Political Activity Policy
Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

If a Presidential candidate’s campaign staff is visiting our USC Libraries or other USC Center on campus, can they take photographs?

It is important to first contact the Office of University Relations regarding a site visit. Click here policy.usc.edu/site-visit for guidelines on Site Visits with Government Officials and Candidates. Generally, photographs are fine to record the site visit but cannot be used for campaign purposes. All questions on whether any planned political activities are consistent with or otherwise permitted must be directed to the Office of University Relations.

Is it permissible to host a Governor's Task Force Meeting on campus?

The Office of University Relations would need to review the details and circumstances. Depending on the circumstances, the university may offer a room without it being reportable. However, food/beverages would be deemed a reportable gift to the government officials in attendance.

Is it okay to sign onto a letter of support on behalf of the university asking for regulatory or legislative action?

Signing onto a letter on behalf of the university can constitute lobbying. Therefore, even if you have the Provost’s approval, you should contact the Office of University Relations. In addition, you are expected to list your time and activities on the USC Lobbying Activity Report Form and provide copies of letters supporting or opposing a position.

Can I give a thank you gift to the Mayor for speaking at our department’s commencement?

Unless the gift is a personalized plaque or trophy valued at less than $250 or it is a meal and nominal items at an event where the Mayor makes a speech, he cannot accept gifts. A personalized plaque or trophy is an exception to the definition of gift in the Political Reform Act, and “nominal” means an insignificant item typically purchased in large volume and provided for free to all attendees at events, such as a pen, pencil, note pad, or similar item.
Can I give a football ticket to an elected official?

Before offering a sporting event ticket, always check with the Office of University Relations. There are different rules at each level of government. It also depends on whether the official has already accepted gifts from the university for that calendar year. See below.

Federal officials

- Federal officials may not accept a gift of free attendance, including food/beverages, at sporting events. They must pay the full value in advance to attend.

State and County officials

- Attendance at an event (e.g. ticketed sporting events, entertainment events, conferences, and events at which food/beverages are consumed) by a government official constitutes acceptance of a reportable gift.
- The State of California’s gift limit is currently $520 per calendar year.
- The County of Los Angeles’ gift limit is currently $520 per calendar year.

City officials

- The City of Los Angeles’ gift limit is $100 per calendar year for most officials because USC is a registered lobbyist employer with the City of Los Angeles. For other cities, please contact the Office of University Relations for more information.

Can I give some USC “swag” to an elected official who was a guest lecturer at my class?

It depends on the official and the USC item you wish to give. The laws vary for each level of government. In order to comply with all applicable laws regarding gifts, do not provide anything of value to a government official without prior approval from the Office of University Relations.

An elected official has asked our office for a contribution towards their Christmas toy drive. Can we give them toys or a financial contribution?

Please check with the Office of University Relations first. Generally, the university may donate to nonprofit organizations. However, we have an obligation to report contributions when we
donate $1,000 or more at the request of a Los Angeles City official. When USC donates $5,000 or more at the behest of a State official, it is the sole responsibility of that State official to report the donation.

I am going to Washington DC to testify on a bill. Is this lobbying and must it be reported?

To ensure compliance with all applicable disclosure laws, our faculty and staff members must complete a lobbying activity reporting form whenever they are involved in communications with government officials, including testifying, research, and preparation of materials for the purpose of communicating with government officials, whenever made on behalf of the university.

For more information, lobbying activity report forms, or any questions, please contact Martha Escutia, Vice President of State Relations and Special Counsel, in the Office of University Relations at 213 740 5371 or email vpgr@usc.edu.