



Working with Candidates on a nonpartisan basis

Elections offer numerous opportunities to interact with candidates for elected office.

As a 501(c)(3) organization, you cannot endorse or oppose candidates. However, you can still use campaigns to get your issues in front of the candidates, build relationships with future elected officials, share your policy ideas, and influence future debates and decisions. Consider how your nonprofit can connect to candidates in various races during an election season.

1. Host or Co-Sponsor a Candidate Forum

Candidate forums not only connect your organization with candidates, but they also give your constituents and community members a chance to meet and interact with future officials. Hosting a candidate forum can raise the profile of your nonprofit and highlight your issues during an election.

2. Invite Candidates to Attend an Event

Invite candidates to visit your nonprofit or attend an event, as the invitation alone gets your organization's name in front of the candidates. Hosting candidates at an event allows your constituents and stakeholders to ask questions and familiarize themselves with their choices. See our Candidate Appearances factsheet for additional details.

3. Conduct a Candidate Questionnaire

Candidate questionnaires let candidates—and the public—know what issues you care about. Invite all of the candidates in a particular race to respond to a set of questions. Once you've collected responses, be sure to publicize them on your website and in your communications. Many candidates are often short on time and are fielding many requests, so consider collaborating with a partner or coalition to consolidate

your efforts and increase the likelihood that candidates will reply.

4. Share Your Policy Ideas

Although elected officials can benefit from your ideas and research year-round, elections provide a focused opportunity to build clout while demonstrating your organization's expertise. During a campaign, candidates need current research and fresh ideas to answer questions and connect with voters. Sharing your policy ideas with candidates can help forward your mission, but be sure to make your ideas and existing research available to all candidates.

5. Attend Candidate Events

Don't be shy! Attend candidate events and feel free to ask questions. However, if you are representing your organization, your approach must be strictly nonpartisan — e.g. You must ask the same question at events for all candidates in the same race.

Resources

Nonprofit VOTE — www.nonprofitvote.org

- *A Nonprofit's Guide to Hosting a Candidate Forum*
- *Nonprofits, Voting and Elections: A 501(c)(3) Guide to Nonpartisan Voter Engagement*
- "Candidate Appearances" Factsheet

League of Women Voters — www.lwv.org

- "FAQ'S Candidate Forums and Debates"

Bolder Advocacy (AFJ) — www.bolderadvocacy.org

- "Candidate Questionnaires and Voter Guides"

IRS — www.irs.gov

- "Election Year Activities for 501(c)(3) Organizations" (FS-2006-17, February 2006)

