



Federal Funds and Voter Participation

Like all 501(c)(3) organizations, those that receive federal funds may not support or oppose candidates for public office. However, like other charities, federally funded agencies may still do a variety of other nonpartisan voter engagement activities.

However certain federal funding does come with added stipulations regarding an organization's voter engagement efforts.

Restricted Programs

The following programs who receive federal support have some restrictions. All others fall under normal 501(c)(3) guidelines for charities.

Recipients of Community Service Block Grants (Community Action Agencies)

Although CSBG recipients, such as Community Action Agencies (CAAs), cannot use CSBG funds for voter engagement, they can often still conduct some nonpartisan activities, particularly when using non-CSBG funds.

CAN

- ✓ Use non-CSBG funds for nonpartisan voter engagement activities, including voter registration.
- ✓ Have staff members employed with non-CSBG funds conduct voter engagement activities.

CANNOT

- ✗ Use CSBG funds for voter registration. However, a CAA may invite other organizations to register voters at their agency.
- ✗ Provide rides to the polls.

AmeriCorps

AmeriCorps members are prohibited from most active nonpartisan political activity.

CAN

- ✓ Make voter registration forms available on the premises for clients.
- ✓ Conduct nonpartisan voter engagement during non-working hours.

CANNOT

- ✗ Conduct voter registration activities during work hours or while performing work for the host organization.

Legal Services

Legal Services groups are generally prohibited by the Legal Services Act from conducting any kind of nonpartisan or partisan political activities.

Head Starts

A 2007 change in regulations made it easier for Head Starts to have a nonpartisan organization use their facilities to conduct voter registration.

CAN

- ✓ Keep parents and others informed of the how, when and where of voting, including helping them find their polling place on Election Day.
- ✓ Have an outside nonpartisan organization do voter registration at Head Start facilities during hours of operation.

CANNOT

- ✗ Have Head Start staff conduct voter registration activities while on the clock.
- ✗ Provide rides to the polls.

Who's Required To Do Voter Registration

The 1993 National Voter Registration Act (NVRA) requires several types of federally supported agencies—such as those that offer public assistance or primarily provide services to those with disabilities—to proactively offer the people they serve the opportunity to register to vote. See our factsheet on the NVRA for more information.

Resources

- AmeriCorps, 2520.65, "Prohibited activities in subtitle C programs" www.americorps.gov
- Community Action Program Legal Services, "Model Policies" www.caplaw.org
- Legal Services Corporation regulations, Part 1608 www.lsc.gov
- National Head Start Association, "Voter Education" www.nhsa.org