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INFORMATION GUIDE TO

# FEDERAL ELECTION PLANNING

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF WOMEN AND THE LAW



nawl  
anfd



Celebrating the Legacy  
Célébrer l'héritage

Defining the Future  
Définir l'avenir



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# Introduction

The 2025 federal election has officially been called, and for women and gender-diverse people in Canada, there is much at stake. In Canada and globally, there is increased polarization, rising far-right extremism, and threats to the human rights and safety of many communities.

Heading into this election, the affordability crisis, access to housing and healthcare, and protecting Canada's economy from a trade war with the U.S. are top-of-mind issues for people in Canada. With these economic threats at the forefront, there is a risk that advocacy around the rights of women and gender-diverse individuals may be sidelined. For feminist organizations, this election provides an opportunity to emphasize that protections for women and gender-diverse individuals form the backbone of a strong and resilient economy.

As feminist organizations, we know that while the affordability crisis and economic challenges affect everyone, women and gender-diverse people, especially those from marginalized communities, bear a disproportionate burden. We recognize that intersectional solutions that consider race, class, gender, sexuality, disability, and geography are necessary to address the complex nature of the affordability crisis and build an economy that works for everyone. We know that when our work is valued and well resourced the economy is strengthened.

This toolkit was designed to strengthen sector capacity to advocate for feminist policies and platforms. Your organization can use this information as soon as possible to help inform how you engage in the federal election and to plan your activities so you are prepared to execute them in a timely manner. Our goal is to support increased civic engagement by feminist organizations and your networks to ensure that everyone in Canada is able to live a safe, healthy and dignified life. We hope these tools will support your organization's ongoing advocacy to protect and promote the human rights of women and gender-diverse people, and amplify our collective voice in the political arena.



In addition to these practical tools, we encourage you to find strength in your partners and allies, to prioritize joy and rest where you can, and to embrace hope and defiance. Most importantly, we want to remind you that you are not alone. The feminist movement in Canada is strong and thriving. Regardless of the challenges, we will persevere and continue to advance progress on the journey to gender justice and substantive equality.

# THIS TOOLKIT WILL HELP YOUR ORGANIZATION:



Gain a deeper understanding of nonpartisan engagement strategies.



Understand regulated activities and the requirements for third-party registration.



Engage with candidates from all political parties to increase their awareness about your organization's mission and key issues for your staff, clients, members and the broader communities you serve.



Share information about each local candidates' priorities and campaign promises, as well as their respective party's national platform commitments, in a factual and non-partisan way, with your staff, volunteers, clients/members, and broader networks.



Utilize earned media to highlight your organization's campaign priority areas and issues.



## **PART 1**

# Charity and Nonprofit Engagement During the 2025 Federal Election

# Overview

The activities your organization may be allowed to engage in depends on a few things:



## WHETHER YOU ARE A CHARITY OR A NONPROFIT:

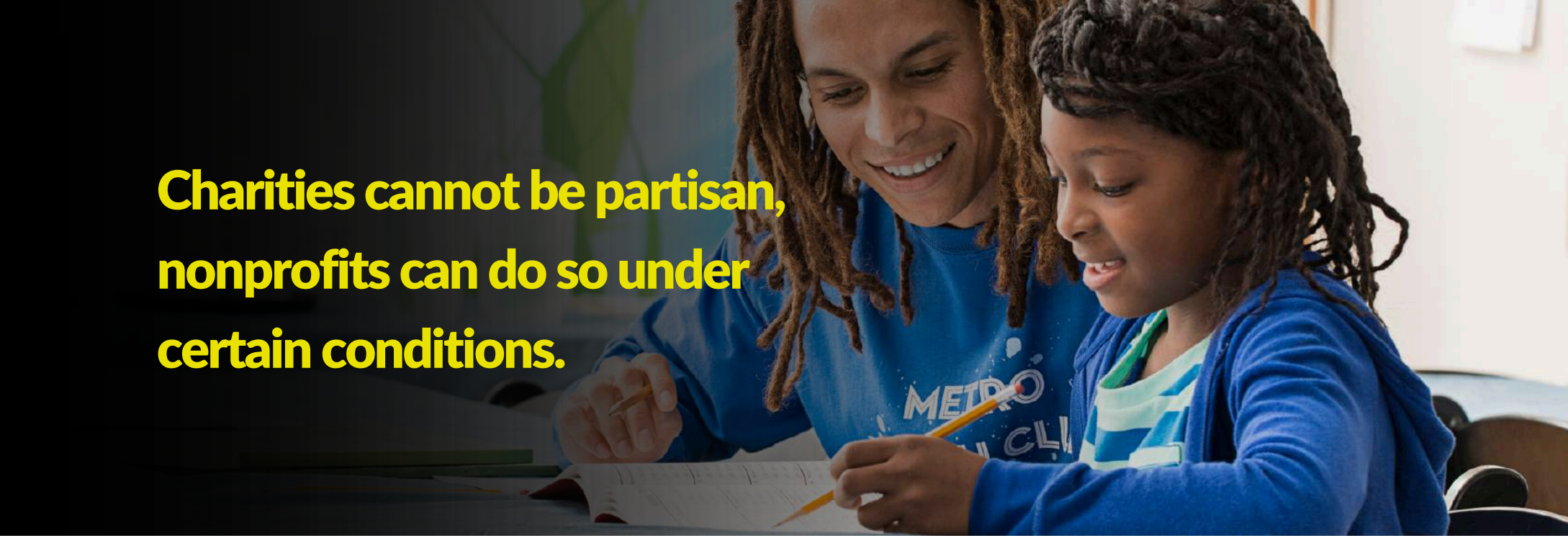
while charities cannot engage in partisan activities, nonprofits can under certain conditions.

