



Voter Participation and Lobbying Guide for **Head Start** Staff; Parents; and Friends



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Introduction

Introduction

The Head Start community aims to protect the future and wellbeing of the country's most precious commodity – our children. To do this well, Head Start staff, parents, and friends must become active in all areas that concern children. This includes understanding and keeping abreast of legislative issues and voting in every election.

Without using program resources, you must also educate your community and the members of your federal, state, and local legislatures about the issues affecting children in poverty. While it is illegal for Head Start programs to use federal dollars to influence the political process in any way, there are allowable activities in which programs can participate. There are even more activities that you, as a private citizen, can do.

The NHSA Voter Participation and Lobbying guidebook will help you and your Head Start program become politically proactive – greatly strengthening the voice of Head Start. The guide will tell you the dos and don'ts of Head Start political involvement. And it will provide you with techniques for increasing your community's political participation.

The regulations in this guide might seem overwhelming at first, but it's important that you learn them. Understanding political activities that are legally acceptable (and the ones that are not) will protect your Head Start program from losing its funding – a strong possibility if laws are broken.

Head Start programs must comply with two sets of regulations:

- Voter participation and political campaign regulations.
These concern your efforts to elect persons to public office.
- Lobbying regulations.
Lobbying is attempting to influence the passage of legislation.

Regulations for both sets of activities are covered in five publications.

- The Head Start Act.
- The Department of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations Bill.
- The Hatch Act.
- The Office of Management and Budget's OMB Circular A-122.
- IRS regulations for lobbying (if the Head Start agency is 501(c)(3) tax-exempt).

This guide addresses all of these measures under "Head Start Political Involvement."

Although regulations still limit the political activities of Head Start programs and their staffs, private citizens – including Head Start staff on their "own time" – may legally engage in numerous political activities.

Your first step toward influencing political change as a private citizen is to register to vote. NHSA's Voter Registration and Lobbying Guide explains how the National Voter Registration Act makes it easy for you to register. In "Voter Registration" you will learn how to organize a campaign to register communities to vote. In "Get out the Vote" you are provided the 10 rules that will ensure your campaign is a success.

"Powerful Letters and More" contains multiple strategies that you – independent of Head Start – can embrace to become a successful advocate.

After you read this guide, you might feel that your hands are tied by the regulations that govern your voter participation and lobbying activities. But these regulations are the law, and it is imperative that you become familiar with them. Taking the time to study this guide will protect your Head Start program and make you a

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powerful defender of children's rights. If your questions are not answered or if you think a particular situation is unclear, contact your local legal services program or States Attorney's Office.

Activities on Head Start's Time

Head Start Political Involvement

Voter participation and lobbying laws for Head Start

Remember: No federal funds, program services paid for by federal funds, Head Start agency-owned equipment, facilities, supplies, or employees on program time may be used for voter participation or lobbying activities. All activities must be nonpartisan. Violation of either or both can result in loss of your federal grant from the Department of Health and Human Services, and/or tax penalties from the IRS.

Regulations Governing Voter Participation and Political Campaign Activities

Regulations in the Head Start Act, OMB Circular A-122, and the Hatch Act prohibit a Head Start agency from participating in any political campaign for or against any candidate – any activities must be nonpartisan and must be done without federal funding. For example, if your program is conducting a voter education program about the candidates, it must include all candidates for a particular office and all their viewpoints without bias.

I. The Head Start Act

Language under Chapter 105: Community Services Programs, subchapter II: Head Start Programs:

- (a) For purposes of chapter 15 of title 5, United States Code, any agency which assumes responsibility for planning, developing, and coordinating Head Start programs and receives assistance under this subchapter shall be deemed to be a State or local agency. For purposes of clause (1) and (2) of section 150(a) of such title, any agency receiving assistance under this subchapter shall be deemed to be a State or local agency.
- (b) Programs assisted under this subchapter shall not be carried on in a manner involving the use of program funds, the provision of services, or the employment or assignment of personnel in a manner supporting or resulting in the identification of such programs with:
 - (1) any partisan or nonpartisan political activity or any other political activity associated with a candidate, or contending faction or group, in an election for public office;
 - (2) any activity to provide voters or prospective voters with transportation to the polls or similar assistance in connection with any such election; or
 - (3) any voter registration activity.

