



MEMORANDUM

To: University Cabinet

From: Office of Special Events & Protocol (OSEP) and Office of Student Engagement (OSE)

Cc: Office of Government Affairs and Office of the General Counsel

Date: September 25, 2020

Re: Election Season Reminder – Guidelines for Political Activities

With the election season well underway, we are providing a brief reminder about Stanford's policy on engaging in political activities (Administrative Guide Memo 1.5.1), and where to go for answers to your questions. **Please further distribute this memorandum to those in your offices with relevant duties and responsibilities.**

Stanford University supports the expression and discussion of ideas and opinions and encourages members of the University community to be informed and engaged citizens. At the same time, however, Stanford is subject to federal, state, and local laws and regulations that restrict the University from engaging in certain political activities – including because of its status as a non-profit 501(c)(3) entity.

Prohibited Activities

- On behalf of the University, no person may engage in any political campaign activity in support of or opposition to any candidate, political party, or political action committee.
- No University resources may be used for any such purpose.
 - Examples of resources include University letterhead, name, seal, email lists, office space, telephones, computers, equipment, photocopying, or other University facilities, support, or resources.
 - A student's dormitory room and telephone service that are personal to the student may be used for these purposes.

Permissible Activities

- All members of the University community may express their political opinions and engage in political activities *in their individual capacities* using personal resources, but must avoid even the appearance that they are speaking or acting for the University in political matters.

- Individuals taking political positions for themselves or groups with which they are associated (such as a recognized student organization) should clearly state, by words (such as an express disclaimer) and actions, that their positions are not those of the University.
- Inviting candidates to speak in a non-candidate capacity is permissible if the event adheres to OSE/OSEP Political Activities policies and is authorized in advance.
 - The speech must be a policy discussion to inform the Stanford community and not an event to advance their candidacy.
 - The policies require that the event must not be a campaign event, must maintain a nonpartisan atmosphere, and must include no signage or distribution of campaign materials, and no solicitation of votes or donations.
 - These policies also apply to virtual events.
- Areas such as White Plaza may be used by registered Stanford student organizations, University schools, institutes, and recognized departments for tables and other activities as permitted under University policies and with approval from OSE.
- Any activities on Stanford property must comply with local, county, state and federal guidelines and health and safety requirements regarding COVID-19, as well as Stanford COVID-19 guidelines.
- 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 of potentially applicable laws, any Stanford researcher considering doing research involving current or future elections or campaigns should confer with the Vice Provost and Dean of Research.

Where to Go for Guidance and Review

In addition to the Internal Revenue Code and federal campaign laws, each state and several local jurisdictions impose rules and restrictions on campaign-related or election-related activity, so it is important to always seek guidance to ensure compliance with applicable laws, as well as University policies.

For guidance related to political activities as described in this memo, please contact the appropriate office.

- **For student activity**, please contact the Office of Student Engagement (OSE): Email: studentengagement@stanford.edu, phone: 650-724-2445.
- **For all other activity** (such as by Stanford recognized departments, schools, and institutes), please contact the Office of Special Events & Protocol (OSEP): Email: stanfordevents@stanford.edu, phone: 650-724-1387.
- These offices in turn will consult with the Office of Government Affairs and the Office of the General Counsel as appropriate.

The points made in this memo are not intended to serve as legal advice, or as a pre-approval to engage in certain activities. Determining whether a contemplated political activity is permissible, prohibited, or may require modification to make it permissible is often fact-dependent, and may need to be reviewed on a case-by-case basis by the appropriate office to ensure compliance with Stanford's policies and the law.

OSEP Contact:

Monday – Friday 8:00 – 5:00 p.m. Pacific (holidays not included)

Email: stanfordevents@stanford.edu

Phone: 650-724-1387 (message)

OSE Contact:

Monday – Friday 8:00 – 5:00 p.m. Pacific (holidays not included)

Email: studentengagement@stanford.edu

Phone: 650-724-2445 (message)

Relevant policies:

Administrative Guide Memo 1.5.1: <https://adminguide.stanford.edu/chapter-1/subchapter-5/policy-1-5-1>

OSE Political Activities Policy: <https://ose.stanford.edu/policies/political-activities>

OSEP Political Activities Policy: <https://osep.stanford.edu/policies/political-activities-policy>

White Memorial Plaza Policy: <https://ose.stanford.edu/plan-event/book-space/white-memorial-plaza>