



Political Campaign Activity

POLICY STATEMENT

Cornell University supports freedom of thought and expression by members of its community. Cornell encourages faculty, staff, and students to be full participants in the civic process, including communicating with policymakers on issues of importance and contributing time and money to the candidates of their choice as private citizens, using their own resources. These activities must be done in a personal capacity, and not imply in any way that the university supports, opposes, or otherwise endorses any candidate for public office.

REASON FOR POLICY

Federal Internal Revenue Code prohibits tax-exempt organization such as Cornell from engaging in political campaign activity. To protect its assets, tax-exempt status, and reputation, the university establishes guidelines for faculty and staff to engage in political campaign activity and political expression, clarifies the responsibilities of independent recognized organizations, and clarifies permissible uses of university property by political candidates.

ENTITIES AFFECTED BY THIS POLICY

- Ithaca-based locations
- Cornell Tech campus
- Weill Cornell Medicine campuses

WHO SHOULD READ THIS POLICY

- All members of the university community

MOST CURRENT VERSION OF THIS POLICY

- <https://www.dfa.cornell.edu/policy/policies/political-campaign-activity>

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RELATED RESOURCES

University Policies and Information

- [University Policy 4.6, Standards of Ethical Conduct](#)
- [University Policy 4.10, Use of Cornell's Name, Logos, Trademarks, and Insignias](#)
- [University Policy 4.16, Social Media Accounts](#)
- [University Policy 5.1, Responsible Use of Information Technology Resources](#)
- [Campus Code of Conduct](#)
- [Cornell University Event Registration Guidelines](#)
- [Posting and Chalking Policy](#)
- [Student Organization Rules on Rallies](#)

External Documentation

- American Council on Education Memorandum: [Political Campaign-related Activities of and at Colleges and Universities](#)
- [Communications Act of 1934, as Amended by the Telecommunications Act of 1996](#)
- Internal Revenue Service Information: [The Restriction of Political Campaign Intervention by Section 501\(c\)\(3\) Tax-Exempt Organizations](#)

CONTACTS

Direct any general questions about this policy to your college or unit administrative office. If you have questions about specific issues, contact the following offices.

Contacts

Subject	Contact	Telephone	Email/Web Address
Policy Clarification and Interpretation	University Relations	(607) 255-9029	vp-universityrelations@cornell.edu
	Federal Relations	(202) 434-8039	dc_office@cornell.edu
Legal Issues	University Counsel	(607) 255-5124	counsel.cornell.edu
Student Organizations	Campus Activities	(607) 255-4169	activities@cornell.edu

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DEFINITIONS

These definitions apply to these terms as they are used in this policy.

Candidate	An individual who is a legally qualified candidate for public office, as defined in the Communications Act of 1934 (see Related Resources).
Political Campaign Activity	Directly or indirectly participating in, or intervening in, any political campaign on behalf of (or in opposition to) any candidate for public office. Political campaign activity may include, but is not limited to, making financial contributions to a campaign; soliciting campaign contributions; distributing information or creating weblinks that favor or oppose certain candidates; sponsoring events to promote certain candidates; disparate treatment of candidates invited to participate at a University event; and establishing political action committees.

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RESPONSIBILITIES

The major responsibilities each party has in connection with this policy are as follows:

All Cornell Community Members	<p>Refrain from using Cornell resources of any kind to engage in political campaign activity, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Using the university name, seal, logo, or other insignia in connection with political campaign activity, such as solicitation of funds for or endorsements of political candidates.• Using a Cornell address, including email address, as the return address for campaign mailings.• Using university facilities, equipment, services, and resources, including but not limited to office supplies, email or social media accounts, computers, telephones, copy machines, bulk mail privileges, sales tax exemptions, electronic mailing lists, directories, web pages, and databases for political campaign activity.
Faculty and Staff Member	<p>Refrain from engaging in political campaign activity using Cornell resources.</p> <p>When engaging in political campaign activity, making political statements, or corresponding with candidates for public office or elected officials, indicate that you are speaking as an individual, and not on behalf of the university.</p>
Recognized Independent Student Organization	<p>Follow Event Registration Guidelines for use of university space. Indicate clearly that any political campaign activity takes place without the endorsement or financial support of Cornell University.</p> <p>Provide prior notice to University Relations, in accordance with the event registration process, of plans for any political campaign activity.</p> <p>Except for reserving university space, make no other use of Cornell resources, including student fees, for political campaign activity.</p> <p>◆Note: Certain exceptions apply for recognized independent student organizations</p>

