



ELECTION TOOLKIT

A guide for nonprofits to meaningfully engage in elections

ONTARIO ELECTION 2022



ABOUT ONN

The Ontario Nonprofit Network (ONN) is the independent nonprofit network for the 58,000 nonprofits and charities in Ontario, focused on policy, advocacy, and services to strengthen Ontario's nonprofit sector as a key pillar of our society and economy.

ONN works to create a public policy environment that allows nonprofits and charities to thrive. We engage our network of diverse nonprofit organizations across Ontario to work together on issues affecting the sector, and channel the voices of our network to government, funders and other stakeholders.

OUR VISION

A Strong and Resilient Nonprofit Sector. Thriving Communities. A Dynamic Province.

OUR MISSION

To engage, advocate, and lead with—and for—nonprofit and charitable organizations that work for the public benefit in Ontario.

OUR VALUES

Courage to take risks and do things differently. Diversity of perspectives, creativity and expertise to get stuff done. Optimism and determination. Solutions created by the sector, with the sector, for the sector. Celebrating our successes and learning from our experiences. Strength that comes from working together.

DISCLAIMER: The section around election rules is general legal information and is not legal advice tailored to your particular situation. Consider consulting appropriate counsel or the relevant Ministry for questions specific to your organization.



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The Power is Ours: Advocacy Matters



2022 is a double election year in Ontario. The provincial election is on June 2, 2022 and municipal elections will take place in October 2022.

Elections are not a time for public benefit nonprofits to sit on the sidelines, but to get in the game as key players.

Nonprofits play a vital role in fostering an inclusive democracy. As the bridge between our communities and government, nonprofits engage and amplify community voices, provide unique public policy insight, and hold governments and decision-makers accountable.

Public benefit nonprofits: some nonprofits have a mission focused on serving their members, such as trade associations and private clubs. But public benefit nonprofits are different. Public benefit nonprofits – charities, nonprofit organizations and non-profit co-ops – have a mission to serve the public. They operate for the good of the public, they reinvest excess revenue back into meeting their mission, and they retain their assets in the public domain for the public good.

As The Nonprofit Vote says, “Governments make, implement and enforce policy. But the community drives it.” Unique to the sector is our ability to harness insights and solutions from the community and share this knowledge and research. Nonprofits are well-positioned to mobilize for an inclusive democracy - particularly Black-led, Indigenous-led, ethno-specific, immigrant-serving, people with disabilities-serving, women and gender-diverse serving organizations. They know what’s happening on the ground, have strong local infrastructures, and are trusted leaders in communities. As a result, nonprofits can thrive, governments can be effective, and communities can be engaged.

Advocacy matters. Many of the issues that nonprofits work to tackle require systemic changes to address the underlying causes, and legislative or policy changes can have an impact on the individuals or communities nonprofits serve. For example, policies related to affordable housing and social welfare can play a key role in addressing food insecurity and impact people who access food banks.

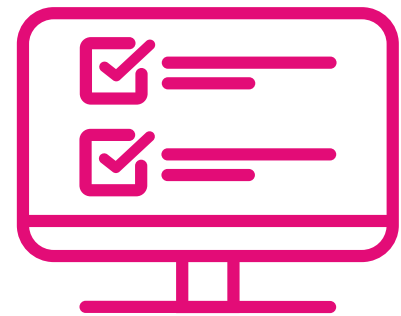
From tackling social, economic and environmental issues to bringing communities together through arts, sports and recreation programs, nonprofits strive to create positive changes. It is therefore imperative for nonprofits to engage in advocacy work to create positive impacts that are long-lasting. As we serve individuals and nurture communities, we also need to hold accountable the institutions that serve us all.

Advocacy is a powerful catalyst for change, and elections provide meaningful opportunities for the nonprofit sector to advocate for the communities it serves as well as for the sector.

Reaching out to parties and candidates prior to the election will help open up dialogue and build a foundation for working together with the people we serve, the government of the day, opposition parties, and elected representatives and their staff.

Build on the energy and conversations already happening in communities. The election period is an opportunity to connect to residents and work together on shared issues and opportunities for collective community impact. This is also a chance for the sector to share the profound impact of nonprofits and charities on our communities and the issues we as a sector are working on across Ontario.

The power is ours - a [recent survey of Canadians](#) found that 55% of people don't believe current politicians have the solutions to address challenges in communities. So, who does? Community!



Strengthening what currently works, changing broken systems, and building better ones are all part of the public policy process. This means engaging with government - and future governments - on policy and programs that build communities where people, especially those who are historically underserved, aren't left behind.

Begin preparing for advocacy opportunities leading up to the elections by collecting compelling stories or captivating data of how our sector and the communities we work with are creating vibrant, resilient places to live, and work.

Rules of election advocacy engagement



Before engaging in election advocacy, nonprofits should make sure they understand the rules around what they can and cannot do. Do not be intimidated by these rules and regulations- get informed on what they mean instead.

Ontario's Election Finances Act - Third Party Election Advertising

Recent Changes

In Spring 2021, the Government of Ontario passed [Bill 254](#), which amends the *Election Finances Act*, extending the regulated “non-election” period and introducing provisions against “collusion.” Certain sections of this bill were found unconstitutional by the Ontario Superior Court. The Government of Ontario invoked the notwithstanding clause and re-introduced these changes as [Bill 307](#), which received Royal Assent and came into force on June 14, 2021.

Some of the changes in these Acts include:

- Third party advertising of up to 12 months before a fixed election date is now regulated.
- Nonprofits and charities who spend more than \$500 on political advertising during the election (after the writ drops) or in the regulated “non-election period” must now register with Elections Ontario and must make an additional filing for every additional \$1000 they plan to spend above their initial filing.
- The meaning of “collusion” is expanded to include sharing a common vendor or donors.
- Failing to comply with the Act can now lead to much more serious fines of up to \$100,000.

Does the Act apply to your nonprofit or charity?

The Ontario's [Election Finances Act](#) - Third Party Election Advertising can apply to nonprofits and charities. Review the questions below to see if it applies to your organization.

Q1: Is your nonprofit or charity a “third party?”

In the context of the Act, “third parties” are individuals or organizations that are **not**:

- political candidates,
- constituency associations, or
- political parties.

Third parties may be overtly partisan (i.e. focused on promoting or opposing the election of provincial parties, candidates or leaders) **or** non-partisan (i.e. focused on promoting or opposing **issues** “closely associated” with provincial parties, candidates or leaders). Third parties include everything from small grassroots community groups to large political action committees. This includes registered charities who face other rules under the Income Tax Act not discussed here.

Yes: The Act may apply to you. Continue to Q2 to learn more.

No: The third party election advertising rules do not apply to you. You may be governed by another section of the Act not discussed in this Guide. Visit [Elections Ontario](#) to learn more.

Q2: Does your nonprofit or charity pay for advertising currently or plan to?

