



Board of Ethics
CITY OF PHILADELPHIA

Political Activity



Regulation 8
Effective Sept. 7, 2020

Social Media Guide



What's inside?

There are many ways that you may interact with social media as a City employee or officer – including when you are engaging in political activity!

This guide provides a brief overview of the political activity rules, describes common situations where these rules apply on social media, and gives examples of both permissible and prohibited conduct. More detail about the political activity rules can be found in [Regulation 8](#).

What is Political Activity?

Political activity is activity directed toward the success or failure of a political candidate, campaign, or partisan political group.

The political activity rules apply differently to different groups of City officers and employees. This guide addresses Groups 1, 2, & 3. You can find more information about these groups in our handy [explainer](#).

1

Most officers & employees in the Administrative & Executive Branches
Members of Boards & Commissions that exercise significant powers of government

2

Employees & officers of the City Commissioners, District Attorney, Police, Sheriff, & Board of Ethics

3

City Council Staff

4

Members of Advisory Boards & Commissions

Political Activity Rules

What is permissible?

All City officers & employees may:

- ✓ Vote in an election
- ✓ Register as a member of a political party
- ✓ Campaign for or against legislation or issues
- ✓ Donate to a candidate, party, or political group*
- ✓ Attend a political fundraiser or rally as a spectator
- ✓ Display a campaign sign in your yard
- ✓ Talk about your personal political opinions

Group 1 may also...

- ✓ Volunteer for non-local campaigns

Group 3 may also...

- ✓ Volunteer for any campaign, including in a management role

What is prohibited?

No City appointed officer or employee may...

- ✗ Engage in political activity while
 - on duty;
 - in uniform;
 - using City title or status;
 - using City resources;
 - in City office space
- ✗ Raise funds for a political purpose
- ✗ Run for office while holding a City position

Group 1 also may not...

- ✗ Take on a management role in a campaign, party, or partisan group

Group 2 also may not...

- ✗ Take on a management role in a campaign, party, or partisan group
- ✗ Volunteer for any candidate or campaign

Political Activity on Social Media

Political activity on social media is generally **permitted**, but **NOT** if you are:

- ▶ on duty
- ▶ in uniform
- ▶ using your City title or position
- ▶ using City resources
- ▶ in City Hall or City office space

You may not...

- ▶ engage in political activity using any City-owned or City-operated social media account, or any account that presents itself as being for official City business
- ▶ use social media to create, promote, or share content related to political fundraising
- ▶ create political content that identifies your City title or position in text or images including in a handle, username, or profile picture

You are not responsible for removing social media content created by others, or that you created before your City service.

Your office may have additional rules about the use of personal and official social media accounts.

Key Considerations

Know your profile; know your platform

Social media platforms often include information from your user profile in content you create. For example, a profile photo typically appears as part of each post. Some platforms automatically include your job title or employer when you create content.

Including your City title or position in a social media profile may limit your ability to engage in political activity using that account because your City title or status cannot be part of content you create that contains political activity.

It is **your responsibility** to know how each social media platform displays your profile information and to be aware of any changes.

You may have to choose between using your City title in a profile and using that account for political activity.

Know your candidates

Group 1 may volunteer in support of candidates for **non-local office**. Involvement in campaigns for the following **local offices** is still prohibited:

- ▶ Mayor
- ▶ City Council
- ▶ City Commissioner
- ▶ District Attorney
- ▶ City Controller
- ▶ Sheriff
- ▶ Register of Wills
- ▶ Philadelphia Court of Common Pleas Judges
- ▶ Philadelphia Municipal Court Judges
- ▶ Elected officers at City polling places (Judge of Elections, Majority & Minority Inspector)
- ▶ PA House & Senate Districts including any part of the City

Case Study: Public Policy Advocacy vs. Political Activity

The American Medical Association tweets a link to an open letter advocating for the wearing of masks by the public.

City Account

You are a City employee or officer managing an official City social media account.

You may retweet the AMA's post from an official City Twitter account without violating the political activity rules.

Personal Account

You are an off-duty City employee or officer on your personal social media account.

You may retweet the AMA's post from an official City Twitter account without violating the political activity rules.

The AMA's letter about mask-wearing addresses a public policy issue, not the success or failure of a candidate, political campaign, political party, or partisan political group. As a result, retweeting the AMA's message is not political activity and is, therefore, permissible from either a City or personal social media account.

