



*Connecting Grantmakers. Inspiring Excellence.*

**Philanthropy Southwest - Public Policy Committee**  
**Policy: Taking Positions on Public Policy Issues**

***Public Policy Committee***

Individuals serving on the Public Policy Committee will represent current Philanthropy Southwest member organizations. The PSW Public Policy Committee's purpose is to inform members of PSW about legislative and regulatory matters affecting foundations.

The committee works to further advance the work of PSW members by educating elected officials about the value of philanthropy in their district and fostering engagement and collaborations among public officials, foundations, and community stakeholders to promote the philanthropic and nonprofit sectors.

***How does Philanthropy Southwest define policy advocacy?***

Policy advocacy is the process of negotiating and mediating a dialogue through which influential networks, opinion leaders, and ultimately, decision-makers, take ownership of your ideas, evidence, and proposals, and subsequently act upon them.

This negotiation could include meetings with policymakers, grassroots organizing, communication campaigns, and public comment through letters or testimony. While lobbying is one aspect of policy advocacy, there are many other options for philanthropy engagement in advocacy.

***What is PSW's role in advancing policy?***

As a leading voice in the Southwest region, PSW is uniquely positioned as an association of funders to influence what gets on the policy agenda and what the policy alternatives might be.

There are three pathways through which PSW can influence policy:

- *Policies that benefit the nonprofit sector.* Given that PSW's philanthropic members are concerned with issues affecting their grantees in the social profit sector, PSW could advocate for policies or system changes that would improve the nonprofit sector's ability to provide services.
- *Issue-based.* PSW members could educate other members about policy issues and request that PSW assist in facilitating that process.
- *Education.* PSW has a role to play in educating members about engaging in and funding policy advocacy.

From time to time, PSW may choose to take positions on legislation, should legislation or policy directly affect its membership, the field of philanthropy, or the broader nonprofit sector.

### ***Criteria for becoming involved in an issue***

Before Philanthropy Southwest becomes involved in a specific policy issue, the Public Policy Committee will consider the following criteria:

- The issue affects or impacts the philanthropic sector.
- The issue strengthens the nonprofit sector or encourages philanthropic giving.
- The issue affects or impacts the nonprofit sector in general and/or grantees.
- The issue directly or indirectly affects PSW members' ability to conduct their philanthropy effectively, or affects PSW itself.
- The involvement of PSW or its members could help shape the outcome of the issue.
- The potential difference of opinions among PSW members or types has been fully considered.
- The current position or role of other associations and coalitions is known, in particular those of:

- Alliance for Charitable Reform
- Council on Foundations
- United Philanthropy Forum
- Independent Sector
- Center for Nonprofits
- Other regional associations

In reviewing these criteria, the Committee may recommend action to the PSW Board such as taking a specific position on a specific legislative or regulatory issue at the local, state, or federal level. The Committee may also recommend that Philanthropy Southwest remain silent. The final decision remains with the PSW Board.

### ***Process***

The Philanthropy Southwest Board, affinity groups, and/or individual members may recommend that the Committee review and discuss a specific issue or topic to determine whether or not PSW should take a specific position. The Committee shall evaluate if the issue meets the above criteria. In doing so, the committee shall follow a process that enables a thoughtful and representative deliberation and decision-making process to determine whether and how PSW should become involved. Committee recommendations shall be determined by consensus.\*

*\*The consensus process respects compromise as the main tool to build agreement; however, in the event there is a member who strongly opposes the recommendation, this opposition will be noted in the Memo of Recommendation to the Board.*

1. Staff shall be responsible to monitor and identify issues and policies that affect philanthropy. Staff may rely on members, affinity groups, partner organizations, or public officials for information on issues.
2. PSW staff, at the direction of the Committee, shall draft a written memo recommending the position of the organization and what strategies, if any, to implement. The memo shall be presented to the PSW Board via email or in-person meeting and include at a minimum:
  - a. Background, research, and data on the issue
  - b. Past PSW activity/action regarding the issue
  - c. Recommended strategies including potential partnerships with other organizations
  - d. Discussion of potential conflicts within the membership

- e. List of positions (if any) taken by partner organizations listed in the criteria.
3. The board shall review and vote on the Committee's recommendation(s) to take full, partial, or no action. The Board may convene in person, via conference call, or via electronic mail. Should the Board decide to take partial action or no action at all, the Board shall provide the Committee with its reasoning.
4. PSW members will be informed through appropriate communication vehicle(s) of the position taken by the Board and subsequent actions related to the position.
5. PSW will at all times act within the limitations of the nonprofit rules for lobbying activities established by the IRS and the PSW membership states.

### ***Strategies for Policy Engagement***

Once a position has been taken on a policy issue, Philanthropy Southwest may engage in a number of strategies, including:

- Informing members about the issue
- Asking members to engage in advocacy and lobbying as permitted by law
- Disseminating information and data to members and the public
- Signing or co-signing a letter
- Joining a coalition
- Contacting elected officials about the issue and about PSW's position on it
- Contacting the media (e.g. submitting letters to the editor, op-ed pieces)
- Offering public testimony
- Contracting with public affairs or research firms

Upon review of a specific issue, PSW may choose not to pursue any of the above strategies. The association may then work with other community actors in a non-public role or take no action.

### ***Communications Strategy***

In all of its communications and interactions, PSW will strive to offer a constructive, solutions-oriented presence and tone.

Staff will use newsletters and the website as a means to regularly communicate with members about upcoming issues on which PSW is working as well as inform about any decisions on public policy positions taken by PSW.

Communication tools will be mindful of Philanthropy Southwest's core value of diversity, in particular, acknowledging the "diversity of thought" represented in the membership.