“**Advertising**” can be in any medium (print, radio, television, digital, etc.). “**Pay**” means that you do not need to count the communications you do for free through your website, social media posts, or newsletters. Payments include the cost of production, including wages for the time it takes the producers of content to produce the content.

Yes: The Act may apply to you. Continue to Q3 to learn more.

No: The third party election advertising rules Act does not require anything from you now, but may in the future if you start paying for advertising or taking contributions to be used for paid advertising.

Q3: Does your advertising take place between June 14, 2021 and June 2, 2022?

Advertising may be regulated if it falls into the regulated “non-election period” or election period. The current “non-election period” runs from June 14, 2021 to approximately May 4, 2022 (the date the next election campaign is expected to begin). The election period will run from approximately May 5, 2022 to June 2, 2022 (the expected date of the next election). In the unlikely event of an early (snap) election, the “election period” will begin the date the election is called.

Yes: The Act may apply to you. Continue to Q4 to learn more.

No: The third party election advertising rules Act does not require anything from you now, but may in the future if you decide to start advertising during the non-election or election period.

Q4: Is your current or planned advertising “political advertising?”

“Political advertising” is advertising that:

- promotes or opposes the election of a provincial party, candidate or leader or
- promotes or opposes an issue “closely associated” with a provincial party, candidate or leader.

Except for the specific carve-outs below, there are no hard and fast rules about what will or won't count as political advertising. The regulator is supposed to do a contextual analysis of a piece of communications to determine whether it counts as political advertising, and they are entitled to consider many different kinds of details which may sway their opinion one way or another. For example, a policy report card may or may not fall into the above category. It depends on factors such as whether the policy report card concludes, based on the grade in a particular area, that the audience either should or should not vote for a particular candidate or party.

The following are **never** political advertising:

- the transmission to the public of an editorial, a debate, a speech, an interview, a column, a letter, a commentary or news;
- the distribution of a book, or the promotion of the sale of a book, for no less than its commercial value, if the book was planned to be made available to the public regardless of whether there was to be an election;
- communication in any form **directly** by a person, group, corporation or trade union to their members or employees. This means you can communicate to your members as much as you like without it counting as advertising.
- the transmission by an individual, on a non-commercial basis on the Internet, of their personal political views, or the making of telephone calls to electors only to encourage them to vote.
- the making of telephone calls to electors only to encourage them to vote.¹



Attention Registered Charities!

Political advertising under the Ontario Election Finances Act is not the same as partisan activities under the Income Tax Act. The Income Tax Act forbids registered charities from engaging in partisan activities, which means the direct or indirect support or opposition of a political party or candidate for office.

Unlike under the Election Finances Act, the CRA has said that advertising about an issue does not become partisan simply because it is associated with a party or candidate.

While the CRA will look at all the facts of each case, it is important not to confuse election law and tax law. Nonprofits need to be aware of Ontario's third party advertising rules even if they are engaging in what we normally think of as "issue based" nonpartisan communications. **Registered charities should not feel they are prohibited from all election advertising.** There is a wide range of communications which are permissible under the Income Tax Act. The CRA's rules regarding registered charities and political activities can be found below. Charities should also be aware that the Ontario Election Finances Act forbids third parties from taking money from them for third party advertising, though they can run their own (in accordance with the rules outlined below).

- Yes: The Act may apply to you. Continue to Q5 to learn more.
- No: The Act for third party election advertising rules does not require anything from you now, but may in the future if you start paying for political advertising or taking contributions to be used for paid political advertising.

Q5: Have you spent more than \$500 on political advertising?

Expenses include any costs incurred in the production, design, and dissemination of content (e.g. staff salary pro-rated for the time it took to produce, the cost of purchasing advertising, etc.), but do not include things such as hosting and maintenance costs for your website.

- Yes: The Act applies to you. Continue to the next section to learn what this means in practice.²
- No: The third party election advertising rules Act does not require anything from you now, but may in the future if you start paying more than \$500 for political advertising or taking contributions to be used for paid political advertising.

What does the Act require third party advertisers to do and not to do?

On the next page there are some dos and don'ts for nonprofits and charities who are subject to the third party advertising rules of the Ontario's Election Finances Act.

DOS

Abide by the rules based on how much is being spent by the nonprofit. Nonprofits spending **\$500 or more** on political advertising (whether it is issue-based or partisan-based) in the regulated non-election period and/or in the election period are required to:

- pass a board resolution authorizing the nonprofit to incur expenses related to the political advertising,;
- appoint an individual to act as “Chief Financial Officer” (CFO) for the purposes of the Election Finances Act;³
- open a new bank account at an approved financial institution;
- deposit all eligible contributions (see below) in that bank account;
- register as a third party with Elections Ontario by filing a Third Party Registration and Change Notice Form (TP-1);
- include in all political advertising an authorization statement, such as “Authorized by Nonprofit XYZ”.



Nonprofits spending (or intending to spend) **\$5,000 or more** on political advertising are **also** required to appoint an auditor. Following initial registration, nonprofits who are subject to the third party advertising rules must file an interim report (TPAR-Interim) with Elections Ontario **each** time they commit or spend an additional \$1,000 on “political advertising”. Following the conclusion of the election period, nonprofits are also required to file a final report (TPAR-Final).

Track Donations for Political Advertising

Elections Ontario recommends that a recording system be established that designates, at the time of deposit, monies and donations in-kind contributed for the purposes of third party political advertising and those contributed for the general purposes of the third party. These separate categories are to be reported on the Third Party Political Advertising Final Report.

According to Elections Ontario, if the CFO is unable to identify which contributions were received for third party political advertising purposes during the election and non-election periods, the Third Party Political Advertising Final Report shall list the names and addresses of **every contributor** who donated a total of more than \$100 to the third party during that period. Therefore, it is good practice to either track which donations are for political advertising and/or inform donors giving more than \$100 that their names and addresses will be published on the Elections Ontario website.

DON'TS

Don't Exceed Your Spending Limit

For the 2022 general election the following spending limits apply to nonprofits engaged in political advertising:



	Regulated non-election period (12-month period prior to Writ Day)	Election period (Writ Day to Polling Day)
Maximum per organization province-wide	\$637,200	\$106,200
Maximum per organization in any given riding	\$25,488	\$4,248

Expenses include all expenses incurred in relation to the production of political advertising (i.e. planning, designing, drafting, etc.) and the distribution of political advertising.

Don't intentionally "collude" with other third parties to avoid the spending limits

Third parties are prohibited from intentionally acting in collusion with other third parties for the purposes of exceeding the expense limits (above). If you are coordinating with other organizations for other purposes, then, generally speaking, you don't need to be concerned about these rules.

The Act says that collusion may be done by:

- Splitting a third party into two or more third parties;
- Sharing a common vendor with one or more third parties that have a common advocacy, cause or goal;⁴ and
- Sharing information with one or more third parties that have a common cause or goal.

