

1.5.1 Political, Campaign and Lobbying Activities

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15.1

Stanford University, as a charitable entity, is subject to federal, state, and local laws and regulations regarding political activities—campaign activities, lobbying, and the giving of gifts to public officials.

While all members of the University community are naturally free to express their political opinions and engage in political activities to whatever extent they wish, it is very important that they do so only in their individual capacities and avoid even the appearance that they are speaking or acting for the University in political matters. The University expressly disavows any political communications that are not made in accordance with these provision: such communications are not authorized and may not be attributed to the University.

In the limited circumstances where individuals must speak or act on behalf of the University in the political arena, they must do so in accordance with the provisions of this Guide Memo.

Authority:

This Guide Memo was approved by the President.

Applicability:

This policy applies to all members of the University community.

1. Summary of Legal Requirements and Restrictions

a. Campaign Activities

Contributions of money, goods, or services to candidates for political office and in support of or opposition to ballot measure campaigns are subject to a wide variety of political laws. Depending on the jurisdiction and the campaign, political contributions may be prohibited or limited and, in

nearly all cases, are subject to a complicated series of disclosure rules. Because of the University's tax-exempt status, the University is legally prohibited from endorsing or opposing candidates for political office or making any contribution of money, goods, or services to candidates. It is important, therefore, that no person inadvertently cause the University to make such a contribution.

b. Lobbying

Lobbying can generally be described as any attempt to influence the action of any legislative body (e.g., Congress, state legislatures, county boards, city councils and their staffs) or any federal, state, or local government agency. Laws regulating lobbying exist at the federal, state, and local levels and can differ widely in scope, depending on the jurisdiction. Some laws, for example, only regulate lobbying of the legislative branch. Others, however, also cover lobbying of administrative agencies and officers in the executive branch (e.g., lobbying for federally-funded grants). To one degree or another, however, most lobbying laws require registration and reporting by individuals engaged in attempts to influence governmental action.

Tax-exempt organizations are permitted to lobby, and the University engages in lobbying on a limited number of issues, mostly those affecting education, research, and related activities. There is usually some threshold of time or money spent on lobbying that triggers registration and reporting requirements. Regardless of thresholds, however, no University employee—other than the following individuals, on matters under their jurisdiction—may lobby on behalf of the University without specific authorization:

- President
- Provost
- Deans of the Seven Schools
- Vice Provost and Dean of Research
- Vice Provost for Graduate Education
- Vice President for Business Affairs and Chief Financial Officer
- Vice President of Human Resources
- Vice President for Land, Buildings and Real Estate
- Director of the SLAC National Accelerator Laboratory
- Director of the Hoover Institution
- General Counsel
- Vice President for Public Affairs

The Vice Provost and Dean of Research may grant permission to faculty members to lobby on behalf of the University for specific purposes. The Vice President for Public Affairs may grant permission to staff members to lobby on behalf of the University for specific purposes. All lobbying on behalf of the University should be coordinated with the Vice President for Public Affairs. Please see the [Federal Lobbying Guidelines for Stanford Faculty and Staff](#) [1] in the Research Policy Handbook.

c. Giving of Gifts to Public Officials and Staff

Almost all jurisdictions have strict rules on the extent to which gifts and honoraria may be given to public officials (both elected and non-elected officials and, often, staff). In some cases gifts and honoraria are prohibited; in others they are limited; and in most cases they are subject to detailed

disclosure. In addition, in some jurisdictions, such as California, gifts to both state and local public officials can result in a public official's disqualification from participation in any governmental action affecting the interests of the donor. Meals, travel, and entertainment are the most common types of gifts, but gift rules can also apply in cases where public officials attend a reception or receive tickets to sporting or other events.

As a non-profit organization, the University generally does not give gifts to public officials and, in those limited cases where it does give such gifts, it must do so in accordance with all applicable laws and regulations. Therefore, any University employee who, on behalf of the University, wishes to make a gift to a public official must receive prior approval from the Vice President for Public Affairs before making such a gift.

d. Reporting of Political Activities

The University must report most of its political activities above certain thresholds. Therefore, any University employee engaging in such activities on behalf of the University should carefully review the remainder of this Guide Memo and should discuss the relevant activities in advance with the Vice President for Public Affairs.

2. Prohibited and Restricted Political Activities

a. In General:

(1) No person may, on behalf of the University, engage in any political activity in support of or opposition to any candidate for elective public office (including giving or receiving funds or endorsements), nor shall any University resources be used for such purpose.