The Secretary, after consultation with the Office of Personnel Management, shall issue rules and regulations to provide for the enforcement of this section, which shall include provisions for summary suspension of assistance or other action necessary to permit enforcement on an emergency basis.

Layman's language: Head Start federal funds, funds considered a match for federal funds (including in-kind resources), Head Start services, or Head Start employees may not be used for any political activities, including transportation to or from voting polls and/or voter registration.

II. The Hatch Act

Under The Hatch Act language found in § 1502 of Title 5, United States: Influencing elections; taking part in political campaigns; prohibitions; exceptions, Head Start employees are prohibited from:

- (1) using their official authority to influence for the purpose of interfering with or affecting the result of an election or a nomination for office;

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- (2) Directly or indirectly coercing, attempting to coerce, commanding or advising a State or local officer or employee to pay, lend, or contribute anything of value to a party, committee, organization, agency, or person for political purposes; or
- (3) Being a candidate for a partisan elective office.

Political activity restrictions apply equally for full-time and part-time employees provided the employee's position with the federally-financed agency is his or her principal employment.

Head Start employees do retain the right to vote as they choose and to express their opinions on political subjects and candidates.

III. The Office of Management and Budget's OMB Circular A-122, *Cost Principles for Nonprofit Organizations*.

Under OMB Circular A-122, federal funds may not be used for:

- i. attempts to influence the outcomes of any federal, state or local election, referendum, initiative, or similar procedure, through in-kind or cash contributions, endorsements, publicity, or similar activity;
- ii. establishing, administering, contributing to, or pay the expenses of a political party, campaign, political action committee, or other organization established for the purpose of influencing the outcomes of elections.

IV. IRS Regulations for agencies tax-exempt under Section 501(c)(3).

Along with OMB's Circular A-122 regulations, the IRS specifies that organizations exempt from federal income tax under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code (IRC), such as many Head Start agencies, may not intervene directly or indirectly in any political campaign on behalf of or in opposition to any candidate for public office. Unlike the lobbying limitation, the prohibition on political campaign activity is absolute. Any intervention in a political campaign can jeopardize a Head Start agency's Section 501(c)(3) exemption and expose its officers and directors personally to substantial tax penalties. Moreover, a violation can occur even if no funds are expended (for example, providing an endorsement for a candidate).

Head Start agencies exempt under 501(c)(3) programs may not:

- (1) endorse or oppose a candidate;
- (2) directly contribute funds to a candidate;
- (3) indirectly support a candidate by making the Head Start agency's facilities or resources available to a candidate (for example telephones, photocopying services, mailing lists, etc.). However, the Head Start agency would comply with the law if it treated all candidates equally (for example renting a mailing list to all candidates on the same terms as it makes for others).

Permissible Activities for Voter Participation and Political Activity

Despite the strict prohibition on campaign intervention, Head Start agencies can still play a significant role in the political process, provided federal funds are not used. Some common methods include:

(1) Public Candidate Forums

A Head Start agency can invite candidates for public office to attend a meeting, sponsor a public forum, or otherwise to state their views on matters of interest in the agency. The agency should be sure to invite all the candidates for a particular office and to allow them to participate on equal terms. The Head Start agency should avoid allowing staff, volunteers, or board members to state the agency's views on the issues or to comment on the candidates' position on behalf of the agency. Personal views, clearly stated as such, are permissible.

(2) Voter Education

Voter education activities, conducted in a totally nonpartisan manner, are permissible. Reporting on the voting records of legislators is permissible, so long as the information is published in the same manner during

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the election campaign as at other times. Do not use statements such as "voted for the Head Start agency's position" or the equivalent. Also, do not begin to publish voting records for the first time during a campaign. Finally, such records should not be sent to the general public, only to those who normally receive informational materials from the agency.

