

## **Election Year Activities for 501(c)(4) Social Welfare Organizations**

501(c)(4) organizations have fewer tax law restrictions than 501(c)(3) organizations with regard to political activity. Provided election activity is not the primary function of the 501(c)(4), they can participate in more partisan election-related activity under tax law than 501(c)(3)s. However, 501(c)(4)s must also be aware of their obligations under federal and state election law.

### **501(c)(4)s MAY:**

- engage in all of the nonpartisan voter education activity that a 501(c)(3) can engage in
- engage in unlimited lobbying, including work on ballot measures
- endorse federal candidates for office to the organization's membership and share the endorsement with the organization's press list
- expressly advocate for a federal candidate's election or defeat when communicating with the organization's membership
- in some states, make cash or in-kind contributions to state or local candidates
- create an affiliated 527 organization (more commonly known as a political action committee)

### **501(c)(4)s MAY NOT:**

- make communications to the general public that include express advocacy for a federal candidate
- make cash or in-kind contributions to federal candidates
- coordinate communications with a federal candidate or party
- engage in electoral activity as the organization's primary activity

## **Election Year Activities for and 527 Political Action Committee**

527 organizations, or political action committees, are established to specifically engage in partisan electoral activities. A 501(c)(4) can pay for the administrative costs of establishing an affiliated federal 527 organization.

### **527s MAY:**

- engage in electoral activity as its primary activity
- endorse candidates for office and share their endorsement with the general public
- make cash or in-kind contributions to a candidate for office (with certain limitations)
- conduct targeted voter education and voter registration activity
- conduct voter education for an electoral purpose

### **527s MAY NOT:**

- engage in lobbying activity without incurring a tax on the amount spent on lobbying

Note: This handout provides general guidelines only, and is intended to serve as an overview. Because the application of law is fact-sensitive and context is critical, it should not be relied upon as legal advice. Organizations should consult with their attorney to receive guidance on special rules governing their conduct.