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Beyond the Slogans: Advancing Democracy With Purpose

Partisan political campaigns tend to co-opt perfectly legitimate terms and concepts for their own purposes. The recent national party conventions pitted “Freedom” versus “Make America Great Again.” But for the dripping partisan rhetoric they represent, the slogans could just as well appear on red, blue, purple, rainbow, or any other color bumper stickers representing the American spirit. We at the *Advocacy in Action* department haven’t changed our views with the times – we are as adamant as ever that nonprofit nonpartisanship is the path to a better, stronger, fairer America. To prove it, here is a late summer reading list of past articles dedicated to advancing democracy in America through nonpartisan engagement.

Consider this a “greatest hits” list of nonpartisanship in pursuit of democracy:

- **[“Teaming Up” to Build Bridges and Fight Polarization](#)** (Mar. 11, 2024)
“United across divides” is the message that welcomes visitors to the homepage of the [Team Up Project](#), a campaign of four national nonprofits to bridge the polarized canyon our country currently faces, showcasing “bridgebuilding in action, share stories about the positive impact of human connection and elevate ongoing organizational work.”
- **[Nonprofits Promoting Democracy and Nonpartisan Engagement](#)** (Sept. 5, 2022)

The elections are positive opportunities for nonprofits to share their priorities and build relationships without taking sides over which candidates for elected office should and should not be elected. Nonprofit activities around the country demonstrate the nonpartisan role nonprofits can and do play in their communities.

- **[Keeping Our Republic: The Roles of Charitable Nonprofits](#)** (July 24, 2022)
Benjamin Franklin famously quipped, “A republic, if you can keep it,” in response to a question of what kind of government the constitutional convention had created. As we see it, keeping our republic is a fundamental function of what nonprofits do – working in the center of public service, promoting civic engagement, and solving community problems.
- **[In Praise of Nonpartisan Electioneering](#)** (May 2, 2022)
Charitable nonprofits are famously and appropriately barred from engaging in partisan, election related activities thanks to the longstanding [Johnson Amendment](#). But that doesn’t mean 501(c)(3) organizations are forced to sit on the sidelines and watch silently as candidates for public office and their supporters seek to define and distort the issues of the day for their own personal and party ambitions. While scrupulously maintaining nonpartisanship, charitable organizations have the opportunity and duty to stand up as *nonpartisan* advocates for truth, their missions, and the wellbeing of their communities.
- **[Nonprofits Take Note: The Elections Are Coming! The Elections Are Coming!](#)** (Oct. 18, 2021)
No, it’s not the 2024 Presidential Elections (thankfully), or even the 2022 “Mid-Term Elections” for Congress and most state legislatures. Rather, in the coming weeks voters will cast ballots for governors, lieutenant governors, and state legislators, mayors, city councilmembers, and school boards across the country. Public policies at all levels of government affect nonprofits wherever they operate. Accordingly, nonprofits share the responsibility to promote greater engagement of the citizenry, civic dialogue, fair and open elections, and open government.
- **[Lessons for Making Sure Everyone Still Counts](#)** (Mar. 8, 2021)
Nonprofits led outreach efforts for the 2020 Census to ensure every person was counted because every person counts. Now, state associations of nonprofits are sharing what they learned from the 2020 Census to raise voices of underrepresented populations and guarantee lessons learned are aggressively applied in the future.

- **Nonprofits, Democracy, and Voting: They Go Together So Well** (Nov. 2, 2020)

Thanks to the great work of many nonprofits, including many among our readers, our nation is headed to [potentially the largest voter turnout rate](#) in the modern era. We celebrate the turnout as a nonprofit advocacy success story. That is, nonprofits promoting democracy is the very essence of nonprofit advocacy. So who is doing what? Here are a few (of very many) impressive examples.

- **Connecting Candidates to Nonprofits** (Oct. 19, 2020)

When all of the candidates agree with the priorities of the nonprofit community, then the people served “win” an election regardless of which candidate gets the most votes. But without all of the tools interest groups have for influencing elections (e.g., PACs, fundraisers, endorsements), charitable organizations have to be creative and proactive to ensure the candidates understand the impact of nonprofits in their districts. It benefits everyone when candidates – who become officeholders – understand how policies affect the ability of the organizations to serve the state’s residents.

Each of these articles focuses on the role of charitable nonprofits in advancing democracy. They are presented here as advocacy in action in that the missions of charitable nonprofits get advanced when communities are connected and engaged, policy makers are attuned to the needs of constituents and communities, and solutions can be shared widely. For the benefit of the public, as opposed to just the benefit of political parties. In short, democracy isn’t something charitable organizations espouse; democracy and charitable organizations can be considered essential parts of the greater whole.