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Being an Advocate for What Matters

PANO Supports PA Non-profit Sector



Advocacy is one of those words that may be difficult to define, but individuals know it when they see it or hear it. For many community non-profit organizations, their purpose and one of their key roles in the community is to lessen the burden of government on local municipalities.

In these cases, advocacy can be a tool to develop a relationship with elected officials, build local leaders, strengthen partnerships with other non-profits within a community, and establish champions at the state and federal legislative levels.

Being an advocate means residents and community leaders using their voices to have their opinions heard and working to impact change.

The Pennsylvania Association of Nonprofit Organizations (PANO) sums up their advocacy role well: “We advance public policies that support a strong non-profit sector in Pennsylvania to build vibrant, thriving communities. We educate and engage elected officials on issues of importance to non-profits and the people who count on them.”

Lobbying

Advocacy is really about education and sharing information.

Every charitable non-profit organization has the authority to lobby for the issues that are important to that organization. Lobbying is a legal activity for charitable non-profit organizations and is an encouraged activity for the organization to grow, evolve, and remain relevant.

There are some restrictions to the amount of resources that non-profit organizations can spend in both time and funds applied to lobbying activities, for more detailed information visit the PA Department of State’s Lobbying Services, or as an additional resource, visit PANO’s website at pano.org.

The stigma towards lobbyists can be erased when their role for non-profit organizations is understood: helping develop policy change for the good.

Downtown Center Advocacy

The priority for the PA Downtown Center (PDC) is for strongly advocating for \$15 million for the Keystone Communities Program line item in the PA Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) budget, before supplemental appropriations.

Over the last several years, the PA Main Street and Elm Street programs, once among the most productive and well received community revitalization programs in the U.S., have been chipped away at by ongoing Commonwealth budget reductions.


These reductions have caused a significant weakening of both the human and financial infrastructure required to implement these programs.

Joining together can amplify the voices of advocates and impact the decisions that are made.

The following are some of the advocacy push from PDC:

- \$15 million could provide sustainable operational assistance and necessary implementation and program support to meet program demands for at least 40 Main Street and Elm Street programs during their five years of designation under the DCED Keystone Communities program.
- Pennsylvania is not investing sufficient funds in enhancing the quality of life in PA communities, especially small town and rural communities, to make them competitive in a 21st century knowledge-based economy.
- A study, conducted by Stover and Associates for the National Main Street Center, indicated that in 2016, the direct return to the Commonwealth for each dollar invested in the Main Street Program resulted in \$7.87 of revenue being returned to state's coffers.
- Current funding levels are keeping the communities most in need of support from participating due to the requirement that local programs fund the local manager 100% on their own.

PDC suggests that municipalities take the opportunity to familiarize legislators with the needs of their communities and address the importance of increased funding for programs like Keystone Communities.

For a list of resources on how to talk with legislators, visit padowntown.org/resource_category/advocacy/. 



ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Julie Fitzpatrick, executive director at PDC, has been involved with a variety of projects in communities all over the Commonwealth, including community visioning, developing regional downtown revitalization strategies, establishing tourism infrastructure plans, and developing

business improvement district plans and other strategic planning activities. She also provides board and committee education and technical assistance to designated DCED Keystone Communities Main Street and Elm Street programs, as well as to communities that are non-designated.



Emily Zebel, network relations and content designer at PDC supports the organization's marketing, communications, and membership. She also works as freelance designer, photographer and videographer and has received numerous awards including selections in the No Man's

Land Film Festival, Filmed by Bike Oregon, and S.O.F.A. Film Festival.



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