(2) No person may, on behalf of the University, lobby (or use University resources to lobby) any federal, state, or local legislative or administrative official or staff member unless specifically authorized to do so. Any lobbying activity, even when authorized, must be conducted in compliance with this Guide Memo, other applicable University policies, and applicable law.

(3) No person may, on behalf of the University, give a gift (or use any University resources to give a gift) to any federal, state, or local official or staff member, except in compliance with this Guide Memo, other applicable University policies, and applicable law.

(4) No person supporting candidates for public office or engaging in other political activities may use University space or facilities or receive University support, except in the limited ways described in section 3.a.

(5) No person may use for lobbying activities federally-funded contract or grant money received by the University.

Even the foregoing activities that are only restricted, rather than prohibited, may be subject to limitations imposed by law. Therefore, any person engaging in the activity, or contemplating doing so, should consult with the Vice President for Public Affairs.

b. Guidelines for Avoiding Prohibited Political Activities

The following guidelines should assist in preventing the involvement or apparent involvement of the University in political activities in support of or opposition to any candidate for elective public office, including both partisan and non-partisan elections. Except in the limited circumstances set

forth in section 3.b., below:

(1) Use of Name and Seal

Neither the name nor seal of the University or of any of its schools, departments, or institutions should be used on letters or other materials intended to influence such political elections.

(2) Use of Address and Telephones

No University office should be used as a return mailing address for such political mailings, and telephone service that is paid by the University, likewise, should not be used for such political purposes. (Obviously, a student's dormitory room and telephone service that are personal to the student may be used for these purposes.)

(3) Use of Title

The University title of a faculty or staff member or other person should be used only for identification and should be accompanied by a statement that the person is speaking as an individual and not as a representative of the University.

(4) Use of Services and Equipment

University services, such as Interdepartmental Mail; equipment, such as copy machines, computers, and telephones; and supplies should not be used for such political purposes.

(5) Use of Personnel

No University employee may, as part of his or her job, be asked to perform tasks in any way related to prohibited political purposes.

3. Permissible Political Activities

a. In General

As noted above, the federal, state, and local laws which limit the partisan political activities that can take place in University facilities and with University support in no way inhibit the expression of personal political views by any individual in the University community. Nor do they forbid faculty, students, or staff from joining with others in support of candidates for office or in furtherance of political causes. There is no restriction on discussion of political issues or teaching of political techniques. Academic endeavors which address public policy issues are in no way prohibited or constrained.

Because the University encourages freedom of expression, political activities which do not reasonably imply University involvement or identification may be undertaken so long as regular University procedures are followed for use of facilities. Examples of permissible activities are:

(1) Use of areas, such as White Plaza, for tables, speeches, and similar activities.

(2) Use of auditoriums for speeches by political candidates, but subject to rules of the Internal Revenue Service, the Federal Election Commission, and the California Fair Political Practices Commission, and other applicable laws. Arrangements must be made with University Events & Services. (See also [Guide Memo 8.2.1](#) [2]: University Events, for more information.)

To reiterate, because tax and political compliance laws impose restrictions, and even prohibitions,

on certain political activities and on the use of buildings and equipment at a non-profit institution such as the University, any such activities must be in compliance with these legal requirements.

Individuals taking political positions for themselves or groups with which they are associated, but not as representatives of the University, should clearly indicate, by words and actions, that their positions are not those of the University and are not being taken in an official capacity on behalf of the University.

b. Limited University Political Activities

Limited activities relating to specific federal, state, or local legislation or ballot initiatives are permissible where (1) the subject matter is directly related to core interests of the University's activities; (2) the President has determined that the University should take a position; and (3) the individuals who speak or write on the University's behalf are specifically authorized to do so.

4. Research Involving Political Campaigns

Any Stanford researcher considering doing research involving political campaigns should consult with the General Counsel's Office for any legal restrictions, and should submit the research proposal in advance to Stanford's Institutional Review Board as appropriate under its policies and procedures.

5. Responsibility for Interpretation

The Vice President for Public Affairs, in consultation with the General Counsel, is the administrative officer responsible for interpretation and application of the above guidelines. Questions on whether planned student activities are consistent with the University's obligations should be directed to the Dean of Student Life, who will consult with the Vice President for Public Affairs and/or the General Counsel. All other questions on whether planned activities are consistent with the University's obligations should be addressed directly to the Vice President for Public Affairs or the General Counsel.

Guidelines on requesting a memo change can be found at
<https://adminguide.stanford.edu/change-request-guidelines>

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Links

[1] <http://doresearch.stanford.edu/research-scholarship/federal-lobbying-guidelines-stanford-faculty-and-staff>

[2] <https://adminguide.stanford.edu/8-2-1>

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