Any contribution from one third party to another third party, for the purposes of political advertising, shall be deemed as part of the expenses for the contributing third party.

Don't Accept Ineligible Contributions

Nonprofits and charities engaged in "political advertising" are only permitted to accept contributions from certain individuals and entities. These rules apply to both (i) monetary contributions and (ii) non-monetary contributions.⁵

DON'TS

The following individuals and entities are permitted to contribute to a third party:

- Persons who are normally resident in Ontario;
- Corporations carrying on business in Ontario, **except registered charities**⁶; and
- Trade unions (under the *Labour Relations Act* or the *Canada Labour Code*) with bargaining rights for employees in Ontario.



There are special and very complex rules for accepting contributions from **unincorporated** associations and organizations. Please review these rules with a lawyer before accepting any contributions from **unincorporated** associations and organizations.

IMPORTANT: please note that registered charities are **not** permitted to donate to third parties. Third parties are **not** permitted to accept contributions from registered charities.

Third parties must be able to identify their contributors. Anonymous contributions are **not** permitted. Cash contributions are **not** permitted for amounts over \$25. Contributions of more than \$100 will be publicly disclosed on Elections Ontario's [website](#).

Don't intentionally or unintentionally "collude" with candidates, leaders and parties

Third parties are prohibited from colluding, including sharing information, with political parties, candidates or leaders. This applies to agents, employees and volunteers of political parties, candidates and leaders. Accordingly, information related to the planning or strategizing of a third party's "political advertising" should be held in the strictest of confidence. It should not be shared with political parties, candidates or leaders.

Penalties

Where the Chief Electoral Officer believes "on reasonable grounds" that a person or entity has contravened the Act, they may order the payment of a fine. An organization may be required to pay a fine for a number of reasons, including:

- not registering,
- accepting ineligible contributions, or
- exceeding spending limits,

The maximum fines for a corporation (including an incorporated nonprofit) is \$100,000 per contravention.

Ontario's Lobbyist Registration Act

If your organization is volunteer-led and -run, the Ontario's Lobbyist Registration Act (LRA) does not apply to you. Lobbyists are defined as paid staff. Nonprofits only need to consider registering if they have paid employees or consultants who engage in lobbying, as defined in the Lobbyist Registration Act. The LRA requires lobbyists to report their activity to the Integrity Commissioner. The definition of lobbying is "activities intended to influence a public office holder with respect to changes to legislation, regulations, programs, privatization, and awarding of grants, contributions or financial benefits."

At the same time, the following activities do not count as lobbying under the LRA:

- "Submissions made with respect to the enforcement, interpretation, or application of any act, policy, program, directive, or guideline."
- Submissions to legislative committees that are a matter of public record.
- Responses to written requests for information, advice or comment from a public office holder.
- Routine constituency communications that are a matter of private interest.

Note that the federal government and some municipalities also have lobbyist registration requirements. Check your local government website for details.

The 50 hour rule

In July 2016 a change to the LRA went into effect which reduced the registration threshold to 50 hours a year spent on lobbying activity across an organization. It also gave the Integrity Commissioner investigative powers and created penalties for noncompliance. Given the significant changes and new enforcement powers, many nonprofits will have to review their practices and record keeping to determine how many hours they are spending on lobbying. If the nonprofit is under 50 hours, they may want to keep a record of how many hours the organization spends on lobbying. Nonprofits that interact 50 hours a year or more with the government in their work may need to register (that's less than an hour a week).



Resources:

- Read ONN's [briefing note](#) and [issues paper](#) that outlines what you need to know.
- Review The Office of the Integrity Commissioner of Ontario's [presentation](#) on the process of how to register your organization.
- [Visit the Ontario Lobbyists Registration webpage](#) to register your organization.

Canada Revenue Agency (CRA)

These rules apply only to registered charities.

Political activities

Before 2018, Canada Revenue Agency had limited registered charities to spending 10% of their resources on what was called "political activities".

In 2018, *Bill C-86, Budget Implementation Act* was passed, which amended the *Income Tax Act* to allow charitable organizations to engage without limitation in public policy dialogue and development activities, as long as those activities further the stated charitable purposes and are nonpartisan.

Although a charity may be permitted to engage in public policy dialogue and development activity, that activity may still be subject to the *Election Finances Act* discussed in the section above.

Partisan activity still prohibited

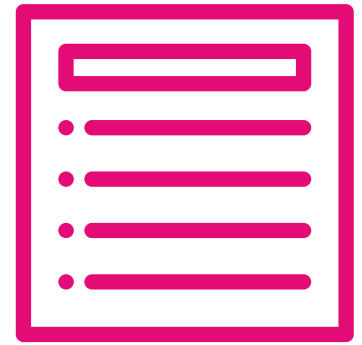
Partisan political activity is the direct or indirect promotion of a political candidate or party, or the direct or indirect opposition to a political party or candidate. Partisan political activity by charities is **explicitly banned**.

Non-partisanship does not mean non-participation. There are many nonpartisan ways for your organization to engage in election advocacy:

- Inviting candidates to an event and/or a meeting
- Organizing a town hall to hear from residents and candidates
- Meeting local candidates
- Reaching out and sharing stories through media or social media
- Public awareness campaigns to educate the public about your issues and the communities you are serving
- Encouraging voter engagement, especially those voters facing barriers to get involved.

Resources:

- [Can I engage in political advocacy 3 things charities need to know.](#)
- Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) [Guidance CG-027, Public policy dialogue and development activities by charities.](#)



Communicating the value proposition of Ontario's nonprofit sector

Ontario's nonprofit sector is a major contributor to innovation, job creation, and the economy. Its one million professionals, driven by their mission, are experts in delivering social, economic, and environmental solutions, especially at the local community level. They enrich our quality of life by promoting mental and physical health, social equity, education, the arts, sports and recreation, the environment, child development, senior care, and much more. They serve millions of Ontarians every year in every corner of the province.

Their work is indispensable and heroic, but it is all too often invisible. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the remarkable contributions of the essential services provided by the nonprofit sector, which relies on funding and volunteers. Their public service deserves to be recognized and honoured.

Preamble to An Act to proclaim Non-Profit Sector Appreciation Week, 2021 [7](#)

Use the upcoming election as an opportunity to share the impact you're having. Parties and candidates will be eager for great ideas and ways of doing things differently, and hearing success stories.

Talk about the issues your nonprofit and community care about. Let's not be humble. We are facing complex changes in Ontario and the rest of the country, and the nonprofit sector is the launching pad for connecting, mobilizing and creating positive changes. We create the conditions for improved quality of life and growing local economies.

Nonprofits often face difficulty in articulating their value to society in terms that are compelling to decision-makers. Nonprofits don't just make a difference in the individual lives of the people they serve (though they certainly do this), they foster economic growth, attract talent, build social capital, mitigate crises, and much more.



The key is to tell your story, and how together we are the sector that brings people and groups together to create opportunities and solutions for thriving communities.

