, and, if so, why?
If so, what actions might CNE take to effectively engage in advocacy?
Does CNE have adequate staff or board capacity to effectively handle the proposed advocacy?
If the advocacy does not fully align with CNE’s mission and sector advocacy role, does this issue impact the entire nonprofit sector?
If CNE is not uniquely positioned to engage in the advocacy, who is? And is there a role for CNE to support those who are uniquely positioned?

**Process for Action**

- CNE’s Executive Director shall evaluate advocacy opportunities on a case-by-case basis.
- She will engage the Executive Committee as needed to assist with such evaluation.
- Board members may also identify advocacy opportunities and share these with the Executive Director.
- The evaluation shall include an assessment of CNE Board and staff capacity to achieve the desired outcomes.
- The Executive Committee will provide guidance and direction as needed.

If immediate action is needed, the Executive Committee and the Executive Director will seek to mobilize a rapid response team, employing other Board members to participate in the advocacy.