Caution: Head Start agencies should be extremely careful in publishing voter guides or the results of candidate questionnaires.

The IRS takes the position that questionnaires or guides that show a bias for or against a candidate constitute intervention in a campaign. Voter guides that set forth the position of the candidates on a wide variety of issues without any indication of preference, direct or indirect, are acceptable. However, it is extremely difficult to pose questions to a candidate without emphasizing a special interest. The IRS believes that a narrowly focused question implies an endorsement of the candidates whose replies are most favorable. There are similar considerations when a candidate is asked to respond to a position paper drafted by the Head Start agency.

(3) Candidate Statements

It is permissible for a Head Start agency to inform a candidate of its position on issues, to urge support of the agency's position if elected, and to ask the candidate to go on record to that effect.

Note: If the candidate is an incumbent, the rules on lobbying which follow this section, come into play regarding pending or proposed legislation.

However, even if the candidate does go on record, the Head Start agency may not publish the candidate's response. The IRC specifically prohibits "the publishing or distribution of statements." On the other hand, the Head Start agency can always use the statement after the election as a reminder to the candidate of promises to be kept.

(4) Get-Out-the-Vote Campaigns

Head Start agencies may invite nonpartisan organizations such as the League of Women Voters to conduct voter registration in public areas of the agency where other public information is made available. The voter-registration forms are for information purposes only. So not attempt to coerce people to register to vote on-site on program time.

Remember: No federal funds, program services paid for by federal funds, Head Start agency-owned equipment, facilities, or supplies, or employees on program time may be used for the above four activities. All activities must be nonpartisan. Violation of either or both can result in loss of your federal grant from the Department of Health and Human Services, and/or tax penalties from the IRS.

Regulations Governing Lobbying

I. Department of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education and related Agencies Appropriations Act

Because of restrictions contained in federal appropriations' legislation, most federal funds that Head Start agencies typically receive cannot be used to influence legislation pending before Congress (including appropriations). Section 504 of the 1995 Labor, HHS, and Education appropriations prohibits the use of appropriated funds. The language reads:

- (1) for publicity or propaganda purposes, for the preparation, distribution, or use of any kit, pamphlet, booklet, publication, radio, television, or film presentation designed to support or defeat legislation pending before Congress, except in presentation to Congress itself.
- (2) To pay the salary or expenses of any grant or contract recipient, or agent acting for such recipient, related to any activity designed to influence legislation or appropriations pending before the Congress.

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Substantially similar revisions have been included in every Labor, HHS, and Education appropriations for more than a decade.

II. The Office of Management and Budget's Circular A-122

Federal funds derived from a direct federal grant program (such as Head Start) subject to cost principles contained in OMB Circular A-122 cannot be used to attempt to influence the introduction or enactment of *federal or state* legislation. This prohibition covers the following activities:

- (1) direct communications with any member or employee of Congress or the state legislature (including efforts to influence state or local officials to engage in similar lobbying activity) or with any governmental official or employee in connection with a decision to sign or veto enrolled legislation. (See examples of direct lobbying below.)
- (2) grassroots lobbying, i.e., preparing, distributing, or using publicity or propaganda, or by urging members of the general public to contribute to or participate in any mass demonstration, march, rally, fundraising drive, lobbying campaign, or letter writing or telephone campaign.
- (3) Legislative liaison activities (including attendance at legislative sessions or committee hearings, gathering information regarding legislation) when such activities are carried on in support of or knowing preparation for an effort to engage in unallowable lobbying.

