



## **Election Cycle Dos and Don'ts for 501(c)(3) Community Health Centers**

Community health centers can be like “sleeping giants” of the democratic process. Your organization has credibility and trust among the people you care for, and access to potential voters who have been underrepresented in the electoral process. As such, you have the power to be the catalysts for a dramatic increase in voter participation through legal, permissible, nonpartisan voter engagement activities-- voter registration, voter education, and get-out-the-vote (GOTV).

This handout gives a basic overview of what is and is not legally permissible voter engagement activity for a community health center. This sheet is not intended to replace legal counsel obtained by your agency; however, it can help you generate some ideas about how your organization will get involved.

**One basic rule: keep all of your organization's activities nonpartisan. Here are some tips:**

### **Things you CAN do as a 501(c)(3) organization:**

- **Voter Registration**
  - ✓ Drives must be designed to educate the public about the importance of voting.
  - ✓ Activities cannot be biased for or against any candidate or party.
  - ✓ Nonprofits may target registration and turnout efforts to the areas or people they serve.
- **Voter Education**
  - ✓ Educate the public on issues and encourage participation in the political process.
  - ✓ Educate all candidates and political parties on your issues.
  - ✓ Conduct or participate in a nonpartisan candidate forum. The forum must be open to all candidates, be run in a balanced way, and include a broad range of nonpartisan questions for the candidates.
  - ✓ Make presentations on your organization's issue to platform committees, campaign staff, candidates, media, and the general public.
- **Get Out the Vote (GOTV)**
  - ✓ As with voter registration, your GOTV drives must be designed to educate the public about the importance of voting, cannot be biased for or against any candidate or party, and may be targeted to underrepresented communities or those the nonprofit serves
  - ✓ Work on behalf of a ballot measure. Note that this counts towards your direct lobbying limits.

### **Things you CANNOT do as a 501(c)(3) organization:**

*These restrictions in no way prohibit officers, members, or employees from participating in a political campaign as private citizens.*

- Use federal grant dollars for registration activities... *which does not mean that you cannot do voter registration if you receive federal grant dollars; it means that you will need to use your other funding sources for your voter registration activities.*
- Endorse or oppose a candidate—implicit or explicit. Contribute money, time, or facilities to a candidate.
- Coordinate activities with a candidate.