

Promote the Vote, Protect the Vote

Educating Voters

Voter education can take two forms. First, you can educate people about when and how to register to vote. Second, you can inform voters about candidates' positions on a diverse set of issues. There are a number of ways to educate voters on the issues we care about, including forums, questionnaires, voter guides, and ballot initiative campaigns.

It is crucial that voter education must be done in compliance with 501(c)(3) regulations. See “Q & A On NCJW’s 501(C)(3) Status On Election Related Activities” (Resource 1.3) or Alliance for Justice’s “The Rules of the Game: A Guide to Election-Related Activities for 501(c)(3) Organizations” (<https://bolderadvocacy.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/Rules-of-the-Game.pdf>) for more information.

When & How to Vote

A primary component of educating voters is making sure that they have the information needed to register to vote and cast a ballot. You can carry out this education effort by including relevant information in all section communications, producing and disseminating voter information cards, and partnering with other 501(c)(3) organizations to help raise awareness of upcoming election deadlines.

Educating on the Issues

Candidate Forums

Candidate forums are an excellent opportunity for constituents to learn about candidates' views. They enable candidates to address the community's concerns in a fair and open setting. Sample questions for a candidate forum are included in the Promote the Vote, Protect the Vote resource guide (Resource 2.5).

- **Do's**

- Invite all viable candidates running for an office. Even if all are invited, there is a risk that the event could appear partisan if some candidates refuse to participate. Cancel the forum if only one candidate agrees to attend.
- Pick a neutral location; the location cannot be selected for political reasons. It should be accessible to individuals with disabilities and, when possible, accessible by public transportation.

- Use an independent moderator so that the forum does not favor a specific candidate.
- Compile a list of neutral questions. Questions should address a broad range of issues and should not suggest the forum sponsor's bias. Questions should not be selected to show particular candidates in a better or worse light.
- **Don'ts**
 - Use the forum as a political fundraiser or allow others to do so.
 - Simply ask candidates to agree or disagree with NCJW's views on the issues.
 - Indicate NCJW's views on issues, thereby prejudicing the forum. NCJW materials distributed or displayed should not give the organization's position on issues raised in the forum.

Candidate Questionnaires

Questionnaires educate and inform voters about candidates' views. Questionnaires can be published and disseminated to NCJW members. Sample questions for a candidate questionnaire are included in the Promote the Vote, Protect the Vote resource guide.

- **Do's**
 - Invite all candidates, regardless of party affiliation, to complete the questionnaire.
 - Include a completion deadline, maximum word count for answers, information about where to send responses, and an explanation of how the questionnaire will be used (e.g. printed in a local newspaper, online, in an NCJW section bulletin, posted on Facebook, etc.).
 - Verify that all candidates received the questionnaire and provide a reasonable amount of time for their response.
 - Compile a list of broad and unbiased questions on a variety of issues.
 - Ask open-ended questions, or if you require candidates to "support" or "oppose" an issue, provide space to explain the answer.
 - Print answers in their entirety unless they exceed the previously established word limit.
 - List the candidates and indicate if they did not respond to the questionnaire or to a particular question.
 - Remind readers in the questionnaire that NCJW does not endorse or oppose any candidates for public office, and that candidates' fitness for office should be judged on a variety of qualifications that go beyond their responses to questions.
- **Don'ts**
 - Highlight a specific question or an individual candidate's response.
 - Ask yes or no questions without allowing for an explanation.
 - Compare candidates' positions to NCJW's positions on the issues or state NCJW's position as part of the published questionnaire.
 - Coordinate with a candidate about questionnaire content.

- Summarize the questions and the candidates' positions in ways that may convey bias.
- Paraphrase answers.

Voter Guides

A voter guide offers “one-stop-shopping” for information about each candidate’s positions on the issues. By compiling voting histories, responses from a candidate questionnaire, and candidate position statements, the voter guide makes it easy for voters to compare candidates’ positions.

- **Do’s**
 - Include all viable candidates’ positions, regardless of party affiliation.
 - Cover a broad range of issues that the candidates would address if elected.
 - Describe the issues using unbiased, neutral language that does not hint at NCJW’s positions.
 - Describe candidates’ positions in a neutral, unbiased, and complete manner, or in the candidates’ own words.
- **Don’ts**
 - Edit candidates’ statements.
 - Compare candidates’ positions to NCJW’s views on the issues or put NCJW’s positions anywhere in the guide.

Ballot Initiative Campaigns

Ballot initiatives, referenda, state constitutional amendments, and bond measures are all legislative proposals that can cover virtually any issue area that appear on the ballot for approval by the voters. When considering these measures, voters act as lawmakers to determine whether or not a policy or proposal is enacted. Not every state allows ballot measures — only 24 states allow citizen initiated statutes and/or constitutional amendments.

Because ballot measures are issue-based, your section can take positions on them, sponsor ballot measures, or form committees to spend money for or against measures on the ballot. However, your state’s law may require that you register and report to the state as political committees. Ballot initiative campaigns are good ways to educate your members about the issues that matter, as well as to get out the vote. And, it is often a way for voters to weigh in on a critical issue without going through the state legislature.

States and most cities and counties have websites that explain the initiatives on the ballot. Here are additional resources to research ballot initiatives:

- Ballot Initiative Strategy Center (BISC) provides information on progressive state initiatives around the country. In addition to a comprehensive list of ballot initiatives in each state, BISC

provides resources, research, and strategies for working on those initiatives.

<https://ballot.org/why-were-here/state-map/>

- Project Vote Smart is a nonpartisan organization that offers a comprehensive list of statewide ballot initiatives around the country. <https://votesmart.org/elections/ballot-measures#.Wk5iW9-nE2w>
- The National Conference of State Legislatures maintains a searchable database of ballot measures. <http://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/ballot-measures-database.aspx>