So, how do we tell the story of our collective impact? Share data and stories on the impact of your nonprofit/ the sector to better engage elected officials and media

**BIG DATA
ABOUT YOUR
SECTOR**

**STATISTICS
ABOUT YOUR
ORGANIZATION**

**STORIES
ABOUT YOUR
IMPACT**

Ontario's Nonprofit Sector

Ontario's nonprofit sector is the largest in Canada. With 58,000 organizations, the nonprofit and charitable sector contributes \$65 billion to Ontario's GDP, employing 844,000 workers – of whom 77% are women.⁸ As a sector, Ontario nonprofits receive less than half of their revenues from governments.⁹ Nonprofits reinvest all surpluses in their missions and leverage government revenues through private grants and donations, the sale of goods and services, and volunteer efforts to create additional value for the communities they serve.

The contribution by nonprofits goes beyond their positive social, cultural, and environmental impacts, it also constitutes positive economic impact on local communities - nonprofits are employers, purchasers, and providers of essential services that, in many cases, save governments money down the road and come with a low-carbon cost.



58,000 nonprofits and charities operating in communities across Ontario.



Employs **844,000** people in Ontario, 77% of whom are women.



Contributes 7.9% to the province's GDP, constituting **\$65.4 billion** in economic impact.

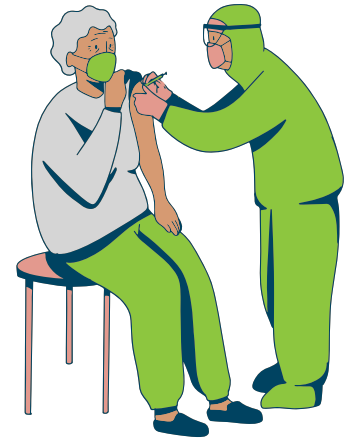


More than **35%** of income is earned independently of government funding and donations.

Role of nonprofits during the pandemic

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, nonprofit organizations in Ontario have been at the forefront of fighting COVID-19, including:

- Providing emergency child care
- Meal delivery and supports for isolated seniors
- Leading vaccination efforts of hard to reach populations
- Providing information and resources on how to cope with anxiety during the COVID-19 pandemic
- Organizing virtual sports and arts programs for Ontarians' mental and physical wellness
- Supporting communities into pandemic recovery with affordable housing, youth employment, and inclusive economic development.



Nonprofits have provided ways for people to come together in a crisis, providing safe and accessible spaces. They have done all of this through creative solutions, grassroots connections, and on-the-ground knowledge.

Here are some examples:

- Live virtual concerts to keep communities connected
- Setting up community fridges to provide food to those in need
- Pre-loaded phones with wellness support for Indigenous youth

The nonprofit business model

The nonprofit business model centres people and well-being to safeguard quality for public interest.

The key elements that differentiate them from for-profit business models are:

- Nonprofit business models put mission first, not profit. Any generated profits are reinvested back into the organization rather than disseminated to shareholders. Providing programs and support in communities is not a short-term endeavor to a longer-term financial goal, but rather to build stable systems of care and function as anchors in communities.
- Volunteer board members govern nonprofits, ensuring local community voices and needs are represented.
- Nonprofit assets are community-owned where ownership is based on community needs rather than on building a real estate portfolio, ensuring public investment in capital infrastructure remains within a community. Nonprofit assets are rarely sold.

- If the nonprofit is defined as a public-benefit nonprofit in Ontario, their real estate can only be transferred to another nonprofit or to the government.
- Incorporated nonprofits are subject to various provincial and federal regulations and must adhere to higher standards of accountability, oversight, and transparency. This is of particular importance when using taxpayer dollars.
- Numerous studies in Canada and other jurisdictions demonstrate how the nonprofit model delivers higher quality, more affordable, and more inclusive direct and indirect care services than for-profits.
- Nonprofits are the very few types of organizations that actively seek out partnerships with others doing similar work with the goal of collaboration and innovation to better serve communities.
- By leveraging the contributions of donors and volunteers, nonprofits provide greater value for community members and government dollars.

Resources:

- Read ONN's report COVID-19 Survey: [State of the Sector One Year Later](#).
- Read about [protecting community assets through nonprofits](#).

Creating your engagement strategy



Tips for successful advocacy¹⁰

1. Sustain a laser-like focus on long-term goals:

- What is the outcome(s) you want to see?
- Is there one major ask/goal you can focus on that is measurable and evidence-backed that you can use to gauge the effectiveness of your advocacy efforts?
- Think in 5, 10, 20, 25 years or even longer timeframes. Oftentimes, change happens incrementally and takes longer than expected.
- Work backwards from your long-term goal. Your long term goal will help you identify the shorter-term objectives and related steps required to achieve your overall goal.

2. Prioritize building the elements for an effective advocacy campaign:

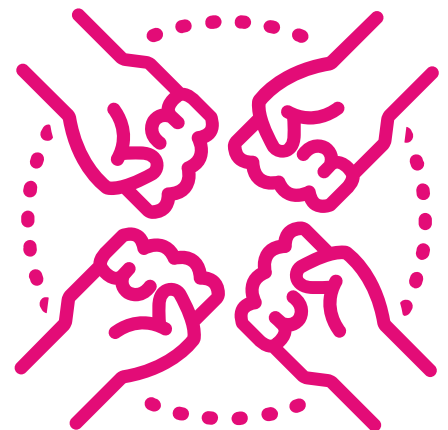
- Conducting research on the issue, gathering both quantitative and qualitative data;
- Consulting with communities affected by the issue to hear their perspectives;
- Deeply understand the priorities of public officials;
- Developing policy solutions with communities to ensure the solutions meet the needs of communities;
- Building relationships with allies;
- Testing key messages with target audiences ;
- Building out grassroots and grass-tops contacts (opinion leaders and people with connections to elected officials);

3. Consider the motivations of public officials

- Consider whether an issue should be brought to elected officials (politicians) or the public service (bureaucrats).
- Do research into the backgrounds of public officials, including their biographical background, connections, previous engagement with your organization, and priorities of constituencies.
- Think about the public officials' interests and incentives. "What activity is most likely to motivate this particular public official?"

4. Create coalitions and partnerships

- Advocacy can be more powerful and influential when done in a group - by forming coalitions, organizations can mobilize a greater number of people and strengthen their messages.
- Strong leadership, a shared vision, clear decision-making structures, and members who bring complementary assets to the table are the cornerstones of effective coalitions.
- Reach out to your network to identify an issue that unifies various organizations or individuals.
- Determine your level of engagement - organizations in a coalition can have different levels of engagement based on their resources and priorities. Some organizations may take on leadership roles while others may provide support and contribute whenever they can.



