

# 2022 ELECTIONS ENGAGEMENT GUIDE

*Protecting Our Democracy*

JCPA | JEWISH COUNCIL  
FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS



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Jewish Council for Public Affairs (JCPA), a network of local Jewish community relations councils and national Jewish agencies, advocates for a just and pluralistic America, Israel's quest for peace and security, and global human rights

*On the cover: Buffalo Jewish Federation's "Great Buffalo Jewbilee". The Erie County (NYS) board of Elections staff was invited and many people were registered onsite. Source: Buffalo Jewish Federation.*

## INTRODUCTION

The right to vote and participate in our democracy is a core American Jewish value—a civic and religious duty. It is the bedrock of our nation. Only through maximum citizen participation in the electoral process can we achieve a democracy that is responsive to the needs and aspirations of its people.

The Jewish community has a rich and proud tradition of civic engagement and voter education, the bread-and-butter work of the community relations field. It ensures that has American Jews have a voice in shaping our country’s policies at every level of government. Jewish community relations councils (JCRCs) play an important role by fostering relationships with community partners and elected officials, educating the local Jewish community, and serving as a bridge between the two.

Critical elections at the federal, state, and local levels are just months away, with vital issues at stake, including voting rights and democracy, abortion access, climate change, and Israel. It is more important than ever that we educate ourselves and our communities about top issues, hold elected officials accountable, and most importantly, turn out to vote.

JCPA’s 2022 Election Engagement Guide offers resources, tools, and best practices for organizing in-person or virtual candidate engagement programs and voter education, both for the Jewish community and in conjunction with intergroup partners. Throughout your programming, we strongly encourage organizing outreach activities in partnership with the local chapters of JCPA member agencies, synagogues, and other Jewish organizations and/or local non-Jewish partners.

Before you get started, make sure to carefully review the Nonprofit Election Programming Guidelines that nonprofits must follow as part of their 501(c)(3) status. Remember to refer to it throughout your programming to ensure you adhere to all the rules.



*NAACP-led voter registration training session that JCRCP professionals and lay leaders attended in the greater Miami area. Source: Jewish Community Relations Council of the Greater Miami Jewish Federation.*

## CANDIDATE FORUMS

The campaign season is the perfect time for JCRCs to engage with incumbents and candidates who may go on to be elected officials, providing opportunities for voters to engage directly with those running for office. While it is important to reach out to candidates for federal office, it is crucial that JCRCs actively engage state and local candidates, such as state attorneys general, mayors, city council members, and sheriffs, who play a central role in developing the policies that directly impact the community. In addition, local elected officials often go on to seek higher office. Building strong relationships with these officials early in their careers can yield long-term benefits.

Hosting a virtual or in-person **candidate forum**, where candidates speak with voters and answer their questions, is one of the best ways to educate voters and form bonds with aspiring officeholders. Forums demonstrate the Jewish community's strong engagement and voice in public life to local civic leaders and those seeking elected office. Candidate debates tend to be high-profile, public events that unite community members and attract new participants to JCRCs. While nothing can replace the experience of an in-person forum, going virtual has advantages, including making your program more accessible to a wider audience.



*Debate held by the Baltimore Jewish Council of the candidates running for Baltimore County Executive.  
Source: Baltimore Jewish Council.*

### General Tips

- Invite all legally qualified candidates, through their campaign office or political party.
- If you are concerned about inviting a third party, the Internal Revenue Service offers additional guidance at [www.irs.gov/pub/irs-tege/eotopici02.pdf](http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-tege/eotopici02.pdf).
- Have a skilled moderator, such as a local newscaster or professor in your community or a seasoned Federation/JCRC leader.
- Provide candidates with equal time to speak and interact with voters, either at the same session or through a sequential format.
- Schedule the debate to last between 60 and 90 minutes.
- If virtual, hold via a commonly used platform, such as Zoom.
- Consider partnering with local Jewish communal organizations, such as the National Council of Jewish Women, Anti-Defamation League, Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, and Hadassah, as well as synagogues, JCCs, JVS/JFSs, and Hillels.