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PRINCIPLES

Overview	While Cornell University strongly values freedom of expression, federal IRS law prohibits tax-exempt organizations like Cornell from engaging in political campaign activity. Violations of this policy could include loss of tax-exempt status, monetary penalties, and reputational harm.
Use of the University's Name, Seal, Logo, or Other Insignia	The name, seal, logo, or other insignia of Cornell University may not be used in connection with political campaign activity, including the solicitation of funds for or endorsements of particular political candidates. For other regulations governing use of university assets, see University Policy 4.10, Use of Cornell's Name, Logos, Trademarks, and Insignias.
Clubs and Organizations	Recognized independent student organizations must clearly indicate and prominently disclose their separateness from the university when engaging in political campaign activity, including sponsoring an event on campus. Organizers must make a disclaimer at the beginning of any such event, as well as in any printed materials or advertisements publicizing the event, that the university does not endorse candidates for public office, that the opinions expressed are not those of the university, and that an independent recognized organization has sponsored the event, such as the following: <i>"This event/publication/solicitation is sponsored solely by the [name of independent recognized organization] without the support or endorsement of Cornell University. Cornell University does not participate in political campaigns on behalf of, or in opposition to, any candidate for public office."</i>
Faculty and Staff Members	Political Campaign Activity Faculty or staff members are welcome and encouraged to engage in political campaign activity as private citizens. However, those who choose to participate in political campaign activity must refrain from any use of Cornell resources in connection with such activities. When engaging in political campaign activity, faculty and staff members may use their titles for identification purposes, but must indicate clearly that they are speaking as individuals and not on behalf of the university. Other Political Expression When engaged in political statements or correspondence, in any medium, faculty and staff members may use their titles for identification purposes, but must indicate clearly that they are speaking as individuals and not on behalf of the university. ◆ Note: All faculty and staff members are bound by other workplace policies that ensure prudent and appropriate use of university resources and facilities, conflict of

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interest, and appropriate dedication of effort during working hours to university responsibilities (see Related Resources).

Use of University Space, Facilities, Equipment, Services, and Other Resources

Cornell resources may not be used, directly or indirectly, in connection with political campaign activity. A Cornell address, including email address, may not be used as a return address for political campaign mailings. Official Cornell publications or social media accounts may not be used for political campaign activity.

University facilities, equipment, services, and resources, including office supplies, computers, telephones, copy machines, bulk mail privileges, sales tax exemptions, email and social media accounts, electronic mailing lists, directories, web pages, and databases may not be used for political campaign activity.

University space and facilities may be made available to recognized independent student organizations on an impartial basis for political candidates and activities such as meetings, speeches, rallies, and other appropriate activities. All such uses must be processed through the regular and established university channels using the Event Registration Form, and will be considered on the same basis as all other requests for use of university facilities. Such events must be primarily for the benefit of members of the university community. Organizers will be expected to pay appropriate service charges to compensate the university for its expenses and to ensure that such events are not subsidized by university funds. Charges for use of facilities for political campaign activities may not be reimbursed from university funds.

◆**Note:** For the purposes of this policy, certain residence hall apartments (e.g., director (RHD), faculty-in-residence (FIR), etc.) are generally considered private space. However, certain campaign activities may not be appropriate in these spaces. For more information, contact University Relations.