## WHETHER THE ELECTION PERIOD HAS STARTED:

the rules governing how certain activities are regulated change once the election has been called.

## WHETHER YOU ARE REGISTERED AS A THIRD PARTY:

both charities and nonprofits must register as third parties if they spend \$500 or more on certain regulated activities.



## Charities cannot be partisan, nonprofits can do so under certain conditions.

People sometimes use the word “partisan” in a narrow way, to mean a demonstrated bias towards one political party or candidate. However, the restrictions imposed on charities by the *Income Tax Act* are much broader.

This law prohibits charitable foundations and charitable organizations from devoting any part of their resources to the **direct or indirect** support of, or opposition to, any political party or candidate for public office. Organizations that violate this rule could see their charitable status revoked. For the purposes of this toolkit, “partisan” is used to refer to this broader *Income Tax Act* prohibition on direct or indirect support/opposition.

Direct support/opposition could look like, among other things, explicitly endorsing a candidate/party, making donations, or inviting only one candidate or political party to speak with the organization and its supporters. While direct support/opposition is more overt and easier to avoid, what constitutes indirect support/opposition can be more nebulous and context-dependent. For example, a charity explicitly deciding to support a political party by publishing research materials offering evidence and arguments in favour of the party’s position on an issue could be considered partisan.

It’s crucial for charities to understand their obligations under the *Canada Elections Act*, the *Income Tax Act*, the *Lobbying Act*, and other applicable legislation, in order to avoid compromising their charitable status. Seek legal advice if you have any questions about whether your specific election activities could constitute direct or indirect support/opposition to a political party or candidate.

Nonprofits do not have the same legal obligation as registered charities to remain nonpartisan (although they may still choose to do so). Nonprofits who are comfortable taking a partisan approach play a valuable role in informing the public about candidates and parties that may or may not align with feminist values. However, nonprofits will still have to register as a third party if they are engaging in regulated activities and meet the spending limit threshold.






## The election period starts when the writ drops.

A federal election period starts with the Governor in Council issuing a proclamation for a general election to be held. The formal written order that follows the proclamation is called the writ of election and the issuing of this written order is known as “dropping the writ,” or “the writ drop.” The election period runs from the date the writ is issued until polling day.

During the election period, feminist organizations should continue to raise issues of concern and encourage women and gender-diverse people to vote. However, the election period is a time of heightened partisanship and requires additional vigilance for charities, to ensure they are not engaging in partisan activities, and for nonprofits, to ensure they are not contravening rules regarding third-party registration.

The rules around regulated activities and third-party registration differ depending on whether or not the election is a fixed-date election and whether we are in the pre-election or election period. Since the 2025 election will not be a fixed-date election, this toolkit is focused on the requirements for third-party registration during a **non-fixed date** election. Consult the *Canada Elections Act* and Elections Canada’s Political Financing Handbook for Third Parties to learn more about fixed-date elections.

In the case of a non-fixed date election, non-profit organizations can engage in partisan activities **before the writ drop** without registering as a third party. During this time, charities are still prohibited from engaging in partisan activities, but may be able to engage in activities like issue advertising without registration, as explored more in the next section on third-party registration.



## Nonprofit and charities may have to register as third parties.

Engaging in certain activities **during the election period** may require your organization - whether a charity or a nonprofit - to register as a third party.

A third party is generally a person or group that wants to participate in or influence elections. They do not seek to be elected themselves but may support certain political parties or candidates.

