

# What are the rules, anyway?

A GUIDE FOR **CHARITIES** TO ENGAGE AND ADVOCATE IN & AFTER ELECTIONS



&

IM△GINE  
CANADA



# Charities can (and are encouraged to) make their views heard during election campaigns - and beyond!

Our organizations are an important bridge, connecting governments to the people affected by government policy.

Public policy directly impacts your organization.  
How you go about your work, what you can do, how you do it, and why your work is needed.

Organizations need to be aware of Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) and Elections Canada rules that may affect them.

#weadvocate  
#nonprofitsadvocate

# I'm a charity



Things you can do  
[Click through](#)



Make sure you...  
[Click through](#)



Things you can't  
do  
[Click through](#)

# Know the rules, get involved, and spread the word

## KNOW THE RULES

Be aware of  
CRA and  
Elections  
Canada rules  
and their  
effects.



## GET INVOLVED

Make your  
voices and  
views heard  
during election  
campaigns and  
beyond.



## SPREAD THE WORD

Share and  
promote your  
advocacy work  
in your  
community and  
online.





# Things you can do

## *Ways to engage anytime*

- ✓ Meet with your elected officials at a meeting or an event you are hosting.
- ✓ Organize a town hall to hear from residents on a critical issue.
- ✓ Respond to government consultations or call for information.
- ✓ Encourage civic engagement, especially for people and communities who face barriers to getting involved.
- ✓ Give information about your charity's policy position on issues related to your mission and communities you serve.
- ✓ Publish op-eds on issues related to your mission.
- ✓ Use your social media platforms, website, and email lists to share issues, stories of impact and voices of your communities.
- ✓ Run campaigns to increase awareness and understanding of community challenges and opportunities for government actions.



# Things you can do

## *Ways to engage during election season*

- ✓ Provide information about party platforms. But don't endorse any of them.
- ✓ Give information about how MPs have voted on a particular piece of legislation (or elected officials at other levels of government).  
But don't single out MPs.
- ✓ Give information about your charity's position on issues (Note: Special rules apply if you are doing paid advertising).
- ✓ Give information to political candidates about your charity's positions.
- ✓ Publish op-eds on issues.
- ✓ Use your social media platforms, website, email lists to share election information.
- ✓ Invite candidates to visit your facility or program (candidates must pay their own costs). Nonpartisan rules require you to invite all candidates.
- ✓ Host an all-candidates debate.
- ✓ Ask questions at an all-candidates debate.



# Advertising during an election



## What's okay?

### Your standard paid advertising that is unrelated to the election.

For example, fundraising appeals, or advertising your services or upcoming events. No restrictions and no need to register.

### General election issue messages.

For example, "Think about the arts when you vote."

"Let's remind the parties that nonprofits are key to creating thriving communities."

"Nonprofits and charities make democracy stronger."



## When do you have to register as a third party advertiser?

**When you spend more than \$500 doing issue advertising**, taking a position on an issue associated with one or more parties or candidates.

This includes paid ads on social media sites, like Facebook ads or Google ads.

# What is issue advertising ?



**When your charity or nonprofit advertises about a specific issue that may be associated with a party or candidate.**



**Issue advertising (a type of “election advertising”) is regulated by Elections Canada as soon as the election is officially called.**



**This doesn't mean you're supporting or opposing a candidate, since you can't do that under CRA rules anyway.**

*“Issue advertising is the transmission of a message to the public during an election period that takes a position on an issue with which a candidate or registered party is associated, without identifying the candidate or party in any way.”*



# How might this look in the real world?



An environmental charity wants to promote the message: “Think about the environment when you vote.”

Action: It wouldn't need to register.



The charity wants to run a specific campaign with paid ads: “Canada needs a carbon tax to fight climate change. Send a message with your vote.”

Action: It would need to register.

**Why is it issue advertising?** Because there is at least one federal party that is known to be in favour of a carbon tax, and at least one federal party that is known to be against a carbon tax. Elections Canada would consider this to be advertising on an issue “associated” with a candidate or registered party.

This wouldn't be a problem with the CRA because:

- It's an issue **related to the organization's purpose.**
- It's **an issue on which the charity has been active,** and if the charity's views happen to be similar to one or more parties.
- You are **not telling people who to vote for or against.**



# Make sure you...



Keep it nonpartisan!  
Don't show bias for one party, candidate or elected official, either directly or indirectly.



Think through the pros and cons of different approaches to advocacy.



You want to continue to reflect your charity's values and those of your supporters, funders, and donors..



# Things you can't do during elections



Give staff paid time to work on political campaigns.



Give any financial support for a party or candidate, including donations or tickets to fundraisers.



Use any of your charity's resources – including volunteers – to support or oppose a party or candidate.



Give unequal treatment to parties or candidates. For example, if you invite a candidate to an event you must invite all candidates.



Encourage your communities to vote for or against a party or candidate.

*"The Income Tax Act prohibits a charity from devoting any part of its resources to the direct or indirect support of, or opposition to, any political party or candidate for public office."*

[Draft guidance CG-027 - Public policy dialogue and development activities by charities](#)

# Resources



**Elections Canada:** [Tools for Third Parties](#), including registration forms and financial forms  
[Third party roadmap](#)



Elections Canada **Political Entities Support Network**

1-800-486-6563

Monday to Friday 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. (Eastern Time)



[CRA guidance on P2D2A](#)

# Who else is doing it?

Get inspired by these organizations doing advocacy!

ABC Life Literacy Canada: [A Guide for Voting](#)

Apathy is Boring: [The Canadian VOTE Coalition](#)

[The Canadian-Muslim Vote](#)

Democratic Engagement Exchange: [Vote Popups](#)

Diabetes Canada: [Diabetes 360° Strategy](#)

UNICEF Canada: [Vote for every child](#)

# Brought to you by



This is a collaboration to support and encourage charities across Canada to engage in advocacy and elections.

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