



National Association for the
Education of Young Children

Advocacy Toolkit

The Dos and Don'ts of Electoral Advocacy

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Nonpartisan Electoral Advocacy for ECE Programs and Organizations

Early childhood education programs and organizations can play an important role during election seasons by making sure that child care and early learning are priority issues for voters and candidates alike.

Some programs—like those that are 501(c)(3)s—are required by law to engage only in electoral activities that are nonpartisan. Some other programs or organizations simply may not want to be partisan—they may want to talk with all of their staff and families about the importance of voting and they may want to engage with all candidates about the importance of early childhood education.

This resource shares some activities that show the difference between being nonpartisan and being partisan to help programs understand what they can and can't do.

Partners such as the Alliance for Justice and their Bolder Advocacy Program provide updated electoral advocacy trainings and information to the public. NAEYC encourages programs to review their resources at: afj.org/bolder-advocacy/

What You Can Do	What You Can't Do
Voter Registration • help new voters understand elections and the voting process • sponsor nonpartisan candidate forums or debates subject to limits on lobbying • distribute nonpartisan questionnaires to candidates • distribute nonpartisan materials on ballot measures • distribute nonpartisan materials regarding all candidates or regarding election process • attend town halls or other forums to raise the issue of the importance of early childhood education	Show Favoritism • endorse/oppose a candidate • rate candidates on their support for early childhood or specific issues (through a report card, rating card, etc...) • publicize which candidates share the nonprofit's views • nonprofit's leaders say positive/derogatory items re: a candidate at nonprofit events (e.g., board meeting) or in nonprofit publications • ask a candidate to pledge their support for a cause • compare and contrast candidate's responses to your organization's views

What You Can Do	What You Can't Do
Candidate Engagement • provide briefings to all candidates on the organization's issues	
Broad Voter Participation • help people get to the polls on election day • register people to vote	Voter Preference • targeting / registering voters for only one party
Can Spend Resources • activities that do not support a single party or issue • voter registration • voter education	No Nonprofit Resources • contribute or spend \$ to endorse/oppose • raise \$ for a candidate • let candidates use office space, equipment, mailing lists, etc.
• get out the vote • direct lobbying (within the limits of the IRS, state, and local laws) • ballot initiatives • grassroots lobbying	

Please note that local and state laws matter, and they change. It is important to check with your local registrar's office to understand what activities are allowed to help people get to the polls, support voting by mail, or support workers and voters on election day.

Adapted from "The Do's and Don'ts of Electoral Advocacy." Originally prepared for NAEYC by Advocacy and Communications Solutions, 2014.

Comparison of 501(c)(3) & 501(c)(4) permissible activities

(Source: Bolder Advocacy and Alliance for Justice, 2014)

Activity	501(c)(3) Public Charity	501(c)(4)
Lobby for/against legislation	Limited	Unlimited
Support/oppose ballot measures	Limited	Unlimited
Conduct public education and training sessions about participation in the political process	✓	✓
Educate candidates on issues within purview of the organization	✓ (must offer information to all candidates)	✓
Sponsor a debate between candidates, where all viable candidates are invited and given equal opportunity to speak on a broad range of issues	✓	✓
Distribute voter guides to the public that set out the candidates' views on a broad range of issues	X	✓
Distribute voter guides to the public that compare candidates on issues of importance to the organization	✓	✓
Rent mailing lists and facilities at fair market value to other organizations, legislators, and candidates	✓ (if rent, must allow any candidate to rent)	✓ (may rent to select candidates only)
Conduct nonpartisan get-out-the-vote activities, voter registration, and education drives	✓	✓
Conduct voter registration and GOTV activities based on party affiliation or how people will vote	X	✓
Conduct nonpartisan voter protection activities	✓	✓
Establish a 501(c)(4)	✓	✓
Endorse candidates and publicize endorsements	X	✓
Fund independent expenditures in support of or opposition to a candidate	X	✓
Make campaign contributions (monetary or in-kind)	X	Depends on state election law (prohibited for federal candidates)
Establish and pay for the administrative and fundraising costs of a connected political organization (separate segregated fund)	X	✓
Criticize sitting elected officials	✓ (may not attack personal characteristics or attack them in their status as a candidate)	✓
Compare organization's issue position with that of a candidate	X	✓
Connect organization's criticism of a public official to voting in an election	X	✓
Highlight the differences between candidates for public office on a high-profile issue on which the candidates have diverging views	X	✓
Ask candidates to sign pledges on any issue	X	✓
Post partisan political messages on social channels	X	✓

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