

DEFINING THE PLAYERS

Advocacy can take many forms, ranging from grassroots lobbying, to direct lobbying of legislators, to explicitly political activities such as campaigning. Each of the entities operated by the advocacy organizations is subject to different restrictions under the U.S. tax code and campaign-finance laws.

ALLOWANCES & RESTRICTIONS

NONPROFIT

501(c)3

These public charities engage primarily in educational work, such as publishing nonpartisan analyses and reports or training local volunteers on the process of grassroots advocacy. They may engage in some lobbying, but it cannot form a substantial part of their activities. They are prohibited from all partisan political activity. Donations to these charities are typically tax-deductible, and the organizations do not have to publicly disclose donors' names.

501(c)4

Deemed social-welfare organizations, these nonprofits can engage in unlimited grassroots and direct lobbying, in addition to educational work. They can also participate in a limited amount of partisan political activity provided it is not their primary purpose. This may include "independent expenditures"—advertising supportive of or in opposition to candidates that is not coordinated with candidates' campaigns. Donations to (c)4s are not tax-deductible, and the organizations typically do not have to disclose donors' names.

POLITICAL ORGANIZATIONS

PAC

Political action committees donate directly to candidates or to political parties, subject to federal and state contribution limits. Donors' names must be disclosed in accordance with federal or state campaign-finance rules.

IEC

These independent-expenditure committees, popularly referred to as "super PACs" at the federal level, can spend unlimited sums on independent expenditures. Donors' names are disclosed.

SOURCES: Alliance for Justice; *Education Week*