- Coalition work can contract and expand as needed - don't worry if the coalition ends once the campaign or election is over, something new might blossom out of it.
- It can be helpful to establish some parameters for the type of advocacy activities the coalition will engage in (meetings with politicians, joint letters etc).
- Set up a "secretariat" for administrative activities such as meetings, making calls, preparing documents etc.
- In addition to the usual suspects, look for "unlikely" partners whose voice in support of the common cause will attract attention (such as a chamber of commerce advocating for high quality, affordable, inclusive and accessible child care). Make sure all partners understand their roles, commitments and expectations.

Framing your "ask"

Every election engagement strategy needs a focus. What is the objective? What is the ask of candidates or political parties?

It's essential to be strategic about what policy change you want to see happen. Make sure your ask is within the scope of the level of government you are reaching out to (federal, provincial or municipal government level issues). Avoid the usual broad asks without specific actions and solutions, and those that focus only on funding requests. What existing funding pockets or budget lines can be redesigned or redistributed better? There will always be competing priorities during election periods, so identify what makes your organization or sector different and the unique strengths you bring to the table.

- What's the issue or solution? What would you like to see addressed?
- Why should candidates care? Which candidate? What's the alignment with what they're focused on and can, or want, to make happen?
- What solution are you proposing to support Ontarians and make communities stronger?
- Who is going to support your ask? Who may oppose your ask and why?
- What's your value proposition? Also think about the overall value proposition of the Ontario nonprofit sector.

Here are some additional tips from the [Calgary Chamber of Voluntary Organizations \(CCVO\)](#) when crafting your messages:¹¹

- Make sure your content is objective, fact-based, and non-partisan;
- Engage your audience (communities, candidates, decision-makers etc) in different ways: a message often needs to be heard multiple times through different avenues before it is remembered;
- Use storytelling in your communications;
- Use visuals and descriptive language to help create a picture of the solution you are proposing.

Resources:

- [How to write a pre-budget submission](#)
- [You're more powerful than you think: a citizen's guide to making change happen](#)
- [Dive: Student Aid - an interactive public affairs case study](#)

Putting community engagement first

Bringing people and communities together and gathering and amplifying voices is a major strength of the public benefit nonprofit sector.

During elections don't forget: we're stronger working together! As public benefit nonprofits, it is imperative to put community at the front and centre of our advocacy work and engagement strategies.



We need to recognize that: ¹²

- The people we serve are knowledge holders and community leaders.
- We exist for the sake of the people we work with and serve.
- Organizations should have power with—and not over—the people we serve.
- Organizations should consciously engage the perspectives and lived experiences of community members.
- Ensure that people have the power, knowledge, support, and respect they need to actively and meaningfully participate in civic engagement.

While doing community engagement, how do you reach those that have opinions but have not had a voice in community decision-making in the past? How do you empower and encourage community members to participate? Here are some ways to put good

community engagement into action:

Identify target audiences:

Who is it you wish to reach? Are there efforts already successfully underway in the target communities? Who are the leaders in the community? Who might in the sector be better connected to the target audiences that you can partner with?



Build trust:

Trust is an essential ingredient in authentic community engagement. Ensure clear and frequent communications to let people get to know you and your organization; be clear about the intent of your engagement. Acknowledge that community members are knowledge holders and that your organization relies on their expertise and wisdom to set advocacy priorities - their involvement is vital. Voices must be included, participation must be recognized, and work that people do must be attributed to them. Remember, trust must be earned, not expected.

Define your method(s) of engagement:

There are many ways to engage community members, and don't limit yourself to just one method! Try using various ways of engagement, such as focus groups (guided discussion to provide feedback on priorities or perspectives), online surveys, paper surveys distributed at community events, one-on-one interviews, and more.

Create safe spaces for communities:

Organizations must ensure that there are effective mechanisms in place to address any concerns or difficulties that people may have. It is crucial to provide a safe environment free of discrimination, harassment, and other emotional or physical harm. Be respectful of different cultures, demographics, and lifestyles. Everyone needs to be respected for their abilities, knowledge, and the diversity that they bring to the process.

Meet community members where they are:

Make it as easy as possible for community members to engage with your organization. This can look like going to places where communities often gather or visit, choosing a time of day that works with their schedules, and wording questions in ways that sound familiar to them. Avoid jargon. Also remember that people often have other responsibilities, so be flexible.



Make your outreach accessible:

Make outreach efforts as accessible as possible by reducing barriers to participation. Depending on your organization's capacity, this can include hosting sessions in an accessible location, providing child care services, or assisting with transportation. Live stream or record the session to benefit those who may not be able to attend in person.

Active listening:

While engaging with communities, be patient, practice active listening and allow their ideas and suggestions to lead to action. People must feel that their opinions and contributions count. Make sure to always follow up and keep the communities updated on your progress! This helps everyone understand the link between input and outcomes.

Support community organizing efforts:

Members in a community have the power and knowledge to provide solutions to the problems they are facing. Organizations can provide resources and support to facilitate community organizing. There might also be community organizing efforts already successfully underway. Instead of re-inventing the wheels, think about ways to amplify these existing initiatives and provide a platform for them to reach a bigger audience.

Good communication is also key for community engagement:

While talking to your audience, how do you ensure that members of the community understand the issues you are raising? What materials do you need to inform people about your effort? How will you use them?

Before creating your own materials, look for any existing resources you can share or adapt, and then determine what other materials you will need to develop. While developing your content, don't just provide facts and numbers; explain why these issues are important in your community and how individuals will be impacted.



Try creating a platform where all the relevant information and engagement opportunities can be found. This will help community members to use the materials for their own advocacy efforts. Some items that you can include are:

- information about your organization, mission, vision, and mandate,
- shareable resources with key messaging and talking points, such as fact sheets or issue briefs,
- sample scripts or draft letters for reaching out to the public and officials,

- Information about the political system, how to vote, and the importance of participating in discussions leading up to the election.

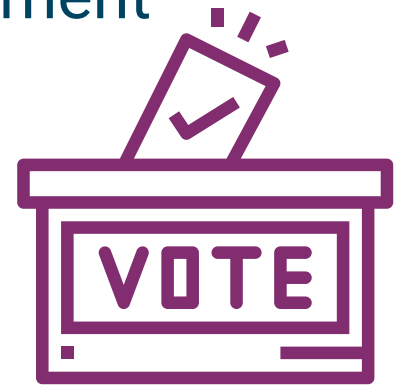
You can also communicate with communities by organizing and hosting information sessions. Promote the events through social media. After a meeting or event, invite further participation and provide the next steps for those who wish to become more involved.

Resources:

- [Building Community Power through Collaboration and Iteration in Policy](#)
- [Systemic Movement Primer](#)
- [Structure of a Movement](#)
- [Reimagining Activism Guide](#)
- [Social Power: How civil society can 'Play Big' and truly create change](#)
- [Tools to Engage: resources for nonprofits](#)

Encourage nonpartisan voter engagement

Public benefit nonprofits are uniquely positioned to connect people and communities in ways that other sectors and organizations can't. Low voter turnout is a serious issue during elections and lack of representation, especially by historically underserved groups, means a diversity of voices often go unheard. Public benefit nonprofits can help remove barriers and encourage voter engagement.



