



ELECTORAL LOBBYING FOR NONPROFITS

MARCH 2025

MAIN TAKEAWAYS

- **Electioneering & What Nonprofits Must Avoid**
 - 501(c)(3)s cannot endorse, oppose, or contribute to political campaigns.
 - Public statements, campaign donations, and nonprofit resources **cannot** support candidates—violations risk tax-exempt status.
- **Campaign Finance Laws & How They Impact Nonprofits**
 - NYC/NYS **matching funds** amplify small donations, but nonprofits with registered lobbyists face strict contribution limits.
 - **Bundling donations** (collecting multiple contributions for a candidate) triggers extra compliance requirements.
- **501(c)(3) vs. 501(c)(4): What's Allowed**
 - **501(c)(3)s** can do nonpartisan voter engagement but cannot engage in political campaigns.
 - **501(c)(4)s** can lobby, endorse candidates, and fund election ads, but donations are not tax-deductible.
- **Participating in Elections — With Guardrails**
 - Nonprofits can host **candidate forums** but must invite all candidates and remain neutral.
 - **Ballot measure advocacy** = lobbying, not electioneering—allowed but must be tracked.
 - Certain **federal grants** (AmeriCorps, CDBG, Head Start) prohibit nonprofits from conducting voter registration.
- **Hosting or Interacting with Political Candidates**
 - **Candidates may visit but cannot campaign**—discussions must focus on the nonprofit's mission.
 - **Galas & Events:** Elected officials must be invited in their official capacity, and all candidates must be included.
 - **Employees running for office** require clear policies on resource use, media representation, and unpaid leave.

TIPS FOR NONPROFIT LOBBYING

- **The "Candidate Visit" Rule Has an Exception**
 - A candidate can visit your nonprofit, but only if they don't talk about their campaign and all candidates are invited.
- **Doing Advocacy Without "Lobbying"**
 - Educating lawmakers on an issue without asking for a specific action does not count as lobbying.
- **Watch Out for "Bundling" Rules at Fundraisers**
 - If your nonprofit staff organizes or collects contributions for a candidate, you may have to file additional paperwork.
- **Timing Matters More Than You Think**
 - The legislative calendar effects when lawmakers are more receptive—don't waste effort reaching out when they're busy with elections
- **Hosting a Voting Site is a Safe Way to Get Involved**
 - If your nonprofit wants to support elections without risk, hosting a polling place is a nonpartisan way to contribute.

RESOURCES

Voter Engagement Guide

Nonprofit VOTE's Nonpartisan Voter Engagement Toolkit: [Download the guide](#)

NYC Campaign Finance Information

- NYC Campaign Finance Program Overview: [Learn more](#)
- NYC Campaign Contribution Limits (2025): [View limits](#)

New York State Campaign Finance

- NYS Contribution Limits: [Check state limits](#)