Case Study: Sharing Candidate Content

Dr. Sarah Smith, a candidate for state representative from a district in Philadelphia, tweets about the AMA's open letter in support of mask-wearing.

City Account

You are a City employee or officer managing an official City social media account.

You may not retweet the AMA's post from an official City Twitter account. Using a City account to **promote content from a candidate** for any elected office – whether local or non-local – is prohibited.

Personal Account

You are an off-duty City employee or officer on your personal social media account.

You may “like” or retweet Dr. Smith on your own initiative so long as you do not use your **City title or position**. Unless you are in Group 3 (City Council Staff), however, you may not participate in Dr. Smith's campaign – including by promoting content at the request of the campaign – because Dr. Smith is running for **local office**.

While the AMA's message is about public policy, a candidate's involvement makes this political activity.

Case Study: Sharing News & Opinion Articles

Veterinarian Dr. John Jones writes an Inquirer op-ed about cat grooming. The piece mentions a presidential candidate's recent comments about cat hygiene and concludes that the candidate's position on cat grooming disqualifies them from holding office and/or endorses their opponent.

City Account

You are a City employee or officer managing an official City social media account.

You may not share Dr. Jones' op-ed, because posting the article would be **supporting or opposing a candidate** and therefore prohibited on a City account.

Personal Account

You are an off-duty City employee or officer on your personal social media account.

If you are in Groups 1 or 3, you may post the op-ed even though it supports or opposes a presidential candidate so long as you do not use your **City title or position**. This is permissible because it involves a **non-local office**.

If the article also included a request to contribute to a campaign or PAC, sharing it would be **political fundraising** and, therefore, prohibited regardless of your Group or the elected office sought.

Case Study: Whiskers4PA

The poster is in **Group 1**. This post raises several potential problems under the political activity rules.

Username & profile pic announce status as City worker

Posted while at work



Ian *works4PHLGov* Smith is at City Hall

Monday at 10:05 am • 🌐

Vote Whiskers for PA Supreme Court! Comment or inbox me for volunteer opportunities!! *Political views are my own and do not reflect official endorsement of Whiskers4PA*

Disclaimer does not protect against ethics violations



Solicits political contributions

JUSTICEWHISKERS4PA.COM

Who has more experience judging you than a cat? Donate now!



21 Comments 10 Shares



Write a comment...



Press Enter to post.

Case Studies: Promoting Campaign Events

You are in Group 1 and volunteering for a non-local campaign. You are asked to post an invite to a meet-the-candidate happy hour on your personal social media accounts. The invite lists suggested contribution amounts.

While volunteering for a non-local campaign is generally permitted for members of Group 1, posting an invitation that requests political donations crosses the line into soliciting political contributions. It would not matter whether a donation was required – any involvement in asking for a political contribution is prohibited. You also would not be able to assist with or staff this event.

You are in Group 3 and working on your Councilmember's re-election campaign. You post two flyers on your personal social media accounts. The first flyer advertises an upcoming candidates' forum where tickets are not required for admission. The second flyer advertises a campaign fundraising dinner with ticket prices ranging from \$50 to \$500 dollars.

If you are off-duty and your social media accounts do not include your City title or status, you would be permitted to post the first flyer about the forum. However, you would not be able to post the second flyer for the campaign dinner because any involvement in asking for a political contribution is prohibited. You also cannot sell tickets to the dinner or collect monetary donations.

Permitted Activity



You may share a photo of protestors with a caption, "I stand with them."

So long as you are NOT:

- On duty
- In uniform
- Using City resources
- Using your City title
- In City office space

You may post a selfie wearing a political party button.

You may retweet a tweet by a candidate for the U.S. Senate and like an Instagram post made by a mayoral candidate.

You may comment, "I agree!" on a post that says vote in support of a State Representative's campaign.

Prohibited Activity



You use your City title in your profile headline on LinkedIn, but because that headline accompanies almost every action, you may not post messages on LinkedIn supporting a candidate.

You manage your office Twitter account. You cannot like a candidate's tweet from that account.

Your shirt has "City of Philadelphia - Office of the Mayor" on the pocket. You cannot upload a picture to your Instagram story of you wearing the shirt at a rally opposing a candidate.*

You may not retweet a celebrity's endorsement of a candidate with the hashtag #DonateNow.

You work for the Streets Department and volunteered to work on your cousin's campaign for county office in Jersey. You cannot Instagram yourself handing out lawn signs while wearing your City uniform.*

**Political activity while in uniform or using your City title/status is prohibited even if you do not post about it on social media.*