Nonpartisanship is key! Don't focus only on one candidate or political party. It's not about who people vote for, but that people are empowered to use their right to vote as one way to voice their opinion on policies and issues that matter to them. There are many ways to support voter engagement, from civic education on how elections work, to providing support on election day for people to get to polling stations.

Resources:

- [What makes someone vote?](#)
- [Vote Pop Up](#)
- [Democracy Talks](#)

Election organizing through networks

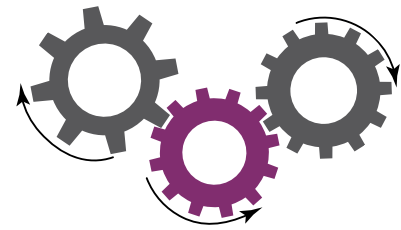
Election engagement is a great opportunity to activate and build your networks. Consider using a network approach to engage people.

- A network approach can help identify common causes and support alignment of messaging by different organizations and groups. This approach distributes power and resources to involve many people in amplifying the causes you have in common. It can help mobilize leadership, expanding opportunities for people to step into leadership positions and it can increase inclusion by engaging new people who know the opportunities you’re advocating for, from their lived experience or who will be affected by decisions.

Resources:

- [ONN’s Networks + Action Guide](#)

Digging into tactics for voter engagement



There are multiple ways to reach out to parties and candidates and share your impact, and support voter engagement. Our friends at the [Calgary Chamber of Voluntary Organizations \(CCVO\)](#) have created a great summary of the tactics and things to consider for each tactic.

TACTIC

Hosting an all candidates forum

Attend candidate forums hosted by others

OPPORTUNITY

Nonprofits are well-positioned to sponsor forums and increase public understanding of the election process and candidates who are running.

Many of these forums provide opportunities for questions from those in attendance - have your question prepared in case you have a chance to ask about your issue.

CONSIDERATIONS

Candidates are usually more willing to attend when:

- they have clear positions on issues
- they expect a large audience
- there is guarantee of neutrality

Be respectful of the organizer and make sure your issue is related to the topics at hand.

TACTIC

Platform analysis and scorecards

Sharing resources and background materials with candidates

Attending meetings with individual candidates

Public awareness campaigns

OPPORTUNITY

Reviewing party platforms, assessing what they have to say about issues of importance to your nonprofit, and sharing that information can be very valuable to people who care about the issues that your nonprofit works on.

This is a great way to educate candidates about your issues, your constituency, or your community. Candidates rely on you to educate them about your issues.

These meetings can be helpful when a candidate's opinion is different from yours - to let the candidate know that there is an alternative and organized viewpoint.

Sharing stories and background materials through traditional and social

CONSIDERATIONS

Political parties may choose to share party platforms at different times and in different formats - check [ONN's website](#) as we follow these developments.

You may share research and your policy priorities with candidates, and ensure that the same information is available to all candidates.

Make sure to:

- Prepare talking points, issues, briefs, fact sheets, etc.
- Keep it brief and use plain language
- Anticipate their questions
- Send thank you letters, including contact information for further questions, and follow-up with summary notes, actions items, etc.
- Meet with more than just one candidate.

You may oppose or support a policy, but keep your communication nonpartisan

TACTIC

Get out the vote

OPPORTUNITY

media is a great way to increase understanding and awareness with public stakeholder groups and the community.

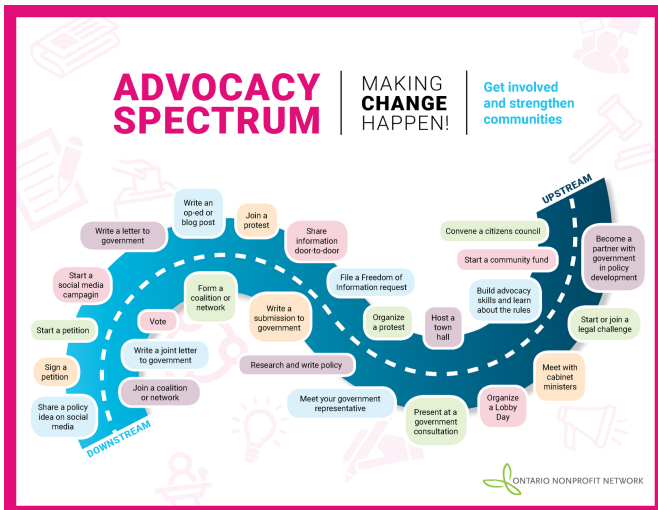
Nonprofits have played, and continue to play, an essential role in the weeks leading up to elections. Traditionally historically underserved groups (younger, diverse, low income) are often supported by nonprofits through access to information about how to vote and transportation to polling stations, among other supports.

CONSIDERATIONS

by making sure it is not connected to a single candidate or political party.

When political candidates recognize the voting power of the nonprofit sector, they are more likely to listen to our issues and concerns. This is our opportunity to engage new voters and show power in numbers.

Organizations and individuals can make effective policy changes through a number of actions, and no one action is sufficient on its own, nor is one necessarily better than another to influence and make policy change happen.



Full Advocacy Spectrum and how it works, available [here](#).

Tips for reaching out to candidates

Asking for a meeting:

- Call, email or send a letter to **the candidate** or **key campaign staff of each party** briefly outlining your organization's work and your key messages. You can find candidates and their staff's contact information on the party's website. You can also find a list of current MPPs and their contact information on the Legislative Assembly of Ontario's website.
- Request a meeting to discuss these items. Parties often have campaign staff or volunteers dedicated to engaging with constituents during election campaigns. Follow up with a phone call or email to the campaign manager. The campaign manager may handle the request or may refer you to another staff member. Negotiate a date, time and location for the meeting. Let the campaign staff know how much time you would like and be prepared to shorten the session if need be.



Preparing for the meeting:

Once the meeting is confirmed, put together a team to attend the meeting. The larger the team, the more organized you'll need to be at the meeting. It's helpful to have a mix of staff, board members and, if possible, members from the community who can provide personal stories of how key issues impact them and what solutions will support them. Inform the campaign staff who will attend the meeting.

As a group, fine-tune the points that you will raise (i.e. your election asks), organize them into an agenda/prep-note, and decide who will chair the session and who will speak to which item. The size of the group will guide how long individuals can speak. More experienced members can help others to organize what they will say. Write up the meeting notes when it's over so everyone has the results of the meeting on paper.

During the meeting:

- Thank the candidate and briefly outline the purpose of the meeting and the agenda. All participants should introduce themselves.
- Be prepared to be flexible. The candidate may not have time or want to go through the full agenda. When this happens, cut to the chase so that the most important items are discussed.
- Finish by thanking the candidate and providing a contact person for further questions or information.

