National Campaign for Transit Justice

A project of Just Strategy

Toolkit: Raising transit issues with decision makers and in elections.

Introduction

Transit issues are very popular with the voters:

- In 2024, APTA reported 51 wins out of 61 measures for public transit 2024, an 86.7% win rate. Link to summary
  - "*The public's enthusiasm for investing in transit reflects a clear desire for cleaner, more accessible transportation options in their neighborhoods. The 2024 election has marked a significant step forward for public transportation, as communities continue to invest in a brighter, more sustainable future for everyone.*" - CEO Paul P. Skoutelas.

- APTA's national voter survey showed that:
  - *81 percent of Donald Trump voters oppose any cuts to current levels of public transportation investment;*
  - *69 percent of all voters support the use of their tax dollars for public transportation. This includes a majority (53 percent) of Trump voters.*
  - *More than 69 percent of Americans believe our public transportation infrastructure is in "crisis," including 63 percent of Trump voters."*

- 2024 Summary: *"Voters Overwhelmingly Support Transit Nationally This Election Cycle*"
- Transit groups, both 501(c)(3) and 501(c)(4), have been effective in raising and promoting transit issues during elections.

Learn and Know the Rules About What 501(c)(3) Can and Can't Do in Elections.

- Alliance for Justice/Bolder Advocacy presentation on C3 lobbying activities.
- Bolder Advocacy Election Checklist for 501(c)(3)
- The Bolder Advocacy website has state-by-state information about how to abide by 501 (c)(3) while strongly advocating for our issues.
- Alliance for Justice comparison chart of allowable C3 and C4 activities

If you are unsure, ASK!

Submit an online question to our Boulder Advocacy coaches using this form or email advocacy@afj.org. Call for technical assistance during standard business hours (eastern time): **866-NP-LOBBY (866-675-6229)**

Raising Transit as a Key Issue in Elections

1. **Share your vision by creating a transit platform:** The organization can create a platform that highlights your overall vision for public transit and what investments are needed to achieve your goals. The document must focus on vision/policy, not on candidates. It should be released well in advance of the elections. Here are some examples:
   - [Fairfax Healthy Communities:](#) This platform includes transit, housing, climate and food security
   - [Transit Rider Demands for the Next Allegheny County Executive](#)
   - [Pittsburgh 100 Days Transit Platform](#)
   - [Move LA's Policy Pillars](#)

2. **Educate the public about your issues**. This can be done by holding public forums to elevate transit as an important election issue, creating videos for social media, publishing a study or report on the impact of the issue, and more. Here are some examples:
   - Move LA's ["Yes on Measure A" Instagram reel](#)
   - Move LA's [op ed outlining the economic impact of Measure A](#) in order to bring the business community on board.
   - Pittsburghers for Public Transit [invited candidates to ride the bus with them](#). Ride-alongs can highlight your vision, demonstrating what is right with transit and what needs to be improved.
   - Send [mailers to your base with the candidate's responses](#), like this example from Pittsburghers for Public Transit and Pittsburgh United.
   - Engage in Non-partisan GOTV activities, [Phone banking/textbanking](#) to [turn your base](#) out for transit

3. **Make Your Voters Visible** to say that transit is a critical issue, and the next elected official needs to prioritize it. For example:
   - T-shirts, buttons, stickers "I ride the bus & I vote."
   - Organizing turnout at public hearings and forums
   - Show that organizations and individuals have signed on to your platform
   - Create a [#VoteTransit pledge](#) for organizations and individuals to show support for your position (remember, 501 (c)(3) organizations can't ask a candidate for a pledge).

4. **Candidate Questionnaires and Forums ([learn the rules](#))**
   - [Fairfax Candidate Questionnaire](#)
   - [Montgomery County Questionnaire](#) (Videos)
   - [Pittsburghers for Public Transit Questionnaire](#)

Learn about 501(c)(4)s and what they can do

- **Quick Guide:** Alliance for Justice [Election Year Activities for 501(c)(4) organizations](#)

The first thing to remember is that working on and spending on elections can not be the primary role of the 501(c)(4) organization. According to the IRS, "*a section 501(c)(4) social welfare organization may engage in some political activities, so long as that is not its primary activity. However, any expenditure it makes for political activities may be subject to tax under section 527(f). For further information regarding political and lobbying activities of section 501(c) organizations, see [election year issues](#), [political campaign and lobbying activities of IRC 501(c)(4), (c)(5), and (c)(6) organizations](#)*."

The Alliance for Justice shares examples of independent election activities that 501(c)(4) organizations can engage in:
- *"Conducting all of the nonpartisan voter education activities in which 501(c)(3)s can engage;*
- *Supporting or opposing ballot measures;*
- *Endorsing federal, state, and local candidates;*
- *Distributing communications to the general public -- including through GOTV activities, voter registration drives, billboards, broadcast ads -- or to the organization's membership in support or opposition to federal or state candidates.*
- *The organization can even encourage voters to vote for or against a specific federal or state candidate.*
- *Asking federal and state candidates to pledge to support the organization's issues if elected.*
- *Producing candidate voter guides or comparisons of where state and federal candidates stand on the issues;*
- *Creating an affiliated 527 political organization called a "connected PAC" or "separate segregated fund" to make contributions to federal candidates;*
- *additionally, many states allow 501(c)(4) organizations to create connected state PACs;*
- *and Pooling resources to engage in the above activities, subject to federal and/or state disclosure rules and limits."*

Example:
- Move Minnesota Action's [c4 endorsements](#)