

## SMART AND ETHICAL PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES FOR PUBLIC INTEREST LOBBYING

### Benchmarking Chart

Democracy depends on citizen participation, and nonprofit organizations provide one of the most effective vehicles for engaging people in the democratic process. Since 1998, the Center for Lobbying in the Public Interest (CLPI) has helped nonprofits across the country, working on every issue and cause, to understand that nonprofit lobbying and advocacy are not only legal, but also critical to achieving their missions and making democracy work.

*CLPI promotes, supports, and protects 501(c)(3) nonprofit advocacy and lobbying to strengthen participation in our democratic society and advance the missions of charitable organizations.*

In 2006-07, CLPI led a process and convened the National Summit on Smart and Ethical Principles and Practices for Public Interest Lobbying at the Rockefeller Brothers Fund's Pocantico Conference Center to:

- Define and lift up “public interest lobbying” as core to nonprofit work.
- Identify and advance smart and ethical practices in public interest lobbying.
- Strengthen the CLPI Action Network to enrich and expand the climate for public interest lobbying.

The idea to develop “Smart and Ethical Principles and Practices for Public Interest Lobbying” arose at our 2005 CLPI Action Network Retreat, and it gained relevance in light of the Abramoff scandal, the resulting increased scrutiny of lobbying in general, and the ripple effect that has further impacted nonprofit lobbying. Nonprofits – guardians of the *public interest* – must seize the opportunity to proactively define our efforts in terms of both ethical and strategic principles for public interest lobbying as a vehicle for better public policy and, ultimately, lasting systemic change.

### Using the Principles and Practices

From the start, CLPI intended for the principles and practices to be useful to nonprofits in their core work, not just an intellectual exercise or research project. Further, we see them as (1) aspirational – we know that no single nonprofit will excel at all of the practices at every moment, and (2) invitational – not the basis for standardization or certification.

Thus, we invite nonprofit lobbyists to use the following principles and practices to benchmark and continuously improve their own efforts to advance public interests and improve public policy. Consider incorporating them into strategic planning, staff and volunteer training, and other organizational capacity building, as well as opportunities for dialogue with coalition partners, constituents, board members and other stakeholders. To view the full report on the development of these Smart and Ethical Principles and Practices in Public Interest Lobbying, visit [www.clpi.org](http://www.clpi.org).

### The Principles and Practices

The following principles, as well as the process for identifying them, are described in greater detail on the following pages:

- ⇒ Public interest lobbying adds civic value to the community today and in the future.
- ⇒ Public interest lobbying is inclusive and expansive, engaging the community and particularly those most affected by the public policy being advocated.
- ⇒ Public interest lobbying is credible, trustworthy, and fact based.
- ⇒ High-quality public interest lobbying is multi-faceted and adaptive.

**Principle 1: Public interest lobbying adds civic value to the community today and in the future.**

<i>Smart and ethical practices to operationalize this principle:</i>	<i>Progress to date</i>	<i>Next steps</i>
Practice 1A: Public interest organizations and their lobbyists promote democracy by including, educating, and empowering a diverse spectrum of voices in the public policy debate.		
Practice 1B: Public interest organizations and their lobbyists take a broad and long-term vision of social change, even as they may pursue the specific focus of one nonprofit.		
Practice 1C: By acting with integrity, public interest organizations and their lobbyists enable ongoing, mutually beneficial relationships with constituents, policymakers, and coalition partners and strengthen public trust in all nonprofits.		

**Principle 2: Public interest lobbying is inclusive and expansive, engaging the community and particularly those most affected by the public policy being advocated.**

<i>Smart and ethical practices to operationalize this principle:</i>	<i>Progress to date</i>	<i>Next steps</i>
Practice 2A: Public interest organizations and their lobbyists hold a core belief in participatory democracy as well as the right and ability of average citizens to make decisions about their lives and communities.		
Practice 2B: Public interest organizations and their lobbyists engage constituents at all levels of the process – from setting the agenda and shaping strategy to meeting with policymakers and assessing results. Note: public interest lobbying firms build this capacity in their nonprofit clients.		
Practice 2C: Public interest organizations and their lobbyists create feedback loops to report back to constituents and incorporate continuous input.		
Practice 2D: Public interest organizations and their lobbyists bring authentic stories to the policy-making process, without exploiting or co-opting the people reflected (i.e., getting people to do something without giving them a full range of information or opportunity to participate).		
Practice 2E: Public interest organizations and their lobbyists engage the media to reach policymakers and the public.		

**Principle 3: Public interest lobbying is credible, trustworthy, and fact based.**

<i>Smart &amp; ethical practices to operationalize this principle:</i>	<i>Progress to date</i>	<i>Next steps</i>
Practice 3A: Public interest organizations and their lobbyists comply – and keep up-to-date to ensure compliance – with all local, state, and federal lobbying laws and regulations.		
Practice 3B: Public interest organizations and their lobbyists select and advance policy positions through objective quantitative and qualitative research and data, including personal stories that exemplify the need for and impact of the intended policy change.		
Practice 3C: Public interest organizations and their lobbyists know and understand all sides of their policy issue, as well as potential ripple effects and unintended consequences.		
Practice 3D: Public interest organizations and their lobbyists use information strategically but do not intentionally mislead with information to enable a policy victory.		
Practice 3E: Public interest organizations and their lobbyists maintain trust by following through and doing what they say they will do.		

**Principle 4: High-quality public interest lobbying is multi-faceted and adaptive.**

<i>Smart and ethical practices to operationalize this principle:</i>	<i>Progress to date</i>	<i>Next steps</i>
Practice 4A: Public interest organizations and their lobbyists aggressively and strategically attempt to protect helpful and reform harmful public policy, not just make a point. By developing their capacity in a broad range of activities and tactics – research and analysis, communications, coalition building, educating the public, convening, direct lobbying, grassroots organizing and lobbying, litigation, etc. – public interest organizations make use of tools that are appropriate to what they are trying to accomplish.		
Practice 4B: Public interest organizations and their lobbyists take informed, calculated risks that do not harm their constituents, coalition partners, or others.		
Practice 4C: Public interest organizations and their lobbyists are accurate, timely, and nimble.		
Practice 4D: Public interest organizations & their lobbyists continue learning & honing their capabilities.		

## **Acknowledgments**

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