

California City, County, School and Special District Local Lobbying Ordinances

Certain California cities, counties, school and special districts have laws regulating lobbying activities, in addition to federal tax law and California state law. “Special districts” include airport authorities and transportation authorities. These laws do not *limit* the amount of lobbying your organization can do. Nonetheless, they may impact the ways in which you interact with public officials. The good news is the vast majority of jurisdictions in California *do not* regulate the interaction between nonprofits and government officials. While local lobbying laws that do exist in some jurisdictions add one more consideration as you develop your local advocacy strategy, they should not be thought of as barriers to your organization’s activity.

Unfortunately, there is no standard law that regulates local lobbying across California jurisdictions. If your organization is active in a particular city, county, or special district, you should take a moment to familiarize yourself with the laws in that location. See the table below for an overview. Although the ordinances vary from location to location, some common local lobbying provisions include:

Registration

Jurisdictions often require a person or entity to file a registration form, either A) before making lobbying contacts or expenditures or B) after a certain number of lobbying contacts have been made or a certain amount of expenses have been incurred. For example, in the City of Carson, every lobbyist must file a registration statement with the city clerk within 10 days of meeting the threshold for registration. These registration rules may apply if your organization hires a consultant to lobby on your behalf, if you have an employee who spends a certain amount or percentage of time on lobbying activities, or if your organization spends a certain amount on lobbying. Registration fees can range from quite small (\$10-25) to several hundred dollars. Some jurisdictions waive the registration fee for qualifying nonprofits.

Reporting

In addition to filing a registration form, some jurisdictions require individuals and organizations that make significant lobbying contacts or that spend significant amounts of money on lobbying to file reports on an annual, semi-annual, quarterly, or monthly basis. These reports may require the person or organization to disclose the amount of compensation received to lobby, whether the organization made any gifts to local officials, and/or whether the organization spent money on a specific type of lobbying known as grassroots lobbying.

Identification

Some local rules require lobbyists to identify themselves in certain ways. For instance, the City of Irvine requires all people who lobby on behalf of an organization to fill out speaker identification cards before appearing before the City Council or another city body and to orally identify themselves and the client(s) they represent upon beginning an address.

Gift Limits or Prohibitions

It is also quite common for a jurisdiction to prohibit gifts to public officials from organizations that are registered to lobby. In these jurisdictions, these gift rules apply in addition to CA state law gift limits and restrictions that impact local officials and employees.

Exemptions for Nonprofits

Additionally, some local lobbying ordinances specifically exempt nonprofits or employees of nonprofits from registration and/or reporting requirements. Some ordinances exempt nonprofits or employees of nonprofits from one type of lobbying registration and reporting, but not from others.

Exemptions for employees of nonprofit organizations vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction and can change over time. For instance, nonprofit exemptions may not apply when a nonprofit is seeking funding from the local jurisdiction. Be sure to review the specific jurisdiction's ordinances for the details of the exemption.

Summary of Local Lobbying Ordinances (As of February 2019)

Although we strive to present comprehensive information, the table below is not necessarily an exhaustive list of lobbying ordinances in California, so it is always a best practice to consult the laws and/or regulations in the jurisdiction in which you plan to advocate to ensure you comply with all relevant rules.

Jurisdiction	Registration	Reporting	Identification	Gift Limit or Prohibition	Registration Fee	Exemption for Nonprofits	Code
Beverly Hills	✓		✓				Beverly Hills Code Title 1, Ch. 9, Art. 1
Carson	✓				✓	✓	Carson Municipal Code Art. 2, Ch. 3.5
Cathedral City	✓		✓		✓		Cathedral City Municipal Code Title 5, Ch. 5.30
Clovis	✓				✓	✓	Clovis Municipal Code Ch. 5.11
Compton	✓				✓		Compton Municipal Code Ch. 2, Art. 4, 2-29

Jurisdiction	Registration	Reporting	Identification	Gift Limit or Prohibition	Registration Fee	Exemption for Nonprofits	Code
Desert Hot Springs ¹	✓					✓	Desert Hot Springs Municipal Code Title 2.22
El Segundo ²	✓		✓				El Segundo Municipal Code Title 1 Ch. 8, 1-8-4
Fresno ³	✓				✓	✓	Fresno Municipal Code Ch. 2 Art. 12
Gardena	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	Gardena Municipal Code Ch. 2.26
Hawthorne	✓	✓			✓		Hawthorne Municipal Code Title 9, Division X, Ch. 9.102
Irvine	✓	✓	✓		✓		Irvine Code of Ordinances Title 1, Division 7
Lancaster	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Lancaster Municipal Code Title 2, Ch. 2.26
Long Beach	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Long Beach Municipal Code Ch. 2.08
L.A. City ⁴	✓	✓		✓	✓		Los Angeles Municipal Code Ch. 4, Art. 8
L.A. County	✓	✓		✓	✓		Los Angeles County Code Ch. 2.160
L.A. County Metropolitan Transportation Authority	✓	✓		✓	✓		MTA Administrative Code & Public Utilities Code

¹ Certain prohibitions do not apply to employees or volunteers of a California nonprofit organization. See [Desert Hot Springs Municipal Code Sec. 2.22.040\(A\)](#).

² An employee working forty hours a week or more full time at the time the employee lobbies on behalf of their employer is not a lobbyist. See [El Segundo Municipal Code Sec. 1-8-4\(A\)\(4\)](#).

