

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

USE OF INSTITUTIONAL RESOURCES

The following FAQs are intended to help UW Medicine workforce members, including faculty, trainees, and staff, navigate the applicable laws, policies and rules governing the personal use of institutional resources.

With limited exceptions identified below, UW Medicine resources should only be used for work related purposes. You may not use institutional resources for your own personal benefit or gain, or for the benefit or gain of another, and you should refrain from any use of institutional resources in any manner that could give the appearance of impropriety. If you have any questions about whether a particular use is prohibited, consult your chair, department director, or hospital, clinic, or lab supervisor or manager before undertaking such a use. UW Medicine workforce members who are state employees (i.e., UWMC and HMC employees, as well as School of Medicine employees – including researchers, faculty and staff) have additional guidelines as detailed in University of Washington Administrative Policy Statement (APS) 47.2. The [Washington State Executive Ethics Board \(EEB\) website](#) has additional resources which you are encouraged to review for more specific information on the use of institutional resources restrictions that may apply to you.¹ UW Medicine Compliance has three additional FAQ topics which address the use of institutional resources:

- [Charitable Fundraising](#)
- [Outside Work](#)
- [Political Campaigning](#)

UW Medicine is a very public-facing organization: the costs of our institutional resources (people, equipment, etc.) are largely paid for through Washington State public tax dollars and other government expenditures. As such, the public expects a good return on its investment, including transparency in how UW Medicine employees use institutional resources. From an ethics standpoint, your decisions about whether the personal use of an institutional resource is appropriate should involve asking yourself these questions:

- Is it illegal or outside institutional policy?
- Is it unreasonable?
- Is there personal gain?
- Is it incurring excessive time or money?
- How would it look to the public?

With your help, UW Medicine’s reputation and public trust can be enhanced by good stewardship of institutional resources.

¹ The WA State Executive Ethics Board’s Ethics in Public Service Act [website](#) includes [Training and Resources](#) as well as Advisory Opinions such as [“Use of Resources Questions and Answers”](#) which provide additional information and guidelines for state employees on the use of institutional resources.

1. What are institutional resources?

Institutional resources include your work time and the work time of your colleagues and staff, your work email, and everything your institution owns, rents, leases or trials. Also included are: equipment, photocopiers, paper, supplies, cash, desktop computers, conference rooms/space, laptops, internet, UW or UW Medicine-hosted social networking sites, and employer-provided cell phones, or other devices (e.g., tablets, etc.).

2. What personal activities or uses are prohibited?

Using work computers or other work devices to access certain internet services, such as streaming audio and video for personal use, is not allowed due to concerns about the potential compromise of the security or integrity of UW Medicine property, information systems or software. You may never use institutional resources for illegal purposes, such as gambling and betting pools, as well as for the purposes of an outside business or other outside work/outside employment. You also may not use institutional resources for political purposes. For more information about prohibited activities, please contact Compliance.

3. Can I use resources such as my workspace or work email for charitable fundraising?

Generally, you may not use institutional resources to support outside charities unless the philanthropic work is part of a larger effort approved and managed by your institution's senior leadership team or by UW Medicine senior leadership.

One example of acceptable philanthropy work would be encouraging staff to form teams and participate in the Annual American Heart Association Heart and Stroke Walk, Head for the Cure, March of Dimes Walk for Babies, or other similar events which have been approved by UW Medicine senior leadership because the goals of these fundraising events are compatible with UW Medicine's mission to improve the health of the public. Approved events can change from year to year, so check with your manager to find out what events have been approved by leadership. When UW Medicine enters into a strategic marketing sponsorship or approves activities that boost workforce morale, staff may form teams and participate in the activity.

Also, with the **prior approval** of your supervisor and department leadership, it may be acceptable to use your work email account to send an email to your department colleagues about your personal fundraising activity or a charitable event. For example, you may be able to use your work email account to send an email to let your department colleagues know that you are selling Girl Scout cookies, Boy Scout popcorn, or school coupon books, but you cannot additionally solicit your colleagues during worktime (e.g., asking them in-person or sending them numerous emails). In these cases, the issue is active solicitation and use of institutional resources which goes beyond minimal ("de minimis") use. Also be mindful of your use of institutional resources when your colleagues ask you about your personal fundraising activity/charitable event: as a general rule, you may engage in limited conversations about the activity/event, but any transactions such as collecting funds from colleagues needs to be done on your own time and without the use of institutional resources.

4. I thought certain personal uses of institutional resources were permissible if they are brief and infrequent. Is this true?

Yes—it is permissible to use institutional resources, including email, telephone, and internet, for occasional personal purposes as long as all of the following conditions are met:

- The use is brief and infrequent;
- There is little or no cost to the institution for the use of its resources;
- The use is not illegal or for political purposes;
- The use is not prohibited by institutional policy;
- The use is not for personal or financial gain, such as for an employee’s outside business or wagering;
- The use does not interfere with the performance of your or your colleagues’ job responsibilities; and
- The use does not compromise the security or integrity of UW Medicine property, information systems or software, such as using a work computer or other work device to access certain internet services (ex. streaming audio and/or video) for personal use.

5. Can you give some examples of personal use of institutional resources that would be acceptable?

Yes—examples include, but are not limited to:

- Using an electrical outlet to charge your personal smartphone or other device;
- Using a work phone to make a brief personal phone calls such as scheduling healthcare appointments or calling your child’s school or childcare provider;
- Using a work computer to check the web for traffic updates or the weather report;
- Sending an occasional personal email, which is also acceptable if the use is brief and infrequent and conforms to all of the other requirements in #4 above.

Keep in mind, however, that any use of institutional resources (such as a work station and/or an employer provided cell phone or other device) does not provide you with any privacy protection. Also, employers may have reasons for monitoring or auditing the use of institutional resources by employees or others. Additionally, most UW Medicine entities are subject to public disclosure laws that require disclosure of employee emails and other electronic records as well as hard copy documentation upon request. When using an institutional resource for personal communication, you should understand that the communication will not be private.

6. I feel strongly about a current issue. I want to write a letter to the local newspaper. Can I sign the letter using my job title or employer’s name?

You may use your own credentials such as RN, MD or PhD, but you may not use your job title or refer to your employment with UW Medicine unless you use a disclaimer to indicate the letter represents your personal opinion and not that of UW Medicine.

7. Am I still subject to the Ethics in Public Service Act while teleworking?

Yes! While times have changed the way we do business and where we might be working, the Ethics in Public Service Act still applies to you. This means, for example, you are still accountable for your time and the state resources (e.g., your work computer) given to you by your agency to do your job away from the worksite. State resources remain state resources regardless of where they are used.

REFERENCES

UW Medicine Compliance Code of Conduct:

https://depts.washington.edu/comply/docs/UWM_CodeofConduct.pdf

University of Washington Administrative Policy Statement 47.2: Personal Use of University Facilities, Computers, and Equipment by University Employees:

<http://www.washington.edu/admin/rules/policies/APS/47.02.html>

Washington State Ethics in Public Service Act:

<http://apps.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=42.52>

Washington State Executive Ethics Board (EEB):

<https://ethics.wa.gov/>

[Washington State EEB Advisory Opinion 02-02A – Use of Resources Questions and Answers:](https://ethics.wa.gov/sites/default/files/public/AO%2002-02A.pdf)

<https://ethics.wa.gov/sites/default/files/public/AO%2002-02A.pdf>

Washington State Code of Ethics for Municipal Officers – Contract Interests:

<https://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=42.23>

Public Disclosure Commission:

<http://www.pdc.wa.gov>