

## Considerations for Community and Public Engagements During an Election Period

The [Toronto Public Service By-law](#) and the [Political Activity Provisions](#) apply to all elections, including a Mayoral by-election. 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 attract participants who intentionally, or inadvertently, discuss, advocate for, or distribute information about a candidate or election issue. This document provides some 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. Staff can speak with their supervisor, manager or [Ethics Executive](#) for questions about specific situations.

### **The Mayoral by-election runs from April 3 to June 26, 2023.**

During a Mayoral By-election, Members of Council remain holders of their offices, even as candidates. City staff should continue to support Members, including Members' office staff, in their role as elected officials which may include participating in City-organized engagement activities. **City and Council business continues during the Mayoral by-election, including public consultation activities.**

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](#)

### **1. City's policies for City staff during an 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. 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.

Information distributed at an event or meeting should also be made available to those who are not in attendance. One way to do this is to post information available at the meeting on the City's website and update the site with any new information that comes out of the meeting.

During a municipal election, staff must provide information to all Members of Council who are candidates and third-party candidates equally – if staff provide information to one candidate they must make it available to all.

## **2. Avoiding bias or providing an unfair advantage to any candidate**

During any election, 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. Staff cannot provide or be perceived to provide an advantage to Members of Council who are candidates. Potential advantages to Councillors might include access to City facilities, staff advice or communications support that are not available to other candidates.

City resources during an election include but are not limited to:

- City employees
- City events
- City facilities
- City funds
- City information
- City infrastructure

Staff should consult the [Use of City Resources during an Election Period Policy](#) for additional guidance including the full definition of a City resource in Appendix A.

## **3. Participation of City staff and Councillors in public engagements during the Mayoral by-election**

During municipal elections or by-elections, staff must consider their role, and the participation of Members of Council who are candidates, at public events along with any public perception or expectation participants may have. 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 by-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 by-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 campaign positions. Staff may not participate or attend if the focus of a public meeting is to advocate for or promote a candidate or election campaign. Staff should review the [Toronto Public Service By-law](#) for additional information on political activities and should consider consulting with their supervisor to assess any implications of accepting or declining the invitation.

The [Use of City Resources during an Election Period Policy](#) includes information and guidance related to the timing of the event, use of the City's logo, distribution of

Councillor newsletters or communications materials, and other restrictions outlined in the City's election-related policies. City Council [amended](#) the Use of City Resources policy to:

- impose the restrictions contained in section 5 of the policy, those that typically apply to candidates after August 1 in the year of a general election, to the Mayoral by-election;
- apply the restrictions to any Member of Council upon the earlier of the Member making a public declaration that they intend to seek election of the office of Mayor or upon filing a nomination for the office of Mayor during a Mayoral by-election.

Members of Council who are candidates in the by-election 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 Deputy 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 her capacity as Chief Executive Officer of the City

If staff 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](#) does not permit grant recipients to endorse or support candidates.

#### **4. Opportunities for public engagement and outreach during municipal elections**

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

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

- Provide information about the upcoming election at public meetings,
- Encourage the public to get involved in the election
- Promote the [Election Pages](#) on toronto.ca or contact information for Toronto Elections in the City Clerk's Office including elections@toronto.ca and at 416-338-1111,
- Let people who may face barriers to voting know more about how the City provides [accommodations](#) to support accessibility in the election.

#### **5. Managing public comments and posts related to the election on City social media platforms and accounts**

At all times, including during elections, City employees are subject to the City's [Guidelines for Social Media Use by Employees](#).

Because the City's social media channels are included as City resources under the [Use of City Resources during an Election Period Policy](#), candidates and political parties may not use them for any 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.

## **6. Responding to requests for information from third-party candidates in the Mayoral by-election**

- Candidate and candidate staff inquiries can be sent to [candidaterequests@toronto.ca](mailto:candidaterequests@toronto.ca). This email is for registered candidates and third-party advertisers in the 2023 Mayoral by-election to ask questions of City staff.
- Questions and answers are posted to the City's [Candidate & Third Party Advertiser Questions to the City](#) webpage to ensure all candidates have access to the same information, and to protect City staff from any perception or allegations of providing special benefits to incumbents.
- Questions to [candidaterequests@toronto.ca](mailto:candidaterequests@toronto.ca) are actioned by the City's Media Relations & Issues Management team within the Strategic Public & Employee Communications division. The team reaches out to relevant divisions to compile the responses, responds to the candidates and posts the responses online.