



An educational effort of Hawaii Family Forum

How to Conduct Voter Education in Your Church Community (PHASE TWO)

This guide is not intended to provide, nor does it provide, any legal advice. Please consult your own legal counsel if you have any questions.

FIRST THINGS FIRST:

While it is important to get your community registered to vote, and then turn them out to vote, it is equally important to provide voter education during the campaign to produce educated voters. While the campaign is strictly non-partisan and does not support or oppose candidates for political office or parties, it does provide the perfect opportunity to provide information on issues that are important to people of faith. In addition, it provides a solid platform for decision making when people end up in the voting booth.

DOS AND DON'TS FOR CHURCHES CONDUCTING VOTER EDUCATION DRIVES

Pastors, churches and other faith-based organizations can educate members of the community on issues important to LIFE, FAMILY and RELIGIOUS FREEDOM. Education on these issues should happen throughout the year and should not be focused only during the election season.

DO:

- Encourage people to pray at all times and stay in the Word of God
- Remember at all times to emphasize education on issues and not political parties or candidate(s)
- Provide resources at all church services so that people can become better informed on all the important issues
- Work with iVOTE Hawaii to set up a candidate forum in your community
- Distribute the approved Hawaii Family Forum voter guide as widely as possible
- Preach on issues that have direct or indirect impact on the community

DO NOT:

- Make statements that can be construed as endorsements or as promoting political issues, such as "Senator Smith is a committed Christian and supports traditional marriage" or "We have to get Senator Jones out of office"
- Conduct voter registration on the same weekend that you are promoting the approved voter guide
- Distribute voter education materials biased with respect to any candidate, political party or PAC
- Invite candidates to speak at your church events with the knowledge that

and expectation that one candidate (or more) would NOT accept the invitation. The IRS has indicated that this will be considered as not providing equal access to candidates

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: Can I distribute voter guides on church property?

A: Yes, as long as the guides meet the IRS guidelines and cover a broad range of issues in an unbiased manner. Make sure you consult with your local legal counsel BEFORE distributing any voter guides on church property.

Q: Who is considered a candidate?

A: The term "candidate" refers to any individual who offers himself/herself, or is proposed by others, as a contestant for elective public office. When an individual "offers" or is "proposed by others" must be determined on the basis of all relevant facts and circumstances. An individual who has made the announcement or submitted paperwork is clearly a candidate; however, even an individual who has NOT announced an intention to seek election (and indeed never becomes a candidate) may be considered a candidate.

Q: Can we invite a candidate to speak at our church?

A: Yes, however, the IRS has indicated that whether a church may invite a candidate to speak at sponsored events depends on the facts and circumstances surrounding the invitation. Since candidates may not be familiar with the inviting organization's tax-exempt status or the prohibition against political campaign intervention under section 501(c)(3), the inviting organization should clarify the capacity in which the candidate is being invited to speak.

Q: Can our church educate voters about issues?

A: Yes. Churches may educate voters about the issues and candidate's positions on the issues as long as these activities are unbiased in context, structure, format, and context, and do not violate the prohibition against political campaign intervention.

Q: Why can't we do voter registration and registration at the same time?

A: A church may distribute nonbiased voter guides and the pastor may deliver a sermon discussing the church's position on one or more of the issues covered in the voter guide. Neither activity in isolation would be problematic; however, if they are done on

the same day they could result in political campaign intervention.

Q: Can we distribute candidate information in the parking lot?

A: The parking lots of most Catholic Churches are classified as private property. Churches that have lots adjacent to commercial venues, such as shopping malls, are not. Churches should consult local legal counsel if questions arise about the proper classification of their parking lots. In Hawaii, Catholic Churches are not authorized to distribute campaign materials, or biased voter education materials, in their parking lots. Other churches should check with their legal counsel.

Q: Can we post signs on our church property?

A: Placement of political signs is essentially an attribution issue. With the limited exception of polling places, political signs should not be placed on property owned by churches. Section 501(c)(3) does not prohibit the placement of political signs on the personally-owned property of church officials or employees.

Q: What about social media and websites? Are there any restrictions?

A: There are no special rules applicable to political campaign intervention via electronic media. IRS treats dissemination of communications that constitute political campaign intervention via an exempt organization website in the same manner as communications disseminated via print or other media. An exempt organization is responsible for the content on its own website. It is also responsible for the content on webpages of other organizations that are directly linked from its website. Accordingly, an organization should monitor the content of all linked webpages. The following information posted on a organization's website or contained in an email communication sent from the organization's computers can be expected to be viewed by the IRS as constituting political campaign intervention:

- (a) selective links to websites maintained by candidates, PAC or political party;
- (b) endorsements of or statements of opposition to any candidate;
- (c) biased voter education materials;
- (d) links to webpages of other organizations containing the same information.