



# A Farmers Market Advocate's Guide to *Lobbying* (Part 1 of 3)

## Getting your voice heard, and how you can affect farmers market policy

FMC believes that public policies are better when they incorporate the knowledge and expertise among practitioners in the field. For too long, many public policies have been incubated in silos. Agricultural policies have kept food producers isolated from consumers, public health policies have been designed without input from farmers, and community development policies have hindered innovation by keeping urban issues separate from rural. In the midst of rapid change and extensive farmers market growth, this is the time to communicate your priorities to legislators and make sure that your voice is heard.

Lobbying is one important way to communicate to your legislators. However, the term does not always have a very good reputation. There is much confusion on what is considered lobbying, who can lobby, and what the alternatives to lobbying are.

### What is lobbying?

Federal tax laws limit how much lobbying non-profit organizations can engage in. For this reason, the IRS (Internal Revenue Service) has a very specific definition for what counts as lobbying. For a nice summary of these IRS restrictions see the ["Worry-Free Lobbying for Non-Profits"](#) booklet by the Alliance for Justice.

#### Direct Lobbying

- **Communication with a legislator that expresses a specific view about specific legislation**

#### Example

- "Senator\_\_\_\_\_, I think that this program is critically important and I urge you to support Bill XYZ when it comes up for vote."

#### Grassroots Lobbying

- **Communication with the public that expresses a view about specific legislation and includes a call to action**

#### Example

- "Call you Senator and urge them support Bill XYZ when it comes up for vote"

### What is the difference between lobbying and education?

In many cases, nonprofits are providing education rather than actually lobbying. For example, if your market received a grant, it is not considered lobbying to communicate about the activities that grant supported, the results, and the impacts that the grant-funded work had on your community. To see a template of case studies featuring FMPP grantees, visit [fmpp.farmersmarketcoalition.org](http://fmpp.farmersmarketcoalition.org). You can also schedule educational visits with your legislators to make sure they are aware of issues and programs in their districts and states, without ever urging support for a specific pending bill. If the legislator or staff person asks for a policy proposal, or for your suggestions on legislation, please refer to [FMC's Policy Priorities](#).

### Can I lobby?

**YES!** Most **non-profits, excluding churches and private foundations, are allowed to spend up to 20% of their overall expenditures on direct lobbying activities**. However, keep in mind that some federal grants or funders prohibit lobbying as a condition of receiving money, so make sure to check with the person in your organization in charge of funding. See the National Council of Nonprofit's overview of [how to calculate lobbying and report expenditures](#) for more information.

You can **also lobby as an individual!** Individuals are allowed to advocate for policy issues directly to legislators and publicly as long as they are speaking only for themselves and not for their employers.

### Resources

Some content adopted from the "Making Policy Work For You: One Person, One Voice" document by the Community Food Security Coalition. See the Alliance for Justice website for more information on lobbying: [www.afj.org](http://www.afj.org)