## Getting Started

Before reaching out to candidates, JCRCs should convene the participating partners to determine the event's rules and format. Once this is decided, it is important to invite all candidates to appear together. If they refuse, you can hold a sequential debate where each candidate appears directly after the other and answers identical questions in the same format.

Prepare five to six questions. Decide ahead of time the lay leaders or community members who will ask the questions. Keep in mind that the questions should reflect a broad range of topics focused on the JCRC's priority issues. We recommend four questions focused on domestic public policy issues and questions and two on international concerns. Choose a skilled moderator who will always remain neutral.

## Structuring the Debate

Set rules governing the length of opening remarks, as well as the amount of time allotted for responses and rebuttals to questions. The organizers must agree to work with the candidates to determine the program format before promoting it. Below is a suggested structure:

- JCRCs open the forum with a brief overview of their mission and the Jewish community's commitment to voter education as the reason for hosting the forum. This is an important step as it frames the discussion for the candidates and the audience and introduces them to your organization.
- Each candidate has three minutes for their opening statement. Remember to set the order in which candidates will speak ahead of time and ensure that each candidate is aware of the schedule.
- Ask the prepared questions. These can be asked by the moderator or by JCRC leaders. Question responses should be no longer than two minutes and candidates should take turns being the first to respond to questions. The opportunity for rebuttal is at your discretion but should be no more than one minute.
- We encourage audience questions but recommend that audience members submit their questions to a designated person to vet first.
- Each candidate should be given two to three minutes for their closing statement.

## LEADERSHIP MEETINGS WITH CANDIDATES

During election campaigns, JCRCs can organize a private meeting between Jewish leaders and candidates running for office to discuss policy priorities. These leadership meetings are an excellent opportunity to connect with candidates and future decision-makers in a more intimate setting with fewer legal restrictions than other types of election engagement activities, such as candidate debates. Hosting a leadership meeting is a means of demonstrating the organized Jewish community's civic engagement and power as a voting bloc. Consider working with community partners to showcase unity on an issue across a diverse range of constituent populations.

You may find candidates eager to participate in these types of meetings. Though each meeting will be with an individual candidate, it is imperative that you invite all candidates (Democrat and Republican) running for a given office and that the meetings with them have identical agendas. In races where there are too many candidates to reasonably host, you may set impartial criteria to narrow the field. For example, you may set a minimum percentage of the vote candidates must have received in the primaries to qualify.

Since this may be the candidate's first interaction with the community relations field, it is important to introduce them to the organizations participating beforehand. For in-person meetings, we recommend hosting the event at your own facility or another affiliated location, such as a Federation, synagogue, or Jewish Community Center.

Leadership meetings are usually scheduled for an hour, and feature the following components:

- The JCRC or Federation leader provides an overall introduction to the Jewish community or coalition and its priority issues.
- The candidate gives an opening presentation (typically five minutes).
- Community leaders ask candidates five to six policy questions set in advance. Questions should be brief.
- Attendees should also offer to be a resource to candidates and staff should they need any information pertaining to the Jewish community.
- At the end of the meeting, attendees should email the candidate or their staff a short packet offering general information about the JCRC/Federation or coalition, and an overview of the priority issues. Include a list of the meeting participants with titles and contact information. Remind the candidate of the offer to be a resource in the future.

## ISSUE NIGHTS

**Issue nights** or **issue townhalls** are public meetings designed to raise awareness about specific issues facing the community and provide balanced educational resources. Issue nights are an effective way to highlight particular topics and engage in election activism without involving candidates and are especially useful for communities that will be voting on ballot measures. Virtual issue nights can be a great way to educate voters who may not have traditionally attended an in-person forum in the past. Consider also using these forums to provide information to voters about how, when, and where to vote.

