

GUIDELINES FOR ELECTION ACTIVITIES

THE BASICS

Election activities carried out in AAUW's name must be conducted within the guidelines set out in AAUW policies. Activities must also be allowable under regulations established by the U.S. Internal Revenue Service and the Federal Election Commission. The full AAUW Board of Directors Policy Book is available [online](#).

AAUW is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. The AAUW Action Fund is a 501(c)(4) nonprofit organization. Any branch or state that has not filed to be separately incorporated as a 501(c)(3) organization falls under AAUW's 501(c)(4) status. There are certain AAUW policies prohibiting 501(c)(3) organizations from undertaking some activities that are legally permissible for 501(c)(4) organizations.

Note: Election activity guidelines for state and local races sometimes differ from those found in federal regulations. To determine state and local regulations for partisan and nonpartisan races, including school boards, check with your state elections division.

AAUW branches and state organizations may conduct election-related activities, as long as:

Guidelines

1. the activities do not expressly advocate the election or defeat of any clearly identified partisan candidate or political party
2. the preparation for and conduct of the election-related activities are not coordinated with any candidate or political party.

Acting as private citizens, individual AAUW members may endorse candidates for partisan elective office, contribute money or anything of value to such candidate(s), and organize for supporting such candidate(s). Such endorsement, contribution, or organizing activity cannot use the name of AAUW. Any AAUW member who is actively involved in a candidate's campaign should avoid participating in activities that may give the appearance of AAUW's endorsement of the candidate.

AAUW BRANCHES AND STATE ORGANIZATIONS MAY DO THE FOLLOWING

- Focus issue education messages and get-out-the-vote activities on the impact that the election results will have on AAUW priority issues. Those messages or activities must not expressly advocate the election or defeat of any candidate or party.
- Encourage voters to support unspecified candidates who agree with AAUW's position on specific issues. For example, a branch or state can publish a "vote pro-choice" message. The message cannot appear, however, in a publication that gives candidates' views on reproductive rights.

GUIDELINES FOR ELECTION ACTIVITIES

CONT.

- Identify particular groups in the community (e.g., women, people of color, people with disabilities) to be part of coalition efforts or to receive election materials. Decisions about which groups to work with should be based on factors such as the desire to build a broad-based coalition, not on whether an anticipated coalition member can affect the outcome of an election.
 - Any political action committee or organization that has endorsed a candidate cannot be asked to be a coalition member in an AAUW voter education or voter turnout campaign.
- Determine and publicize the positions of candidates. In addition to voting records, the following may be used to gather and publicize information about the candidates' positions on issues: position papers issued by candidates, public statements made by candidates, candidate questionnaires, and candidate forums. Different guidelines apply to each activity.

Candidate Questionnaires

All candidates running for the offices to be covered in the questionnaire must have the opportunity to participate. Language must not favor or disfavor a particular candidate, and all responses received must be printed in their entirety in any publication of questionnaire responses. The publication of responses should include the names of all candidates to whom the questionnaire was sent, but publication may proceed even if all candidates do not respond.

Candidate Forums

All major party candidates for the office must be invited, and an effort must be made to ensure their participation. If only one candidate can attend and the other candidates do not send representatives, AAUW branches with 501(c)(3) status may **not** proceed with a forum. AAUW branches with 501(c)(4) status may proceed in organizing regardless of how many candidates attend. (For the full set of rules pertaining to candidate forums, see AAUW Policy 301 in the [Board of Directors Policy Book](#))

Any publication or oral statement of the candidates' responses to questions asked on a questionnaire or at a forum may include a statement of AAUW's position on the issues covered, as long as there is no call to remember AAUW's position when voting.

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ONLY A 501(C)(4) MAY...

Access AAUW's Policy and Member Advocacy Department's Head-to-Head voter guides [here](#)

- **Publish voting records for the state's congressional delegation, state legislature, or other body.** The voting record must include all incumbents within the district or geographic area to be covered. Its content (e.g., the votes to be included) and distribution must not be coordinated with candidates.
- **Publish voter guides that include the position of major party candidates on specific issues.** The information in the voter guides must be available from public sources, such as prior votes cast by candidates, position papers, or public statements made by the candidate.

AAUW BRANCH AND STATE ORGANIZATIONS MAY NOT DO THE FOLLOWING:

- They may not endorse candidates in any partisan election, including local, state, congressional, gubernatorial, or presidential elections.
- They may not target any voter registration efforts at members of a particular political party or at individuals likely to vote for partisan candidates who support AAUW issues. The public must be notified by signs and in any handouts that all voter registration information is available to individuals without regard to their political preference.
- They may not distribute advocacy materials as part of voter registration.
- They may not distribute voter guides in conjunction with any event designed to highlight an incumbent's or a candidate's positions (e.g., a press conference regarding how a member of Congress voted on budget cuts affecting women and families). During such events, no mention should be made of the election.
- They may not coordinate any election-related activities with one or more candidates, campaigns, or political party organizations.
- They may not provide membership lists to be used in fundraising or other efforts as an in-kind gift to any partisan or nonpartisan campaign. This includes AAUW e-mail, phone, and mailing lists.
- They may not use AAUW e-mail, phone, or mail network updates to expressly advocate on behalf of a candidate who is running for partisan political office. This includes advocating financial or any other in-kind support of a particular candidate.