

INTERFORM

IN CONVERSATION FAQ

SOCIALLY ENGAGED SPEECH FOR NONPROFITS

Q: How can nonprofits build their capacity for advocacy?

A: There are 5 main ways nonprofits can expand their advocacy. First, they must identify what their points of emphasis are and set guidelines around how they want to talk about those issues. Then, nonprofits must determine what community collaboration looks like for them: how can your organization work WITH people instead of FOR them? That's the essence of democratic collaboration. Next, evaluate the historic origins of systems currently in place to understand better how they need to be improved. It's also important to develop a plan for how to advocate amongst antagonists of advocacy. Finally, nonprofits should see advocacy as an essential foundation to all of their work.

Q: What are the steps to building a nonprofit coalition?

A: Determine the rules of engagement with those who are not supportive of your advocacy. Who constitutes the opposition, and what kind of resources are they using that may hinder your advocacy? Then, formulate effective messaging campaigns to rally your allies AND focus on converting those who are not in agreement with your values. Powermapping is also key to building a coalition. That means sitting with your partners and determining what your goals are and the resources available to accomplish them.

Q: What are the limits placed by the IRS on 501c3 political campaigning?

A: Nonprofits cannot endorse or campaign for individual candidates, it's illegal. They can however advocate for general issues and voter education.

Q: How does the First Amendment affect these limits?

A: The first amendment protects the rights of the individuals belonging to a 501c3 to voice their opinions independently of the organization. Nonprofits do not have protected political speech.

Q: Why was the 501c3 political speech policy created?

A: The policy was created in 1967 because of the perceived influence of nonprofits on Washington.

Q: Can a 501c3 invite candidates to their events?

A: A 501c3 can invite the general public to their events, and candidates are free to attend as members of the public.

Q: Can a 501c3 invite a candidate to speak about their candidacy?

A: They can, but only if every single candidate in that particular race is also invited. It's not recommended that nonprofits do this because there are already many speaking ops for candidates and it is an unnecessary replication of labor.

Q: Can a 501c3 send out mailers about candidates or races, and what kind?

A: A 501c3 can send out mailers as long as they don't advocate for any specific candidate. The mailer can more broadly advocate for voter registration or declare support of one of the missions or values claimed by the organization.

Q: Can a 501c3 lobby for a certain bill or initiative?

A: If the organization also has a 501c4 classification and a designated staff member(s) for lobbying, then yes.

Q: Can a 501c3 support a ballot initiative?

A: Yes.

Q: Can a 501c3 do voter engagement work?

A: Yes.

Q: Can a 501c3 create voter education guides?

A: Yes.

Q: Do 501c3's with mission statements and values that concern human rights have the right to speak on social justice issues?

A: Yes, but make sure the issues you advocate for are a part of your 501c3's stated mission and values.

Q: What networking opportunities exist within the Council of Nonprofits?

A: They have resources for understanding tax donation standards, and they can help you navigate how IRS rules apply specifically to your nonprofit & connect you to other nonprofits to discuss how they manage their advocacy.

Q: How can nonprofits connect their budgets to policy advocacy?

A: Your internal budget is a document about what the nonprofit's moral priorities are. What communities are you engaging, and what communities are engaging with you?