However, there are specific exceptions recognized for certain activities. A Head Start agency may:

- (1) Provide a technical and factual presentation of information on a topic directly related to grant performance through hearing testimony, statements, or letters to Congress, a state legislature, member or staff in response to a documented request, provided such information is readily obtainable and can readily be put in deliverable form (costs for travel, meals, and lodging are unallowable unless incurred to offer testimony at a regularly scheduled hearing pursuant to a written request for such presentation by the Chairman or Ranking Minority Member of the Committee or Subcommittee conducting the hearing);
- (2) Engage in direct lobbying to influence state legislation to directly reduce the cost, or to avoid material impairment of the organization's authority to perform the grant; and
- (3) Engage in any activity specifically authorized by statute to be undertaken with grant funds.

According to IRS regulations, direct lobbying is any attempt to influence local, state, or federal legislation by contacting any member of legislature, legislative staff, or government employee to persuade him or her to propose, support, oppose, change, or otherwise influence legislation. It does not matter if the legislation is pending or it is a specific legislative proposal not introduced yet. Direct lobbying can take a number of forms, all directed to legislators and their staffs as opposed to the general public, including:

- Writing and sending letters or postcards to the members of the legislature.
- Making telephone calls to a member or employee of the legislature.
- Having face-to-face meetings with a legislative member or staff person.
- Giving reports, fact sheets, and other analyses to a legislative member or staff person supporting or opposing a specific legislative proposal.
- Presenting testimony on legislation to a committee or subcommittee unless it has been requested in writing by a committee or legislative body (but not an individual member).
- Giving a legislator or staff member advice and information about legislation or a specific legislative proposal if a view for or against the measure is expressed.

Lobbying Activities Allowed with Federal Funds

- ¹ Lobbying (i.e., policy advocacy) of state or federal Executive Branch officials (except with regard to a veto of legislation if the funds are derived from a grant program subject to OMB Circular A-122), but subject to the Byrd Amendment reporting and disclosure rules¹ regarding lobbying for a specific grant or contract award;

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- (2) Lobbying to influence local (i.e., city or county) legislation, provided that the activities are of direct benefit to the grant or within the scope of services contemplated under a block grant.
- (3) State-level lobbying in order to directly reduce the cost or to avoid material impairment of the grantee's authority to perform the grant.
- (4) Head Start agencies may pay membership dues to national, state, and local trade associations which, among other things, lobby as long as the dues are reasonable in amount and the associations provide bona fide educational or informational services of direct benefit to the grantee.

Note: Head Start agencies should determine whether there are restrictions on lobbying activities attached to funds received from Head Start and local government sources. Your State Attorney's office or the department from which the state money is granted will have the restrictions, if any, in the applicable grant language.

¹ Under the Byrd Amendment, Head Start agencies receiving (directly or as subrecipients) grants, contracts, or cooperative agreements exceeding \$100,000 or loans exceeding \$150,000 must certify that they will not use federal funds to lobby the executive or legislative branch of the federal government in connection with a specific grant, cooperative agreement, contract or loan and the extension, continuation, renewal, amendment or modification thereof. In addition, the recipients must disclose (by filing a form) if they use non-federal funds to pay for activities that are prohibited if paid for by federal funds. Exceptions to this rule are: lobbying activities related to legislation (including appropriations and authorizations) or regulations affecting a particular grant program as opposed to a particular grant award; ordinary discussions with federal agencies concerning grant or contract administration; professional and technical services; and providing information specifically requested by an agency or Congress.

The Use of Private Funds for Lobbying

Private funds are considered to be any funds that are not derived from federal, state, or local governments. Private funds available to a Head Start agency typically consist of donations and income from activities that are not supported by grant funds and, accordingly, are not subject to grant program income rules. Please caution that matching shares required for federal grants and federal grant-related income are subject to the OMB Circular A-122 lobbying restrictions.

Grant funds do lose their federal identity once they have been applied to allowable purposes and may thereafter be used to support lobbying activities and accordingly can be treated as private funds. For example: Conference fees paid by a Head Start agency from grant funds can subsequently be used by the conference sponsor to support lobbying. Another example would be: Funds paid to a vendor for supplies or services can be used by the vendor to support lobbying activities. Private funds can be used to support a variety of lobbying activities not allowed with federal funds. However, they are still subject to the statutory limitations on lobbying for Head Start agencies exempt from federal income tax under Section 501(c)(3) of the IRC.