A person, corporation or group **must register with Elections Canada as a third party immediately after it conducts one or more regulated activities in an election period with combined expenses totalling \$500 or more (this may include staff time).**

### LEARN MORE

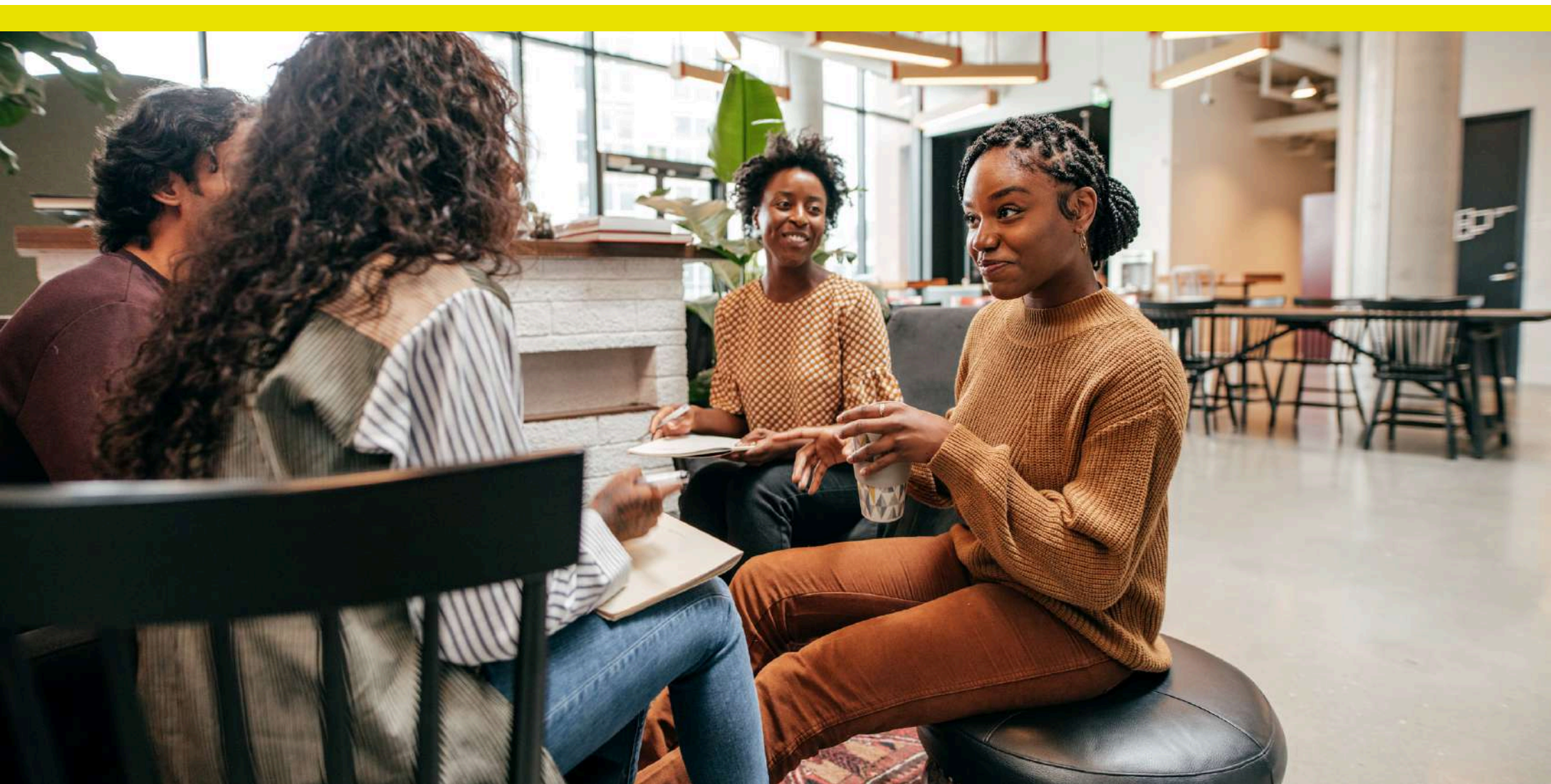
- Government of Canada: [Canada Elections Act](#)
- Government of Canada: [Income Tax Act](#)
- Elections Canada: [Political Financing Handbook for Third Parties, Financial Agents and Auditors](#)

# Guidelines on Third-Party Registration and Regulations

Registered charities will not put their charitable status at risk merely by registering as a third party with Elections Canada.

You cannot register before the election period starts. If your organization registers as a third party, keep in mind that the organization's name and demographic information will be published on Election Canada's Third Party Database website and that this information is public.

It's important to note that **“regulated activities”** are not necessarily synonymous with **“partisan”** activities. This means that, even if your organization chooses to remain non-partisan, it may still have to register as a third party if it engages in regulated activities with combined expenses totalling \$500 or more.



## There are three types of regulated activities :

### 1 ELECTION ADVERTISING:

The transmission to the public by a third party, by any means during the election period, of an advertising message that promotes or opposes a registered political party or candidate, including by taking a position on an issue with which the registered political party or person is clearly associated. Election advertising must include a clearly visible tagline containing the third party's name, phone number and civic or Internet address.

