

C4 Action Item Series: *How to Insert the Trade Issue into Elections*

Your greatest impact during election time is non-express advocacy communication to the general public. Note that none of these activities can be coordinated with a campaign or candidate, and none can contain express advocacy.

Organizing Get out The Vote and Voter Registration Efforts

- Unlike 501(c)(3)s, 501(c)(4)s can encourage voters to consider narrowly-defined, high-profile issues
- You can conduct a fair-trade based voter registration drive
- You can put a button on your website encouraging visitors to vote fair trade
- You can encourage coalition groups to ask staff and members to vote
- Include an article in your newsletter about the importance of voting

Preparing a Voter Guide

- A 501(c)(4) can distribute voter guides which focus on a narrow range of issues and suggests a “correct” position.
- If you are constructing a voter guide based on responses from a survey, you do not have to receive answers from all candidates, as long as you have made a good faith effort to get the survey to all candidates.
- This includes sending it to them certified mail, by email and calling to follow up.
- If a candidate received it and did not to respond, simply list the candidate and put “no response to survey”
- Distribute these through your activist networks, and put them in public places
- If your town has a sizeable Latino population, make a Spanish version.
- Do outreach to local newspapers and organizations with newsletters
- Encourage media to cover the event or write a story on the impact of trade

Creating Incumbent Voting Records or Scorecard

- Remember, 501(c)(4)s have more leeway to limit voting records to narrow issues, and include the organization’s viewpoint on the issue

Distributing Candidate Questionnaires

- 501(c)(4)s can publicize questionnaires which focus on a narrow range of issues and suggest a “correct” position. You cannot promise the campaign resources based on the results or answers.

Bird-dogging candidates

- Follow them to parades, events, rallies, debates
- Go to any public events where a candidate will be present.
- Carry posters, wear a sandwich-board, and hand out fliers
- Ask questions about incumbents’ fast track votes and their stance on FTAs

Securing Candidate Pledges

- 501(c)(4)s can ask candidates to sign (or publicly refuse to sign) a pledge to take a certain position on an issue, and publicize the results broadly as long as this communication does not contain express advocacy

Making Endorsements

- May communicate endorsements to members
- May announce endorsement to usual press list
- Must limit to media outlets the organization usually notifies for press releases
- May not coordinate press announcement with candidate, campaign, or party