

# What Nonprofits Can and Cannot Do in an Election Year



As the election season is in full gear, your organization may wonder how to get involved. The IRS rules provide strict guidance for 501(c)3 nonprofit organizations and the role you may or may not play in the election process. Nonprofit organizations are uniquely well suited to address issues of voter participation – and help communities to become active and engaged to ensure broad representation and public officials who are responsive to community concerns.

## Your organization may:

- Educate people about their voting rights and encourage people to register to vote; provide helpful information such as where polling places are located. One simple way to increase civic participation is to give your staff time off to vote or volunteer at a polling place.
- Host a candidate forum – make sure all candidates are invited, rules are fair and the audience is not stacked to favor any candidate.
- Educate all candidates on issues of public interest where you have expertise.
- Direct public education about issues by way of scorecards, Internet communications, and other social media; provided messages are issue related and nonpartisan in nature.
- Unlike candidate advocacy, advocacy on referenda and ballot initiatives is okay for nonprofits.
- Provide public education using nonpartisan reports, opinion editorials, or letter to the editor to get the word out on issues.
- Maintain existing nonpartisan relationships with your elected officials.

## Your organization may not:

- Participate in activities defined as electioneering
- Endorse candidates for public office.
- Use corporate email to pass on information about individual candidates, including emails that may be defamatory or considered humorous.
- Make campaign contributions to candidates.
- Use organizational resources, mailing lists or staff time for candidate election activities with the exception of ballot measure, subject to lobbying limits.
- Communicate publicly anything that explicitly or implicitly favors or opposes a candidate.
- Support candidates using the nonprofit's website, events, publication or other resources.

For more information, visit [Nonprofit VOTE Nonprofits, Voting and Elections](#)