

Political Advertising

Definitions

Political advertising includes any advertising displays, newspaper ads, billboards, signs, brochures, articles, tabloids, flyers, letters, radio or television presentations, digital or social media advertising, or other means of mass communication, used for the purpose of appealing, directly or indirectly, for votes or for financial or other support in any election campaign. [RCW 42.17A.005\(36\)](#)

Mass communication: a message intended to reach a large audience through any of the methods described above as well as periodicals, sample ballots, web sites, e-mails, text messages, social media, and other online or electronic formats enabling the exchange of communication. [WAC 390-05-290](#). Sending 100 or more identical or substantially similar letters, e-mails or text messages to specific recipients within a 30-day period is an example of mass communication.

Political advertising does not include letters to the editor, news or feature articles, editorial comment or replies to editorials in a regularly published newspaper, periodical, or on a radio or television broadcast where payment for the printed space or broadcast time is not normally required. [\[WAC 390-05-290\]](#)

General Requirements

- Most political advertising requires [sponsor identification](#) (a brief message that explains who paid for the ad). The type of ad, print, broadcast, etc., determines how the sponsor ID must be displayed.
- All political advertising about a candidate for partisan office must identify the candidate's [party preference](#). There are no exemptions..
- Statements about candidates in political advertisements must be truthful.
- At least one candidate photo used in the ad must have been taken in the last five years and it can be no smaller than the largest photo in the ad.

Political advertisements are not required to identify the office or position a candidate is seeking.

These instructions are for political advertising that is sponsored by a candidate or has been coordinated with a candidate. Requirements for independent advertising - advertising that is not coordinated with a candidate - are explained in the Political Committee Instructions.

Sign Placement:

The [Washington State Department of Transportation](#) regulates when and where campaign signs can be placed along Interstate highways, primary highways, and highways that are part of the Scenic and Recreational system. All cities and counties have sign regulations. The Public Works Department is usually the best resource for finding information explaining where campaign signs may be placed, when they can be installed, and when they must be removed.