

The Public Service & Joining a Political Party Factsheet

As the administrative centre of both the Australian and ACT Governments, Canberra is home to a significant number of public servants. Many of those interested in joining ACT Labor are employees of the Australian Public Service (APS) or the ACT Public Service (ACTPS) and often seek clarity on the rules governing political party membership and related activities.

This fact sheet outlines what is permitted under current APS and ACTPS frameworks. It draws on guidance from the Australian Public Service Commission (APSC), the Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU), and hopefully will provide you the guidance and clarity to join ACT Labor today!

Can I Join ACT Labor if I work in the Public Service?

Yes. Australian Public Service (APS) employees are permitted to join political parties, including ACT Labor, and may engage in political activity in their private capacity. This participation must, however, be consistent with the APS Values and Code of Conduct, in particular, the obligation to maintain political neutrality in work hours, uphold integrity, and preserve public confidence in the APS.

The Australian Public Service Commission's (APSC) Values and Code of Conduct in Practice provides clear guidance:

"APS employees may participate in political activities as part of normal community affairs. They may also join, or hold office in, political parties."

This means APS employees can:

- Join ACT Labor or any other political party
- Attend local branch meetings and events
- Volunteer on election campaigns during their personal time
- Assist with campaign activities such as phone banking, doorknocking, or handing out flyers
- Take on party roles, including branch president, secretary, or campaign committee member

However, political engagement must be strictly separate from your official role. You must **not**:

- Undertake political activity during work hours
- Use APS resources (e.g. email accounts, office equipment, work phones) for political purposes

- Imply that your agency or the APS supports your political views
- Wear party-branded clothing or display political materials in the workplace
- Allow political involvement to compromise your impartiality as an APS employee

Senior employees and those in public-facing, policy-influencing, or politically sensitive roles should exercise caution. The APSC also recommends that employees consider how their actions, including posts on social media, may be perceived, particularly considering their duties and seniority.

If you are unsure whether a particular activity is appropriate, you should consult your agency's HR area, integrity adviser, or the APSC's guidance materials.

Can I Join ACT Labor if I Work in the ACT Public Service?

Yes. ACT Public Service (ACTPS) employees are allowed to join political parties, including ACT Labor, and may participate in political activity in their personal capacity, if they continue to uphold the values of political impartiality, integrity, and public confidence in the Service.

Under the *ACT Public Sector Management Standards 2016* and the ACTPS Code of Conduct, public servants are required to act apolitically in the course of their official duties. However, nothing in these provisions prevents ACTPS employees from engaging in lawful political activity in their own time.

As an ACTPS employee, you may:

- Become a member of ACT Labor;
- Attend branch meetings and party events;
- Volunteer on election campaigns (outside of work hours);
- Distribute campaign materials, door-knock, and assist with phone banking; and
- Take up party roles, such as branch president, secretary, or campaign committee member

What you must **not** do is:

- Engage in political activity during work hours;
- Use government resources (e.g. email, office equipment, or vehicles) for party business;
- Represent or suggest that your employer endorses your political views; and

- Allow your political activity to interfere with your duty to serve the government of the day impartially;

Senior officers and executives should exercise additional caution, given the nature of their roles. If you are unsure whether a particular activity is appropriate, it is advisable to consult your Directorate's HR team or integrity adviser.