³ Nonprofit organizations that have an employee engaged primarily in lobbying services for such nonprofit organization are not exempt from registering. See [Fresno Municipal Code Sec. 2-1208\(e\)](#).

⁴ There is a limited exemption for certain 501(c)(3)s that receive government funding and provide direct services to indigent people. See [our factsheet on the Los Angeles Municipal Lobbying Ordinance](#) for more information.

Jurisdiction	Registration	Reporting	Identification	Gift Limit or Prohibition	Registration Fee	Exemption for Nonprofits	Code
L.A. Unified School District	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		LAUSD Lobbying Disclosure Code
Malibu	✓				✓		Malibu Municipal Code Ch. 2.24
Manhattan Beach	✓		✓		✓	✓	Manhattan Beach Municipal Code Ch. 4.132
Milpitas	✓	✓					Milpitas Code of Ordinances Title 1, Chapter 310 (I-310-3.160)
Moreno Valley ⁵	✓				✓		Moreno Valley Municipal Code Ch. 5.26
Oakland	✓	✓		✓			Oakland Code of Ordinances Ch. 3.20
Oceanside	✓	✓	✓		✓		Oceanside Code of Ordinances Ch. 16C
Orange County	✓	✓			✓		Orange County Code of Ordinances Title 1, Division 1, Art. 5
Pico Rivera ⁶	✓	✓					Pico Rivera Municipal Code Ch. 2.56
Richmond ⁷	✓	✓			✓		Richmond Code of Ordinances Ch. 2.54
Sacramento	✓	✓	✓		✓		Sacramento City Code Ch. 2.15

⁵ An employee working forty hours a week or more full time at the time the employee lobbies on behalf of their employer is not a lobbyist. See [Moreno Valley Municipal Code Sec. 5.026.020\(D\)](#).

⁶ The Pico Rivera and Santa Cruz lobbying ordinances apply only to cable television decisions. Please see the linked codes for specifics.

⁷ The registration fee is waived for organizations that can show proof of their 501(c)(3) or 501(c)(4) tax exempt status. [Richmond Code of Ordinances Sec. 2.54.050\(b\)](#).

Jurisdiction	Registration	Reporting	Identification	Gift Limit or Prohibition	Registration Fee	Exemption for Nonprofits	Code
San Diego City	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		San Diego Municipal Code Ch. 2 Art. 7 Div. 40
San Diego County	✓	✓		✓			Code of Regulatory Ordinances Division 3, Ch. 1, §23.101 et seq.
San Diego Unified Port District	✓	✓		✓			San Diego Unified Port District Code § 0.14
San Diego Regional Airport Authority	✓	✓					San Diego RAA Code § 2.15
San Francisco ⁸	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	Campaign and Governmental Conduct Code Art. II Ch. 1
San Jose	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	San Jose Code of Ordinances Ch. 12.12
San Luis Obispo	✓		✓				San Luis Obispo Municipal Code Ch. 2.64
Santa Ana				✓			Santa Ana Code of Ordinances § 2-852
Santa Clara City	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Santa Clara City Code Ch. 2.155
Santa Clara County	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Santa Clara Code of Ordinances § A3-61 et seq.
Santa Clara Valley Water District	✓	✓	✓		✓		Santa Clara Valley Water District Code No. 10-01

⁸ Officers or employees of 501(c)(3)s and certain 501(c)(4)s are exempted from registering and reporting their direct communication with San Francisco officials. However, **nonprofits must register and report certain grassroots lobbying expenses**. See San Francisco Campaign and Governmental Code Art. II, Sec. 2.105 on “[Expenditure Lobbyist](#),” the Ethics Commission [Regulation 2.105](#), and our factsheet, [San Francisco’s Grassroots Lobbying Disclosure Law for Expenditure Lobbyists](#). Note that employee compensation does not count toward an organization’s monthly \$2,500 grassroots expense reporting threshold, but all other grassroots lobbying expenses do. Certain 501(c)(3)s may apply for a waiver of the grassroots lobbyist registration fee.

Jurisdiction	Registration	Reporting	Identification	Gift Limit or Prohibition	Registration Fee	Exemption for Nonprofits	Code
Santa Clarita ⁹	✓						Santa Clarita Municipal Code Ch. 7.03
Santa Cruz City/County ¹⁰	✓	✓		✓			Santa Cruz County Ch. 8.08
San Joaquin County	✓				✓	✓	San Joaquin County Code Ch. 7
Santa Rosa City	✓				✓	✓	Santa Rosa City Code Ch. 10.35
Santa Monica	✓				✓		Santa Monica Municipal Code Ch. 4.85
West Hollywood	✓				✓		West Hollywood Municipal Code Ch. 2.72

The information contained in this fact sheet and any attachments is being provided for informational purposes only and not as part of an attorney-client relationship. The information is not a substitute for expert legal, tax, or other professional advice tailored to your specific circumstances, and may not be relied upon for the purposes of avoiding any penalties that may be imposed under the Internal Revenue Code or any other law. Alliance for Justice publishes plain-language guides on nonprofit advocacy topics, offers educational workshops on the laws governing the advocacy of nonprofits, and provides technical assistance for nonprofits engaging in advocacy. For additional information, please feel free to contact Alliance for Justice at 866-NPLOBBY.

⁹ A regular employee of an organization who communicates with “the City during the course of their employment,” is not a lobbyist. See [Santa Clarita Municipal Code Sec. 7.03.030\(F\)](#).

¹⁰ The Pico Rivera and Santa Cruz lobbying ordinances apply only to cable television decisions. Please see the linked codes for specifics.