

Considerations for Community and Public Engagements During a Municipal Election Period – Applicable Policies and Other Considerations

This document provides information 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 [Political Activity Provisions](#) of the [Toronto Public Service By-law](#) apply to City employees during any municipal, provincial or federal election period.

City policy defines an “election period” as follows:

- For a municipal (including school board) election, the election period commences on May 1 of an election year and ends on voting day.
- For a provincial or federal general election, the election period commences the day the writ for the election is issued and ends on voting day.
- For a question on the ballot, the period commences the day City Council passes by-law to put a question to the electorate and ends on voting day.
- For a by-election, the period commences when the by-election is called and ends on voting day.

Public meetings and other engagement activities held during an election period may attract participants who intentionally or inadvertently discuss, advocate for, oppose or distribute information about a candidate or election issue.

If staff work with an organization or group which receives a community grant, they should remind the organization or group that the [Guide to Political Activities for City-funded Community Groups](#) does not permit grant recipients to endorse or support candidates.

Staff planning in-person consultation events during an election period should also note that facilities may be used as voting locations, which may limit availability or lead to cancellation of bookings.

1. City's Policies For City Staff During A Municipal Election Period

City staff must maintain public confidence in the electoral process by providing neutral, professional information and maintaining impartiality. 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 or election issue. During a municipal 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; and
- 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, oppose or otherwise provide an unfair advantage to any candidate. Staff cannot provide or be perceived to provide an advantage to elected officials who are candidates. Potential advantages to elected officials might include access to City facilities, staff advice or communications support that is not made 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

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 on relevant pages on the City's website.

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

3. Participation Of City Staff And Councillors In Public Engagements During An Election

During municipal elections or by-elections, staff must consider their role, and the participation of Members of Council, 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 other candidates for the 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 elected officials, or campaign positions. Staff may not participate or attend if the focus of a public meeting is to advocate for, oppose 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.

4. Restrictions To Services Provided To Members Of Council Beginning August 1 of An Election Year And During A Mayoral By-Election

Section 5 of the [Use of City Resources during an Election Period Policy](#) imposes restrictions on certain services provided to Members of Council after August 1 in the municipal election year or in the case of a Mayoral by-election, irrespective of whether they are seeking election in the new term or not. These restrictions include references to the name or image of a Member of Council in advertising, communication, signage, media materials and ceremonial documents.

5. Opportunities For Public Engagement And Outreach During Municipal Elections

Public interest in local issues typically increases during an election, especially during a municipal 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 factual 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 416-338-111.
- Let people who may face barriers to voting know more about how the City provides accommodations to support [accessibility](#) in the election.

6. 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.

7. Responding To Requests For Information From Third-Party Candidates In A Municipal Election

- Candidate and candidate staff inquiries during a City of Toronto municipal election can be sent to candidaterequests@toronto.ca. This email is for registered candidates and third-party advertisers 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 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.

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