



**Guidelines on Political Campaign Events, Appearances, and Leafleting at USM  
Institutions  
April 2018**

**Objective**

The University System of Maryland (USM) and its institutions recognize the importance of hosting political campaign forums, speeches, debates, meetings and other events during election seasons to enhance the education of our students; to foster an informed, active, and engaged citizenry; and to provide a community service through open, public events that present candidates for public office and address important issues and challenges that face our democracy.

In the spirit of our public, educational mission, USM has developed the following guidelines to ensure the fair treatment of all political parties, organizations, and candidates that request the use of our campus facilities for campaign events, consistent with federal and state laws and the U.S. Constitution.

In addition, these guidelines are meant to ensure the integrity of our institutions as fair, impartial hosts that encourage the free and open discussion of political ideas and issues for the benefit of voters.

No USM institution shall endorse any party or candidate. University officials should refrain from activities that may be perceived as university support of a political campaign. Public statements—oral, written, or electronic—by university officials in support of political candidate(s) should clearly state that this is the official’s personal viewpoint and is not made in his/her official capacity at the institution.

These guidelines apply explicitly to the use of USM resources or positions in support of or in opposition to candidates for public office. They are not intended to limit discourse among faculty, administrators, employees, and students regarding political or campaign issues or candidates. The discussion of political and public policy issues and the political process, as part of the fundamental teaching and research mission of USM institutions, is protected by the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.

**Hosting and Sponsorship of Campaign Activities**

### ***Institution Sponsored Events***

USM institutions are permitted to invite all legally-qualified candidates for public office to speak at university-sponsored events such as debates and forums. USM institutions that choose to invite persons to speak in their capacity as candidates for public office must take steps to ensure that all such legally-qualified candidates for a given public office are invited and given equal access and opportunity to speak, and that none are favored in relation to the activity.

USM institutions should strive to offer fair and equal access to all legally-qualified candidates for public office. It is better to err on the side of caution by inviting all legally-qualified candidates for a public office to the campus—even if you expect some or most to refuse the invitation—than to appear exclusive or partisan.

Equal access means equal in kind, footing, or basis. For example, if an institution invites one candidate to speak at a well-attended annual banquet, but invites another candidate to speak at a sparsely attended event when the students are on spring break, the university will not have provided equal opportunity to participate.

### ***Non-Institution Sponsored Events***

Other political campaign activities are permitted on USM campuses when they are sponsored and/or hosted by registered student organizations and all expenses related to the activity (including fees to cover space rental) are borne by the candidate(s), political organizations, or student organizations. Campus organizations seeking to use institution facilities for a political activity should have access to those facilities on the same terms as any other voluntary student organization using facilities for other purposes.

To the extent that members of the public may rent campus facilities for community, cultural and other purposes, the facilities also may be rented for campaign events, consistent with the institutional policy on the rental and use of campus premises and facilities. Such non-institution sponsored events should not be subsidized or supported by USM in any manner, and should be treated like any other public event for which institution facilities have been rented.

### ***Statement of Neutrality***

Regardless of whether a candidate's appearance is institution-sponsored, an explicit statement must be made as part of the introduction of a candidate or candidates that the institution does not endorse any candidate. This is imperative in the case of all university-sponsored events.

In cases where the events are not university-sponsored but a university official is invited to introduce a candidate or candidates, the official should make this same statement of neutrality on behalf of the university.

### **Political Activities by Institution Employees, Students and the Public**

## ***Employees***

Employees of USM have the right to freely express their views on any subject, including advocacy for/against candidates for public office. However, in exercising these rights, the resources of USM cannot be used, and employees should not engage in partisan political activities during work time.

Political campaign activities by USM employees should be conducted independently of their USM employment and at times when such activity does not interfere with employment obligations to their institutions. No USM employees should participate in the production or dissemination of partisan political campaign communications and materials during work hours or by using USM resources, such as university letterhead and stationery, computers, printers, fax machines, telephones, web sites, and work e-mail accounts.

## ***Leafleting and Campaigning on Campus Property***

Legal cases and precedent has largely established public university open areas as “designated public forums” where the right to free speech can be exercised by both university and non-university related individuals. Therefore, individuals and organizations representing political campaigns or policy positions generally have a First Amendment right to distribute leaflets, brochures, and other materials on campuses.

Campuses do have the right to restrict the locations of leafleting if it interferes with or poses a disruption to the essential operations of the university (classroom instruction, laboratories, dormitory access, library and dining hall uses, etc.), or poses a public safety hazard. For example, a campus might prohibit leafleting at the bottom of an escalator or near roadways to avoid creating a dangerous condition or hazard to university students, employees, or visitors to campus.

Institutions may also adopt policies that govern leafleting and campaigning on campus premises by outside individuals or organizations that are not students or institution-sponsored organizations. These policies may include reasonable restrictions on where and when such activities may occur, including the designation of areas of the campus where leafleting and campaigning by outside groups is permitted, and a requirement that the groups reserve space on campus in advance of leafleting or campaigning there.

## **Campus Communications, Advertising, and Media Relations Regarding Political Campaign Activities**

Generally, university-produced communications materials—such as posters, programs, invitations, e-mail messages, web sites and pages, videos, podcasts, press releases, and advertising—should not imply institutional endorsement of any political party or candidate for public office.

These specific conditions and guidelines should be followed regarding materials and communications produced and controlled by USM institutions:

- No partisan political communications should include endorsements/participation by titled university administrators who could be perceived as “endorsing” beyond their role as an individual citizen.
- No identifiable institutional logos or logotypes, marks, recognizable landmarks, symbols, music, or mascots should be “lent out” or given to candidates for public office or political parties to use for the production and promotion of partisan political communications.
- Video and/or photographic use of USM facilities and employees for production of partisan political messages and communications must not imply or infer any institutional endorsement using identifiable institutional logos or logotypes, marks, recognizable landmarks, symbols, music, or mascots.
- Campaign production crews working at official university activities must abide by the same guidelines and standards of all media covering those activities, including meeting credentialing requirements when necessary. All campus video and photographic shooting should be cleared in advance through campus media relations offices and must not interfere in any way with university activities.
- In any university-produced print and electronic communications regarding a campaign event, forum, or speech by a candidate for public office, USM institutions should not place hyperlinks to a candidate’s web site(s) in a manner that it appears to favor one candidate over another.
- Lastly, as a universal fail-safe rule, all university-produced communications announcing a campaign visit, speech, debate, or forum should include a statement of neutrality to the effect that the does not support or oppose any candidate for public office but merely provides a neutral public venue for the discussion of political issues.