



Candidate Appearances

At Your Nonprofit Event

During the election season, a candidate may appear at your nonprofit event in one of three ways: 1) in their capacity as a candidate invited to your event, 2) in their capacity as a public figure invited to your event, or 3) as an uninvited attendee at a public event. Each scenario has different guidelines to ensure that their appearance remains nonpartisan.

1. Inviting candidates to an event in their capacity as candidates

Your nonprofit may want to invite candidates for office to a function or event to expose them to your work, develop relationships with future office holders, or for a purpose related to your ongoing programs.

If you invite all the candidates to the SAME event:

- Invite all candidates in the same race. They don't all have to come, but all must be invited.
- Remind candidates that they are attending as guests. Campaigning and political fundraising are prohibited.
- Remind the audience that this is a nonpartisan event.

If you invite candidates to appear at DIFFERENT events:

- Provide equal opportunity to candidates for the same office, including a similar time, venue, and presentation format.
- Prior to introducing the candidate, clarify for the audience that the appearance is not an endorsement and that there will be additional opportunities to meet the other candidates.

Keep in mind that elected officials are themselves candidates when they are running for re-election in a primary or general election. This is particularly important to remember in the last two months leading up to the election.

2. Inviting a candidate to an event in their capacity as a public figure

A charity may invite a candidate to an event in their capacity as a recognized public figure, like an elected official or expert in their field. You might invite a candidate to speak because he or she 1) currently holds, or formerly held, public office; 2) is considered an expert in a non-political field; 3) is a celebrity or has led a distinguished public service, military, legal, or other career. Under these circumstances only extend an invitation if:

- The candidate is chosen to speak solely for reasons other than their candidacy and speaks only in a non-candidate capacity.
- There is no mention of their candidacy during the presentation or event.
- The atmosphere is kept entirely nonpartisan and free of campaign activity (e.g. campaign brochures or other materials are not out on a table).

3. Candidates attending your event on their own initiative

Candidates may appear at a public event held by your nonprofit on their own initiative. In that case:

- Take care that there is no actual or implied endorsement.
- Do not give the candidate an opportunity to address the gathering or distribute campaign literature.

Resources

Bolder Advocacy, "Hosting Candidates at Charitable Events," www.bolderadvocacy.org

IRS, "Election Year Activities for Section 501(c)(3) Organizations" (FS-2006-17), www.irs.gov