Fundraising

Head Start agencies may raise private funds for lobbying activities through employee contributions, for example, under a payroll deduction plan. The following precautions must be taken:

- (1) These contributions must be completely voluntary;
- (2) Such contributions must not be used for political activities, that is, giving money to candidates or political parties as opposed to supporting efforts to increase appropriations;
- (3) Contributions should not be solicited, collected, or tabulated during work hours or using Head Start agency-owned equipment, facilities, or supplies unless reasonable and documented reimbursement is made to the agency;
- (4) Contributions should be kept in a separate non-federal bank account;
- (5) Letters and checks enclosing private funds should identify them as such;

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(6) When using a payroll deduction plan, the Head Start agency board should approve the plan.

Participating employees should sign a form indicating their awareness of the deduction, its intended use for lobbying, that it is made voluntarily and is not tax-deductible, and that it may be canceled at any time.

Head Start agencies also may raise funds from vendors and contractors as long as the payment or contribution is voluntary. Their contributions are tax-deductible as an ordinary and necessary business expense insofar as they get something in return, for example, a public acknowledgment of their support.

Caution: The public acknowledgment may constitute paid advertising, hence the contribution may be taxable to the Head Start agency as unrelated business income. Alternatively, if the agency is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization, the contribution may be deductible as a charitable expense.

Head Start agencies may use non-matching private funds for support of their lobbying activities. Private contributions from the general public should be sought during off-hours and off site if possible to separate this activity from those supported by federal funds. Otherwise, document and reimburse federal fund accounts for costs associated with the private fundraising. Please caution that Head Start agencies exempt under Section 501(c)(3) should observe the IRS rules regarding the solicitation and reporting of charitable contributions and comply with applicable state laws regulating charitable fundraising activities.

Record Keeping

Head Start agencies should keep careful records and reimburse federal fund accounts with private or non-restricted funds for any lobbying related expenses. Federal grants should be reimbursed for the cost of any long-distance phone calls to members of Congress or state legislators that cannot clearly be justified as non-lobbying or allowable lobbying in nature. Postage, photocopies, facsimiles, and other overhead-type costs incurred for lobbying purposes (even if done during off-hours) also should be identified and federal fund accounts should not be charged for them.

Caution: Do not become tripped up by technology. Facsimile (FAX) machines print the date and time of a transmission on the document; computer systems frequently encode a date and time when a document was created. It will be very difficult to establish that a lobbying communication was made after hours if the date and time imprint indicate otherwise.

Head Start agencies exempt under Section 501(c)(3) should keep detailed records of lobbying expenditures and activities. This information is required to be reported on the agency's annual IRS Form 990 informational return. Moreover, sufficiently detailed records of activities and expenditures are the only means of defense if the Head Start agency is alleged to have engaged in an excessive amount of lobbying.

Activities on Your Own Time

National Voter Registration Act

President Clinton signed the National Voter Registration Act, or "Motor Voter" Bill, into law on May 20, 1994. This law requires states to establish voter registration procedures for federal elections so that eligible citizens may apply to register to vote in the following ways:

- (1) Simultaneous with applying for a driver's license;
- (2) Through the U.S. Postal Service;
- (3) In person at selected state and local offices that serve the public and at any military recruiting office.

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Six states are exempted from the provision:

North Dakota (because it has no voter registration requirements).

Idaho, Minnesota, New Hampshire, Wisconsin, and Wyoming (because they allow citizens to register at polling places on Election Day).

(1) Applying for voter registration and driver's license simultaneously.

This section of the law states that any person who is applying for the first time, renewing, or changing their driver's license can apply for a voter registration simultaneously. The voter registration form will now be part of the motor vehicle application form. A sample form is included in the back of this section.

