



# Federal Funds and Voter Participation

Federal funds may not be used for political purposes to support or oppose candidates for public office. This is the same restriction that applies to all 501(c)(3) organizations. However, this does not mean federally funded agencies cannot do many kinds of nonpartisan activities like those described in our online toolkit, *Nonprofits, Voting and Elections*.

However certain federal funds do come with added stipulations regarding nonpartisan activities. The restrictions specifically mention prohibitions on conducting voter registration or giving rides to the polls.

## Who's Restricted

The following federally supported programs have special stipulations. All others fall under normal 501(c)(3) guidelines for charities.

- Recipients of Community Social Service Block Grants
- AmeriCorps
- Legal Services
- Head Start

### Recipients of Community Social Service Block Grants (Community Action Agencies)

CSBG recipients such as Community Action Agencies are generally restricted from conducting voter registration activities or rides to the polls. However, CAAs may conduct many other types of nonpartisan activities, particularly when using non-CSBG funds.

#### Can do

- Use non-CSBG funds for nonpartisan voter engagement activities
- Have staff members employed with non-CSBG funds conduct voter engagement activities

#### Can't do

- Voter registration activities
- Rides to the polls

### AmeriCorps

AmeriCorps volunteers and staff are prohibited from most active nonpartisan political activity. However, they

can make voter registration forms available on their premises.

#### Can do

- Have voter registration forms available on the premises for clients
- Conduct nonpartisan voter engagement on non-working hours

#### Can't do

- Political activities during work hours

### Legal Services

Legal Services groups are generally restricted by the Legal Services Act in conducting any kind of nonpartisan or partisan political activities.

### Head Starts

As of 2007, Head Starts are less restricted than other agencies in their permitted political activities, in that they can have a nonpartisan organization use their facilities to conduct voter registration.

#### Can do

- Keep parents and others informed on the how, when and where to vote, such as helping them find their polling place on Election Day
- Have a nonpartisan organization do voter registration at Head Start facilities during hours of operation

#### Can't do

- Use Head Start funds, or staff during work hours, to conduct partisan, election advocacy
- Have staff conduct voter registration activities
- Provide rides to the polls

## Resources

AmeriCorps, 2520.65, "Prohibited activities in subtitle C programs," [www.americorps.gov](http://www.americorps.gov)

Community Action Partnership Legal Services: Model Policies, [www.caplav.org/modelpolicies.html](http://www.caplav.org/modelpolicies.html)

Legal Services Corporation regulations, Part 1608, [www.lsc.gov/pdfs/1608CFR.PDF](http://www.lsc.gov/pdfs/1608CFR.PDF)

National Head Start Association, "Voter Education," [www.nhsa.org/news\\_and\\_advocacy/advocacy/voter\\_education](http://www.nhsa.org/news_and_advocacy/advocacy/voter_education)