



A Guide to Girls Inc. Policy & Advocacy

Who and What:

Girls Inc. is a nonprofit organization that serves girls ages 5-18, primarily in afterschool and summer programs delivered by 78 local affiliates at more than 1,600 sites in 350 cities across the United States and Canada. Girls Inc. creates a pro-girl environment and utilizes evidence-based programming to equip girls with the tools they need to grow up strong, smart, and bold. Girls Inc. also works to advance the rights and opportunities of girls and young women, to reduce and eliminate the barriers they face, and to reform systems that impede their success. We are committed to girl-centered advocacy, informed by the lived experiences of girls, and girl-led advocacy that prepares girls to be change agents in their communities and beyond.

Policy work is not partisan politics

- As a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, Girls Inc. does *not* engage in partisan politics. We do not support or oppose particular political parties or political candidates. Instead, we advocate on the issues that affect girls' lives.
- We support laws and policies that will increase girls' opportunities and improve the quality of life for young women everywhere, and we oppose those that will curtail girls' and women's rights and opportunities. We focus in particular on laws and policies that affect girls in underserved communities and girls of color, as well as LGBTQ youth - in other words, the youth who face the greatest barriers to success in our society today.
- Although advocacy can be political, the advocacy that Girls Inc. engages in is not. Being an advocate for girls does not require you to identify with a certain political ideology or party. Girls Inc. is committed to working with leaders and representatives on both sides of the aisle, to seek bipartisan solutions.
- We believe the policies we promote (that will help girls grow up healthy, educated, and independent) *should* be bipartisan - even though in today's polarized climate too often they are not - and we are eager to work with members of both major parties in the U.S. to move those issues forward.
- It is possible to remain nonpartisan in matters of advocacy, and Girls Inc. does this on a daily basis. The mission of Girls Inc., to advance girls' rights and opportunities, is one that transcends party lines.

Questions? Contact us at lkaufmann@girlsinc.org and kvelloza@girlsinc.org.



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Advocacy In Action:

- At Girls Inc. National, there are many different ways we engage in advocacy to elevate girls' issues both to lawmakers and the public.
- Lobbying, or directly communicating with lawmakers about specific existing or potential legislation, is a type of advocacy, but overall it is a small portion of the advocacy that Girls Inc. engages in on a day-to-day basis.
- When we do lobby, we do not endorse or oppose a political official or party; instead we focus on the content of the laws or policies in question.
- We also work in coalitions and with strategic partners to advocate with lawmakers, raise public awareness, and mobilize people to take action to further our federal policy priorities.
- We support the local and state advocacy efforts of our affiliate network and build capacity for girl-led advocacy initiatives wherever possible.
- At Girls Inc., we are dedicated not just to being a voice *for* girls, but also to lift up the voices *of* girls themselves. The advocacy girls are leading in communities across the network, along with our national Teen Advocacy Council, are examples of this commitment.

Board/Executive Leadership and Advocacy:

- The most effective charitable organizations have recognized that successful advocacy simply means using our voices as committed and informed champions for our missions. Both staff and board leaders alike have a crucial role to play in advocacy at Girls Inc.
- Strong leadership is about creating the circumstances that will allow nonprofits' missions to be achieved.
- To be passionate, articulate, and effective champions for our mission at Girls Inc., staff and board leaders need to be well informed about public policy issues that affect girls.
- We can distinguish ourselves as one of the only - if not the only - national girls' direct service nonprofit that also does impactful advocacy work on the issues girls face in our society.



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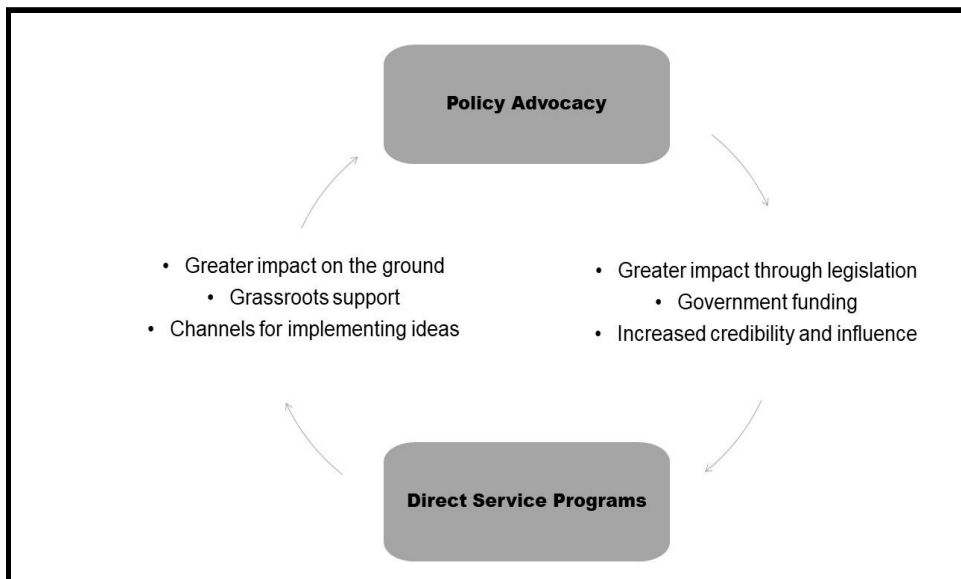
Why:

Advocacy is one of the six practices of high-impact nonprofits.

Such organizations understand that they cannot achieve large-scale change without advocating for policy reform or without accessing the power and resources of government.

Advocacy and direct service co-exist in a **virtuous cycle**, where one desirable occurrence leads to another which further promotes the first occurrence, and so on, resulting in a continuous process of improvement.

In other words, organizations that engage both in advocacy and direct service have a greater impact in both areas than organizations that only do one. By integrating policy and advocacy cohesively with our programming, we create opportunities for greater impact in both areas.



How:

- Our work with girls and what we learn from them helps inform our policy positions. Teaching girls to advocate for themselves and others, and giving them opportunities to do so, creates change today and is an investment in their leadership tomorrow.
- Our large network of affiliates, working in coalitions and engaging individuals through direct programs, gives us a constituency of members and allies we can mobilize for policy change.
- Our advocacy work raises awareness about the issues girls face and about Girls Inc. It may give us credibility and may get us additional funding (from the government or other sources) that allows us to expand our reach.
- When policy is informed by our work with girls and our programs prepare girls to be advocates, we are more effective at both.

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