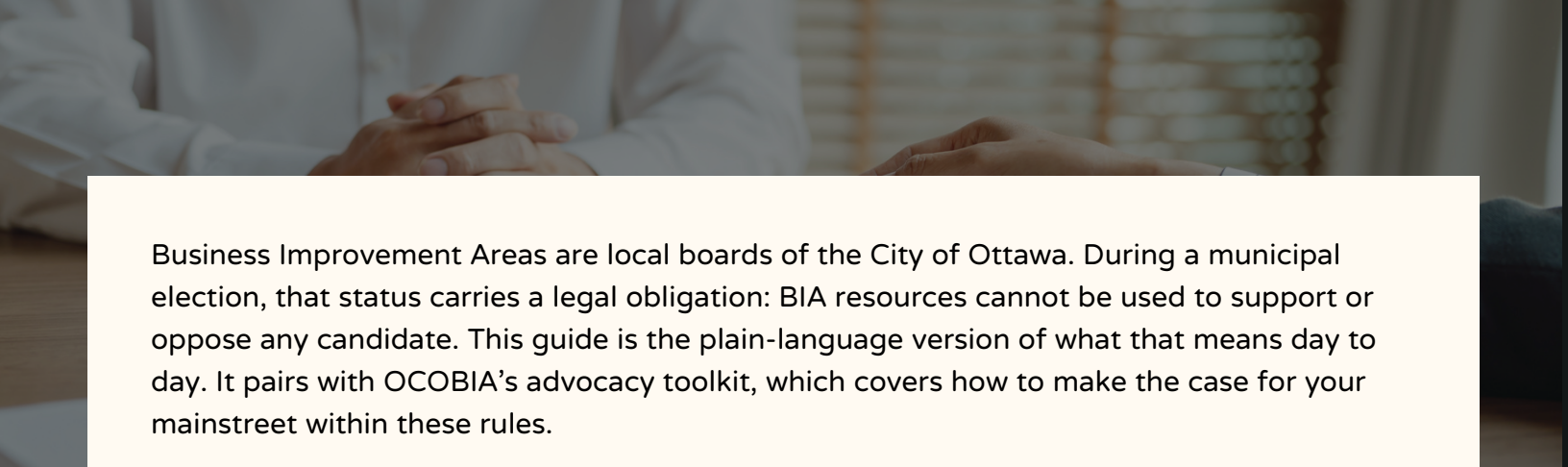


BIA ELECTION NEUTRALITY GUIDANCE

Staying onside during the
2026 municipal election





Business Improvement Areas are local boards of the City of Ottawa. During a municipal election, that status carries a legal obligation: BIA resources cannot be used to support or oppose any candidate. This guide is the plain-language version of what that means day to day. It pairs with OCOBIA's advocacy toolkit, which covers how to make the case for your mainstreet within these rules.

The principle in one line: advocate for issues, never for candidates.

You can be loud about what your district needs and completely silent on who should win.

Follow your own BIA's election policy first. BIAs across Ottawa handle candidate engagement differently — some meet candidates, others don't engage at all and simply direct candidates to their published priorities. If your BIA has an election policy, it takes precedence over anything in this toolkit. When in doubt, check with your board.

START HERE: GET THE CITY'S POLICY

The City of Ottawa's Election-Related Resources Policy is the governing document on using corporate resources during an election. Obtain it, circulate it to your board and staff, and confirm your BIA's position with the City Clerk.

One thing to get right: that policy is written for Members of Council and City staff. As a local board, your BIA should either formally adopt it or confirm with the City Clerk that you follow the same rules — rather than assuming it automatically applies to you. The Municipal Elections Act (s. 88.18) requires both the City and its local boards to have resource rules in place, so this step isn't optional.

[City of Ottawa election-related resources policy](#)



WHAT COUNTS AS A "BIA RESOURCE"

If it belongs to the BIA, it can't be used to promote a candidate.
That includes:

- Staff time
- Email lists and newsletters
- Social media accounts
- Offices and meeting space
- Equipment and materials
- Your branding and logo
- Your website

WHAT YOUR BIA MUST NOT DO

- Endorse, support or oppose any candidate or their platform
 - Let campaign material move through your channels
 - Promote individual candidates through your social or newsletters
 - Use staff time to support a campaign
 - Host campaign activities or fundraisers using BIA resources
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WHAT YOUR BIA CAN STILL DO

Neutrality doesn't mean silence. You can actively advocate for your mainstreet, as long as it's issue-based:

- Share information about the role and impact of your BIA
- Give candidates background on your district and its priorities
- Send a neutral candidate questionnaire (OCOBIA's is ready to use)
- Publish "Our BIA Believes" statements outlining mainstreet priorities
- Meet with candidates individually if your BIA election policy allows — if the same offer is made to every candidate in that race
- Prepare to engage the newly elected Council after the vote

The equal-treatment rule is the one people trip on: if you offer a walkabout, a coffee or a briefing to one candidate, you offer it to all of them.

→ BEFORE YOU POST OR SEND

A quick check for anything going out through BIA channels during the campaign:

- Does it name, picture or favour a candidate? → Don't send it.
- Is it about an issue rather than a person? → Fine.
- Are you treating all candidates the same way? → Required.
- Not sure? → Ask the City Clerk before it goes out, not after.

A note on why this matters: Beyond the legal obligation, neutrality protects your BIA's credibility and its working relationship with whoever wins. A BIA that stayed clean and fair through the campaign is a BIA the new Council will take seriously. That's worth more than any short-term advantage.