Election advertising includes issue advertising: Issue advertising is the transmission of a message to the public that takes a position on an issue with which a candidate or registered political party is associated, without identifying the candidate or party in any way. **Issue advertising is only regulated during the election period.**

Charities should be careful when engaging in issue advertising. This type of advertising is allowed under the *Income Tax Act*, **unless it amounts to support/opposition of a political party or candidate.** Where it becomes risky is if an issue becomes so clearly associated with a particular party or candidate that advertising on the issue has the effect of promoting or opposing them, even though they are not mentioned in the ad. Contact a lawyer and/or the CRA for guidance if you have questions about whether an issue has become too closely associated with a political party or candidate.

### 2 PARTISAN ACTIVITIES:

Activities carried out by a third party that promote or oppose a political party, nomination contestant, potential candidate, candidate or party leader, other than by taking a position on an issue with which the political party or person is associated. Making telephone calls, sending text messages and canvassing are examples of partisan activities.

### 3 ELECTION SURVEYS:

Surveys about voting intentions or choices, or about an issue with which a registered political party or candidate is associated, that a third party conducts or causes to be conducted during the election period. The survey results are used in deciding whether to organize and carry out regulated activities, or in the organization and carrying out of regulated activities.

## How to register as a third party

A coalition of organizations can register as a group without each individual member organization having to register. However, the coalition will have to provide the name, contact details, and declaration of residency for an individual responsible for the group. If the coalition has a governing body, the application has to include a copy of a resolution passed by that governing body authorizing it to incur partisan expenses.

### In order to register as a third party, an individual or organization must:

1. Appoint a financial agent, who must sign a declaration accepting the appointment
2. Appoint an auditor, who must sign a declaration accepting the appointment, if the third party has conducted regulated activities with combined expenses of \$10,000 or more
3. Submit the Application to Register a Third Party to Elections Canada

Contact a lawyer if you are unsure about whether an activity is compliant with the *Canada Elections Act* or *Income Tax Act* or if you have any questions regarding third-party regulations.

## LEARN MORE

- Elections Canada: [Questions & Answers for Third Parties](#)
- Elections Canada: [Political Financing Handbook for Third Parties, Financial Agents and Auditors](#)
- Elections Canada: [Tools for Third Parties](#)
- Canada Revenue Agency: [Charitable Activities](#)
- Government of Canada: [Canada Elections Act](#)
- Government of Canada: [Income Tax Act](#)

# Guidelines for Non-Partisan Engagement for Charities

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Here are a few tips to consider in your communications to help you remain non-partisan:

## 1. Distribute information in an impartial and neutral way

Charitable organizations are allowed to share impartial information on the policy positions of **all** political parties or all candidates both before and during the election period. However, this information must be shared in a neutral fashion. For example, creating a chart with every party or candidate's position or promise(s) on a given issue, with a link to their platform, is a non-partisan activity.

### **Partisan Pitfall:**

Creating a chart with a red "x" next to policy positions that differ from the charity's and/or putting a green checkmark next to policy positions that align with the charity's views could be considered partisan.

Another non-partisan approach would be to provide members of your network(s) with links to the campaign platforms of **all** political parties and encourage them to learn where each party stands on the issues that matter to them.

### **Partisan Pitfall:**

Only linking to the website or campaign platforms of political parties/candidates that are aligned with the charity's views could be considered partisan.

### **Partisan Pitfall:**

Singling out the voting pattern of any particular political party or candidate on an issue could be considered partisan.

## 2. Keep things focused on policies, not parties or candidates

As a general rule, the CRA recommends that charitable organizations focus on the policy issue under discussion rather than on the candidate or political party. According to the CRA, “Charities may engage in unlimited public policy dialogues and development activities (PPDDAs) that further its stated charitable purpose(s), provided the charity **never directly or indirectly supports or opposes a political party or candidate for public office**. In other words, a charity is free to advocate for retaining, opposing, or changing any law, policy, or decision of government in furtherance of its stated charitable purpose.”

However, charitable organizations may wish to avoid the following:

- Commending or criticizing political parties/candidates on the charity’s website, in its publications, or on its social media pages.
- Speculating on the outcome of the election or on which party/candidate may form the next government.
- Sharing links to third-party websites or social media pages that commend or criticize political parties or political candidates.

### Partisan Pitfall:

Sharing a link to a news article critical of a party or candidate’s position on the charity’s social media page could be viewed as partisan.

When considering whether a charitable organization has engaged in partisan activities, the CRA is concerned with the activities of the charity rather than the activities of the political party/candidate. For example, if a political party/candidate has a **similar** view on the same issue, adopts a policy approach suggested by your organization, uses your research, or makes a comment about your organization, the CRA has stated that this would likely not violate the prohibition against engaging in direct/indirect support or opposition.

### Partisan Pitfall:

When engaging in issue advertising, recall that there may be instances where the issue has become so clearly associated with a political party or candidate that advertising around the issue has the effect of promoting or opposing them. This could be viewed as partisan.