Programs typically feature a panel of experts representing a broad range of views on a particular subject and are often modeled after town hall meetings. JCRCs may wish to cosponsor issue nights with other local Jewish and non-Jewish organizations. This is an effective way to form new relationships and strengthen existing ones, particularly with issue-centric groups.



*Lance-Chivacula debate. Source: Jewish Federation of Greater MetroWest New Jersey.*

Issue nights are usually scheduled for 60 to 90 minutes, and feature the following elements:

- JCRC leadership introduce the program and welcome all of the participants.
- State that the event is intended to be educational only and that the JCRC does not endorse any candidate. Nothing at this event should be construed as an endorsement of any candidate in any way. However, JCRCs may take positions on public policy issues.
- After the host's introduction, present the issue topic and panel.
- Each speaker gives roughly 10 minutes of remarks.
- Moderator engages the speakers in 2-3 questions or speakers may pose questions to each other before proceeding to an audience question and answer period.

Suggested speakers include local community members, educators or academics, advocates, activists, and journalists. One benefit of virtual programming is that you have access to more potential speakers. However, it is still important to have local voices represented. Strive for a variety of voices and perspectives.

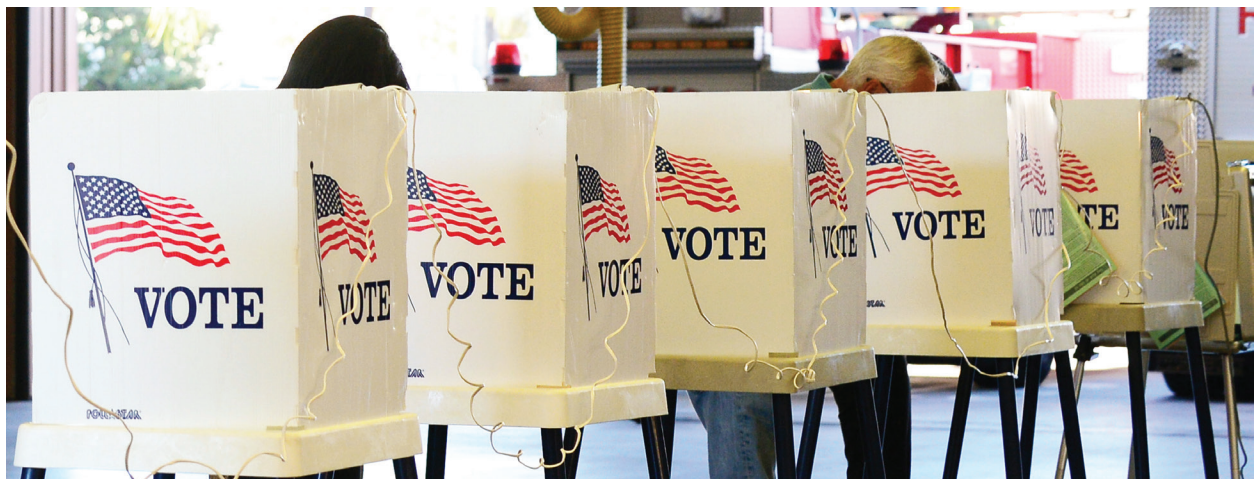
## MEET WITH YOUR LOCAL ELECTIONS OFFICIALS

Faith in election integrity is at an all-time low. Many voters lack an understanding of how elections work, leaving a vacuum that mis- and disinformation often fills. In addition, there is a coordinated campaign to harass and intimidate election officials – including violent threats and doxing. One of the best ways to combat these trends and boost confidence in election proceedings and results is to arrange meetings with your local elections officials. Consider organizing a public meeting with your Secretary of State or other local election official. This will give community members the opportunity to understand the elections process and engage directly with officials who can answer their questions.

Please report your meeting or event by email [jcpainfo@thejcpc.org](mailto:jcpainfo@thejcpc.org) so that we can track the community relations field's outreach to local elections officials.

