

# MINISTERS' STAFF GUIDANCE ON POLITICAL ACTIVITY

Employees working in a minister's office are permitted to participate in some forms of political activity in the workplace, while other public servants are not. This exception recognises the unique nature of this role in Ontario's government.

As a minister's staff member, you are a public servant working for an elected official who is a member of a political party. You face the challenge of balancing your duties to the Crown and responsibilities to your minister.

The Integrity Commissioner is your Ethics Executive and can help you comply with the political activity rules under the *Public Service of Ontario Act, 2006*.

## What is political activity?

Political activity is defined in the PSOA as:

- a. doing anything to support or oppose a political party;
- b. doing anything to support or oppose a candidate in a federal, provincial or municipal election;
- c. being or seeking to become a candidate in a federal, provincial or municipal election; or
- d. commenting publicly and outside of the scope of one's duties as a public servant on matters that are directly related to those duties and on which a political party or a candidate has publicly expressed a position.

## Political activity in the workplace

At work, ministers' staff can take part in political activity only under certain circumstances:

- The activity is related to the performance of a ministerial power, duty or function; and
- The activity cannot conflict with the interests of the Crown.

Allowable political activities while working	Restricted political activities while working
Assessing how materials prepared by a ministry align with a political party's position on an issue	Publicly endorsing or opposing a political party or candidate
Preparing responses to opposition party positions on ministerial activities	Engaging with ministerial stakeholders on matters related to a political campaign
Communicating positions that reflect the elected government's perspective	Organising campaign fundraising or other political events
Liaising with other ministers' offices	Managing riding association activities

Ask for the Integrity Commissioner's advice on specific political activities or tasks.

## Political activity on personal time

Ministers' staff may participate in political activity on their personal time and outside of their ministerial duties, subject to the following restrictions:

- no government premises, equipment, or supplies may be used, and
- it cannot conflict with the interests of the Crown.

## Supporting a candidate? If so, remember:

Do not identify yourself as an employee of a minister's office.

Do not solicit a political donation or other forms of support from a person who has dealings with your minister or ministry, such as a vendor or funding recipient.

Do not solicit a political donation from a person who is registered to lobby your minister or ministry.

Check with Human Resources about taking a leave of absence if you are going to work on or volunteer for a political campaign.

Ministers' staff are bound by the Conflict of Interest Rules, which stipulate that you cannot:

- use or disclose confidential information;
- create the appearance that you are giving any person or entity preferential treatment;
- allow any activity to interfere with your ability to perform your duties as ministers' staff.

Contact the OIC before taking part in any political activity, including if you are considering becoming a candidate.

Each situation is unique and the Integrity Commissioner is best suited to provide guidance on how to balance your duties to the Crown with your political activity.

The Integrity Commissioner also provides advice about the Conflict of Interest Rules and post-employment requirements under the PSOA.

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