

A close-up photograph of a woman's face and upper torso. She is wearing a white t-shirt and holding a circular button that says 'VOTE' in blue capital letters, surrounded by a ring of red and blue stars. The background is a solid light gray.

# How to Engage in the Political World

## Everything's Political – How to Engage in the Political World?

Politics are a part of everything around us, from the rules made by governments to the decisions in schools, workplaces, and neighborhoods. Politics decide how money and resources are shared, who gets to speak up, and what opportunities people have. They affect things like the roads we use, the healthcare we get, and the schools we attend.

Getting involved in politics is important because it lets people speak up for what they need, help make fair decisions and hold leaders accountable. Whether it's voting, joining local meetings, or working for change in your community, being part of politics helps make the world a better place for everyone.

Big "P" Politics means the big government stuff like laws and elections, while little "p" politics is about everyday decisions and power struggles in places like schools, workplaces, or neighborhoods.

The distinction between big "P" Politics and little "p" politics lies in the scope and focus of the term:

### **Big "P" Politics**

This refers to formal, institutionalized political systems and processes, often at the national or international level. It involves:

- Governmental Structures: Legislatures, executives, judiciaries, and other branches of government.
- Policy and Legislation: The creation, implementation, and enforcement of laws and regulations.
- Political Parties and Elections: Campaigns, voting, and party platforms that influence governance.
- Public Power Dynamics: Relations between governments, political leaders, and international bodies.
- Examples:
  - Presidential elections
  - Debates over national healthcare legislation
  - UN negotiations on climate change

**Little "p" politics**

This refers to the informal power dynamics, relationships, and decision-making processes that occur in everyday life, often within organizations, communities, or workplaces. It involves:

- Interpersonal Dynamics: How individuals or groups navigate power, influence, and conflict.
- Local Issues: Decisions made in local government, school boards, or community organizations.
- Workplace and Social Contexts: Advocacy, negotiation, and coalition-building within smaller settings.
- Examples:
  - Office conflicts over leadership roles
  - Advocacy for a local park renovation
  - Coalition-building in a grassroots community campaign

**Key Differences**

Aspect	Big "P" Politics	Little "p" politics
Scope	National or global	Local or organizational
Actors	Governments, politicians, parties	Individuals, groups, communities
Formal vs. Informal	Formal systems and structures	Informal, relationship-based
Focus	Governance, laws, policy	Workplace dynamics, local advocacy
Examples	Elections, treaties, legislation	Workplace dynamics, local advocacy



## How Nonprofit Organizations Can Engage with Both Levels of “Politics”

### **Big “P” Politics**

- Advocacy for Policy Change:
  - Lobbying for or against specific legislation.
  - Engaging with lawmakers and regulators.
- Public Campaigns:
  - Organizing voter registration or education drives.
  - Mobilizing supporters to contact elected officials.
- Partnerships:
  - Collaborating with political bodies or coalitions on shared goals.
- Compliance:
  - Staying within the legal boundaries of political engagement (e.g., restrictions on endorsing candidates for 501(c)(3) organizations).

### **Little “p” politics**

- Grassroots Organizing:
  - Building coalitions to address local issues.
  - Hosting town halls or forums to engage community members.
- Community Advocacy:
  - Partnering with local leaders to push for change at the city or county level.
  - Empowering stakeholders to voice concerns directly.
- Relationship Building:
  - Navigating internal power dynamics to align diverse stakeholders.
  - Engaging local influencers or community champions.

### ***Why Should Nonprofits Engage with the Level of “Politics?”***

#### **Big “P” Politics**

- Influence Systemic Change:
  - Laws and policies enacted at higher levels have wide-reaching effects.
  - Nonprofits can drive meaningful societal change by shaping policy.
- Amplify Impact:
  - Advocacy at the national or state level can scale local initiatives.
- Ensure Representation:
  - Engage to ensure that underrepresented groups have a voice in policymaking.

### Little "p" politics

- Build Grassroots Momentum:
  - Local actions often lay the foundation for broader change.
  - Communities are more likely to engage with visible, tangible issues.
- Foster Collaboration:
  - Addressing local power dynamics and forging alliances strengthens an organization's ability to act collectively.
- Solve Immediate Problems:
  - Local political engagement often yields quicker results on issues directly affecting communities.

By engaging with both big "P" Politics and little "p" politics, nonprofit organizations can maximize their influence, address challenges from multiple angles, and work toward sustainable, systemic change while staying rooted in community needs.

