

CT COMMUNITY NONPROFIT ALLIANCE



formerly



2016 Guide to Election Season Activities for Nonprofits

June 22, 2016

The stakes are high for nonprofits this election season. Before new candidates are sworn into office and others are re-elected, it is imperative that nonprofits engage with candidates to highlight the important work that you do and the issues that impact you and the individuals you serve.

Election related activities are part of larger continuum of civic engagement for many in the nonprofit community. By engaging voters and candidates this election season, nonprofits will further their missions, have a positive impact on communities, build relationships with potential and current elected officials, and increase the general understanding of policy issues important to nonprofits and philanthropy.

This election season, we urge you to consider organizing one or more of the following events:

- [Candidate forums](#)
- [Site visits/facility tours with candidates](#)
- [Voter registration drives](#)

See below for more information on how to plan for these types of events, engage candidates and voters, and comply with state and federal laws throughout the process. If you are interested in pursuing other types of activities, please [share your plans with us](#) so we can support your efforts!

As you plan for these activities, keep the following dates in mind:

- Primary Election Day: **August 9**, 2016
- National Voter Registration Day: **September 27**, 2016
- Voter Registration Deadline: **November 1**, 2016
- Election Day: **November 8**, 2016



Give Candidates a Tour

An easy way to engage candidates firsthand is to invite them to your facility for a tour. Whether they are running for the first time or have served for years, it is important for them to experience the work that you do, meet your clients and staff, and hear how you fit into the fabric of your community and our state. Keep facility tours simple and short; limit them to an hour or two and make arrangements beforehand for candidates to meet with your staff and individuals that you serve who are comfortable sharing their stories.

Host a Candidate Forum

Hosting a candidate forum is an excellent way for candidates to hear about the issues directly from their constituents. A “Town Hall” format allows your staff, the individuals you serve, and other community members to ask candidates questions about issues that are important to them. Depending on your focus, the forum can serve to increase awareness about your organization and the community that you support, or address critical policy issues and funding needs. For more information on planning a candidate forum and keeping the event nonpartisan, [click here](#).

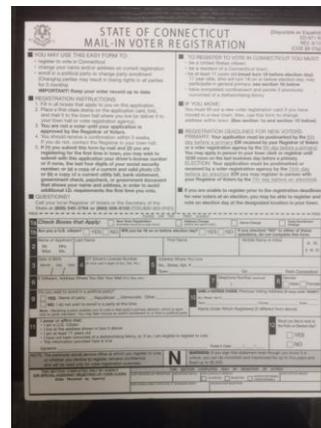
Register People to Vote

Voting is an essential activity nonprofits should embrace by encouraging and educating their staff, clients and other supporters. Voter registration efforts have a significant impact on voter participation, and as long as you [remain nonpartisan](#), you can and should engage in this work. In a presidential election, nine out of ten newly registered voters will turn out to vote. Research by Nonprofit VOTE demonstrates that when nonprofits talk to and assist their clients with registering to vote, individuals are much more likely to vote and more likely to talk to their friends and family about voting.

Registering to vote in Connecticut is usually as easy as a few clicks. You can encourage your staff to [register online here](#) and host a voter registration drive with a few laptops or tablets. To access resources and learn more about how to organize a voter registration drive, [click here](#).

Connecticut voting resources:

- [Voter Registration Toolkit for Staff](#)
- [CT Secretary of the State Voter Information Page](#)
- [Register to Vote Online \(requires ID from DMV\)](#)
- [English Language Voter Registration Form](#)
- [Spanish Language Voter Registration Form](#)
- [Election Day Voter Registration Locations by Town](#)
- [Voting by Absentee Ballot](#)
- [Voting with a Disability Fact Sheet](#)



Rules to Follow

However you engage with candidates, make sure you follow the simple rules outlined below. CT Community Nonprofit Alliance staff is ready and excited to help you plan, organize and execute these events.

As long as you maintain strict nonpartisanship, do not explicitly or implicitly endorse a candidate and provide all sides with equal access and opportunity, the IRS allows 501(c)(3) organizations to engage in

the political process. By following a few easy steps, you can educate candidates and engage your constituents in the political process.

Candidate Appearances: Educating current and potential elected officials about what you do is essential to your advocacy efforts. If you are planning to host candidates at your organization, follow these simple rules and guidelines:

- You must invite all candidates for a particular office. They don't all have to attend, but they must be invited.
- For both a candidate forum and a site visit, we recommend hosting opposing candidates on different dates. This will ensure a productive conversation and may result in better attendance from each candidate.
- You must give each candidate equal opportunity and provide a similar venue, time and presentation format for each event.
- You may also invite elected officials who are candidates to appear in their official capacity. If you do so, make sure that the candidate is chosen to speak solely for reasons other than their candidacy. While you can't control what they say, take steps to ensure that the atmosphere of the event is kept free of campaign activity.
- Finally, candidates are free to arrive uninvited to a public event you host. If that occurs, take care that there is no actual or implied endorsement.

Voter Registration: There are tens of thousands of people that work at nonprofits in Connecticut and hundreds of thousands who are served. Our power can be realized if everyone is encouraged to vote, and you can help encourage them. Make sure you follow these simple rules and guidelines:

- Staff and volunteers can help people register to vote, but must do so in a nonpartisan way. If someone asks for information about candidates, staff and volunteers should refer him or her to information from newspapers and other unbiased sources.
- Staff and volunteers may not suggest which candidate to support or what party to join and may not withhold registration from anyone.
- The IRS specifically cites voter registration as an appropriate nonpartisan activity for a 501(c)(3).

Additional Resources

- [Voter Registration: At Community Health Centers in 2016](#) (06.23.16)
- [What Staff Can't Do: Political Activities On and Off the Clock](#) (06.30.16)
- [Work with Candidates in 2016! Candidate Forums, Appearances and More](#) (04.28.16)
- [Voter Registration in 2016: Registering Your Clients and Constituents to Vote](#) (04.14.16)
- [Being Nonpartisan: Guidelines for 501\(c\)\(3\) Nonprofits](#) (03.17.16)
- [The Benefits of Voting: Making the Case for Nonprofit Voter Outreach](#) (02.25.16)
- [Getting Started in 2016: Nonpartisan Voter Engagement at Your Nonprofit](#) (02.11.16)
- [Nonprofit VOTE Resource Guide](#)
- [Alliance for Justice: Bolder Advocacy](#)
- [Nonprofit VOTE](#)
- [Rock the Vote](#)

