Syracuse University

Office of Academic Affairs

WEDNESDAY, SEPT. 2, 2026

Dear Faculty and Staff:

I write to remind faculty, staff and administrators about relevant laws, regulations and University policies affecting how the University and its employees engage in political discourse and have contact with public officials. This includes the ways in which the University and its employees may interact with government and elected officials and political candidates.

The University values the rights of individual citizens to speak and assemble freely and to participate in discussion on public policy issues. Each year, many members of the University make very important contributions to current public policy debates. However, as a tax-exempt organization under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, Syracuse University is prohibited from participating or intervening in any partisan political activities. Therefore, it is important to remind members of the administration, faculty and staff of long-standing University policies designed to ensure that the activities and speech of individual members of our University community are not attributed to or mistaken for partisan political activities or speech on behalf of the University.

The information below provides guidance on relevant laws, regulations and University policies affecting how the University and its employees can engage with government and elected officials and political candidates.

Please direct any questions about this memorandum or the issues contained herein to the Office of Government and Community Relations at 315.443.3919 or gcr@syr.edu.

Sincerely,

Lois Agnew
Vice Chancellor, Provost and Chief Academic Officer

Guidance on Government Relations, Political Activity and Lobbying

A. Partisan Political Activity

As a tax-exempt organization under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, Syracuse University is prohibited from participating or intervening in partisan political activities on behalf of or in opposition to any particular government official or candidate for public office. Participation or intervention includes, but is not limited to, making financial contributions and publication or distribution of written or oral statements in favor of or opposition to a particular official or candidate. Violation of this prohibition may result in monetary fines and exposes the University to possible revocation of its tax-exempt status. This prohibition for the University extends to elections, officials and candidates at all levels—federal, state and local. Members of the University community are free to engage in partisan political activity on their own behalf, provided that they specify that they are acting in their capacity as private citizens and are not speaking or acting on behalf of the University. This includes any statements, written or verbal, that could be construed as an endorsement of a particular political party, candidate or partisan cause. For additional guidance, please review the University's policy on partisan political activity.

B. Use of University Property or Resources by Syracuse University Employees

University resources, including funds, property, event spaces, letterhead, email and information technology like computers and websites, should not be used for individual or personal political activity. Individuals may not host partisan political events on University property—or use University funds, information technology or other resources to plan or promote such events—in their capacities as private citizens. Schools, colleges and academic and administrative departments within the University may not sponsor or host partisan political events and may not use University property or resources for such events. Recognized student organizations may host certain political activities on campus, consistent with the limitations set out in the Partisan Political Activity Policy. The prohibition on partisan political activity does not apply to non-partisan voter registration events.

For additional guidance, please review the University's policy on partisan political activity and the University's policy governing events on University property.

C. Lobbying

Because of its ongoing engagement with public officials and agencies to advance its mission, Syracuse University is a registered lobbying organization with both New York State and the federal government. Lobbying may be summarily defined as communications with federal, state or local government officials that are intended to influence: (a) the passage or defeat of legislation or a local law or ordinance (including state or federal budget bills); (b) the adoption or implementation of any public policy, rule, regulation or executive action; (c) the awarding of a contract; or (d) the outcome of any rate-making proceeding. Lobbying includes not only direct contact with government officials, but also indirect contact with government officials in the form of "grassroots lobbying," which means encouraging or soliciting others to deliver messages.

As a registered lobbying organization, the University must publicly report all lobbying activity that occurs at the federal, state and local levels. For this reason, all faculty and staff engaged, or seeking to engage, in lobbying activities on behalf of the University are required to report expected (prior to contact) and actual (after contact) communications or interactions with public officials or their staff to the Office of Government and Community Relations. In addition, social media posts mentioning or tagging public officials may constitute lobbying, so faculty and staff should take care to present any messages on their individual social media accounts as their personal opinions and not those of the University.

The Office of Government and Community Relations, in conjunction with the Office of University Counsel, is responsible for determining which, if any, communications or interactions with a federal, state or local elected official, staff member or agency/department are considered reportable lobbying activities. The reporting responsibilities outlined in this paragraph are not intended to limit individuals' rights of expression or academic freedom, including rights to engage in political or civic activity or interact with public officials as private citizens.

No public or governmental funds may be used for lobbying activity, which includes travel expenses and any expenses related to preparing for meetings or other communications with public officials. This includes all federal sponsored research funds. For example, faculty or staff may travel to Washington, D.C., in connection with a federally sponsored program; however, they may not engage in lobbying activity during that time if federal funds are used to pay for travel, meals and lodging.

D. Reportable Business Relationships

New York's Public Integrity Reform Act requires the University, as a registered lobbyist, to disclose any compensation over $1,000 paid to a public official in a single year. In higher education, these types of compensation relationships most often arise in the context of a university employing a public official as an adjunct faculty member. They can also arise from transactions between the university and outside businesses in which a public official may be a partner or shareholder, e.g., law, accounting or engineering firms. If you are aware of any compensation being paid from the University to a public official — either directly or through an outside vendor—you must disclose the transaction(s) to the Office of Government and Community Relations.

E. Gifts and Meals

With few exceptions, University policy and federal and state law prohibit the giving of gifts to public officials or other government employees. New York State also places restrictions on gifts to third parties at the request of public officials. Gifts include but are not limited to athletic tickets, meals, travel, entertainment or lodging. Also not allowed are tokens of appreciation or recognition, or providing travel or meals related to official University events or business, without first contacting the Office of Government and Community Relations. For more information about gifts, please review the University's gift policy.

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