## RECRUIT POLL WORKERS

There is a national decline in the number of poll workers nationwide, leading many poll sites to close down in 2020. Fewer poll sites mean longer lines and more barriers to reaching sites. JCRCs are in a great position to help recruit poll workers through October. Consider recruiting poll workers from your board members, employees, and constituents. Visit the [National Association of Secretaries of State](#) for more information on how to sign up.





## GET OUT THE VOTE



Get Out the Vote, or “GOTV,” is a critical component of civic engagement that is aimed specifically at increasing voter turnout. GOTV should start in the late summer and encompass a variety of activities like voter registration drives, phone banks, canvassing, and flyers reminding people to vote. These activities should be nonpartisan and geared toward turning out all eligible voters, not just those of a particular party or position.

Though more people are registered to vote, unfortunately, voter turnout is expected to be lower than in 2020. Almost 50% of eligible voters do not vote in presidential elections and even fewer do so during midterms like 2022 and less prominent state and local elections. Legislators and political parties know that the Jewish community votes.

GOTV programs are an excellent way to partner with other diverse communities in your area. JCPA recommends that JCRCs participate in the following activities:

- Place “Get Out the Vote” ads in local Jewish papers and work with local Federations to email “Get Out the Vote” reminders to your Jewish community.
- Post user-friendly information on how to register to vote on your website. Hand out flyers with this information at all events leading up to registration deadline. Registering to vote is now easier than ever before with the advent of the National Mail-In Voter Registration form. It is now possible to register over the internet at a number of different websites including [www.nass.org/can-i-vote](http://www.nass.org/can-i-vote), [www.eac.gov/voters/national-mail-voter-registration-form](http://www.eac.gov/voters/national-mail-voter-registration-form), and [www.rockthevote.org](http://www.rockthevote.org).
- Consider hosting a few voter registration drives, which is a great way to provide volunteer opportunities to both leaders and young people. If this is not feasible, we encourage JCRCs to consider partnering with local organizations that are organizing such drives and/or inviting them to register people at JCRC and Federation events.
- Assist seniors and those with disabilities in exploring their voting options.
- Collaborate with the local Hillel to encourage students to vote.
- Join or form a coalition with other community groups to engage in election integrity programs and to help marginalized populations vote.

## EDUCATE THROUGH JEWISH PRESS AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Working with the local Jewish media is a great way to educate and engage the community in elections. JCRCs are encouraged to partner with local Jewish press in their voter education efforts and make use of social media to ensure that candidates' positions on priority concerns are known to the community.

Partner with local Jewish newspaper staff to prepare a candidate questionnaire covering five to seven topics. Both your JCRC and the newspaper, and other Jewish organizations, should publish the responses in print and online, as well as on social media. Many people, especially younger generations, get their information primarily through social media, so it is critical to use online platforms as a component of your programming to reach your entire community.

### Social Media

Social media platforms are an effective vehicle to provide information on when and where to vote, such as how to find one's poll location, get an absentee ballot or contact their local election office for help. Be sure to remind people of registration or election deadlines and dates!



# RESOURCES

## ELECTION ENGAGEMENT TIMELINE

Use this timeline to help plan and schedule your programming.

### September

- ❑ Plan your candidate debates or sequential to be held in October. Extend invitations to all legally qualified candidates as soon as possible. Confirm cosponsors, platform or venue, and promotional matters. Secure the candidates and agreements on format, structure and media outreach.
- ❑ Plan “issue nights” to educate members in a non-partisan fashion about important policy issues, especially if your state is one with ballot initiatives. Secure cosponsors for the events.
- ❑ Send candidate questionnaires to all candidates for their input and agreement. (JCPA is available to assist you with questions.)

### October

- ❑ Recruit poll workers.
- ❑ Hold your candidate forum, leadership meeting, and/or issue night.
- ❑ Publish candidates’ questionnaire responses in local newspapers and on your website.
- ❑ Place an ad/article in synagogue, community, and organizational bulletins or newsletters reminding people to vote.