Ultimately, charities can and should continue to advocate on key issues affecting their communities before and during an election period. For greater clarity, we encourage charitable organizations to watch the Government of Canada’s webinar on what constitutes public policy dialogues and development activities.

## LEARN MORE

- Government of Canada (Guidelines): [Public Policy Dialogue and Development Activities by Charities](#)
- Government of Canada (Webinar): [Public Policy Dialogue and Development Activities by Registered Charities](#)

### 3. Monitor the organization's public platforms

The obligation to refrain from providing direct or indirect support/opposition to any political party or candidate extends to your organization's internet activities and web pages. A charity that provides a platform for the public to comment on and discuss issues (i.e. a website, blog, or **social media page**) must remove, in a timely manner, any comments made on its platform that support/oppose a political party or candidate for public office. The CRA recommends that charitable organizations consider adding a notice on their platform advising users that such messages will be removed.







## PART 2

# Advocacy Tips and Strategies

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# Candidate / MP Engagement

There's no better time to engage with your organization's next Member of Parliament than before and during the election period. Candidates are eager to meet with as many community organizations and constituents as possible. They want to earn your support/vote and will be keen to listen to your concerns and ideas, and to answer your questions.

Time invested to connect with candidates in a non-partisan way is time well spent. One of these people will be your next Member of Parliament. And if your organization operates in a large city, a group of MPs, often from different political parties, will be elected to serve in the next federal parliament. This means your organization's 'candidate engagement strategy' may include several or more riding races.

Notably, in addition to representing the interests of their constituents in Ottawa, the winning candidate(s) may be appointed to other key roles, with significant influence and responsibilities. These additional jobs include: Cabinet Minister, Parliamentary Secretary, Shadow Cabinet Minister/Opposition Critic and House of Commons Committee Chair.

**Below is a list of key ways your organization can engage with federal candidates to amplify your priorities.**

## 1. Become familiar with local candidates and stay current on campaign activities

As each party's candidate is confirmed, follow them on a few of their social media platforms to stay informed of their campaign activities and promises.

### **Partisan Pitfall:**

Liking and/or sharing the posts of a particular political party or candidate could be viewed as partisan.

Visit the candidates' websites to sign-up for e-updates from their campaigns. This website will also include: the candidate's biography, information about upcoming candidate events and local and national platform announcements, as well as how to volunteer, donate and vote.






Follow traditional news sources - newspapers, tv and radio - for updates on the riding race(s) and news of campaign commitments from local candidates and their national party leaders.

## 2. All-Candidate Survey / Questionnaire

One of the best ways to increase a candidate's awareness of your organization's work in the riding or city they are running in, as well as to secure information about a candidate's priorities and willingness to support your organization's work, is to send them a "candidate questionnaire."

The candidates' responses can then be shared within your organization and networks so that staff, volunteers, clients and community members are aware of each candidates' position on key issues and willingness to support your ongoing work. This information will help people to be more informed about the candidate or political party that best aligns with their values and the issues they care about.

### Possible questions:

-  What is your party's position on **(insert subject)**? If possible, please provide links to relevant information, including: national platform promises, news releases, backgrounders and leader statements.
-  If (re-) elected the next MP for **(insert riding name)**, will you commit to working to **(insert up to THREE asks)**? Please elaborate on how you will do this.
-  What professional, volunteer or life experiences will inform your work to **(insert issue your organization wants addressed)**?
-  Are you available to meet with representatives of **(insert name of your organization)**, in the next two - three weeks? Please provide the name and contact information for the person on your campaign team who we should contact to schedule a meeting with you.
-  Is there any additional information you would like to add?

In an email message, and on the survey itself, **include a deadline for response to the questionnaire** and the **name of the person in your organization and their phone number, as well as the email address** the completed survey should be sent to. Also, state how the information provided by the candidate will be shared by your organization - posted on your group's website, included in an e-update to staff, volunteers, clients and members, discussed at meetings, etc.

### Partisan Pitfall:

Failing to provide enough time for a specific candidate to complete the survey, or asking different survey questions to each party/candidate, could be viewed as partisan.

**Timing:** Your questionnaire should be sent no later than the first week of the formal campaign period. It can be sent sooner if the candidate has a website with their contact information on it.

Finally, if you don't receive an email acknowledging receipt of the survey, you should follow up with an email or call to the campaign office to ensure the survey was received. If a candidate or political party declines to participate, you may wish to retain proof that each party/candidate was offered the opportunity to respond to the survey.

#### **Partisan Pitfall:**

If disseminating the survey results publicly, failing to share the survey responses of all parties or candidates could be viewed as partisan.

### **3. Candidate Briefings**

Candidates will welcome the opportunity to meet with community organizations, leading-up to and during the campaign. It's best to put your request to meet in writing, in an email. The format of the meeting (in person or virtual) can be suited to your organization's needs and capacity, as well as the candidate's availability.

