Interest Groups

What Is an Interest Group?

An interest group organizes to protect and promote its interests.

- It does this by trying to influence the making of public policy. Public policy is all those things that a government does to reach its goals—its programs, actions, and decisions.
- Because local, State, and national levels of government make policy, interest groups work at all these levels.

Interest Groups v. Political Parties
Interest groups and political parties are not the same thing. Parties nominate candidates for public office. Interest groups do not. Political parties try to win elections so they can control the government. Interest groups only want control over some of the government’s policies. They do not want to run the government. Political parties talk about many issues because many different groups of people belong to each party. But interest groups focus only on issues that affect their members. Interest groups are private. They must answer only to their members.

Interest Groups at Work
The goal of interest groups is to influence public policies. They use three main ways to reach their goals.

1. Influence Public Opinion
Attitudes shared by most people are called public opinion. Interest groups work hard to get public opinion on their side. Interest groups use propaganda. This is a way they can try to get the public to believe their belief is correct and should become public policy.

2. Lobby to get Policy Changed
Many interest groups hire lobbyists’ to influence members of Congress hoping to change the legislators’ opinions about an issue. This act of pressuring is called lobbying.

- Lobbyists give lawmakers information that supports their opinion.
- Lobbyists may speak before legislative committees.
- Many also use grass-roots pressure to influence politicians. That means getting voters on their side, so the voters will put pressure on politicians.

The Art of Lobbying

- **LOBBYS**
  - An outer room or hallway of a government building.
- **LOBBYIST**
  - A person who stands in the lobby and waits to talk to a government official.
- **LOBBYING**
  - Persuasive talk that seeks to influence opinion and decision making.
3. Affect the Outcome of Elections

Interest groups try to affect the outcome of elections so that those politicians that support their issues are elected and will change policies according to the common interest.

Interest groups give money to the parties and candidates that agree with them through their Political Action Committees (PACs). In addition, they may also spend on advertising to promote one candidate over another.

The Positives and Negatives of Interest Groups

 Positives

 1. Stimulate interest in new public issues.
 2. Provide an easy entry level for people to get involved politically.
 3. Provides information to the government and to members.
 4. Socialize individuals with shared attitudes and values.
 5. Influence change for improvements in society.

 Negatives

 1. May not have the best interest of the majority of the nation at heart.
 2. May have influence out of proportion to their size.
 3. May be difficult to determine which people an interest group is representing.
 4. Some do not represent the view of all the people for whom the claim to speak.
 5. Some groups use illegal or unethical tactics to get their way.

Types of Interest Groups

Business/Trade Associations - Interest groups formed by merchants, creditors, business owners and other commerce related organizations. Their goal is to promote business interest. An example is the Chamber of Commerce of the United States.

Agricultural Groups - These interest groups look after the interest of farmers and the government's agricultural policy. They include several broad-based farm groups and larger number of groups that represent farms who raise particular commodities such as dairy products, grain, fruit peanuts, livestock, cotton, wool, corn, and soybeans. An example is the American Farm Bureau Federation.

Professional Groups - Professions are generally defined as those occupations that require extensive and specialized training, such as medicine, law and teaching. Three major professional groups are The American Medical Association (AMA) the American Bar Association (ABA) and the National Education Association (NEA).
**Labor Union Groups** - A labor union is an organization of workers who share the same type of job or who work in the same industry. Organized labor generally speaks with one voice on such social welfare and job related matters such as Social Security programs, minimum wages and unemployment. The largest in both size and political power is the AFL-CIO (The American Federation of Labor Congress of Industrial Organizations).

**Promote Causes** - A large number of groups exist to promote or oppose a certain cause. Examples of these groups include the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), The League of Women Voters, National Wildlife Federation, The National Right-to-Life Committee, Planned Parenthood, and the National Rifle Association.

**Promote Social Programs** - A number of interest groups seek to promote the welfare of certain segments of the population. Examples of these groups include the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), and National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). These special interest groups include those that are promoting the welfare of minority groups in America.

**Religious Groups** - These groups try to influence public policy in religious matters. Examples of groups include the National Council of Churches, Christian Coalition, and the Anti-Defamation League.

**Public Interest Groups** - These groups are different than the others described because they do not just seek benefits for their members but for the entire public. These interest groups seek to institute certain public policies of benefit to all or most people in this country, whether or not they belong or support that organization. An example is Common Cause.

### Examples of Interest Groups

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>PURPOSE</th>
<th>INTEREST GROUPS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>to promote business</td>
<td>National Association of Manufacturers (NAM)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Chamber of Commerce of the United States</td>
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<tr>
<td>to organize labor</td>
<td>AFL-CIO</td>
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<td></td>
<td>American Federation of Musicians</td>
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<tr>
<td>to protect agricultural interests</td>
<td>National Farmers Union</td>
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<td></td>
<td>American Farm Bureau Federation</td>
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<td>to promote causes</td>
<td>National Women's Christian Temperance Union</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>to promote social programs</td>
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<td>American Association for Retired Persons</td>
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<td>for religious purposes</td>
<td>National Council of Churches</td>
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<td>National Catholic Welfare Council</td>
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<td>American Jewish Congress</td>
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<tr>
<td>for the public good</td>
<td>Common Cause</td>
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<td>League of Women Voters</td>
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