



## Advocacy vs. Lobbying

It may be helpful to understand the difference between advocacy and lobbying. Below is a simple explanation that you may find helpful to make this distinction for yourselves as well as others:

**Advocacy**— actions taken to support or promote a particular cause, idea, or policy. In PAA’s case, this includes sharing examples of population research, how research can help shape policy, or responding to actions taken by the executive, legislative, or judicial branches of the Federal government.

**Lobbying**— actions taken to attempt to influence legislation either through direct or indirect contact ([IRS.gov](https://www.irs.gov)). Direct contact is contact by an organization, its employees, or through a paid third party (e.g., lobbying firm). Indirect contact is an organization encouraging others to contact the legislative body for the purpose of proposing, supporting, or opposing legislation.

It is a common misconception that nonprofit organizations are barred from lobbying. This is not true. Nonprofit organizations are legally allowed to lobby (as defined above) up to a certain amount of their operating expenses. PAA measures lobbying activity using the IRS “expenditure test” which provides a way for nonprofits to measure its lobbying activity to remain in compliance with limits for nonprofit lobbying. The expenditure test is based on the organization’s operating budget. For PAA, this is about \$325,000, which we are well under. The amount PAA spends is reported to the IRS annually as part of our tax return.

Remember this limit only applies to lobbying as defined above. This limit does not include advocacy.

The only political activity nonprofits are banned from is electioneering – the act of supporting or opposing a candidate for election and raising funds accordingly.

PAA members engage in grassroots advocacy via our “action alerts.” These alerts encourage members to share views or encourage their representatives to support or oppose specific legislation.

### ***Examples – Advocacy vs. Lobbying***

- Submitting comments on a proposed rulemaking from a federal agency – Advocacy
- Asking a House representative to include report language supporting population centers in an appropriations bill – Lobbying



- Filing an amicus brief with the Supreme Court not to include a citizenship question on the Census – Advocacy
- Telling a Senate staff member to encourage their boss to vote against a bill – Lobbying