

Foundation Support for Election-Related Activities

It's Legal, It's Effective, It's Doable!

Public and private foundations may support nonpartisan election-related activities. Election years provide a window of opportunity for advocates. Candidates running for office are more likely to listen to organizations advocating for causes, and communities need help bringing the issues, programs and policies that affect their lives to the attention of candidates. Supporting election-related activities is an effective way for foundations to strengthen democracy by broadening the civic dialogue and giving a voice to underrepresented communities.

Foundations should consult with their lawyers for details, but in general foundations have a great deal of flexibility in election-year grantmaking. The key is not to fund or engage in projects that appear to support or oppose candidates for public office.

How Foundations Can Get Involved

Both public and private foundations can fund the following activities through general support grants, specific project grants, or use the foundation's resources to conduct various activities including:

- nonpartisan public education and training sessions about participation in the political process
- educate all of the candidates on public interest issues
- host a [candidate debate or forum](#)
- publish a [voting record or legislative scorecards](#) (with certain restrictions)
- prepare candidate [questionnaires and create voter guides](#) (with certain restrictions)
- canvass the public on issues
- rent at fair market value mailing lists and facilities to other organizations, legislators, and candidates (with certain restrictions)
- officials and employees acting in their [individual capacities](#) may work on political campaigns outside of work hours or using their available leave
- make general support grants to charities that are promoting ballot measure campaigns
- make [specific project grants](#) to charities that are promoting ballot measure campaigns and fund up to the non-lobbying portion of the proposal

What Public Foundations Can Do To Support Election-Related Activities

In addition to the activities described above, public foundations can also:

- lobby (up to its lobbying limits), including endorsing a ballot measure or working on a ballot measure campaign
- in addition to making general support grants and specific project grants, public foundations can make [earmarked lobbying grants](#) to charities that are promoting ballot measure campaigns
- fund and conduct nonpartisan get-out-the-vote and voter registration drives

What Private Foundations Can Do to Support Election-Related Activities

Private foundations may conduct, and fund public charities to engage in, the non-partisan voter engagement activities described above. Federal tax law imposes added restrictions on private foundation grants (or other expenditures) earmarked for [voter registration activities](#) and [lobbying](#), including endorsing or supporting ballot measure campaigns.

What Foundations Cannot Fund

Both public and private foundations are prohibited from funding or engaging in the following:

- endorsing candidates for public office
- making any candidate campaign contributions
- making expenditures on behalf of candidates
- restricting rental of their mailing lists and facilities to certain candidates
- asking candidates to sign pledges on any issue
- increasing the volume or amount of incumbent criticism as election time approaches
- publishing or communicating anything that explicitly or implicitly favors or opposes a candidate

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