

KEEP OUR DOORS OPEN

2026 VICTORIAN STATE ELECTION DOS AND DON'TS

Who is this for? Managers, Committee members and staff of Neighbourhood Houses that want to advocate on community issues during an election period.

The golden rule

Election advocacy is allowed. Community organisations can speak up about issues affecting their communities, provided their activities remain connected to their charitable or community purpose and do not become campaigns for or against a political party or candidate.



Generally Acceptable

- Advocate for better outcomes for your community.
- Ask candidates where they stand on community priorities.
- Host forums or candidate events focused on issues.
- Educate community members about policy proposals and their likely impacts.
- Encourage public discussion and civic participation.



Proceed Carefully

- Candidate scorecards.
- Material targeting specific electorates.
- Campaigns mentioning political parties or candidates.
- Communications that could reasonably be interpreted as encouraging people to vote a particular way.



**Neighbourhood
Houses Victoria**



High Risk

- Endorsing a party or candidate.
- Urging supporters to vote for or against a party or candidate.
- Using organisational advocacy primarily to influence election outcomes rather than advance community issues.
- Accepting anonymous or overseas funds for regulated election campaigning.

KEEP OUR DOORS OPEN

CASE STUDY: Request to Hire a Neighbourhood House Venue

A political party asks to hire a meeting room for a campaign event.

The Neighbourhood House's venue hire policy does not prohibit political events. However, management becomes concerned that the proposed event could lead to protests, significant media attention and disruption to regular programs. Staff are also concerned about creating an environment that may discourage some participants from attending the House.

After reviewing the venue hire policy, operational risks and community impacts, the House decides not to proceed with the booking.

Good practice: Where a booking is declined, managers should be able to demonstrate that the same approach would have been applied regardless of which political party made the request.

Key lessons

- Decisions should be based on legitimate operational, safety or community wellbeing considerations.
- Decisions should not be based solely on agreement or disagreement with a party's views.
- The venue hire policy should be applied consistently.
- Similar requests from other political parties should be assessed using the same criteria.
- Document the reasons for the decision and retain records.

When advocacy may become regulated election campaigning

Election laws can apply when money is spent for the main purpose of influencing how people vote by promoting or opposing a candidate or political party. Organisations should pay particular attention when spending is election-specific, references candidates or parties, and is designed to influence voting behaviour.

Authorisation requirements

Many election-related advertisements and printed materials require an authorisation statement if they are intended to influence voting. As a practical rule, stay away from materials or activities that recommend who to vote for or who not to vote for. Stick to language about our issue, values, and principles.

KEEP OUR DOORS OPEN

Hosting candidates and election forums

Be transparent and fair. Focus on community priorities, use consistent rules for participants, keep records of invitations and avoid giving organisational endorsements

Questions to ask before launching a campaign

Is this activity linked to our purpose and mission?

Are we talking about an issue rather than supporting a candidate?

Does the material educate, inform or encourage debate?

Could a reasonable person see it as telling people how to vote?

Is it being distributed close to an election or voting location?

Are we tracking election-related spending?

CASE STUDY: Hosting a Community Election Forum

A Neighbourhood House plans to hold a public election forum to discuss local community priorities, including cost of living, social inclusion and access to community services.

The House invites candidates from across the political spectrum and applies the same participation rules to everyone. Questions are focused on community issues rather than party politics. Promotional material makes it clear that the House is facilitating discussion and is not endorsing any candidate.

Good practice: If a candidate declines the invitation, the forum may still proceed provided the House made genuine and reasonable efforts to include all relevant candidates.

Key lessons

- Focus on issues that relate to the House's community purpose.
- Apply the same rules to all candidates.
- Keep records of invitations and responses.
- Avoid statements that suggest organisational support for a particular candidate or party.