

What are the rules, anyway?

A GUIDE FOR **NONPROFITS** TO ENGAGE AND ADVOCATE IN ELECTIONS



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

#weadvocate

#nonprofitsadvocate

I'm a nonprofit



Things you can do
[Click through](#)



Being nonpartisan
[Click through](#)



Advertising during
an election
[Click through](#)

Know the rules, get involved, and spread the word

KNOW THE RULES

Be aware of
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 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 nonprofit'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 action.



Things you can do

Ways to engage during election season

- ✓ Provide information about party platforms. But don't endorse any of them if you want to be nonpartisan.
- ✓ 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 if you want to be nonpartisan.
- ✓ Give information about your nonprofit's position on issues (Note: Special rules if you are doing paid advertising).
- ✓ Give information to political candidates about your nonprofit's positions.
- ✓ Publish op-eds on issues.
- ✓ Use your social media platforms, website, and email lists to share election information.
- ✓ Invite candidates to visit your facility or program (candidates must pay their own costs). You should invite all candidates to be nonpartisan.
- ✓ Host an all-candidates debate. Ask questions at an all-candidates debate.



What does it mean to be nonpartisan?

Nonpartisan information does not favour or criticize a specific political party, candidate or elected official.

Nonprofits are **not** subject to rules that apply to charities by the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA). This includes rules around being nonpartisan. The decision should be based on how best to support your nonprofit's mission.

So, as a nonprofit, you have a choice:

Be
nonpartisan

OR

Support/
oppose a
candidate or
political
party

[Go to: Things to consider in your approach to advocacy and engaging in elections.](#)

[Go to: What you need to know about paid advertising.](#)

[Next](#)



Being nonpartisan



Do provide equal opportunity by talking with all candidates or elected officials and policy makers relevant to your issue.



Don't advocate for any political party or assume how a party will react before engaging them.



Don't instruct or attempt to influence constituents as to which candidate or party to support.



Don't make partisan statements or endorse a party, for example, by posting their photos on your website.



Don't do report cards that obviously favour or are critical of a particular party or candidate. Stick to the policies, not the people or parties.



It's ok to provide analysis of party platforms or positions on issues.



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 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.

“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.”

[Elections Canada](#)

[Next](#)

How might this look in the real world?



A nonprofit serving refugees and newcomers wants to promote the message:

“Refugees are welcome here.”

Action: It wouldn't need to register.



The nonprofit wants to run a specific campaign with paid ads:

“Canada needs to continue offering a safe place for all refugees. 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 known to be in favour of accepting refugees, and at least one federal party that is known to be in favour of tightening the rules for refugees entering Canada.

Elections Canada would consider this to be advertising on an issue “associated” with a candidate or registered party.

How do you register as a third party advertiser?



You must register with Elections Canada once your issue advertising reaches \$500, during the pre-election and election period (For 2019, that means starting June 30, 2019).

- This spending includes the cost of print, radio, or television advertisements or flyers that are handed out during door-to-door canvassing, and promoted social media posts.
- This doesn't include use of your existing website or e-mail list or regular use of your social media accounts (as long as it is not paying to promote posts).



Third party campaigns with spending **over \$500** need to be paid for from a dedicated bank account.



Spending more than \$10,000? Campaigns costing more than \$10,000 must have an audit statement and may also require interim reporting before election day.

Financial information will need to be submitted to Elections Canada after the election.

Spending limits on issue advertising

Registered third parties are subject to spending limits:

- No more than \$4,386 in any single federal constituency
- No more than \$511,700 overall



An organization cannot accept funding from foreign sources for its election advertising.

[Tools for Third Parties](#)

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)

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 nonprofits across Canada to engage in advocacy and elections.

The information contained in this tool is intended solely to provide general guidance on matters of interest for the personal use of the reader, who accepts full responsibility for its use. The information is provided with the understanding that the authors are not engaged in rendering legal or other professional advice or services. As such, it should not be used as a substitute for consultation.