The basic form to be made by each state will include: a statement of eligibility requirement; an attestation that the applicant meets each requirement; and a requirement for a signature under the penalty of perjury. The application is invalid without your signature.

(2) Registering by mail.

This provision is included to accommodate those persons who normally do not drive. Each state is required to use a mail application form as developed by the Federal Elections Commission. (Sample included at end of Powerful Letters and More). Registration-by-mail applications will include:

- Identifying information including signature;
- Data relating to previous registration by applicant;
- Any other information necessary to enable the appropriate state election official to assess the eligibility of the applicant and to administer voter registration and other parts of the election process.

(3) In-person registration at selected state and local agencies or any military recruiting office.

All state agencies involved in providing public assistance as well as all offices in the state providing services to persons with disabilities must be designated as voter registration agencies. Other places designated by the state for in-person registration are:

- Public libraries and schools;
- City and county government offices;
- Fishing and hunting license bureaus;
- Unemployment compensation offices.

These agencies will also provide the mail-order forms and, if requested, assistance in completing forms.

Completed applications may also be turned in at any of these locations. Contact your state election commission to identify designated locations.

Once you have registered, the next step is to become informed on the issues affecting your community, job, and so on. You can do this by joining associations representing your interests and by inviting legislators, their staff, and association representatives to come to your program or to a community meeting to discuss a broad range of issues affecting you and your community.

Then with that information you can make informed decisions on selecting the candidate you would like to vote for in elections. However, all of this does you no good unless you vote!

General elections are commonly held the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November. Presidential elections are every four years; House of Representative elections are held every two years with all House seats up for election; and Senate elections are held every six years with one-third of the Senate seats up for election at one time. Each state has different terms for their state legislators. Consult your local library for more information on state and local elections.

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With Congress allocating more and more responsibility to the states, it is essential that you stay informed on state as well as federal issues.

Activities on Your Own Time

Voter Registration

Organizing a Voter Registration Campaign

CAUTION: Head Start directors and staff should be extremely cautious when they become involved in a voter-registration campaign. Registration activities must be done off site and during off-hours. If an agency uses a policy council meeting to begin organizing a registration campaign, no directors or staff should be involved for the reason that, as a Head Start employee, they run the risk of being perceived as being there on behalf of Head Start. The best course is to organize meetings off site and during off-hours for employees to attend if they want to be involved.

All voter registration activities must be done on your time, without agency resources and without federal funds. Although it may sound difficult to do, remember your children and children in your community are counting on you to "Get out the vote!"

Voter registration drives should include as many people from the community as possible. A policy council or board member should identify a community leader to become the leader of the voter registration drive or campaign. The community leader should act as facilitator for many meetings.

Here's how to help your community develop its voter registration campaign:

- Provide parents, staff, and friends with information about the need for all eligible community members to be registered to vote;
- Discuss how they can influence the laws and legislation governing their day-to-day lives;
- Discuss what effect the laws Congress is considering passing will have on Head Start and its parents;
- Discuss what those laws are;
- Discuss how they can help ensure Head Start is not changed by becoming registered voters. Also, remember to encourage registering eligible family members;
- Designate staff or parents who can assist the leader in identifying a place to have meetings and in selecting a date and time;
- Send letters or notices to parents, local churches, civic groups, newspapers, community businesses, and vendors inviting them to attend your meeting to plan and organize a voter registration drive.

During the meeting, the group should:

1. Discuss how to identify the target neighborhoods or districts in which voter turnout is low. In targeting areas or people, you must remain nonpartisan. You must focus on all potential voters whether or not they agree with your own political beliefs.
2. Invite nonpartisan organizations such as the League of Women Voters to conduct voter registration in public areas of the agency.
3. Invite a representative from the above to attend a Policy Council, Board, or Parent Center Committee meeting to discuss how to become a registered voter.

