Election Year DOs and DON’Ts

Although NAACP units are 501(c)(4) tax-exempt organizations, the national NAACP is a 501(c)(3) organization which is restricted in how it can assist people in registering or getting out to vote. In addition, NAACP policy specifically prohibits units’ engagement in political campaign activity. This means that NAACP units cannot endorse or oppose candidates running for public office, make financial or in-kind contributions to candidates, political parties, or PACs, or engage in other activity that is designed or targeted to influence the outcome of any candidate election.

However, the prohibition against NAACP units being involved in political campaign activity does not mean that they have to sit out of the upcoming election. In fact, the NAACP can and does engage in a wide range of election-related activity without jeopardizing its tax-exempt status -- from sponsoring voter registration drives and educating people about the issues to encouraging people to vote and giving them rides to the polls on Election Day -- **as long as the activity is nonpartisan.**

So to summarize: because of the law and long term NAACP policy, NAACP units do not engage in partisan political activity. However, the NAACP has a long and proud history of engaging in nonpartisan voter registration and get out the vote efforts.

To be conducted in a nonpartisan way, any NAACP-sponsored voter registration, education, and turnout work for elections of candidates cannot show any bias for or against political candidates, parties, or views. This means that everyone who wants to register for an election or has signed up for a ride to the polls, must be allowed to do so, regardless of party affiliation or whether they agree with the NAACP’s position on particular issues. **However, NAACP units are permitted to direct their voter registration, education, and turnout work toward demographic groups that have been disadvantaged or underrepresented historically**, such as African Americans,
Latinos and other people of color, low-income people, the homeless, women, students, immigrants, etc.

When discussing issues in connection with its nonpartisan election-related work, NAACP units should not discuss them in a way that reveals their positions on the issues or that encourages people to support or oppose certain public policies. For example, an NAACP unit could print and distribute a flyer that said: “The next election will determine the future of affirmative action in our state. Register today and let your voice be heard,” or “The upcoming election will affect public education, taxes, welfare reform, housing, and human services. Register to vote and have an impact on the decisions affecting your life.” But an NAACP unit could not distribute a flyer that said: “Oppose vouchers. Register to vote here,” or “Register to vote and join us in standing up for affirmative action.”

**NOTE:** The prohibition on NAACP units being involved in political campaign activity does not prohibit them from supporting or opposing ballot measures, i.e. referenda, initiatives, constitutional amendments, and other legislative issues decided directly by a vote of the electorate. Work on ballot measures is considered to be lobbying – not political campaign activity – and NAACP units are permitted to lobby. Therefore, the restrictions on nonpartisan communication described in this manual only apply to the NAACP’s ability to do election-related work in connection with candidate elections – not to work done in relation to ballot measures pending before the voters.
Do...

- Sponsor voter registration drives – post the following disclaimer at any NAACP unit-sponsored voter registration drive:

  **Disclaimer should read:** “Our voter registration services are available without regard to the voter’s political preference. Information and other assistance regarding registering or voting, including transportation and other services offered, shall not be withheld or refused on the basis of support for or opposition to particular candidates, parties, or policy positions.”

- Inform people of their right to vote, explain how to work in an election campaign, or tell them when and where to vote on Election Day.

- Distribute material educating voters about the issues at stake in the election – include the following disclaimer on any voter education material distributed by the NAACP unit.

  **Disclaimer should read:** “This voter education material is nonpartisan and is in no way intended to reflect an endorsement for, or opposition to, any candidate, political party, or PAC.”

- Target African Americans, Latinos and other people of color, low-income people, homeless people, women, immigrants, and other underrepresented or disadvantaged groups for your voter registration, education, or GOTV activity.
- Invite all candidates running for a particular office to attend a candidate debate at a NAACP unit event to discuss their views and answer questions posed by members of the community.

- Produce and distribute unbiased candidate questionnaires covering a range of issues that are based on written surveys of all candidates.

- Invite a candidate to speak at a NAACP unit event -- as long as you extend the same invitation to all other candidates in the race.

- Urge voters by phone, door-to-door canvass, or public service announcements to remember to vote on Election Day.

- Provide voters with rides to the polls on Election Day.
DON’Ts – Partisan Election Related Activity that NAACP Units CANNOT DO

Do Not…

• Make oral or written statements supporting or opposing a political candidate, party, or PAC.

• Tell individuals, communities or voters which candidates they should vote for.

• Contribute money to, or provide services for, a political candidate, party, or PAC.

• Work with a political candidate, party, or PAC in planning or carrying out nonpartisan voter registration, education, or turnout activity.

• Allow a political candidate, party, or PAC to distribute campaign or other partisan materials on the NAACP unit’s property.