

THE BUSINESS VIEW – *James Temple***Why corporations fear advocacy - how nonprofits can help**

Helping a nonprofit with an advocacy campaign carries the stigma of being risky business in the corporate world. For private and public organizations alike, the word *advocacy* tends to incite the fear of uncontrolled chaos. Perceived risks of taking a particular side on a social issue include polarizing the viewpoints of employees and clients, and attracting backlash from stakeholders who disagree with that support.

I recently read *Lobbying for Social Good*, an article published in a 2009 edition of the *Stanford Social Innovation Review*. The authors discussed how government relations teams at certain US companies help nonprofits advocate for shifts in public policy. They spoke about the need for increased attention to social causes in the government space, but also stressed the balancing act among the potential costs, benefits and legal sensitivities over who can lobby or advocate, how and when.

That made me wonder whether there's a way Canadian businesses can support advocacy. My conclusion? Yes, but it may involve changing how we think about the word itself.

I think we've all become micro-focused on the textbook definition of what advocacy can mean in the context of social change. What we often forget is that we can transform the ways that advocacy is shaped in our everyday business. Much like corporate responsibility, the integration of social values in a business or a community is a journey, a process.

I'd like to advocate (lobby if you will) for all of us to re-examine the word and look at some of the more practical steps that we can take for social change by looking through the eyes of a funder and a recipient.

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Funders must advocate for those who don't have a voice

We must remember that funders have an extended network of influence and exposure. They must go beyond advocating for a social cause and focus their message around the work it takes for their nonprofit partners to achieve the results they desire.

Funders should begin to advocate for something simple like time: the extra time a grant recipient needs to think, to reflect, and to take the right risks to innovate and expand for the sake of the social outcomes they hope to achieve. Instead of focusing on the deadline for an accountability report from a nonprofit, they must advocate for a change in processes so that stagnant conversations around dollars, cents and outputs begin to change and develop.

Nonprofits must advocate strategically for networks

Too many times, funding proposals take root within the passion of the cause and forget to focus on the alignment with a funder's portfolio and its business objectives. The “ask” turns into an appeal to use employee communications or social networks to relay a message rather than developing a partnership with a business that meets everyone's needs.

Change doesn't happen overnight. But I'd argue that advocating for the right conversations could begin that shift quickly. Just sit around a table and challenge others to think differently about their approach. Go beyond the red-tape processes and think about funding in a way that makes sense.

These things don't happen in the forum of public policy advocacy. But they are achievable goals that funders and nonprofits can advocate for together to help strengthen relationships and the networks that drive social change. ☺



About James Temple

James Temple is the director of corporate responsibility for **PricewaterhouseCoopers Canada** and director of the **PricewaterhouseCoopers Canada Foundation**. He oversees a team responsible for integrating good social, environmental and economic values into PwC's decision-making processes. James is a featured presenter at international conferences, speaking on the value of developing strong corporate-community partnerships. He co-chairs the **Association of Corporate Grantmakers** and sits on the board of directors for the **Ontario Association of Food Banks**.

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