

2024 ELECTION YEAR GUIDANCE FOR FACULTY AND STAFF

As a public institution, staff and faculty of Western Washington University must abide by applicable laws and institutional policies regarding political activity.

The *Ethics in Public Service Act* ([RCW 42.52.180\(1\)](#)) states: “No state officer or state employee may use or authorize the use of facilities of an agency, directly or indirectly, for the purpose of assisting a campaign for election of a person to an office or for the promotion of or opposition to a ballot proposition... Facilities of an agency include, but are not limited to, use of stationery, postage machines, and equipment, use of state employees of the agency during working hours, vehicles, office space, publications of the agency, and clientele lists of persons served by the agency.”

De minimis use exceptions do not apply to political activity, any use of state resources is prohibited.

Examples of legally permissible activities:

- **Wearing campaign buttons** to work or placing campaign material in personal, assigned space.
 - But balancing that free speech right against the obligation to **not use visible public facilities to post or present such material**, which might leave the impression that the campaign is favored by the institution, its leadership or staff.
- **Participating in campaigns on personal time.** Personal time is:
 - time outside the individual’s normal work day, or
 - vacation or other approved leave status.

Political creed is a protected classification under the Washington Law Against Discrimination. Persons serving in supervisory capacities should recognize the risk that employees may view overt political statements, including such simple acts as wearing a campaign button, in a manner which negatively impacts an employee’s work environment.

Other applicable laws and policies:

[RCW 42.52.160](#) [RCW 42.17A.550](#) [RCW 42.17A.635](#) [RCW 42.52.130](#) [RCW 42.52.180](#) [De Minimis Usage AAG Advisory Opinion](#)
[POL-U5400.13 Using University Property for Political Activity](#)



Questions?

Please contact the Office of Government Relations

Nora Selander, Director, selandn@wwu.edu

Elissa Hicks, Policy and Affairs Coordinator, hickse2@wwu.edu

EXAMPLES OF IMPERMISSIBLE ACTIVITIES:

- Use work time to solicit support, oppose, or collect signatures or money for ballot measures.
- Use work time to campaign for or against a candidate for public office.
- Use public property to campaign for or against a candidate or measure; **except that** ‘neutral forum’ public property otherwise open to public use can be used for campaigning, provided you do not engage in such campaigning using work time or other public resources.
- Use public facilities or supplies for campaigns or measures, which includes office space, telephones, email, word processing, paper, and other publicly owned property, for campaigns, whether during or after work hours
- Display or distribute political material in or on publicly owned vehicles or facilities.
- Use publicly owned facilities to instruct or urge public employees to campaign for candidates or measures, or implying that job performance might be judged according to willingness to use their own time on a campaign.
- Use public time or facilities to draft or pass a resolution by an appointed committee or board, taking an official position regarding a pending ballot measure or endorsement of a particular candidate.