



Political campaigning: Your rights & responsibilities

As at April 2024

CPSU members often ask for advice about their involvement in rallies and campaign activities and their responsibilities as public servants.

Guidelines give green light to get involved.

Australian Public Service Commission (APSC) Guidelines (Values and Code of Conduct in Practice) state: *“APS employees may participate in political activities as part of normal community affairs. They may also join, or hold office in, political parties.”* The only exception is for staff working in the Australian Electoral Commission.

However, *“If an APS employee is involved in political campaigning, they should make it clear they are not undertaking these activities as part of their official duties.”*

Stay safe and smart

In practice, this means you should not campaign during work time, use work resources for campaigning, or behave in a way that might infer that your political campaigning is a part of your official duties or that your employer supports your political views. For example, you shouldn't wear clothing with political messages while at work.

Your time, your rights:

You are free to do any of the following in your own time:

Community activities:

- attend political rallies or functions
- display campaign posters on your property
- letterboxing, door-knocking and other volunteer campaign work

Your workplace activities:

- attend union meetings
- discuss union issues with colleagues
- receive and read union information and emails

Social media

APSC Guidance states *“Broadly speaking, APS employees have the right to post, and participate in online debate, on a range of issues – including topics of political or social interest, government policy, and the merits of various parties’ policies in the lead-up to an election (subject to agency-specific requirements).”* (Guidance for APS Employees, September 2020, p. 5).

You should avoid making comment on policies that are directly related to the agency you work in.

The APSC also advises that employees should consider:

- **Seniority** – If you are more senior, then your behaviour online is more likely to affect public confidence in the APS.
- **The connection between the topic and your work** – Avoid making comment on policies directly related to your work, comments that could reasonably be perceived to be made on behalf of your agency or the Government, or which could be seen to compromise your capacity to fulfil your duties in an unbiased manner.
- **Expression** - Always avoid offensive and discriminatory comments, and language that is overly harsh or extreme. Avoid comments that could be seen as gratuitous attacks on your employer, the Government, Members of Parliament etc.



Should I use my real name? The guidelines say that employees must still uphold the APS Values even when material is posted anonymously, or using an alias or pseudonym. As a general rule we advise members to remove any information about where they work or who they work for from their social media profiles.

So what can I do online? In an unofficial capacity and in your own time, members should feel free to 'like' and 'share' posts which are not offensive (racist, violent, sexual and defamatory) and are in line with the APS Code of Conduct. Social media conventions take comments on other people's posts as a direct personal comment by you and the policy also applies to these.

Paid campaign work

Under APS guidelines, employees wishing to take leave to work on a campaign should obtain approval from their agency head.

Need more?

If you feel you are being unfairly treated at work in relation to expressing your democratic rights, or simply require clarification, please contact the CPSU immediately on 1300 137 636.

More information on the [APSC guidelines here](#).

LOOKING FOR ADVICE?

This information was produced by CPSU and paid for by union members. Every member contributes to the resources, strength, and capacity of our union.

Members are encouraged to call the Member Service Centre on **1300 137 636**.

NOT YET A MEMBER?

Join today at cpsu.org.au or call **1300 137 636** for access to advice, support & representation when you need it.

