Political Activities Memo – Student FAQs

2020 will be an exciting time for students who would like to take an active role in the democratic process—through the ballot box and beyond. While students may become involved in political campaigns in their individual capacities, the University of Chicago, as a tax-exempt organization, is prohibited from participating in political campaign activities. These FAQs answer some of the most common questions concerning student involvement in the political campaign process.

Q1. I would like to get involved in the political process. What do I need to know?

A1. Students may become involved in political campaigning in their individual capacities.

It is important to know, however, that there are limitations that pertain to students and student groups when they seek to use University resources. These limitations are explained in the University’s Political Campaign Activity Memorandum. This memo, among other things, describes the process the University must follow if candidates are invited to speak on campus or in connection with a University-sponsored event, and explains that the use of University’s name, trademarks, logos, facilities, websites, and other resources may not be used in support of or in opposition to a political candidate or campaign.

Q2. I would like to host a candidate on campus—do I need approval?

A2. Yes. Approval is required to host candidates on campus. If you are an RSO, please contact your RSO advisor. You can find your RSO advisor on Blueprint. If you are not an RSO, please contact Purvi Patel in the Institute of Politics.
Q3. How long does it take to have an event approved?

A3. Ideally, you should make the request at least two weeks before an event. Of course, the earlier you make the request, the better. There are several steps the University is required to follow to host a political candidate to speak on campus, including providing an equal opportunity to all political candidates running for the same office. Requests made fewer than two weeks before an event may face difficulty being approved as multiple meetings may be necessary before an approval can be granted.

Q4. My RSO would like to host a phone bank for a specific candidate/initiative. Is there any place we can hold this event on campus?

A4. No. A phone bank is considered political campaign activity and cannot be hosted on University property.

Q5. My RSO would like to host a phone bank for a specific candidate/initiative. If we host this event off campus, can we use our RSO funds to pay for flyers/marketing to advertise this event?

A5. University funds (these are funds received from Annual Allocations, SGFC, or other campus bodies) cannot be used in support of or in opposition to a political candidate. This would include the marketing/advertising of these events, even if the event is held off campus. RSO funds may, however, be used in connection with approved non-partisan voter education and registration programs, as described in the University’s Political Campaign Activity Memorandum.

Q6. My RSO would like to endorse a candidate for office. Can we post our endorsement on our UChicago website? On our social media?

A6. RSOs may post an endorsement on their website and/or social media provided it is not hosted by the University. It is the responsibility of the RSO to make it clear in the post that its members are speaking as individuals or their organization and not on behalf of the University.
Q7. I would like to support a candidate. Can I use my UChicago email to send campaign information to my friends?

A7. If you would like to send emails on behalf of a political candidate, you may certainly do so with your personal (non-uchicago.edu) email addresses, but you are not permitted to use your UChicago email address to participate in any campaigning for a candidate, as this is utilizing a University resource for campaign purposes.

Q8. Can I create a Facebook group called “UChicago for [My Candidate]”?

A8. No, you cannot use the UChicago name, logo, or other trademarks for any political campaign activity purposes. You may, however, identify yourself as a student of the University of Chicago.

Q9. Where can I find more information on the University's political activities policy?

A9. You can find more information on the University's policy here.