



Voter Education

Educating Voters on your Organization's Issues

As a general rule, it is entirely appropriate for a nonprofit organization to focus on the issues in structuring voter education, voter registration, and GOTV programs as its core mission will often include substantive positions on issues it considers important. The organization is not required to abandon that mission or withhold its expertise during an election year. A nonprofit properly may make the most of this heightened level of voter awareness by injecting such topics into the campaign debate, with the aim of increasing public support for its policy stances. The focus of the 501(c)(3)'s voter education efforts, however, must be limited to the discussion of the organization's agenda and not on the candidates' views on that agenda.

Thus, a 501(c)(3) may continue its normal public education programs during an election campaign period, even if the issues it addresses are controversial. Most of the difficult questions arise when the message starts near election time or is linked to the election in some way, either explicitly or implicitly. Issue advocacy during election periods must be handled with care. Misuse of issue ads is a subject that the Internal Revenue Service watches closely during an election period.

Voter education can also be undertaken by way of the following activities: candidate events, candidate questionnaires and voter guides, legislative scorecards and voting records, and issue advocacy and candidate education.

Preparing Voters for Election Day

In addition to educating voters on your organization's issues, nonprofits have an important role to play in preparing voters for Election Day by educating citizens about the voting process and their right as voters. Many voters may be unaware of new policies that have been implemented since the last time they voted, what documents are needed at the polls, the type of machines they will be using to vote, and their rights when they get to the polling station.

Nonprofit organizations can take a leading role in providing voters with information with the following activities:

- ✓ Provide voter registration deadlines, election dates, and state election office contact information;
- ✓ Remind voters which documents are needed at the polls, and their rights as voters;
- ✓ Post sample ballots prior to the election and show voters how to use a voting machine;
- ✓ Encourage your constituents to volunteer at the polls on election day;
- ✓ Provide voters with basic information on new election policies that have been implemented since the last time they voted.

This document provides general guidance only and should not be relied upon as legal advice.