

eliminating racism empowering women

ywca

Basic Rules for 501(c)3 Organizations (C3) and Elections What Associations Can and Cannot Do

Voting is the most important tool that women and people of color have to help shape the policies that affect their lives and those of their loved ones. Guaranteeing all citizens the right to vote is an important part of our commitment to eliminating racism and empowering women. The YWCA has been working toward securing fair and full voting rights for all Americans since the early 1900s.

Today, in city, state and federal elections, YWCAs continue this important work by implementing Get Out The Vote (GOTV) campaigns in their communities. Below are some guidelines for local YWCA associations in conducting activities during the 2008 election season.

YWCAs Can:

- Conduct nonpartisan voter registration and GOTV efforts.
- Conduct nonpartisan “candidate forums” on issues of concern to its constituency. The forum must be open to all candidates, conducted in a balanced way, and include a nonpartisan panel of questioners.
- Make substantive issue-oriented presentations to platform committees, campaign staffs, candidates, media, and the public.
- Take advantage of the increased attention that policy issues enjoy during an election period to focus public attention on C3 issues and agenda.
- Conduct nonpartisan training on issues and organizational skills.
- Report to its normal constituency, as part of continuing advocacy (lobbying), on votes of all legislators (not just candidates) on issues of interest to the association, and indicate whether they support the position.
- Allow staff to participate as individuals in political campaigns, on their own time and not as representatives of the organization.

YWCAs Cannot:

- Give endorsements to candidates for office - either explicitly or implicitly.
- Make contributions to candidates or parties (including “in-kind” contributions, publicity, and staff time, use of facilities or assets).
- Establish, fund, or manage a Political Action Committee (PAC).
- Evaluate candidate positions (except in certain circumstances where the evaluation pertains to a candidate’s position on pending legislation that is the subject of lobbying by the organization).
- Coordinate activities with a campaign.

Key Points:

Activities must be nonpartisan. As a nonprofit 501(c)3 organization, YWCAs cannot engage in activities that appear to directly or indirectly influence a campaign for elected public office at any level of government. YWCAs can, however, remind voters that every vote counts and elected officials decide public policies.

Review the voter registration and voter education laws in your state *before* engaging in any voter registration or education activities. For a summary of recent changes to state law that may impact your association’s ability to participate voter registration please visit Brennan Center for Justice for their law summary at: http://www.brennancenter.org/page/-/d/download_file_50479.pdf. To find the laws regarding elections and nonprofit participation, contact the election commission in your state. (See Appendix A, State Registration Information.)

Additional Resources:

Alliance for Justice: <http://www.afj.org/>