

Introduction for non-party campaigners

This document is for individuals and organisations who are thinking of campaigning in the run-up to elections but who are not standing as a political party or candidate

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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

Email: publications@electoralcommission.org.uk

Terms and expressions we use

You will normally be doing enough to comply with the law if you follow this guidance.

We use '**must**' when we refer to a specific requirement. We use '**should**' for items we consider to be minimum good practice, but which are not legal or regulatory requirements.

Our approach to enforcement

The Commission regulates political funding and spending. We are committed to providing those we regulate with a clear understanding of their regulatory obligations through our guidance documents and advice service.

Wherever possible, we use advice and guidance proactively in order to secure compliance. And we regulate in a way that is effective, proportionate and fair.

If you do not comply with legal or regulatory requirements you or your organisation may be subject to civil or criminal sanctions. You can find more information about the Commission's approach to enforcement

at www.electoralcommission.org.uk/party-finance/enforcement

Introduction for non-party campaigners

Who this document is for:

This document is for individuals and organisations who are thinking of campaigning in the run-up to an election but are not standing as a political party or candidate.

This document covers:

- an introduction for non-party campaigners
- who regulates campaigns
- when campaigns are regulated
- when you must register as a non-party campaigner

Related documents

- [Overview of non-party campaigns](#)
- [Overview of regulated non-party campaigning](#)
- [Registering as a non-party campaigner](#)
- [Managing non-party campaign spending](#)
- [Joint campaigning for non-party campaigners](#)
- [Overview of UK Parliamentary general election: Constituency campaigning](#)

Summary

Political parties, candidates and non-party campaigners are vital to a healthy democracy and we encourage active participation by campaigners. Where there is significant spending on campaigning, there are rules that must be followed to ensure that there is transparency in the system.

Non-party campaigners undertake a variety of campaigning activities.

In many cases, these campaigns and activities will not be regulated by us.

However, where spending on certain campaigning activities can be seen as reasonably intended to influence voters to vote for or against a political party or a category of candidates, there are rules that apply. We regulate compliance with those rules. There are also rules on spending on activities intended to influence voters to vote for or against an individual candidate. While we do not regulate those rules, this introduction provides a summary of those rules.

This introduction will give you the key points about the rules on non-party campaigning and explain where you can find more information.

Introduction

Non-party campaigners are individuals or organisations that campaign in the run-up to elections, but are not standing as political parties or candidates.

A non-party campaigner may, for example, be a campaigning organisation, a charity, a faith group, a company or an individual.

In electoral law, these individuals or organisations are called 'third parties'. Where non-party campaigners have registered with the Electoral Commission they are called 'recognised third parties'; in our guidance, we call recognised third parties 'registered non-party campaigners'.

You may want to campaign on particular issues, or for or against particular parties or candidates.

There are separate rules for campaigning at referendums. For more information see our page for [campaigners in referendums](#).

The two types of non-party campaigns

There are two types of non-party campaigns.

These are:

- **Local campaigns** – non-party campaigns for or against one or more candidates in a particular constituency, ward or other electoral area
- **General campaigns** - non-party campaigns for or against a political party, or particular categories of candidates, including campaigns on policies or issues closely associated with a particular party or category of candidates (for example, candidates in a certain age group)

Different rules apply to these two types of non-party campaigns.

Who regulates campaigns?

Local campaigns

Campaigning for or against one or more candidates in a particular ward or constituency is covered by the Representation of the People Act 1983 (RPA) or equivalent legislation in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Complaints about breaches of the rules that apply to local campaigns should be made to the police; the Electoral Commission does not regulate local campaigning.

General campaigns

General campaigns are regulated by the Electoral Commission.

If you are campaigning for or against political parties or categories of candidates, or policies or issues closely associated with a particular party or category of candidates (for example, candidates in a certain age group) you may need to register with us and follow the rules on campaign spending, donations and reporting.

When are general campaigns regulated?

In the run up to certain elections, there is a set time when the rules on spending and donations apply. We call this time the 'regulated period'. The rules will differ, depending on which election is being held.

Campaigns are regulated in the run-up to elections to:

- the European Parliament
- the UK Parliament
- the Scottish Parliament
- the National Assembly for Wales
- the Northern Ireland Assembly

For more information on both types of campaigning see this document:

- [Overview of non-party campaigns](#)

Spending at local authority elections is only covered by general campaign spending rules if the election falls within the regulated period of one of the elections listed on this page.

UK Parliamentary general elections usually have a regulated period of 365 days, ending on the day of the election.

However, the regulated period for the 2015 UK Parliamentary general election will be slightly shorter than normal and starts on **19 September 2014** and ends on polling day, **7 May 2015**.

All other elections have a regulated period of four months, ending on the day of the election.

We publish specific guidance for each election which sets out the spending limits, regulated period and reporting deadlines which you can find on our [website](#).

When must you register as a non-party campaigner?

If you are:

- running a 'general' campaign (see page 3) **and**
- you spend, or plan to spend, more than £20,000 in England or £10,000 in any of Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland on 'regulated campaign activity' (see below) during a regulated period,

you must register with us as a non-party campaigner.

If you do not register, or are not eligible to register, you cannot spend more than £20,000 in England or £10,000 in any of Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland on regulated campaign activity during a regulated period.

Only certain types of individuals or organisations can register as a non-party campaigner.

If you register with us, you will have a higher spending limit. The spending limits will depend on which election you are campaigning in. Once you are registered, there are rules you must follow on donations, spending and reporting.

The non-party campaigning rules apply to spending on what we call 'regulated campaign activity'.

The following will be 'regulated campaign activity' if they can reasonably be regarded as intended to influence voters to vote for or against political parties or categories of candidates, including political parties or categories of candidates who support or do not support particular policies or issues (we call this the '**purpose test**'):

- press conferences or other media events that you organise
- transport in connection with publicising your campaign

As well as meeting the purpose test, spending on the following activities is only regulated if the activities are **also** aimed at, seen or heard by, or involve the public (we call this the '**public test**'). This applies to:

- the production or publication of election material

For more information see these documents:

- [Overview of non-party campaigns](#)
- [Overview of non-party regulated campaign activity](#)
- [Registering as a non-party campaigner](#)

In the run-up to a UK Parliamentary general election, the maximum amount a non-party campaigner can spend on regulated campaign activity in a particular parliamentary constituency is £9,750. For more information see:

- [Overview of non-party campaigns](#)
- [Focused constituency campaigning](#)
- [Managing campaign spending](#)

- canvassing and market research (including the use of phone banks)
- public rallies and public events

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.

You can 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:** 020 7271 0616 pef@electoralcommission.org.uk
- **Scotland:** 0131 225 0200 infoscotland@electoralcommission.org.uk
- **Wales:** 029 2034 6800 infowales@electoralcommission.org.uk
- **Northern Ireland:** 0289 089 4020 infonorthernireland@electoralcommission.org.uk

Visit us at www.electoralcommission.org.uk

We welcome feedback on our guidance – just email us at: pef@electoralcommission.org.uk