### November

- ❑ Remind everyone to vote on Tuesday, November 8.
- ❑ **VOTE ON NOVEMBER 8TH!**
- ❑ Invite speakers to discuss policy implications of the elections soon after Election Day.
- ❑ Plan an in-person or virtual “Meet-and-Greet” with newly elected officials for December or January and offer to be a resource.

## EVENT PROMOTION

- Create a Facebook event and post social media flyers to attract a variety of attendees. Make sure to share template invites and flyers with any participating partner organizations so they can advertise the event too.
- Write and send out a media advisory to invite members of the press to your event.
- Make sure you candidates know that the program is on the record when you invite them.
- Check in with any local partner organizations before the event to finalize any logistics items and talk through any questions.
- Be sure to send a final reminder email to your event's attendees the evening or morning before your event.

## BEST PRACTICES FOR VIRTUAL PROGRAMING

For any of the programs you are organizing, from forums to townhalls to leadership meetings, we suggest using the following best practices:

### Virtual Technology

- Explore different virtual platforms and select the one that makes the most sense for each event. For example, a Zoom webinar allows participants to see the candidates and the questions, but it does not allow for personal interaction with participants. Regular Zoom links allow the candidate to see all the participants, but the Q &A and chat box need to be managed. Be sure that your Zoom capacity can handle the amount of people you plan to attend. For larger audiences a webinar may be preferable.
- Assign someone to be responsible for the technology and another person to handle the questions and chat box. The chat box is a good way for participants to engage with each other on the content of the program and share information and thoughts. It is ideal to have someone monitor the box to ensure that people are civil and positive.
- Convene a final check-in call with everyone who has a role in your event. Walk through the event from start to finish to make sure everything is ready, and everyone is clear about their role. Anyone who is speaking or playing a role should be on the call
- It is critical to conduct a tech run-through with all your speakers to make sure they have a stable connection and to troubleshoot any potential issues. We recommend scheduling these calls at least a few hours before your event to ensure you have enough time to fix any issues that arise. Make sure your speakers are using the same setup they will be using during the event.
- Zoom security has been a concern of late. If you want to make sure your Zoom call is not disrupted, you can use a passcode. However, make sure test it out thoroughly first by doing practice meetings and be sure to include the passcode whenever you send out the Zoom link to participants or speakers.

## JCPA'S 2022 FEDERAL POLICY PRIORITIES

**Antisemitism and Hate:** Combat antisemitism and hate in all its forms.

- Improve tracking, response to, and prevention of hate crimes, white supremacist violence, and the spread of online hate, both in the U.S. and abroad.
- Pass the Domestic Terrorism Prevention Act to improve efforts to prevent domestic terrorism by white supremacists and other violent extremists.
- Confirm the appointment of a Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Antisemitism.

**Democracy and Voting Rights:** Strengthen our democratic institutions, extend representation, and expand access to the ballot box.

- Pass the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act to update and restore the Voting Rights Act.
- Oppose all efforts at the state level to subvert or undermine the integrity of election processes.
- Enact sweeping democracy reforms to prevent voter suppression, and reform campaign finance and ethics rules.

**Criminal Justice:** End mass incarceration and its disproportionate impact on people and communities of color and reorient the criminal legal system to reflect a rehabilitative and restorative justice approach to public safety.

- Support comprehensive, bipartisan sentencing reform that reduces mandatory minimums and applies retroactively.
- Enact police reform measures that improve use of force standards, police accountability, racial profiling, militarization, data collection, qualified immunity, and training.
- Provide for reentry support for essential needs, including by lifting any ban on access to social services and housing.
- Invest in restorative justice and noncarceral programs and social services, including education, housing, employment, health care, and other public benefits that make communities safer and more equitable.

**Racial Justice:** Most of our work intersects and overlaps with racial justice and equity.

- Seek equity and ensure the safety and wellbeing of all people in the U.S.
- Implement JCPA's [Racial Justice Platform](#), which outlines policies aimed at ending systemic racism and racial disparities in America. This platform, adopted in 2021, is a compilation of goals on criminal justice reform, economic opportunity, education, health, housing, jobs, and voting rights that must be pursued collectively to be effective.

