



Guidelines for elected and appointed officials' participation in elections activity

Elected officials and city staff should understand Public Disclosure Commission (PDC) guidelines before participating in any elections activities, including taking a position on a ballot measure or endorsing a candidate for political office. Below are some common examples of activities city officials may and may not do. It is not intended to be comprehensive. A complete listing of the PDC Guidelines for [Local Government Agencies in Election Campaigns](#) can be found on their website pdc.wa.gov. If you have any questions, please call the PDC at (360) 753-1111 or consult your jurisdiction's legal counsel.

General provisions

Activities that are allowed:

- City employees or elected officials may, on their own time during non-work hours (and not with the use of city property or equipment), participate in campaign-related activities.
- Elected officials may make statements supporting or opposing an initiative or referendum in response to a specific media inquiry. All city officials may respond to requests for factual information as part of their normal job duty.
- City officials may use their title for identification purposes in endorsements supporting or opposing a candidate or an initiative or referendum, but should not use public facilities or equipment for communications and should make clear that it is their personal view.
- City employees or elected officials may place on their individual agency calendar basic information if they are scheduled to be out of the office to attend campaign events.
- A city may provide a facility, if it is available, for a public forum, making arrangements for all sides to be represented.
- A city may allow use of a public meeting space, if it is available as normal and regular conduct, to community groups for campaign activities. If a city normally charges for the use of these facilities, then the city must charge all users equally.
- City employees may wear lapel buttons at work if the city has a policy permitting employees to wear political buttons.
- Private employee vehicles displaying bumper stickers may be parked on public property.
- City officials may encourage staff and members of the public to vote, as long as such encouragement routinely occurs for other elections.

Activities that are *not* allowed:

- City employees or elected officials may not use public facilities, supplies, or equipment, for any campaign purpose. This includes phones, copiers, mail facilities, computers, email, websites, social media, uniforms purchased with city funds, and paper products. City officials may not reimburse the city for usage of these facilities. City officials may not use city vehicles to transport or display political material.
- City officials may not promote or oppose a candidate or ballot measure during work hours. This includes gathering signatures, distributing materials, coordinating speakers/fundraising/ phone banks, etc. It does not include elected official statements on ballot measures in response to a specific media inquiry.
- City officials may not maintain individual campaign-related events on agency-wide distributed calendars.
- City employees may not oppose or support an issue or candidate before a civic group on city work time. It must be on personal time.
- City officials may not post signs advocating for or against candidates or ballot measures on any city property.
- City employees or elected officials may not pressure city employees to participate in campaign activities for a ballot measure or candidate, take a position, or coordinate informational activities with campaign work.



Ballot measures

Activities that are allowed:

- Elected officials and city staff may speak at community forums and clubs during regular work hours to make an objective and fair presentation of the facts on a ballot measure if it is normal and regular conduct. City equipment (projector, laptop) may be used for the presentation.
- Elected officials may attend an event any time during the day and give their opinion about a ballot measure, as long as they are not being compensated by the city or using any public equipment, facility or vehicle (with exceptions for specific inquiries).
- City employees or elected officials may use their job title with the city in a letter to the editor (written on their own time using their own computer). They must clarify that they are expressing their own opinion, and not speaking for the city.
- A city employee may respond to a political inquiry by providing routine factual information if that is part of their normal job duty.
- Members of an elected council may vote to support or oppose an initiative or referendum. If your council plans to vote to take a position on an initiative or referendum, the notice of the meeting when the vote will be taken must include the title and number of the ballot proposition. Council members or the public must have an equal opportunity to express an opposing view.
- Elected officials may make statements supporting or opposing an initiative or referendum in response to a specific media inquiry. All city officials may respond to requests for factual information as part of their normal job duty.
- A city may use its website, newsletter, or other publications to provide citizens with information about an issue that directly impacts the city, looking at all available information. If you routinely provide objective and fair facts on a ballot measure or controversial issue, you may present objective and fair presentation of facts on the ballot propositions.
- If your website or newsletter publishes resolutions or reports on council activity, you may report on action taken on a resolution.
- Distribution of all information must be to "normal and regular" recipients, using the publication's regular schedule. Repeated distribution of the same information may be considered campaign activity by the PDC.

- A city website may be used to inform citizens about anticipated ballot measure impacts, and allow readers to explore an issue through detailed links, if part of normal conduct and do not link to campaigns. Websites may be updated according to the city's normal procedures.
- City employees may provide in-house contingency planning (what if an initiative or referendum passes). This isn't a public activity. This includes researching the impact of a ballot proposition for the purpose of gathering facts.
- City employees may respond to requests for public records even if the records will be used in support or opposition of a measure, as long as the record isn't exempt from disclosure under state law.

Activities that are *not* allowed:

- City officials may not use public facilities, supplies or equipment, for any campaign purpose. This includes phones, copiers, mail facilities, computers, email, social media, websites, uniforms purchased with city funds, and paper products. City officials may not reimburse the city for usage of these facilities. City officials may not use city vehicles to transport or display political material.
- City officials may not promote or oppose a candidate or ballot measure during work hours. This includes gathering signatures, distributing materials, coordinating speakers/fundraising/phone banks, etc. It does not include elected official statements on ballot measures in response to a specific media inquiry.
- City officials may not produce information that targets specific subgroups. This does not refer to mailing to groups that are on the city's regular distribution list.
- City employees may not oppose or support an issue or candidate before a civic group on city work time. It must be on personal time.
- City officials may not have a petition available for signature at city hall, or other city facility or vehicle.
- City officials may not post signs advocating for or against candidates or ballot measures on any city property.
- City employees or elected officials may not pressure city employees to participate in campaign activities for a ballot measure or candidate, take a position or coordinate informational activities with campaign work.