

**GUIDELINES FOR CHAPTERS ON SMPS AND POLITICALLY-RELATED MESSAGING**

Adopted: **September 2022**

The recent years have been challenging for our members, our chapters, and the greater SMPS community. We continue to deal with the impact of COVID-19, and our countries are dealing with numerous contentious political issues, including disagreements over the actions of the various political institutions, and, recently, passionate responses to judicial rulings. In this context, we are obligated to remember that nonprofit organizations serve a particular type of mission and there are issues that also impact these organizations.

Voices and opinions should not be disregarded or shut out within an organization. Still, in the United States, SMPS is registered as a nonprofit 501(c)(6) organization and with this tax-exempt status comes rules and regulations regarding what is appropriate behavior, and what groups should consider when communicating around politically oriented issues. One of the major concerns is that the tax-exempt status may be questioned for organizations like SMPS and its chapters. Lobbying or advocating in areas that are not related to the core business purpose can create perceptions SMPS and/or its chapters are engaging in unrelated activities. More important to consider, there is also the possibility of alienating the community for which you're dedicated to serving.

The SMPS official position on political advocacy is the following:

“Though SMPS, a 501(c)6 organization, may engage in legislative/lobbying activities, the U.S. Internal Revenue Service states that the effort must be related to the organization’s exempt purpose. Our stated purpose is to promote the professional and educational advancement of persons engaged in marketing and business development activities on behalf of architectural, engineering, and planning firms; to foster the understanding of the skills and techniques employed in such activities, and the exchange of information relating to such activities. The Corporation (SMPS) shall operate not for profit but exclusively for charitable, scientific, literary, or educational purposes.

To adhere to the purpose of this Society and to do it well, SMPS must embrace all individuals who can benefit from the services it provides. These individuals come from varying political backgrounds and join the Society knowing there is no political agenda. SMPS could risk its reputation as a legitimate nonprofit organization should it deviate from its stated purpose and would also risk alienating its core constituency should the political focus not be one that is agreed upon by any given member.”

This viewpoint is based on the formal Articles of Incorporation:

“The purposes of the [SMPS] Corporation shall be the promotion of the professional and educational advancement of persons engaged in marketing and business development activities on behalf of architectural, engineering and planning firms, the fostering of understanding of the skills and techniques employed in such activities, and the exchange of information relating to such activities. The Corporation shall operate not for profit but exclusively for charitable, scientific, literary or educational purposes.”

As such, from its inception, SMPS has endeavored to be apolitical. The SMPS mission is to advocate for, educate, and connect leaders in the building industry. When necessary, public statements have focused on matters that directly impact the profession and industries we serve while we celebrate the diversity of the members. Taking sides on a political issue can be interpreted as inconsistent with the mission, vision, and brand.

SMPS encourages members to respect the perspectives of our colleagues regardless of whether we agree with their point of view. Also, we should give thought to our diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts and that all 7,000+ member voices are welcome. Political discourse can be perceived as one-sided. Therefore, and as a matter of practice, SMPS HQ generally does not respond to political concerns unless they have a direct impact on the profession and the industries in which we work.

When issues arise, we urge leaders to have transparent and inclusive conversations about how the chapter communicates beyond mission and vision. As a leader, you probably understand the complexities of these challenges; however, here are a few things to consider:

- As professionals, we deal with communications every day. Another way to evaluate your chapter's messaging is to apply the same decision-making process you use for your company. Is the purpose of the communication consistent with the mission, vision, and brand? Does it advance our purpose and goals? For nonprofit organizations, the founding purpose can typically be found in the bylaws, articles of incorporation, and/or the application for tax exemption.
- There may be multiple ways to think about an issue. While one viewpoint may be perceived as supportive or held by most members, there could be others that vehemently disagree. All views should be, considered, and respected.
- What is the impact you desire from making or not making a statement?
- Is there a consensus among the members?
- Think about the SMPS mission and vision when evaluating communications related to cultural, social, or political issues.

Finally, as an elected leader, you directly oversee the community of your chapter but also remember it is part of a larger network of chapters and members located in Canada and the U.S. Your messages are often heard and seen beyond the confines of the chapter's territory.

If you need any assistance or advice with these guidelines, please contact Natalie Gozzard at [natalie@smpls.org](mailto:natalie@smpls.org).