

Statement on Public Policy and United Way of Atlantic County's Role



Public Policy is central to, and leverages, *Community Impact*. Nearly every community issue of interest to local United Ways has a strong public policy element, including early learning (Success By 6), 2-1-1, housing, and child health, among others. According to United Way of America research, the average United Way agency receives over 40% of its funding from government, versus only 6 percent from their local United Way.¹ Public policy helps us leverage our impact by influencing not just how much is spent on issues that we care about, but how that money is spent, which is at least as important.

In addition to influencing public funding decisions, changes to rules, regulations and laws can have major impacts on community outcomes. Additionally, changing notions of appropriate roles for government have placed more responsibility for the delivery of human services on nonprofit and faith-based organizations funded by local United Ways. Because decisions made by our elected and appointed officials often have a significant effect on the nonprofit sector's ability to serve, it is critical that the United Way of Atlantic County have a place at the table with policymakers.

A major reason for our United Way's involvement in community impact is to redefine and reposition the United Way brand. As a core community impact strategy, however, public policy is not just a tool for shaping the brand; it also reflects that redefined brand. This means pursuing an activist public policy agenda that reflects our community's values in the broadest sense. In choosing issues, United Way of Atlantic County should focus on issues with broad, usually centrist appeal, not issues more likely to divide the community. Of course, controversy can lurk below the surface of almost any issue, but these problems can be minimized by focusing on issues and solutions where there is broad agreement, and emphasizing an approach that is constructive, practical, and oriented toward pragmatic problem-solving.

The strength of United Way of Atlantic County is centered in the leadership of volunteers, our long-standing partnership with area employers and in the organization's ability to adjust to a changing environment. United Way can be a neutral ground where all points of view come together for discussion and consensus on solutions to difficult problems facing our community. Our role in public policy has grown out of this sense that today's problems require creative solutions that must be developed by the broad cross-section of our community.

Therefore, the Board of Directors of United Way of Atlantic County, at its regular meeting on June 19, 2007, gave approval for the formation of a board level Public Policy Committee. This statement further defines the intention of that decision and is supported by the attached document entitled, "United Way's Role in Public Policy".

¹ United Way of America Research Services, 1999 Community Impact Survey.