

What PTAs May and May Not Do Around Elections

PTAs are forbidden by IRS law from engaging in any political activity in support of or in opposition to any candidate for public office. However, PTAs may engage in nonpartisan voter education activities and in a limited amount of lobbying. Below is a brief list of activities PTAs may and may not engage in around elections.

PTAs may

- Engage in limited lobbying, including work on ballot measures.
- Conduct nonpartisan public education and training sessions about participation in the political process.
- Educate all of the candidates on issues of importance to PTA.
- Prepare candidate questionnaires and create voter guides (with certain restrictions).
- Canvass the public on issues.
- Sponsor candidate debates (all candidates must be invited to participate).
- Conduct nonpartisan get-out-the-vote and voter registration drives.

PTAs may not

- Endorse candidates for public office.
- Make any campaign contributions.
- Make expenditures on behalf of candidates.
- Ask candidates to sign pledges on any issue (tacit endorsement).
- Increase the volume or amount of incumbent criticism as election time approaches.
- Publish or communicate anything that explicitly or implicitly favors or opposes a candidate.

Election activities of individuals associated with PTA

The legal limitations on political campaign activities do not apply to the activities of PTA leaders or members who are acting in their individual capacity. PTA leaders and members may work on political campaigns outside of their involvement with PTA. However, PTA leaders and members may not use any PTA resources for these activities. Here are a few examples of actions that *are not allowed* under the law:

- A PTA president makes statements biased for or against candidates for public office during an event sponsored by the PTA or in a PTA publication.

- A PTA member wears a political button at a public event or function when acting on behalf of the PTA.
- A PTA secretary gives the membership mailing list to a candidate.

PTAs can protect themselves from violating these laws by

- Requiring PTA leaders acting as individuals engaged in partisan political activity to clearly state that they are acting in their individual capacity, not on behalf of the PTA, and that any reference to their work for the PTA is made only for identification purposes.
- Notifying members about the restrictions on their activities when they are representing the PTA in public.
- Disavowing any partisan actions of leaders or members that appear to be authorized by the PTA, taking steps to ensure that such actions are not repeated. Such disavowal should be in writing and done in a timely manner.

Adapted with permission from Alliance for Justice, “Permissible Election Activities Checklist” and “Election Activities of Individuals Associated with 501(c)(3) Organizations,” www.afj.org/nonprofit.