Resources:

[Ontario NDP website](#)

[Ontario Green Party website](#)

[Ontario PC website](#)

[Ontario Liberal website](#)

[List of current MPPs](#)

Engage through media



Traditional media

Letters to the Editor or Op-Eds

These types of articles help raise awareness and can get the attention of parties and candidates. While there is strong competition for space in larger media outlets, local media are often looking for good local content. During elections, political parties set up media monitoring teams with a focus on local media.

- **Focus on making it local.**
- **Make it relevant** and tie it to what's happening in the community, in the general news cycle, or what's been published recently in that media outlet.
- **Use facts, figures and compelling stories** to make your point.

Don't be discouraged if your letter is not published. If editors keep receiving submissions on a given topic, chances are news outlets will recognize public interest in the topic and cover it in some way. Turn your submission into a blog post or eblast to share with your networks and communities.

Resources:

- [CCVO Tips for Engaging with the Media](#)
- [Writing letters to the editor of your local newspaper](#)
- [Write an Op-Ed](#)
- [Local newspapers in Ontario](#)

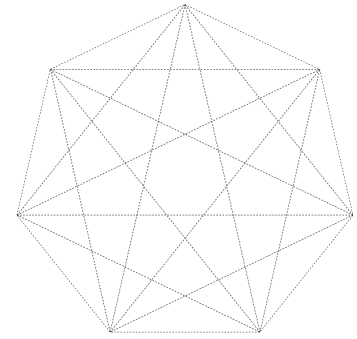


Social media

A 2020 survey showed that “23% of adult social media users in the United States – and 17% of adults overall – say they have changed their views about a political or social issue because of something they saw on social media in the past year.” ¹³

Over the past 2 years, people have been spending more time on their social media due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which makes social media increasingly important for advocacy work. Social media platforms have been utilized to mobilize and unite people in innovative ways.

Organizations can reach more audiences, promote participatory dialogue and strengthen collective action through social media.



Pick the right platform

You don't need to be on every single social media platform. Pick the right platform for your organization based on the kinds of content you want to share and the audience you want to reach! Research where your target audience is most likely to be online.

- **Facebook:** Used by people of all ages (though teens are the smallest age group of users).
- **Twitter:** Best for quick updates, discussions, and interacting with candidates. Connecting with candidates on twitter is a creative way to get their attention and noticed by a wider audience. Great for running hashtag campaigns. Tweet length is limited to 280 characters.
- **Instagram:** Instagram is a highly visual platform, perfect for graphics and videos
- **LinkedIn:** Although designed for professional networking, LinkedIn offers a platform for you to promote resources and events with people within your network.
- **TikTok:** A video-based platform popular with Gen Z - great for engaging youth! Users can record and share 15-60 second video clips, which can be consumed and spread quickly.



Connect with provincial party leaders on Twitter:

Steven Del Duca of Ontario Liberal Party

Andrea Horwath of Ontario New Democratic Party

Doug Ford of Ontario Progressive Conservative Party

Mike Schreiner of Green Party of Ontario



Tips for social media engagement:

- Evaluate what time and resources are available to your organization and be realistic about your ability to engage on any specific platform.
- You can choose a central platform for your online advocacy efforts, and use additional social media efforts to point people towards your main platform.
- Plan how often you will post, on which platforms with tools such as a social media content calendar.
- Tag candidates, parties and key organizations and people.
- Share ways people can take actions.
- Share posts and contents from other organizations or individuals that talk about the same issues.
- Create participatory and interactive posts that encourage the audience to continue engaging with your content. For example, use the “poll” and “questions” functions in your Instagram stories to engage your audience. You can ask poll questions such as “Do you know when the Ontario election is happening in 2022?” and “Do you plan on voting in the 2022 provincial election?” You can also post the poll results on your story!
- Don’t forget to use hashtags - create your own hashtag for campaigns, or use general hashtags to join bigger conversations (#ONpoli | #VoteON and more).

Resources:

- Step by step instructions on [how to use the “questions” and “poll” functions on Instagram](#)
- [The Ultimate Social Media Guide for Nonprofits](#)
- [Engaging the Crowd: Social Movement Building via Online Bystander Mobilization](#)
- Free tools to create your own visual assets: [Canva](#), [Piktochart](#), [Pixton Comic Maker](#)



After the election

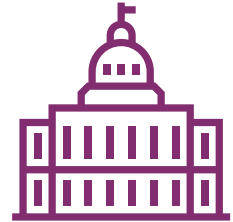
Elections are just “the end of the beginning” - your advocacy work doesn’t stop after the election. The period following an election is critical for nonprofits to build a relationship with the new government, which is now seeking ideas and allies. Relationships matter - when you have a strong relationship with the government, the government may reach out

to your organization for ideas and advice in the future.

Send congratulations and welcome letters to the newly elected officials. In your letter, congratulate them for being elected and express your interest in working with them in their critical roles. This is a great opportunity to once again introduce your organization and your policy priorities. Ask for an opportunity to meet with the newly elected officials at their earliest convenience. [See a sample letter of congratulations here.](#)

Continue building and maintaining relationships with other organizations as well. If you've formed coalitions and partnerships with others during the election, building on these relationships and supporting each other to build long-term collective capacity to direct governments towards the collective good.

Who does what in the Ontario government



The Legislative Assembly

The Legislative Assembly of Ontario (also called the House or Queen's Park) has 124 seats, each aligned with an electoral district or riding, to which Members of Provincial Parliament (MPPs) are elected. Typically, MPPs belong to 1 of 4 parties: the [Ontario Liberal Party](#), the [Ontario PC Party](#) (Progressive Conservatives), the [Ontario NDP](#) (New Democrat Party) and the [Green Party of Ontario](#). In 2018 and 2020, the [Ontario Party](#) and the [New Blue Party of Ontario](#) were founded respectively. Independent MPPs do not belong to a political party.

Elections can happen outside the usual four-year cycle if the governing party either fails to maintain the confidence of the Legislature (for example: if it fails to receive the majority of votes from MPPs on the budget bill, or on a confidence motion), or if it calls an election. When the governing party has a majority, provincial elections are normally held every four years on the first Thursday of June.

Members of the opposition are MPPs from the parties that do not form government. The Legislative Assembly votes on legislation brought forward by a Cabinet Minister or by any MPP. It votes on the provincial budget. Members may be part of standing or special purpose legislative committees. [See Glossary of the Legislative Assembly.](#)

The Cabinet

The Cabinet makes the major decisions about government policies and priorities, including provincial budgets. Cabinet members introduce government legislation for consideration in the House. The decisions made in Cabinet provide direction for policy development and implementation in the Ontario Public Service (OPS), the bureaucracy. The Premier selects MPPs from the governing party to make up the Cabinet. They are called Ministers and each leads a ministry. Ministers are accountable to the Legislative Assembly and the public. The Premier has the flexibility to change the number of Ministers and ministries as well as the MPPs who will serve as Ministers. This can take place in mid-term and virtually always happens when a party is elected or re-elected to form government. See a list of current ministers [here](#).