At the end of the meeting, you should have developed a strategic plan that includes:

- Voter registration time and place.
- A distribution plan for literature about all candidates running for a particular office.
- An invitation to all candidates for a particular office to address issues of concern to low-income families.
- A way to ensure large attendance at all open meetings where all candidates are invited to speak through community advertising such as "Meet the Candidates Forum" flyers in restaurants and businesses.
- A way to encourage participants to vote on Election Day.

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- A "thank you" party for all your volunteers after the elections!

The organizational chart to staff your campaign should resemble the following:



Duties and responsibilities:

- *Chairperson*: Oversees the entire registration campaign.
- *Co-Chairperson*: Assists the chairperson and manages day-to-day operations.
- *Secretary/Treasurer*: Records information from meetings, acts as correspondence person, and manages all finances for the committee.
Note: (There is very little, if any, fund-raising involved in voter registration. Any funds raised will be used to buy materials that are not supplied by the local voter registration office and food items not donated for volunteers.)
- *Coordinator of Volunteers*: Recruits, organizes, and manages volunteers for events. Maintains the volunteer list for future campaigns.
- *Coordinator of Supplies*: Manages all supplies needed for the registration drive, including picking up the necessary registration forms from the local voter registration office.
- *Coordinator of Registration Sites*: Locates the site to hold the drive. Obtains information on whom to contact to reserve the area. Visits the area to determine what is needed, for example, tables, chairs, tents, and so on.
- *Coordinator of Data*: Compiles information on the number of people who registered. Maintains the list for future use.

Get Out the Vote

The Federal Election Campaign Act of 1971, as amended, requires that any registration drive conducted or sponsored by a corporation, labor union, or trade association must be nonpartisan. No federal funds may be used to conduct any voter-registration activities either. The Internal Revenue Code mandates the strict nonpartisanship of all registration and get-out-the-vote activities by organization eligible to receive tax-deductible contributions under Section 501 (c) (3) of the code.

Voter registration campaigns can target groups in areas that have been inactive in the election process. However, the targeting must remain nonpartisan. A successful voter registration campaign consists of careful planning and organizing.

The 10 Commandments for a Successful Voter Registration Drive

1. Always set your goals.
2. Always know the law.
3. Always work with election officials
4. Always form a coalition with citizen groups.
5. Always select your sites.
6. Always recruit, train, and assign volunteers.
7. Always "sell" voter registration.
8. Always keep good records.
9. Always publish your results and celebrate.
10. Always follow-up and evaluate

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1. Always set your goals.

Set an achievable goal as an incentive to inspire volunteers and serve as a guide for evaluation. Decide how long your registration should last, what group to target, and the location of setup.

2. Always know the law.

Become familiar with federal, state, and local laws that govern voter registration in your community. State-by-state instructions are included at the end of the kit. If you believe registration practice in your state violates citizens' voting rights, please seek legal assistance.

3. Always work with election officials.

Advise election officials of your plans. They will provide you with the registration forms, assist with registration at special sites, or train and deputize volunteer registrars. If you are planning a major registration drive, please contact election officials early and in writing to insure that adequate forms are on hand and enough people are available to assist you.

4. Always form a coalition

Coordinate your activities with other citizen groups planning a registration drive and have information on scheduling and sites to avoid duplication.

5. Always select your sites

The location of the drive and when you have it is critical to its success. Select areas where there are large numbers of unregistered citizens. Consider festivals, fairs, sporting events, schools, colleges, public transit stops, and shopping centers. Make visits to your sites ahead of time to select the most visible areas to set up booths. Always have adequate volunteers on site during peak attendance time.

6. Always recruit, train, and assign volunteers.

Inspire volunteers with their responsibility to protect the citizens' right to vote by correctly completing the registration forms and promptly forwarding them to election officials. Provide training in techniques for approaching potential registrants. Conduct training on how to motivate citizens to register. Always use each voter registration event as an opportunity to recruit volunteers.

