

There are no universally accepted definitions, but here are some useful examples and distinctions from a few online sources including [Grantmaking for Community Impact](#), [Grassroots Solutions](#) (Organizing vs. Mobilizing), [OpenSecrets.Org](#).

Here is a synthesis / summary of what those sources offer as definitions and distinctions between the types of organizations and activities:

- **Civic Engagement (or Community Engagement)** refers to the ways in which citizens participate in the life of a community in order to improve conditions or to help shape the community's future.
 - ... means working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, *through both political and non-political processes*. (Nytimes)
 - It can involve building the structures, formats, and processes -- and/or developing the skills, knowledge and experience -- that enable people to participate effectively in the democratic process.
- **Political Action** encompasses any and all activities that engage ordinary people in civic life, such as organizing, advocacy and voter registration, education and mobilization.
 - Political action is any action that brings pressure on political or governmental agencies and/or individuals in order to persuade them to take action.
- **Advocacy** is the act of promoting a cause, idea or policy to influence people's opinions or actions on matters of public policy or concern. It tends to be done **on behalf of** those who are directly impacted by the issues, and can include/encompass:
 - issue identification, research and analysis;
 - public issue education;
 - lobbying efforts for or against legislation;
 - nonpartisan voter registration, education and mobilization;
 - litigation;
 - education of government agencies at all levels;
 - participation in referenda and ballot initiatives;
 - grassroots mobilization; and
 - testimonies before government bodies
- **Community Organizing** is a process of building relationships, leadership and power, typically among disenfranchised communities, and bringing that power and collective voice to bear on the issues that affect those communities by engaging with relevant decision-makers.
 - The issues raised, solutions identified and strategies developed to achieve those solutions all are defined and acted on by the leaders themselves, usually with help from professional organizers.
 - It can be one part of an overall advocacy or public policy campaign strategy, but it is distinguished by the fact that affected constituencies are the agents of change, rather than paid advocates or lobbyists who represent the interests of such constituencies.
- **Community Mobilization** is working with people to focus on a set of steps to get something done.
 - Whereas organizing is about building long-term capacity and power, mobilizing is about leveraging that capacity and power for immediate action.
 - It is issue-oriented, with leaders driving the action on a pre-determined issue and around a pre-determined set of solutions. (This may have been determined through a grassroots organizing process or top-down by leaders/experts.)

- It is a tactic that can be invoked by advocacy, organizing or even service groups (e.g. service day). C
- **Community Consultation** (also often called “Civic Engagement” or “Community Engagement”)
 - Done **on behalf of institutional decision-makers** who seek to consult / hear the voices of those who are directly affected by the policy or issue to inform their decision-making.
- **Lobbying** is attempting to influence—directly or indirectly—the passage or defeat of government legislation.
 - Lobbying can be one part of an advocacy strategy, but advocacy does not necessarily have to involve lobbying.
 - Nonprofits can lobby legally. Federal laws determine how much lobbying a nonprofit organization can undertake, but there are no limits on how much non-lobbying advocacy (described above) a nonprofit can engage in.
- **Electoral Politics or “Electioneering”** involves pooling campaign contributions and donating those funds to [campaign](#) for or against candidates, [ballot initiatives](#), or [legislation](#). (Also sometimes referred to as “political action” although we offer a broader definition for this above.)

From LDD:

Policy Development:

A plan, course of action, or set of regulations adopted by government, business or an institution, designed to influence and determine decisions or procedures.

Lobbying/Advocacy:

A set of targeted actions designed to influence government officials when they make laws and regulations, distribute resources, and make other decisions that affect people’s lives.

Community Organizing:

The process of bringing people affected by an issue together to use their collective power to pressure the decisionmaker to make changes that address the organized group’s needs and demands.

Electoral politics:

Directly influencing who gets elected and the policies they support by running for office, managing/working on campaigns and working for elected officials.

From AO:

How is Organizing Different from Advocacy?

Organizing can be distinguished from advocacy in that advocacy seeks to change policies without directly addressing the underlying systemic power dynamics that foster inequity. Advocacy is frequently done by professional staff who are experts in policy areas and may hold insider relationships with key decision makers, and thus are able to broker policy deals. Often this involves bringing the power of organized money to the table, or demonstrations of public support through mass mobilizations that help change the targeted policy. Often, advocacy reinforces existing power dynamics by relying on organizing money or status/position to influence change, and does not result in the building of power or leadership development of those affected.

Organizing and advocacy strategies can be complementary, when organizing and advocacy groups participate in a larger coalition. An organized, targeted action meant to result in policy change can require policy expertise and mobilization, and organized money can strengthen these efforts. However, organizing and advocacy can also be in tension, particularly when a culture of urgency exists. There may be times when the surest way to stop something that would hurt kids is to rely on existing networks of power. Failing to address the underlying power dynamics that create inequity means we may win on any given issue but fail to eliminate inequity. We may even continuously win on multiple issues, but inequity will continue to persist. (See section X for more on this.) LEE must support members to identify cultures of urgency and navigate the tension that can arise between advocacy and organizing as a result of urgent culture.

LEE believes that building the political power of families and communities affected by educational inequity is essential to achieving an excellent education for all students, and that equipping our members with the skills of community organizing and creating vehicles for them to act collectively is a key strategy to achieve this goal. We are committed to inspiring members to engage in the slow and patient work of organizing, while our organization supports members doing advocacy work as well.