

Introduction

# Introduction to referendum campaigning

---

This document is for campaigners who want to know more about the rules at referendums

Contents:

---

Who can campaign at a referendum

---

Being a registered campaigner

---

Lead campaign groups

---

Registering as a campaigner

PEF Online  
Form RIS1

## Translations and other formats

For information on obtaining this publication in another language or in a large-print or Braille version please contact the Electoral Commission:

Tel: [020 7271 0500](tel:02072710500)

Email: [publications@electoralcommission.org.uk](mailto:publications@electoralcommission.org.uk)

## What is referendum campaigning?

In the run up to a referendum, there is a formal campaigning period called the 'referendum period'.

During this period, referendum campaign spending limits and rules apply. These limits and rules cover most referendum campaigning activities, such as:

- advertising of any kind including for example, street banners, websites, YouTube videos.
- material sent to voters including for example, letters or leaflets that you send promoting your campaign.

The rules also specify who can authorise spending and how you must record and report expenditure to us.

## Who can campaign at a referendum?

Anyone can spend up to £10,000 on campaigning during the referendum period without registering with us. The referendum period is when the rules on donations and spending apply.

If you want to spend more than this, you must register with us to become a 'registered campaigner'.

You must tell us which side of the debate you are campaigning for.

## How do I register?

If you want to register with us, then please visit [PEF Online](#) for guidance on how to make an application online. Alternatively, you can register with us by completing and returning [form RIS1](#).

For more information, see this document:

- [An overview of referendum campaigning](#)

# 2

## Who can register as a campaigner?

Only the following types of individuals or organisations can register as campaigners:

- An individual who is resident in the UK or registered on a UK electoral register.
- A UK-registered political party.
- A UK-registered company which is incorporated in the EU and carries on business in the UK.
- A UK-registered trade union.
- A UK-registered building society.
- A UK-registered limited liability partnership which carries on business in the UK.
- A UK-registered friendly, industrial, provident or building society.
- A UK-based unincorporated association that carries on the majority of its business or other activities in the UK.



Even if you are already registered with us as a political or third party, you still need to register as a campaigner for the referendum.

## Being a registered campaigner

Registering as a campaigner gives you:

- a spending limit above £10,000
- access to the electoral register to help your campaign
- the right for representatives to attend postal vote opening sessions, polling stations and the counting of the votes.

## Referendum finance and spending

As a registered campaigner you must comply with rules on spending, donations and loans under the relevant legislation. These cover most campaigning activity.

You must register someone to be a 'responsible person'. This person will be responsible for making sure that these rules are followed.

For more information, see this document:

- [An overview of referendum campaigning](#)

You must also report your campaign's donations, loans and spending to us during after the referendum.

'Loans' include guarantees, securities and credit facilities such as overdrafts and credit cards.

There are rules about who in your campaign can authorise spending.

### **Political parties**

If you are a political party, your registered treasurer will be your 'responsible person'.

You must continue to report donations and loans every quarter as usual. You must submit a spending return after the referendum, but you do not need to submit any additional donation or loan returns.

You cannot make any donations or loans to other registered campaigners, except for a designated lead campaign group.

## Lead campaign groups

If you have registered, you can apply to us to become the lead campaign group for one side of the debate. We publish guidance for each referendum explaining when you can apply to do this.

The benefits for lead campaign groups may include:

- A higher spending limit than other registered campaigners
- To be able to send information to voters free of charge
- Referendum campaign broadcasts
- A grant from us depending on the referendum
- The use of certain public rooms

We must make sure that the lead campaign groups adequately represent those campaigning for each outcome.

Because of this, if you want to apply for designation, you may want to consider forming an umbrella organisation with other groups who are campaigning for the outcome you support.

The umbrella organisation must be registered with us as a campaigner if your application is to be considered.

For more information on lead campaigners see:

- [Situations and Procedures – The designation process](#)

# 4

## How we can help

You can find more information in the guidance documents we have suggested in this document, or you can view our full range of guidance and up-to-date resources on our website.

If it's easier, you can also contact us on one of the phone numbers or email addresses below. We are here to help, so please get in touch.

Call us on:

- **England:** 0207 271 0616  
[pef@electoralcommission.org.uk](mailto:pef@electoralcommission.org.uk)
- **Scotland:** 0131 255 0200  
[infoscotland@electoralcommission.org.uk](mailto:infoscotland@electoralcommission.org.uk)
- **Wales:** 0292 034 6800  
[infowales@electoralcommission.org.uk](mailto:infowales@electoralcommission.org.uk)
- **Northern Ireland:** 0289 089 4020  
[infonorthernireland@electoralcommission.org.uk](mailto:infonorthernireland@electoralcommission.org.uk)

Visit us at [www.electoralcommission.org.uk](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk)

We welcome feedback on our guidance – just email us at:

[pef@electoralcommission.org.uk](mailto:pef@electoralcommission.org.uk)