7. Always "sell" voter registration

Use every means possible to promote voter registration such as the media, talk shows, public service announcements, editorials, and news articles. Make sure that all of your advertisements include the time and date your registration drive will take place. Be creative — design events that will attract many people. Volunteers should not only man booths but also work the crowd.

8. Always keep good records.

Volunteers should keep track of everyone they register by using tally sheets that include names, addresses, and telephone numbers of each registrant.

9. Always publish your results and celebrate

Show the world that your voter registration drive was a great success! Public officials and candidates will take note. Reward your volunteers. Let them know how much you appreciate them and look forward to working with them again.

10. Always follow-up and evaluate.

Keep in touch with your new registrants — remind them to get out and vote. Evaluate your efforts and decide what worked best. Keep this information along with your list of volunteers for your next voter registration drive.

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Powerful Letters and More

As private citizens, Head Start agency employees and board members may lobby to their hearts' content, even though they are employed by (or in the case of board members, associated with) an organization that may receive all or part of its financial support from federal funds.

Activities may include grassroots activities such as participation in organizing and directing mass letter-writing campaigns, as well as direct lobbying. Appropriate precautions should be taken to ensure that private activities are truly separate from any activity that arguably is supported by federal dollars. For example:

- (1) These activities should be undertaken on an employee's own time and off site. That lobbying activities may be conducted at night, does not automatically establish that they are done on an employee's own time, especially if employees tend to work in the evenings on certain days of the week. After-hour lobbying should therefore be conducted at times that are rarely devoted to Head Start activities. To facilitate this, Head Start agencies should specify in personnel policies and in individual employment contracts the number of hours comprising the expected full-time work so that it is clear when an employee has fulfilled his obligation and may properly claim to be off-duty. This is particularly true for executive directors whose salaries are paid from various sources of funding.
- (2) Employees and board members should make it clear that they are speaking or writing not on the Head Start agency's behalf, but on their own. Do not have letters or other materials processed by persons who are doing so when compensated by federal funds.

Caution: Even if lobbying is done by volunteers, that is, at no cost to the Head Start agency, it can count against an agency's allowable lobbying under Section 501(c)(3) if done on behalf of the Head Start agency and is deemed to be an agency activity as opposed to solely a private activity.

Rules for lobbying as a private citizen

- Do not identify yourself as acting, writing, or speaking on behalf of your organization.
- Do not use program letterhead when writing legislators.
- Do not write or call during paid work time.
- Do not use stamps, telephones, photocopiers, or any other facilities or equipment paid for with federal program funds or other restricted dollars.
- Do not have your letters or accompanying materials typed or processed by people doing this work on time paid for by the nonprofit organization.
- If you travel to Washington, D.C., or a state capital with agency funds for a legitimate program-related purpose, you can lobby legislators in your role as a private citizen on your own time.

As with lobbying limitations, the restrictions on voter participation and political activities apply only to the Head Start agency as an organization. They do not apply to a board member, a staff person or volunteer acting on his or her own time. These individuals retain the right to vote as they choose, to express their opinions on political subjects and candidates.

It is, of course, crucial that board members, staff, and volunteers separate their personal political activities from their activities on behalf of the Head Start agency. For example, while a board member can freely support a candidate of his or her choice, the board member cannot indicate that the Head Start agency supports the candidate or use the agency's resources, such as employee time, facility space, telephone, facsimile, and so on, to support a candidate.

If there is a chance that the activities of a director, officer, or employee (particularly a highly visible employee) will be identified with the organization, disclaimers or other statements may be necessary.

Voter Participation and Lobbying Guide

Allowable private voter registration and political activities include:

- Voting and helping others to vote (see section on National Voter Registration Act and organizing a voter registration drive.)
- Volunteering to help in a campaign by staffing a telephone bank, distributing leaflets, stuffing envelopes, and providing other assistance during non-work hours and away from work.
- Putting a candidate's bumper sticker on a personal car or placing a candidate's poster in your front yard.
- Contributing personal funds to a candidate or political action committee.
- Expressing written or verbal opinions about political subjects or candidates.



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