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The Power of Nonpartisanship

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It is the law of the land – and good for the nonprofit community and those we serve – that charitable nonprofits must remain nonpartisan. Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code expressly directs that charities and foundations shall *“not participate in, or intervene in (including the publishing or distributing of statements), any political campaign on behalf of (or in opposition to) any candidate for public office.”*

There is both safety and power in that limitation. If individual organizations came to be regarded as *Democratic charities* or *Republican charities* instead of the nonpartisan problem solvers that they are, it would diminish the public’s overall trust in the sector and thus limit the effectiveness of the nonprofit community. Similarly, if private foundations could contribute to partisan political campaigns, then their resources would be diverted to pay for political ads and political consultants rather than invested in the work of charitable nonprofits advancing their missions to actually help individuals and communities.

As Nonprofit VOTE explains in its online publication, [Staying Nonpartisan: Permissible Election Activities Checklist](#), nonpartisanship respects the diversity of political opinions among nonprofit staff, volunteers, and the people served. Nonpartisanship also strengthens an organization’s ability to advocate across partisan lines and have access to diverse community leaders and funding sources. Plus, it helps ensure that nonprofits are and remain trusted messengers who can engage underserved populations that campaigns and candidates often miss.

So what does being nonpartisan mean in practice?

The [Internal Revenue Service offers guidance](#). “Contributions to political campaign funds or public statements of position (verbal or written) made on behalf of the organization in favor of or in opposition to any candidate for public office clearly violate the prohibition against political campaign activity.” The IRS explains, however, that not all election-related activities are forbidden. “For example,” the guidance states, “certain voter education activities (including presenting public forums and publishing voter education guides) conducted in a non-partisan manner do not constitute prohibited political campaign activity.” The IRS also acknowledges that “other activities intended to encourage people to participate in the electoral process, such as voter registration and get-out-the-vote drives, would not be prohibited political campaign activity if conducted in a non-partisan manner.”

Remaining nonpartisan is the key to nonprofit power in the elections. It’s something all nonprofits should feel free to honor and embrace to advance their missions.