

Special Section Introduction:

*ARNOVA Governance Symposium Case Studies
for Use in the Classroom and Practitioner Training*

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On behalf of the Governance Section of the Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action (ARNOVA), we are pleased to present this special section of the *Journal of Nonprofit Education and Leadership*, which consists of four advocacy case studies. The cases were developed as part of the Governance Symposium, Board Advocacy: Promoting Organizational Values, Beliefs, and Goals, convened during the 2017 ARNOVA conference. The symposium was cosponsored by the Governance Section of ARNOVA and the Alliance for Nonprofit Management, the national organization of capacity builders. These case studies provide wonderful learning tools focused on board advocacy for use in the classroom and in training workshops and are designed for instructors, consultants, students, board members, and executive directors. The set of cases is followed by a study guide that is designed to be used in conjunction with all the cases. The guide includes instructor/trainer and student/training-participant sections with activities, discussion questions, and a list of print and electronic resources.

Within the governance field, there has been an increased focus on the significance of advocacy as a governance responsibility. As a result of this focus, in their 2016 Leading With Intent Survey, BoardSource (2017) found that 52% of their member nonprofits engage in some form of advocacy, up from 33% in 2014. The following cases highlight how four nonprofit boards engaged or perhaps should have engaged in advocacy to advance their missions.

The first case, “Invisible Children: Advocacy and Accidental Viral Marketing” written by Jeff Aulgur and Ruth Bernstein, describes the dramatic rise and fall of Invisible Children, a nonprofit with a mission to increase public awareness of the Lord’s Resistance Army’s activities in Central Africa. Through the use of social media, Invisible Children created a massive following to generate donations and advocate for “ending violence and exploitation in isolated and vulnerable communities.” Beginning with the 2006 Global Night Commute, an event that saw 800,000 youth sleeping in 125 city centers and culminating with the 2012 release of a 30-minute video that went viral, capturing the attention of 100 million in its first six days, Invisible Children relied on

social media to attract a youthful following to their cause. By using these advocacy strategies, Invisible Children was able to draw attention to a little-known problem and raise substantial funds. Unfortunately, social media also contributed to the downfall of the organization, as it became increasingly clear that the leadership was unprepared to deal with the public response to their appeal.

The second case, “A Mission of Eliminating Racism, But Where Is the Advocacy?” written by Judy Freiwirth, describes a situation in which a significant part of a regional nonprofit’s mission is focused on eliminating racism as well as becoming “an inclusive women’s advocacy and resource center with a pro-active membership.” Its advocacy work was limited to the executive director and a small task force. Although its recent strategic plan called for the full board to actively engage in racial justice trainings, dialogues, and advocacy outside the board room as part of their key governance responsibilities, most board members continued to be satisfied with only a few board members of color engaging in this work—maintaining the status quo was more comfortable for most of the board.

The third case, “Behind the Scenes: The Religious Right and Anti-Gay Legislation” by Judith Millesen, is a story of what is possible when a deeply held institutional purpose is strategically aligned with political decision makers who share the same beliefs and values and mobilize to advance an agenda deemed to be in the public interest. This case looks at the “bathroom” bills in North Carolina and Texas designed to limit transgender people to using bathrooms based on their sex at birth, not their current gender identity. With multiple implications, this case demonstrates the effect of political power used to advocate for a specific agenda.

The final case, “California Arts’ Race to 47th Place” written by Vernetta Walker, tells the tale of the California Arts Council’s use of advocacy to implore the state of California to provide funding for the Council. By adding advocacy to the organization’s strategic plan, the board and staff became increasingly focused on their ability to influence state budget appropriations. By engaging professional lobbyists and educating board members in how to advance the Council’s mission, they saw, after a 97% cut in appropriations in 2003 (from \$30 million to \$1 million), a restoration of the appropriation to \$5 million, with a promise from Governor Brown that this would be the “baseline” for future years. Although this is significantly less than the \$30 million of the “glory days” prior to 2003, the budget would have been significantly less without the advocacy efforts of the organization.

As co-editors of this special section, we hope these cases will not only be useful in your classes, workshops and seminars, but will also help advance advocacy as a key governance responsibility and thereby increase the impact of the nonprofit sector.