



Campaign Finance Handbook

CHAPTER 11: ELECTIONEERING COMMUNICATION

What is Electioneering Communication?

Any broadcast, cable, or satellite communication made between the date a person becomes a candidate and the thirtieth day prior to a primary or general election at which the candidate will be elected to that office, that refers to a clearly identified candidate and is not otherwise considered an “expenditure.” This largely covers all radio and television communications. The candidate reference within the communication could be by use of the candidate’s name, image, likeness, or by some other clear and unambiguous reference.

Electioneering communication does not include print media, printed materials, or communications over the internet or telephone. See [Other General Provisions and Statutory Definitions](#) below for more detail.

[R.C. 3517.1011](#); [OAC 111:2-3-09](#)

What to Do First

Any person intending to make a disbursement for the direct costs of producing or airing electioneering communications must file [Form 31-EC, Notice of Intent to Make Electioneering Communication Disbursements](#), with the Secretary of State’s office before making such a disbursement. Upon the filing of a [Form 31-EC](#), the Secretary of State will issue credentials that permit the filing of required detailed reports via the Secretary of State’s online filing system. Except for the initial filing of a Notice of Intent to Make Electioneering Communication Disbursements, the prescribed format for filing all electioneering communication reports is through the Secretary of State’s online filing system.

[R.C. 3517.1011\(C\)](#)

When to File Reports

Any person who makes a disbursement or disbursements for the direct costs of producing and airing electioneering communications aggregating more than \$10,000 during any calendar year must file, within 24 hours of each disclosure date, a disclosure of electioneering communications statement. The filer must continue filing weekly through that calendar year, after the first disclosure of electioneering communications statement is filed, so long as more electioneering communication disbursements are made. These later reports must be filed on the same day of the week as the day of the week that the initial disclosure statement was filed.

[R.C. 3517.1011\(A\)\(6\) and \(D\)](#)



What a Filing Must Contain

Each electioneering communication disclosure statement must contain:

- Full name and address of the person making the disbursement, any person sharing or exercising direction or control over the activities of the person making the disbursement, and the custodian of the books and accounts of the person making the disbursement.
- Principal place of business of the person making the disbursement, if not an individual.
- Amount of each disbursement of more than \$1 during the period covered by the statement and the identity of the person to whom the disbursement was made.
- Nominations or elections to which the electioneering communications pertain and the names, if known, of the candidates identified or to be identified.
- For each contributor who contributed an aggregate of \$200 or more to the person making the disbursement and whose contributions were used for making the disbursement, must contain:
 - Full name and address of the contributor and, if the contributor is a political action committee, its registration number.
 - Month, day, and year of the contribution.
 - If the contributor is an individual, the name of the individual's current employer, or if the individual is self-employed, the individual's occupation and the name of the individual's business.
 - Description of the contribution, if other than money.
 - Value of the contribution.
 - For any contribution transmitted through a payroll deduction, if the amounts deducted from the wages and salaries of two or more employees exceed, in the aggregate, \$100, the full name of the employees' employer and the full name of the labor organization of which the employees are members, if any.

[R.C. 3517.1011\(D\)](#)

Foreign National Prohibition

Foreign nationals are prohibited from making a disbursement, either directly or indirectly through any person or entity, for the direct cost of producing or airing an electioneering communication.

[R.C. 3517.121\(B\)\(3\)](#)

Coordinated Electioneering Communication

An electioneering communication that is made under any arrangement, coordination, or direction by a candidate or a candidate's campaign committee, or by the officers, agents, employees, or consultants of a candidate or a candidate's campaign committee, or by a former officer, former agent, former employee, or former consultant of a candidate or a candidate's campaign committee, is considered to be coordinated and, as such, becomes an in-kind contribution to the candidate. An in-kind contribution is subject to contribution limits, the corporate prohibition, and other requirements of the general campaign finance laws.

[R.C. 3517.1011\(A\)\(5\), \(G\) and \(H\); 3517.102](#)



Disclaimer Requirement

Within each electioneering communication, a statement must appear or be presented in a conspicuous manner that clearly indicates that the electioneering communication is not authorized by the candidate or the candidate's campaign committee and that clearly identifies the person making the disbursement for the electioneering communication in accordance with

[*R.C. 3517.20, R.C. 3517.1011\(F\)*](#)

Other General Provisions

During the 30 days before a primary or general election, any disbursement to pay the direct costs of producing or airing a broadcast, cable, or satellite communication that refers to a clearly identified candidate is considered to be made for the purpose of influencing the results of that election and must be reported as an expenditure or as an independent expenditure.

[*R.C. 3517.01\(C\)\(6\), 3517.10*](#)

The term "contribution" for the purpose of electioneering communication is not the same as the term "contribution" used in other areas of the campaign finance law.

[*R.C. 3517.01\(C\)\(5\)\(e\)*](#)

A person is considered to have made a disbursement if the person has signed a contract to make the disbursement.

[*R.C. 3517.1011\(B\)*](#)

Statutory Definitions Relating to Electioneering Communication

"Electioneering communication" means any broadcast, cable, or satellite communication that refers to a clearly identified candidate and that is made during either of the following periods of time:

- If the person becomes a candidate before the day of the primary election at which candidates will be nominated for election to that office, between the date that the person becomes a candidate and the 30th day before that primary election and between the date of the primary election and the 30th day before the general election at which a candidate will be elected to that office.
- If the person becomes a candidate after the day of the primary election at which candidates were nominated for election to that office or between the date of the primary election and the 30th day before the general election at which a candidate will be elected to that office.¹

[*R.C. 3517.1011\(A\)\(7\)\(a\)*](#)

"Refers to a clearly identified candidate" means that the candidate's name, nickname, photograph, or drawing appears, or the identity of the candidate is otherwise apparent through an unambiguous reference to the person, such as "the Chief Justice," "the Governor," "member of the Ohio Senate," or "member of the Ohio House of Representatives," and other such examples cited in the act, or through an unambiguous reference to

¹ For purposes of [*R.C. 3517.1011*](#), "candidate" has the same meaning as in [*R.C. 3501.01\(H\)*](#).



the person's status as a candidate.

[R.C. 3517.1011\(A\)\(13\)](#)

Electioneering communication does not include any of the following:

- communication that is publicly distributed through a means of communication other than a broadcast, cable, or satellite television or radio station, such as communications appearing in print media, mailings, brochures, bumper stickers, yard signs, communications over the internet, including email, or telephone communications
- communication that appears in a news story, commentary, public service announcement, news programming, or editorial distributed through the facilities of any broadcast, cable, or satellite television or radio station, unless those facilities are owned or controlled by any political party, political committee, or candidate
- communication that constitutes an expenditure or an independent expenditure
- communication that constitutes a candidate debate or forum or that solely promotes a candidate debate or forum and is made by or on behalf of the person sponsoring the debate or forum

[R.C. 3517.1011\(A\)\(7\)\(b\)](#)