



Political Activity Guidelines for Communities of Faith

Can United Church communities of faith engage in political activity during an election?

The United Church of Canada and its communities of faith can participate in political activity during the election **but we cannot be partisan**. During an election United Church communities of faith must register as third parties if they spend over \$500 during the election period on election advertising.

How can United Church communities of faith become involved in political activity?

United Church communities of faith as charities can do the following as they relate to their charitable purpose and provide a public benefit:

Do

- provide information to members and the general public about public policy (the laws, policies, and decisions of a government in Canada or a foreign country).
- conduct research into public policy, distribute that research, and discuss its findings with the media and others.
- disseminate opinions: may express opinions on matters as a way of participating in the development of public policy. These must draw on research and evidence and obey hate speech laws and other legitimate restrictions on freedom of expression.
- advocacy: may advocate to keep or change a law, policy, or decision of any level of government in Canada or a foreign country.
- mobilize others: may call on supporters or the general public to contact politicians of all parties to express their support for, or opposition to, a particular law, policy, or decision of any level of government in Canada or a foreign country.
- make representations: in writing or verbally to elected officials, public officials, political parties, and candidates and may release such materials publicly. (Note that a charity engaging in this type of activity with the federal government may be required to register as a lobbyist organization if the cumulative lobbying activities of all employees constitute 20 percent or more of one person's duties a month; <https://lobbycanada.gc.ca/eic/site/012.nsf/eng/00403.html>. Provincial regulation on lobbying may be different.)
- provide forums and convene discussions: may invite competing candidates and political representatives to speak at the same event. This includes organizing an all-candidates meeting, **taking due diligence to invite candidates from all parties**.
- communicate on social media: charities may express their views, and offer an opportunity for others to express their views, with regard to public policy, on social media, or elsewhere.

United Church communities of faith as charities cannot engage in partisan activity.

Don't

- promote or oppose a political party, candidate, or party leader, including through social media campaigns, get-out-the-vote activities, reaching electors by telephone, or participating in door-to-door canvassing to promote a party.
- promote or oppose a political party, candidate, or party leader by naming a political party or person, using the party's logo, or showing a photograph of the candidate.
- engage in social media campaigns that encourage voters to engage in strategic voting in electoral districts with close races.
- indirectly refer to a party or person—for example, by using a social media post to encourage voters to vote strategically in your district—because this can be seen as partisan.
- make a donation to a political party or candidate's election campaign.
- buy tickets to a political party's fundraiser.
- allow or assign paid staff or volunteers to work for a candidate's election campaign.
- send your volunteers, paid staff, or board members to accompany a candidate in a door-to-door campaign.
NB: It's OK for these people to be involved in a campaign on their personal time! They just can't be acting as representatives of your community.
- invite only one candidate to speak to your community without giving all candidates an equal opportunity to present their views and answer questions.
- allow a political party to use your premises for free.

Important Note on Social Media



A charity that provides a platform for the public to comment on and discuss issues (for example, a website or blog) must monitor these platforms and remove messages that support or oppose a political party or candidate for public office. We strongly recommend adding a notice to your social media platforms saying that messages that support or oppose a political party or candidate will be removed.

What are the rules for advertising about issues during an election?

If your community of faith plans to spend over \$500 between the time the election is called and the election itself to advertise "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," you may need to register as a third party with Elections Canada and comply with the requirements for third-party advertising during an election (the following is quoted from Elections Canada, [New Requirements for Third Parties: Corporations, Unions, Groups and Individuals](#)):

- **Content:** The content of the advertisement must be for or against an issue with which at least one candidate or registered party is associated. Such issues could be social, domestic or foreign policy, economics, or national security issues. Individuals or groups can learn more about issues associated with registered parties and candidates from the registered party or candidate's political platform, debates they participate in, social media campaigns, etc.
- **Context:** Determining whether a particular message promotes or opposes an issue with which a candidate or registered party is associated is largely based on the facts. An issue advertisement transmitted during the election could at some point become associated with a candidate or registered party. It is, therefore, important to be mindful that any political advertising for or against an issue transmitted during elections may be regulated.

The above applies to paid ads, including those on social media, not for regular Web postings (which would be covered by regular staff costs).

Learn More

Elections Canada, [New Requirements for Third Parties: Corporations, Unions, Groups and Individuals](#).

Elections Canada, [Political Financing Handbook for Third Parties, Financial Agents and Auditors](#) (EC 20227), June 2019.

Government of Canada, [Public policy dialogue and development activities by charities](#) (CG 027), January 21, 2019.

Still have questions?

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