For MPs seeking re-election, the request for a meeting can be sent to their constituency or campaign office. For other candidates, send the request to the email address on their websites.

The request should include who will attend the meeting on your organization's behalf and the subject(s) you wish to discuss. Also, request to meet as early as possible and indicate if you would like the meeting to be at your office or a location of the candidate's choice.

If after a few days you haven't received a response to your request, resend the email and follow-up with a phone call to the candidate's office.

If a candidate agrees to meet with you, be sure to prepare in advance to maximize the opportunity. We recommend creating a document that you can leave behind with the candidate at the conclusion of your meeting. The 'leave behind' can be print information about your local organization, a briefing note prepared by advocacy experts in your sector, or a subject-specific news release.



## MEETING STRUCTURE

You can prepare an agenda to propose and follow during your meeting. This will help you ensure you accomplish your goal for the meeting. Typically, you would want to have enough time to do each of the following:

- Introduce yourself and the organization or group you represent.
- Deliver your core message. Explain what you want to talk about and why, and clearly articulate your ask.
- Answer any questions from the candidate. Listen carefully, identify areas of agreement and disagreement.
- Try to obtain a commitment to do (or not do) something. Even a small commitment allows you to revisit the conversation later on and to push your agenda forward.
- Thank the officials for their time.

## TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE MEETINGS

- Arrive early. Plan for security checks, technical issues and other possible delays.
- Keep an eye on the clock during the meeting.
- Take notes (who is present, what was discussed, what was the response, any follow ups).
- Make sure all members in your team have an opportunity to speak, not just the lead spokesperson.
- Pay attention to language (including body language).
- Emphasize areas of agreement and shared interests.
- Be persistent but be patient and polite.
- Leave behind any documents/information that you want the candidate to have.

After the meeting, contact the candidate to thank them for their time. In this email, you should also send a summary of what was discussed, and outline any action items or commitments that were made.

## 4. Hosting a “Candidate Meet and Greet”

If you have access to suitable space, you may wish to offer to organize a “meet and greet” for the candidate with your staff, volunteers and clients/members. The opportunity to meet a larger group of potential voters may elevate the priority of your organization’s request for a meeting in the candidate’s busy schedule.

You can also offer to organize a virtual meeting with a wider group of people from your organization if that’s more convenient for everyone.

### **Partisan Pitfall:**

Only hosting a meet and greet with candidates whose views align with the charitable organization’s could be viewed as partisan.

## 5. Attending All-Candidate Debates / Town Halls:

These events, often organized by community associations or single-issue groups such as climate and human rights activists, are a good way to secure direct candidate engagement - either by maximizing your chance to ask a question or by briefly meeting with the candidate after the event.

# TIPS TO LEVERAGE AN ALL-CANDIDATE DEBATE:

- ✓ Write out your question. Impactful questions for candidates should be close-ended (able to be answered with yes/no), short (60 seconds or less), and prepared and practiced ahead of time. Introduce yourself briefly, and start your question with “will you promise to,” “will you support,” or “will you oppose.”
- ✓ Reach out to the event organizers in advance of the event to confirm how questions will be asked. Will it be via questions provided to the moderator, by the organizers in advance of the event, or directly from audience members? If the former, ask the event organizers if they will consider a question submitted by your organization for the moderator to ask.
- ✓ Arrive early with a colleague to ensure you get a good spot. Sit near the front of the stage, where your raised hand is more likely to be noticed, or in seats close to where microphones are set up for questions from audience members.
- ✓ Ask, listen, and respond: Be prepared for if the candidate dodges the question and gives a vague or non-committal answer. If this happens, you can politely interject to ask your key yes/no question again.
- ✓ Make sure your colleague is video recording the exchange, to get the candidate’s response on the record. You should also record other candidate statements relevant to the issues you care about.

### **Partisan Pitfall:**

If sharing the video publicly, failing to show the candidate's full response and/or only sharing the responses from certain candidates could be viewed as partisan.

Take several photos of the event. The best photo will capture engagement or conversation between candidates and someone from your organization.

If local media are covering the event, seek them out after the debate ends to offer a **non-partisan** comment from your organization. You can do this by keeping your key message focused on a critical issue for your organization and community members.

Post about your group's participation in the event on your organization's social channels. Highlight what the candidates said about your key issue(s) in a neutral and factual manner. Include the candidates' social handles in the posts. Ask your network members to like and share the post.

## **6. Hosting an All-Candidates Forum / Town Hall**

Organizing and hosting an all-candidates forum or town hall requires a lot of work and advance planning. The scope of work includes: engagement and coordination with all of the candidates participating in the event, securing and briefing a moderator, designing the format of the debate, logistical arrangements (such as securing a venue, audio-video and set-up), and promotion of the event.



