

How to Create a (c)(3) Advocacy Plan

A good starting step for advocacy organizations working to create change is to create an advocacy plan that lays out the organization's goals, the strategies it will use to accomplish that goal, and the expected outcomes for those strategies.

This is particularly important for (c)(3) organizations working in coalitions composed of (c)(3)s and (c)(4)s, but also for (c)(3) organizations when working in an election year. A written advocacy plan can be a group's best defense to show that the (c)(3)'s plans and expected outcomes were (c)(3)-permissible if the organization faces allegations that it has engaged in impermissible attempts to support or oppose a candidate for public office.

The following is a sample advocacy plan for an organization that wants to end puppy mills in its state. It is planning to conduct some of its advocacy work with the No More Puppy Mills Coalition, which was formed to support the introduction and passage of legislation to ban puppy mills and the sale of dogs that were bred by puppy mills. Members of the coalition include (c)(3) organizations and (c)(4) organizations.

In this hypothetical example, a (c)(4) partner in the No More Puppy Mills Coalition wants to hold legislators who vote against puppy mill legislation accountable in the next election cycle as part of their strategy. A (c)(3) coalition partner may not participate in or allow its name or resources to be used toward that (c)(4) goal, including allowing its name or resources to be used in messages that encouraged voters to hold legislators accountable for their votes in the next election. However, it could still work in coalition with the (c)(4) partner to educate the public about the puppy mill problem and to pass legislation and policies and do nonpartisan voter registration and get-out-the-vote activities, as well as educate candidates about the issues.

Creating a plan, such as the one below, would help a (c)(3) coalition partner show that its efforts to ban puppy mills were limited to (c)(3)-permissible strategies and expected outcomes.

The following plan is a simple plan; an organization may want to create a more detailed plan with timelines, targets, and names of staff responsible for implementing each strategy.

501(c)(3): Save the Puppies Education Fund's Plan

Goal: Ban puppy mills and the sale of dogs that were bred by puppy mills.

Strategies

Engage in a public education campaign about the harms caused by puppy mills, including the abuse of animals, the health and mental impacts on dogs born in puppy mills and the costs families may incur when they purchase an unhealthy dog from a puppy mill.

Working with the No More Puppy Mills Coalition, encourage the Agriculture committees of the Senate and Assembly to hold a public hearing on puppy mills.

Engage in corporate advocacy to discourage pet stores from selling puppies bred in puppy mills.

Expected Outcomes

Members of the public will understand the harm caused by puppy mills.

Members of the public who want a puppy will seek a pet from a shelter, rescue organization or reputable breeder.

Members of the legislature will learn more about the puppy mill problem.

The press will put the issue into the news.

Policy makers will learn ways in which they can address the puppy mill problem.

Pet stores will not support puppy mill breeders

The public will not patronize stores that support the puppy mill industry.

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Working with the No More Puppy Mills Coalition, encourage the legislature to introduce and pass legislation to ban puppy mills and the sale of dogs bred in a puppy mill in the state.

Legislation will be passed and there will be no more puppy mills or sale of puppy mill puppies in the state.

Include voter registration and information on the state's new vote by mail process at all community education events. On election day, have volunteers use social media to remind voters that the polls are open.

More members of the public, including supporters of the effort to ban puppy mills, will be engaged in the civic process; they will be registered and vote in elections.

When creating its organization's advocacy plan, a (c)(4) coalition partner may include their own strategies to advocate for the election or defeat of candidates (subject to state law), such as the strategies in the following (c)(4) plan.

These are strategies that would not be permissible for the (c)(3) coalition partners who would need to ensure their actions, names, and funds were confined to (c)(3)-permissible goals, strategies, and expected outcomes.

501(c)(4): Puppy Justice Action Fund's Plan

Goal: Ban puppy mills and the sale of dogs that were bred by puppy mills.

Strategies

Working with the No More Puppy Mills Coalition, encourage the Agriculture committees of the Senate and Assembly to hold a public hearing on puppy mills.

Expected Outcomes

Members of the legislature will learn more about the puppy mill problem.

The press will put the issue into the news.

Policy makers will learn ways in which they can address the puppy mill problem.

Working with the No More Puppy Mills Coalition, encourage the legislature to introduce and pass legislation to ban puppy mills and the sale of dogs bred in a puppy mill in the state.

Legislation will be passed and there will be no more puppy mills or sale of puppy mill puppies in the state.

Include support for puppy mill legislation in candidate questionnaires and make support for the bill a requirement to receive the (c)(4)'s endorsement.

Voters will know which candidates support the puppy mill ban and will hold opponents accountable in the upcoming elections.

In a swing district make independent expenditures that encourage voters to vote against an incumbent who voted no on the puppy mill ban bill.

An incumbent that supported the puppy mill industry will lose the election and a candidate who favors the puppy mill ban will win the race.

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