Contact an MPP

If an issue or solution affects a particular community, it may be best to work with the local MPP. You can find a list of current MPPs [here](#).

What kind of public policy and activities happen at the provincial level?

If an issue or solution has provincial implications, it is likely best to influence through the Minister responsible for that area. [Ministries of the Ontario government](#)

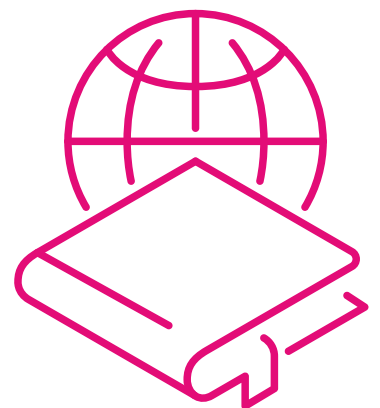
Resources & References

Resources

Here we've listed all of the resources mentioned above, as well as other resources that might be helpful.

Election Basics:

- [Being nonpartisan](#)
- [Civics 101 videos](#)
- [Democracy Dictionary](#)
- [Elections 101 Workshop -Videos](#)
- [The Samara Centre for Democracy](#)
 - [What to expect when you are electing](#)
 - [Provincial Elections Infographic](#)
- [Elections Ontario](#)
 - [Electoral districts](#)
 - [Check, confirm or update voter registration information](#)
- [How government works](#)



Election Rules:

- Can I engage in political advocacy 3 things charities need to know
- Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) Guidance CG-027, Public policy dialogue and development activities by charities.
- Six Things You Need to Know About the Lobbyists Registration Act

Advocacy guides and resources

- The Art of the Possible
- Calgary Chamber of Voluntary Organizations (CCVO):
 - Federal Election Nonprofit Advocacy Guide
 - Everyday Advocacy Guide
- The Nonprofit Vote : the impact of advocacy and why nonprofits should engage in advocacy work
- Galleries Ontario: Advocacy for Arts Organizations - a toolkit
- Social Planning Toronto
- Social Planning Network of Ontario
- Advocacy and Social Justice: Measuring Impact
- Civix: <http://civix.ca/main/>
- Don't think of an Elephant! Know Your Values and Frame the Debate
- Sparking change: 3 ways to engage in advocacy.
- Beyond the Cause: The Art and Science of Advocacy.
- Everyday Advocacy and Why Should Your Nonprofit Advocate
- Why Take Action on Policy.
- Let's not conflate advocacy and political activities.
- How to write a pre-budget submission

Engagement and Voter Outreach

- Municipal Youth Engagement Tools
- Systems Change Strategies and Resident-led Advocacy.
- 2021 Voting guide for Indigenous Women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ Voters
- Building Trust in Community Collaborations
- Civic Engagement Campaign
- Dive: Student Aid - an interactive public affairs case study.
- Framework for Working with Community-based Not-for-Profit Organizations
- Let's mobilize: How to start a community action program
- Voter Outreach and Engagement Handbook
- ON Canada Project - Millennial & Gen Z Engagement

- [Democracy Mixtape](#)
- [Our Canadian Election](#)
- [Building Community Power through Collaboration and Iteration in Policy](#)
- [Systemic Movement Primer](#)
- [Structure of a Movement](#)
- [Reimagining Activism Guide](#)
- [Social Power: How civil society can 'Play Big' and truly create change](#)
- [Tools to Engage: resources for nonprofits](#)
- [Network-based advocacy and the challenge of navigating pandemic politics](#)
- [You're more powerful than you think: a citizen's guide to making change happen](#)
- [Up for Debate: Mobilization Toolkit \(2021\)](#)
- [What makes someone vote?](#)
- [Vote Pop Up](#)
- [Democracy Talks](#)

Media Engagement

- [CCVO Tips for Engaging with the Media](#)
- [Newer social media platforms and their potential to help non-profits](#)
- [Using Social Media for Digital Advocacy](#)
- [Social media strategies played important role in pandemic election: experts](#)
- [The Ultimate Social Media Guide for Nonprofits](#)
- [Engaging the Crowd: Social Movement Building via Online Bystander Mobilization](#)
- [Writing letters to the editor of your local newspaper is easy and effective](#)
- [Write an Op-Ed,](#)
- [I write letters to the editor because...](#)

Storytelling and Narrative Change

- [Measuring Narrative Change: Understanding Progress and Navigating Complexity](#)
- [The Story of Our Stories: A Regional Community-Engaged Research Project](#)
- [Protecting community assets through nonprofits](#)

Infographics:

- [Nonprofits Step Up](#)
- [Advocacy Spectrum](#)
- [ONN infographics about the nonprofit sector](#)

References

1. [1] Act subsection 1(1)
2. Please note that this does not constitute legal advice or legal information. Nonprofits are advised to seek legal advice if they have questions and/or concerns about the impact of Bill 307 on their specific organization(s).
3. Although many nonprofits do not use this term, this is the term used by the Election Finances Act.
4. A common vendor for this purpose is a seller of advertising, and may include a social media platform. However, just using a common vendor is not enough to put you in violation of anti-collusion rules. You need to be actively coordinating with other parties to exceed the limit through the use of this vendor.
5. Please note that contributions given to a third party are not eligible for tax receipts.
6. For more information, please see the detailed rules outlined on page 21 of Elections Ontario's [Election Finances CFO Handbook for Third Parties](#).
7. Non-Profit Sector Appreciation Week Act, 2021 (Royal Assent, Dec. 9, 2021). Ontario Legislative Assembly, Hansard, 42nd Parliament, 2nd Session.
<https://www.ola.org/en/legislative-business/bills/parliament-42/session-2/bill-9>
8. Statistics Canada. 2019. CANSIM table [36-10-0616-01](#), [36-10-0221-01](#), and [36-10-0617-01](#)
9. Statistics Canada. 2019. Production, income and outlay accounts of non-profit institutions. CANSIM table [36-10-0613-01](#).
10. Independent Sector. Beyond the Cause: The Art & Science of Advocacy. 2012.
<https://www.independentsector.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/IS-BeyondtheCause-Full.pdf>
11. CCVO. (2021) Federal Election Nonprofit Advocacy Guide.
<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5aef5b46cef3728571e6c46c/t/611e82fc27c07616b4798bf0/1629389565217/CCVO%2B2021%2BFederal%2BElection%2BAdvocacy%2BGuide+%281%29.pdf>
12. Toronto Neighborhood Centres. (2021) TNC People-Centred Civic Engagement Charter. https://drive.google.com/file/d/14tX5cQvifQvRyY5Sv0KH-F1GAwVMCw_x/view?usp=sharing
13. Pew Research Centre. https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/10/15/23-of-users-in-us-say-social-media-led-them-to-change-views-on-issue-some-cite-black-lives-matter/ft_2020-10-15_socialmediachange_01/