

Electoral Advocacy: What Your Nonprofit Can—and Can't—Do Right Now

New Tools from ACS to Help You Engage Confidently and Compliantly

Primary season is underway across much of the country, and with the mid-term general election on the horizon, now is the time for nonprofits to get strategic about electoral advocacy.

But here's what we hear from organizations all the time: *"We want to help, but we're not sure what we're allowed to do."*

That hesitation is understandable and is exactly why ACS has developed two practical resources to help your organization engage in the electoral process with confidence, clarity, and full compliance with your 501(c)(3) status.

Why Electoral Advocacy Matters for Nonprofits

Your organization serves the people of your community. Elections shape the policies, funding, and leadership that directly affect the people you serve. If your voice isn't heard, someone else's will be—and your community's interests may not be represented.

The good news? If your organization has 501(c)(3) status, you can do more than you think. [Voter education](#), [voter registration](#), [Get Out the Vote \(GOTV\) activities](#), [candidate forums](#), [ballot initiative work](#), and more are all fair game—as long as you are nonpartisan.

The key is understanding requirements and building a plan.

"But what do you mean?"

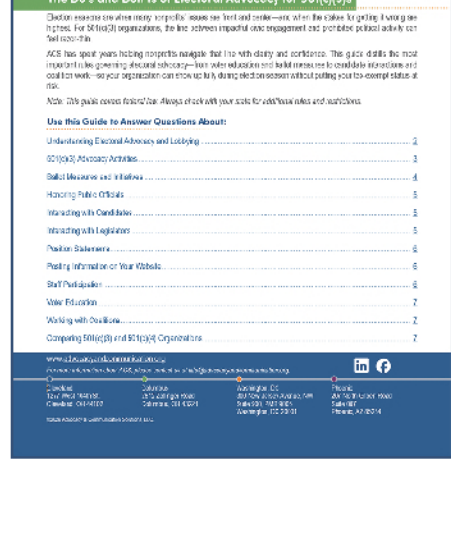
- **Advocacy** is an umbrella term and involves identifying, embracing, and promoting a cause.
- **Nonpartisan electoral advocacy** is performing advocacy efforts during an election year that do not support or oppose a specific candidate or party.
- **Lobbying** is advocacy that is intended to influence legislation. Only some methods of advocacy are considered lobbying. Although the terms are often used interchangeably, you must make record and report your lobbying activities as defined by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS).

Introducing ACS's Updated Electoral Advocacy Resources

The Do's and Don'ts of Electoral Advocacy for 501(c)(3)s

Not sure if a specific activity is allowed? This guide answers the questions we hear most often—from honoring public officials during an election year, to working with coalitions, to what your staff can do on their own time. It covers:

- The difference between nonpartisan electoral advocacy and lobbying
- What activities are permitted and prohibited under federal law
- How 501(c)(3) and 501(c)(4) rules compare side by side
- Specific guidance on ballot measures, candidate interactions, website posting, and more



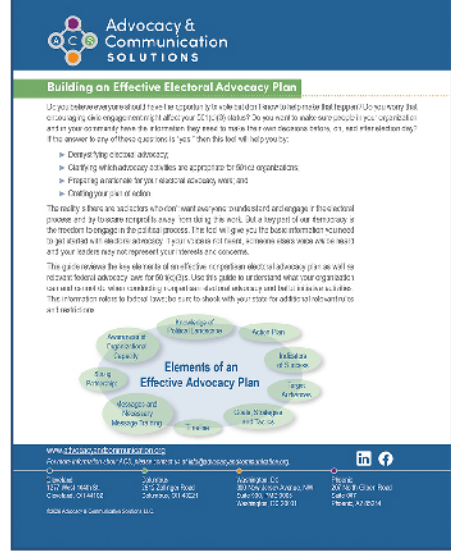
[Download the Do's and Don'ts Guide](#)

Want to know the rules if you are a school district or a foundation? Contact us to understand the few but important differences and distinctions.

Building an Effective Electoral Advocacy Plan

Knowing what you *can* do is step one. Actually doing it effectively is step two. This planning tool walks your organization through a step-by-step process to:

- Set a clear goal and define your target audiences
- Determine your internal capacity to help meet the goal
- Assess the external political landscape including trends and hot topics
- Develop your message and choose your strategies and tactics
- Build a realistic timeline from now through Election Day
- Measure your progress along the way



[Download the Electoral Advocacy Planning Guide](#)

Start Now—The Calendar Moves Fast

If primary elections are set to occur the coming weeks or months, there's no time to wait. Have more time? Great! Either way, use these resources to:

- Assess what your organization is ready to tackle
- Get your board and staff aligned on what's allowed
- Build your plan before the window gets any smaller

Download Both Tools

[Download the Do's and Don'ts Guide](#)

[Download the Electoral Advocacy Planning Guide](#)

Want more?

Want to learn how communication, strategy development, advocacy, or capacity building can move your organization forward? Need an expert for training sessions or conference presentations?

Contact one of our team members toll free at 1-877-372-0166, email us at info@advocacyandcommunication.org or visit our website at advocacyandcommunication.org



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