### **Partisan Pitfall:**

If your organization is hosting a debate or Town Hall, failing to invite all candidates and/or failing to ensure that candidates are given an equal opportunity to present their views and respond to questions could be viewed as partisan.

# Earned Media Strategies

Earned media refers to publicity gained through organic means rather than paid advertising. It includes media coverage, word-of-mouth, social media shares, online reviews, and mentions in news articles, blogs, or influencer content. Essentially, it's the exposure your organization receives because others choose to talk about it, which differs from paid media such as advertisements, and owned media, such as your organization's website or newsletter.

For example, if a news outlet writes an article about your organization's work on feminist law reform, or if a coalition partner shares your campaign on their social media, that's earned media. It's valuable because it tends to be more credible and influential than paid media and can reach a wider audience than owned media.

Earned media strategies present a valuable opportunity to raise awareness about key issues affecting your organization, clients/members, and broader community. Feminist organizations can use tools such as op-eds and letters to the editor to shape or inform public opinion, encourage people to take action, and apply public pressure to candidates and Members of Parliament to make a commitment on a key issue. These tools can also be used to increase awareness about key issues at stake in this election for the people your organization serves. Earned media strategies have minimal cost and can be written by staff members, board directors, volunteers and your broader community.

## **STRENGTH IN NUMBERS:**

Collaborate with other feminist organizations to share the workload, amplify collective demands, and increase reach across the country. By partnering with organizations working in climate justice, gender based violence, immigration, economic security, disability rights, housing, human rights, etc., we can leverage our own expertise on a particular topic, while amplifying the knowledge and expertise of partners.

A series of well-timed op-eds and letters to the editor can ensure feminist issues are consistently featured in traditional media. While collaboration can be a very effective tool in your op-ed arsenal, please bear in mind that three named authors is usually the limit for published op-eds.



## Op-Eds

Op-eds are short opinion pieces published in newspapers and written by members of the public. They are a great way to express your opinion on a particular issue and position yourself as an expert.

Identify the newspaper you want to submit it to, so you can make sure you respect the word limit and adapt your style and content to the needs of that newspaper's readers.

- A few examples include: The National Post, Globe and Mail, Canadian Broadcasting Company/Radio-Canada, Ottawa Citizen, Toronto Star and The National Observer.
- Consider submitting your op-ed to local publications if the issue you are writing about has strong local or regional context.

### **Partisan Pitfall:**

An Op-Ed written by your organization that focuses on a specific political candidate or party's policies/platform could be viewed as partisan.



# Six Tips for Writing Effective Op-Eds

## 1 IDENTIFY A HOOK:

To write a successful op-ed and increase your chances of being published, you need to relate your topic to current news to convince the editor to publish it now. You do not need to necessarily choose your op-ed based on current news, but you will have to highlight some sort of relation between the two. Here are a few examples of hooks to make your topic relevant:

- “Today is the anniversary of X event” / “Today is the international day for Y” (Make sure you submit the op-ed at least a few days before)
- “Since the COVID-19 pandemic, violence against women has been recognized as rising to epidemic proportions.”

## 2 MAKE YOUR TITLE SHAREABLE:

Your title should be clear and read as something people will want to share; a title that is too mysterious is not effective in that regard. Consider stating a clear opinion in the title – you will likely get readers sharing the title as a way of agreeing with the statement, regardless of whether they have read the article. Although a title with a question piques readers’ interest, it may be less shareable because readers have to read through the entire piece to know if they agree with your message.

## 3 CONSIDER WRITING YOUR INTRODUCTION LAST:

Besides the title, the introduction is the section of an op-ed that is the most read. The introduction is often the most challenging part to write and a part of the op-ed that you will likely need to rewrite several times. The first sentence of the op-ed should motivate readers to continue reading. Some examples include a question, a provocative statement, a pop culture reference, a challenge to conventional wisdom, or a surprising fact – anything that can pique the reader’s curiosity.

The introduction may also contain your key message, which is a simple thesis that can fit into one sentence. While you can address counterarguments, make sure your opinion is clear throughout the op-ed. Read examples of op-eds from the newspaper you want to be published in.

## 4 POLISH YOUR STYLE:

It is important to keep your op-ed reader-friendly and not use any jargon or acronyms. Consider that many people will read your text on their cell phone, so short paragraphs are essential. Cut out repetition or unnecessary information. Keep in mind that you are not trying to prove an argument like in a research paper; you are simply making an argument about a specific issue. Ultimately, if it looks like an op-ed and reads like an op-ed, it will get published as an op-ed.

**5****EDIT, EDIT, EDIT:**

Once you have completed your op-ed, you should spend some time editing. Return to your introduction and rewrite it to align with the arguments you have made in the op-ed. Make sure that your title still matches the contents of the op-ed.