**Policy issues on which JCPA will advocate, but may not take the lead:**

**Abortion Access and Reproductive Care:** Pass the Women's Health Protection Act, pass the Women's Health Protection Act, the Ensuring Women's Right to Reproductive Freedom Act, the Right to Contraception Act, and other legislation that protects access to abortion.

**Poverty and the Social Safety Net:** Provide the necessary assistance to ensure that every person is, regardless of income, able to sustain a basic standard of living, particularly as the country recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic. Increase access to and eligibility for critical social safety net programs, such as SNAP, TANF, Medicare and Medicaid, and Social Security. Expand and make permanent the Earned Income Tax Credit and the Child Tax Credit. Enact a federal minimum wage floor of at least \$15 an hour for all workers in the U.S.

**Immigration:** Restore and expand our asylum and refugee resettlement systems and improve the fairness of our immigration laws and regulations. End immigration detention and invest instead in community-based alternatives. Support a pathway to citizenship for all Dreamers and parents of Dreamers and all eligible undocumented immigrants currently residing in the U.S., as well as lawful permanent resident status for Temporary Protected Status holders and Deferred Enforced Departure recipients. Make unauthorized entry and reentry into the country a civil offense handled by the immigration system rather than a federal crime.

**Environmental and Climate Justice:** Take bold action to address international climate change, a key racial justice issue. Incorporate a strategy for fighting climate change and building resiliency into our pandemic recovery and invest in low-income and minority communities that suffer disproportionately from climate change both in the U.S. and internationally. Fully meet the U.S.'s obligations under the Paris Climate Agreement to reduce greenhouse emissions by 26%-28% in the first 10 years of the treaty. Enhance equal access to clean air, water, and green space.

**International Human Rights:** Restore U.S. leadership in the provision of international humanitarian aid and the prevention of genocide and other mass atrocities. Make genocide determinations regarding ongoing atrocities perpetrated against both Rohingya and Uyghur ethnic minorities, mandate strong economic sanctions, and provide humanitarian assistance.

**Israel:** Support a strong U.S.-Israel relationship and continue to promote efforts to secure a two-state solution for the Israeli and Palestinian peoples, where they can peacefully coexist. Implement the Middle East Partnership for Peace Act to expand peacebuilding and coexistence efforts between Arabs and Israelis, and secure U.S. funding to replenish the Iron Dome. Oppose BDS efforts at the local, state, and national levels.



## Staying Nonpartisan: Permissible Election Activities Checklist For 501(c)(3) Nonprofit Organizations

The federal tax code contains a single sentence that defines the prohibition of partisan political activities by 501(c)(3) charitable organizations. It states 501(c)(3) organizations are “prohibited from directly or indirectly participating in - or intervening in - any political campaign on behalf of or in opposition to any candidate for elective public office.”

Whether activities are considered partisan political activity depends on the “facts and circumstances” in each situation. What is clear it that there’s still a lot a 501(c)(3) can do on a nonpartisan basis to promote voter and civic engagement as part of its charitable and educational mission during the election season.

### Permissible Nonpartisan Activities - with common examples

The IRS affirmatively states that 501(c)(3) organizations may conduct voter engagement or connect with candidates on a nonpartisan basis. This includes encouraging voter participation, educating voters, and talking to candidates about issues. 501(c)(3) organizations may:

#### 1. Conduct or Promote Voter Registration

- Conduct a voter registration drive at your nonprofit or in your community.
- Encourage people to register to vote in your communications, on your website or at events.

#### 2. Educate Voters on the Voting Process

- Provide information on when and where to vote - such as finding their poll location, getting an absentee ballot or contacting their local election office for help.
- Remind people of registration or election deadlines and dates.

#### 3. Host a Candidate Forum

- Sponsor a candidate forum with other community partners for all the candidates.
- Encourage your community to attend your forum or another candidate forum sponsored by a trusted partner.

