

4.12 - Election Period Guidelines - Policy

Section: Operations
Subject: Election Period Guidelines
Policy: 4.12
Approved: November 23, 2007
Reviewed: May 21, 2013
Revised: November 1, 2015

The College shall adhere to communications and political activity guidelines as determined by relevant legislation and supplemented by instructions provided by the Government of Saskatchewan.

4.12 - Election Period Guidelines - Procedure

Section: Operations
Subject: Election Period Guidelines
Procedure: 4.12
Approved: November 13, 2007
Revised: November 1, 2015
Reviewed: November 30, 2016

Guidelines for Government Communications

Activities During an Election Period

Interpretation

- The term **election period** in these guidelines is defined as from the day the election writ is issued until the day after Election Day.
- The term **publish** in these guidelines is defined as any means of broadly communicating or disseminating information.
- The term **in case of an emergency** used in *The Election Act, 1996* is to be interpreted rigidly. To qualify, an emergency must clearly be one in which the time factor is a crucial element. For example, situations in which the health or safety of the public is at risk or where there is risk of an environmental or economic crisis, will all receive consideration as an "emergency" if time is of the essence.

News Releases

- News releases should be kept to a minimum, and concern only matters of vital importance. Such releases, except those dealing with an emergency, shall be in the name of the minister and shall consist of statements made by him or her.
- As always, all news releases shall be submitted to and released by Media Services.

Requests for Information by Media, Public

- In managing media inquiries, Ministers will continue to be available to handle media inquiries without being affected by the restrictions of the Election Act.

Media spokespeople from the "government department" are not to initiate contact with media outlets. Department officials should deal with media inquiries promptly, but should provide only technical or factual information. In general, in order to avoid creating a perception of participating in policy debate, an official's response will preferably not be for attribution. Department spokespeople should not participate in debate of programs, policy rationale, or defense of programs. The Minister responsible should conduct interviews of this nature.

- There is to be no deviation from the usual manner in which each agency responds to requests for information or material from the general public or organizations.

Advertising (General)

- Advertising of government programs and policies will be discontinued, except in cases of an emergency.

This restriction does not apply to advertising that does not promote the government or government programs or services or to advertising in place to ensure the health and safety of the public. For example, a forest fire bulletin issued by Saskatchewan Environment during the high-risk fire period, or one by SaskPower warning of the dangers of overhead wires could be continued.

Personnel Advertising

- Essential personnel advertising is permitted. Care must be taken that only the particulars of the job are used, and that the ad does not outline features of a program in a way that might be construed as extolling the virtues of that program.

Tender and Legal Advertising

- Tender advertising will be handled with the same stipulations as outlined above for personnel advertising.
- Routine legal advertisements (judicial sales, highway bans, etc.) may be placed as usual.

Goodwill Advertising

- All goodwill advertising is prohibited during an election period.

Brochures and Publications

- Those brochures and publications already "in place" and available to the public may continue to be available in the usual way. However, no new publications are to be published during an election period.
- Distribution of publications and brochures is limited to meeting direct requests from the public. No mailing or other distribution involving such material is to be undertaken during the election period.

Inserts with Mailing

- Inserts shall not be included with billing notices (e.g., Social Services' SAP payment notices, SaskPower bills) or other mailings distributed during the election period.

Signs, Posters, Billboards

- Signs, posters and other methods of publication are restricted to those necessary for identification or directional purposes. Prohibited in particular would be signs such as those on construction sites, worded in a laudatory fashion that would appear to give the government the type of publicity advantage the Act was designed to prevent.
- Billboards providing information on government programs or product marketing information are also prohibited during an election period.
- All existing signage that promotes government programs or activities should be removed or covered for the duration of the election period.

Official Openings

- Official openings are not to be held for government buildings or facilities during the election period.
- There is no restriction on participation by a minister in an official opening of a private project or at a ceremony conducted by another level of government.

Exhibitions

- Displays, such as those at trade shows or other public events, which promote government programs and policies are prohibited during an election period.

Polling and Focus Testing

- Polling and focus testing are to be discontinued during the election period.

Participation in Meetings/Speeches by Departmental Personnel

- While government personnel are urged to continue their normal activities and contacts with the public and organizations with which they are routinely involved:
 - speeches or public statements concerning controversial issues or those promoting programs or policies are to be avoided during the election period; and
 - active participation in public conferences/stakeholder meetings will be severely curtailed. Public servants must avoid public statements at such conferences/meetings that describe or promote new or existing programs or otherwise provide information about departmental activities.

Statements at conferences/meetings or in a speech should be confined to technical matters only. A description of Government activities will not be considered technical in nature as it falls squarely within the application of s.277.

Internet Advertising

- During an election period, no new promotional material shall be posted on a website and no advertising e-mail messages shall be sent out from a website. This applies to sites where a "government department" as defined in the Act maintains that website. For example, during the election period, no press releases and nothing with a minister's name attached to it should be added to a government department website.
- Any advertising done by a government department on a website maintained by third parties will be restricted in the same manner as general advertising pursuant to these guidelines. For example, Sympatico banner ads would be discontinued during an election period.
- Advertising by a Crown corporation on a website maintained by a third party, which is contracted in advance and that is with respect to its competitive business interests will be permitted.

Promotional Giveaways

- Distribution of promotional giveaways should be discontinued during an election period. Items already distributed (not unfulfilled commitments) are not affected.

Public Consultations

- Public consultations are to be discontinued during an election period.

Presentations

- Promotional presentations are to be discontinued during an election period. Presentations of a purely technical nature may proceed.

Sponsorships

- During an election period, no new sponsorships are to be undertaken. Any signage or other public acknowledgements that recognize existing sponsorship contributions are to be taken down, covered or otherwise removed for the duration of the election period.

Freedom of Information Requests (FOIs)

- Freedom of Information requests are to be handled in the routine manner.

Examples of Activities Exempt From

Guidelines for Government Communications

Activities During an Election Period

- "Everyday" types of contacts between departments and groups such as municipal councils, school boards or any other groups or organizations that constitute your regular clientele.
- Regular extension work of a purely technical nature (e.g., Department of Health- medical topics).
- Ongoing reports or services that provide useful and necessary information of a non-political nature (e.g., hog marketing reports, weekly crop reports, reports on campsites, highway reports).
- Seminars, conferences or meetings at which government employees act as "resource persons," to explain technical information, but **not** to provide particulars regarding government activities (some types of such gatherings could be particularly sensitive and should not be attended).

- Educational projects of an **ongoing** nature that involve government personnel going into schools and other educational institutions (e.g., talks to children in schools on oral hygiene, food handling courses for a restaurant group).
- All forms of legal advertising in newspapers or the *Gazette* (e.g., highway bans, judicial sales, public hearings of the Highway Traffic Board).
- Attendance at and participation in committees, advisory boards, etc., that are part of a civil servant's regular functions.
- All requests from the public for information, brochures, publications, etc.
- Advertising by a Crown corporation that was contracted prior to the issue of a writ and is related to the Crown corporation's competitive business interests.

Provincial Direction

Specific restrictions and guidelines will be made available by the Province in advance of a Provincial election.