

Community and Public Engagement Considerations During the Election Period

The [Toronto Public Service By-law](#) and the [Political Activity Provisions](#) apply to all elections. For more information about elections, City staff are encouraged to visit: [Policies for City Employees during Election Period – City of Toronto](#)

Public meetings and other engagement activities held during an election period may include participants who intentionally, or inadvertently, discuss, advocate for, or distribute information about a candidate or election issue. This Q&A outlines considerations for staff who, acting in their position as a member of the Toronto Public Service, conduct or participate in virtual, in person, or hybrid consultations, workshops, or other engagement activities with the public during the municipal election period. Staff can also speak with their manager or [Ethics Executive](#) for questions about specific situations.

The municipal election period for 2022 is May 2 to October 24, 2022

A number of policies and guidelines are available for City staff and include:

- [Use of City Resources During an Election Period Policy](#)
- [Toronto Public Service By-Law – City of Toronto](#)
- [Protocol for responding to requests for information from candidates for the October 24, 2022 municipal election \(toronto.ca\)](#)

Q1. What is the primary objective of the City's policies for members of the Toronto Public Service during the election period?

City staff must maintain public confidence in the electoral process by providing neutral, professional information and maintaining impartiality in the process and outcome of the election.

During the election period, it is critical that staff do not contravene any of the City's election-related policies and that there is no possibility of real or perceived bias with regard to any candidate, current Councillor, or election issue.

Staff must ensure that any information they distribute at an event or meeting is also publicly available to those who are not in attendance. One way to do this is to provide information that is already available on the City's website and ensure any new information is posted on the City's website.

During a municipal election, staff must provide information to all Members of Council running for re-election and new candidates equally – if staff provide information to one Councillor or candidate they must make it available to all. The [Protocol for responding to requests for information from candidates for the October 24, 2022](#)

[municipal election \(toronto.ca\)](#) outlines the steps staff must take during the election period (May to October).

Q2. How can staff avoid bias or providing an unfair advantage to any candidate?

During any election, staff must remember that City of Toronto resources cannot be used to promote one candidate over another candidate or to support, endorse or otherwise provide an unfair advantage to any candidate.

If the City or City staff play a role in public meetings and events, they must understand that "City Resources" during an election include but are not limited to:

- City employees,
- City events,
- City facilities,
- City funds,
- City information and
- City infrastructure.

The full [definition of a City Resource](#) is located in Appendix A (p. 7) of the [Use of City Resources during an Election Period Policy](#)

Q3. What should staff consider in planning public engagements during a municipal election period (May 2-October 24), particularly as it relates to inviting and providing information to Councillors?

During the municipal election period, staff cannot provide or be perceived to provide an advantage to Councillors, whether or not they are candidates in the election. Potential advantages to Councillors might include access to City facilities, staff advice or communications support that are not available to other candidates. Staff should consult the [Use of City Resources during an Election Period Policy](#) (PDF) for additional guidance.

See Q6 for example on how to reference a Member of Council during a municipal election.

Staff are encouraged to consider delaying engagement activities until the new term of Council unless they are related to matters that are time-sensitive or have a regulatory requirement. Councillors remain the elected representative of their respective wards until the new Council is sworn in, so they can be provided with publicly-available information about engagement activities. Staff should consult the [Use of City Resources during an Election Period Policy](#) regarding Councillor involvement.

Q 4. What should staff consider when they receive an invitation to a public meeting or event during the election period?

Staff must consider their role at public events along with any public perception or expectation participants may have of them. For example,

- Will they be participating as an observer, participant, or disseminating information about City services?

- Will staff be making a presentation, or be asked to comment on City services, the election, or issues of public interest?
- Will current members of Council or candidates for the municipal election be speaking, hosting a discussion, or running their own information session or booth?
- Have staff been invited to provide a professional or personal opinion on the election or a candidate's campaign,
- Is the City co-sponsoring, promoting, or otherwise connected to the event? Is this solely a community sponsored event, or is it co-sponsored or linked to any candidate or campaign issue?

It should be made clear to event organizers that staff must remain neutral on campaign-related issues and will provide information about the City's services and programs but not comment on candidates, current Councillors, or any positions. If the focus of the public meeting is to advocate for or promote a candidate or election issue, staff should review the [Toronto Public Service By-Law – City of Toronto](#) regarding political activities. Staff may also consider consulting with their supervisor to assess any implications of accepting or declining the invitation.

Staff should recognize that current members of Council are holders of their office until the end of their term on **November 14, 2022**. Staff should continue to involve members of Council, providing it does not contravene the City's election-related policies. Staff should be familiar with policies related to the timing of the event, use of the City's logo, newsletters or communications materials, and other restrictions outlined in the City's election-related [policies](#).

Additionally, if you work with an organization or group which receives a Community Grant, it is important to know that the [Guide to Political Activities for City-funded Community Groups](#) which governs the behaviour of grant recipients does not permit them to endorse or support candidates.

Q5. How can staff leverage the opportunities for engagement and outreach that the municipal election provides?

Public interest in the City and municipal issues typically increases during an election. This can be an opportunity to make new connections within the communities you work, in and network with organizations and individuals to provide information about City services and programs.

Although staff cannot give their personal opinion on the election or any candidates and must remain neutral and non-partisan while performing their job duties, staff can:

- Encourage the public to get involved in the election and visit the [elections pages on toronto.ca](#) or contact Toronto Elections staff in the City Clerk's Office for more information at elections@toronto.ca or 416-338-1111,
- Make an announcement about the upcoming election at a meeting of tenants, board or co-op members, community groups, resident associations etc. and share links to [toronto.ca](#) for more information,
- Let people who may face barriers to voting know more about how the City provides accommodations to support [accessibility in the election](#).

Q6. How should staff manage comments and posts related to the election on City social media platforms and accounts?

City employees are subject to City policies and related legislation when using social media. The City's Social Media Policy and the Personal Use of Social Media Policy are available at http://insideto.toronto.ca/social_media/pdf/socialmediause.pdf

A candidate or political party may not use the City's social media channels for any federal, provincial or municipal election-related purpose. Where staff can moderate comments, photos and other information on social media, any campaign materials for a candidate must be removed.

The Integrity Commissioner has issued [guidance](#) concerning social media use during the campaign for Members of Council.

After August 1 of an election year, members of Council must not be referenced by City social media accounts. Instead, City staff should use the generic term "Councillor XX Ward" or "Mayor of Toronto" without naming the specific Member of Council. The Mayor will be subject to the same restrictions as Members of Council but will continue to be named in media releases and City materials related to inter-governmental activities only in his or her capacity as Chief Executive Officer of the City

Q7. How can staff find out more information and get advice about public consultation activities during the election period?

Staff should seek advice from their supervisor, manager, or Directors and Division Heads as appropriate.

If you have further questions about the City's civic engagement work, you can contact the City Manager's Office at engagement@toronto.ca.