#### 4. Create a Candidate Questionnaire

- Submit questions to all the candidates in a race on issues of interest to your nonprofit.
- Publish the candidate’s full answers on your website or in a nonpartisan voter guide.

#### 5. Distribute Sample Ballots or Nonpartisan Voter Guides

- Display or provide an official sample ballot that highlights state elections common to all voters in your state
- Distribute a nonpartisan voter guide from trusted partner about what is on the ballot.

#### 6. Continue Issue Advocacy during an Election

- Continue your regular advocacy or lobbying activities during the election period, as long it is related to pending legislation on issues you have a history of working on and not timed or structured to influence how people vote.

#### 7. Support, Oppose or Host a Community Conversation on a Ballot Measure

*Unlike candidates for office, nonprofits may take sides on a ballot measure. IRS rules treat this as a lobbying activity, not electioneering.*

- Educate the public on your position within your normal lobbying limits.
- Have your board take a position for or against a question on the ballot.
- Engage your community leaders and residents in a conversation about the issues at the county and state level.

*Note: If you make a significant investment of staff and funds on ballot measure advocacy, you must track spending as lobbying expenses and check your state’s campaign spending disclosure laws for ballot questions.*

#### 8. Encourage People to Vote

- Send reminders to your staff, clients and constituents about voting in the next election and why voting is important.
- Nonprofits may conduct any type of get out the vote activity to encourage people to vote as long as it is about participating as a voter and not suggesting who to vote for.



## Staying Nonpartisan: Permissible Election Activities Checklist

For 501(c)(3) Nonprofit Organizations

### The partisan prohibition means a 501(c)(3) organization or a staff member speaking or acting on behalf of the nonprofit may not:

- Endorse a candidate.
- Make a campaign contribution or expenditure for or against a candidate.
- Rate or rank candidates on who is most favorable to your issue(s).
- Let candidates use your facilities or resources, unless they are made equally available to all candidates at their fair market value - such as a room commonly used for public events.

#### What does it mean to rank or rate a candidate?

Anything that indicates which candidates you think are better or worse on your issues could be seen as a partisan endorsement. This would include things like giving candidates letter grades (A, B, C, etc.), but even commentary that compares candidates' views to yours is a problem. Take, for example, a voter guide you create to publicize where candidates stand on an issue that also includes your organization's position on the issue. This would tell the voter which candidates you believe gave the "correct" answer. When you circulate or publicize a nonpartisan guide giving candidate positions, keep your opinion out of it. Let voters use the information presented to make their own decisions.

The main principle for being nonpartisan is to conduct voter engagement and education in the context of your educational and civic mission and not in a way intended to support or oppose a specific candidate. So if you hold a candidate forum or offer to brief the candidates on issues of importance to your organization, make sure you treat the candidates equally. When you do voter registration or remind people to vote, do it in the context of the importance of voting – encouraging active citizenship and giving voice to the communities you serve.

#### Resources

Nonprofits, Voting and Elections: A 501(c)(3) Online Guide to Nonpartisan Voter Engagement, [www.nonprofitvote.org/nonprofits-voting-elections-online](http://www.nonprofitvote.org/nonprofits-voting-elections-online)

Federal Funds and Voter Registration: for organizations receiving Community Service Block Grants or AmeriCorps/National Service programs, [www.nonprofitvote.org/all-resources/](http://www.nonprofitvote.org/all-resources/)

If you have a question, contact Nonprofit VOTE at [info@nonprofitvote.org](mailto:info@nonprofitvote.org) or Bolder Advocacy at [advocacy@afj.org](mailto:advocacy@afj.org). Or visit online:

- Nonprofit VOTE – [www.nonprofitvote.org](http://www.nonprofitvote.org)
- Bolder Advocacy – [www.bolderadvocacy.org](http://www.bolderadvocacy.org)



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JCPA | JEWISH COUNCIL  
FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS

25 Broadway, Suite 1700  
New York, NY 10004  
(212) 684-6950