A second pair of eyes can catch mistakes you may have missed, so before sending your op-ed to the newspaper, have a friend read and edit it. If time allows, put the draft aside, return to it the following day, and read it aloud. Make sure to eliminate repetitions and long sentences.

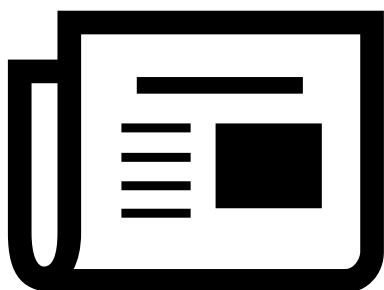
**6****SEND IT TO A NEWSPAPER:**

After editing, you should email relevant newspapers or magazines with a short pitch. The pitch should include the subject of your op-ed, your main thesis, your hook, and your affiliation or authority on the topic. In the body of the email, include the title and number of words, and paste the entire op-ed instead of sending it as an attachment (unless the newspaper provides different instructions).

It is not acceptable to submit your piece to more than one newspaper, but newspapers do not usually reply when they reject a piece. For that reason, you can provide a deadline in your email, and if you have not heard back from the newspaper by the deadline, send a follow-up email informing them that you are retracting the submission and sending it to another newspaper. It usually takes a few days for a newspaper to accept a piece.

If the op-ed is accepted, save the contact information of the person who follows up with you so you can send your next op-ed directly to them. The newspaper may make edits to your piece, such as changing the title or shortening the content. They will not ask you to approve these changes.

Finally, it is important not to get discouraged if your op-ed does not get picked up immediately – it may just be bad timing. Once you get the hang of it, you can use this tool with regularity as a part of your law reform advocacy toolkit.



**CHECK OUT THIS OP-ED WRITTEN BY NAWL'S LEGAL DIRECTOR SUZANNE ZACCOUR AS AN EXAMPLE:**

Law360.ca:

[Parental alienation: The one-size-fits-none theory](#)

## Letters to the Editor

The letters page is one of the most popular sections of a newspaper or publication, and therefore is a great way to reach a broad span of people in Canada beyond your immediate circle. A letter to the editor can be written by anyone – you do not need to be an expert on the topic to have your letter published. Letters are typically written by individuals, rather than on behalf of an organization.

### A few tips to keep in mind:

- ✓ Your letter should respond to a recently published article, editorial or letter in the publication you are submitting to. Be sure to indicate the article you are referring to, or include a link.
- ✓ You must sign your name at the end of your letter. Unsigned letters are rarely published.
- ✓ Respect the word count. While specifics vary across publications, a letter to the editor should be no longer than 150-200 words max. Letters that exceed the word count are unlikely to be published.
- ✓ Be concise. Given the limited word count, it is essential to get straight to the point you are trying to make.
- ✓ Embrace your unique voice. Editors are looking for content that will grab a reader's attention, spark conversation, or generate a buzz. Your voice and tone can contribute greatly to the overall impact of the piece.
- ✓ Review the writing tips for op-eds listed above. Generally, these tips will also apply to Letters to the Editor as well.

If your op-ed or letter are published, encourage your network to share it so you can reach a wider audience. You can promote it on your social media channels, include a link in your newsletter, and post a copy on your website. Ask your network to share any of their published content with you so you can cross-pollinate audiences.

### Partisan Pitfall:

Sharing/reposting an op-ed or letter to the editor on your organization's channels that supports/opposes a political party or candidate could be viewed as partisan.

## LEARN MORE

Take NAWL's free, open access Feminist Law Reform 101 course to learn more about engagement strategies outside of the election period.

- National Association of Women and the Law: [Feminist Law Reform 101 course](#)

# Conclusion

Charities and nonprofits serve as crucial bridges between government and our communities. We lead critical work and provide essential services for people in Canada, all of which are greatly impacted by policy decisions of the federal government. Therefore, our sector plays an important role in advocating on key issues, influencing the development of political party platforms, and generating public support for feminist policies during federal elections. Our engagement in the election process helps foster a democracy that is inclusive and representative of the needs and values of people in Canada.

We encourage charities and nonprofits to embrace civic engagement strategies, but with additional caution around activities that could be interpreted as providing indirect or direct support/opposition for a political party or candidate. Through collaborative efforts, our sector can present a unified voice to advocate for feminist policies that will support a safe and thriving Canada for everyone.



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This toolkit was produced by the National Association of Women and the Law. NAWL is dedicated to advancing substantive equality for all women in Canada through law reform, particularly at the federal level. Since our founding in 1974, we are proud to have had a major role in achieving significant milestones for women's rights, and for our advocacy to have impacted numerous laws and policies across the country.

This toolkit was developed in collaboration with:



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Celebrating the Legacy  
Célébrer l'héritage

Defining the Future  
Définir l'avenir

Share your feedback and help us improve by scanning the QR code:



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