

**RCW 42.17A.005 Definitions. (Effective until January 1, 2026.)**

The definitions in this section apply throughout this chapter unless the context clearly requires otherwise.

(1) "Actual malice" means to act with knowledge of falsity or with reckless disregard as to truth or falsity.

(2) "Agency" includes all state agencies and all local agencies. "State agency" includes every state office, department, division, bureau, board, commission, or other state agency. "Local agency" includes every county, city, town, municipal corporation, quasi-municipal corporation, or special purpose district, or any office, department, division, bureau, board, commission, or agency thereof, or other local public agency. "Agency" does not include a comprehensive cancer center participating in a collaborative arrangement as defined in RCW 28B.10.930 that is operated in conformance with RCW 28B.10.930.

(3) "Authorized committee" means the political committee authorized by a candidate, or by the public official against whom recall charges have been filed, to accept contributions or make expenditures on behalf of the candidate or public official.

(4) "Ballot proposition" means any "measure" as defined by RCW 29A.04.091, or any initiative, recall, or referendum proposition proposed to be submitted to the voters of the state or any municipal corporation, political subdivision, or other voting constituency from and after the time when the proposition has been initially filed with the appropriate election officer of that constituency before its circulation for signatures.

(5) "Benefit" means a commercial, proprietary, financial, economic, or monetary advantage, or the avoidance of a commercial, proprietary, financial, economic, or monetary disadvantage.

(6) "Bona fide political party" means:

(a) An organization that has been recognized as a minor political party by the secretary of state;

(b) The governing body of the state organization of a major political party, as defined in RCW 29A.04.086, that is the body authorized by the charter or bylaws of the party to exercise authority on behalf of the state party; or

(c) The county central committee or legislative district committee of a major political party. There may be only one legislative district committee for each party in each legislative district.

(7) "Books of account" means:

(a) In the case of a campaign or political committee, a ledger or similar listing of contributions, expenditures, and debts, such as a campaign or committee is required to file regularly with the commission, current as of the most recent business day; or

(b) In the case of a commercial advertiser, details of political advertising or electioneering communications provided by the advertiser, including the names and addresses of persons from whom it accepted political advertising or electioneering communications, the exact nature and extent of the services rendered and the total cost and the manner of payment for the services.

(8) "Candidate" means any individual who seeks nomination for election or election to public office. An individual seeks nomination or election when the individual first:

(a) Receives contributions or makes expenditures or reserves space or facilities with intent to promote the individual's candidacy for office;

(b) Announces publicly or files for office;

(c) Purchases commercial advertising space or broadcast time to promote the individual's candidacy; or

(d) Gives consent to another person to take on behalf of the individual any of the actions in (a) or (c) of this subsection.

(9) "Caucus political committee" means a political committee organized and maintained by the members of a major political party in the state senate or state house of representatives.

(10) "Commercial advertiser" means any person that sells the service of communicating messages or producing material for broadcast or distribution to the general public or segments of the general public whether through brochures, fliers, newspapers, magazines, television, radio, billboards, direct mail advertising, printing, paid internet or digital communications, or any other means of mass communications used for the purpose of appealing, directly or indirectly, for votes or for financial or other support in any election campaign.

(11) "Commission" means the agency established under RCW 42.17A.100.

(12) "Committee" unless the context indicates otherwise, includes a political committee such as a candidate, ballot proposition, recall, political, or continuing political committee.

(13) "Compensation" unless the context requires a narrower meaning, includes payment in any form for real or personal property or services of any kind. For the purpose of compliance with RCW 42.17A.710, "compensation" does not include per diem allowances or other payments made by a governmental entity to reimburse a public official for expenses incurred while the official is engaged in the official business of the governmental entity.

(14) "Continuing political committee" means a political committee that is an organization of continuing existence not limited to participation in any particular election campaign or election cycle.

(15)(a) "Contribution" includes:

(i) A loan, gift, deposit, subscription, forgiveness of indebtedness, donation, advance, pledge, payment, transfer of funds, or anything of value, including personal and professional services for less than full consideration;

(ii) An expenditure made by a person in cooperation, consultation, or concert with, or at the request or suggestion of, a candidate, a political or incidental committee, the person or persons named on the candidate's or committee's registration form who direct expenditures on behalf of the candidate or committee, or their agents;

(iii) The financing by a person of the dissemination, distribution, or republication, in whole or in part, of broadcast, written, graphic, digital, or other form of political advertising or electioneering communication prepared by a candidate, a political or incidental committee, or its authorized agent;

(iv) Sums paid for tickets to fund-raising events such as dinners and parties, except for the actual cost of the consumables furnished at the event.

(b) "Contribution" does not include:

(i) Accrued interest on money deposited in a political or incidental committee's account;

(ii) Ordinary home hospitality;

(iii) A contribution received by a candidate or political or incidental committee that is returned to the contributor within ten business days of the date on which it is received by the candidate or political or incidental committee;

(iv) A news item, feature, commentary, or editorial in a regularly scheduled news medium that is of interest to the public, that is in a news medium controlled by a person whose business is that news medium, and that is not controlled by a candidate or a political or incidental committee;

(v) An internal political communication primarily limited to the members of or contributors to a political party organization or political or incidental committee, or to the officers, management staff, or stockholders of a corporation or similar enterprise, or to the members of a labor organization or other membership organization;

(vi) The rendering of personal services of the sort commonly performed by volunteer campaign workers, or incidental expenses personally incurred by volunteer campaign workers not in excess of fifty dollars personally paid for by the worker. "Volunteer services," for the purposes of this subsection, means services or labor for which the individual is not compensated by any person;

(vii) Messages in the form of reader boards, banners, or yard or window signs displayed on a person's own property or property occupied by a person. However, a facility used for such political advertising for which a rental charge is normally made must be reported as an in-kind contribution and counts toward any applicable contribution limit of the person providing the facility;

(viii) Legal or accounting services rendered to or on behalf of:

(A) A political party or caucus political committee if the person paying for the services is the regular employer of the person rendering such services; or

(B) A candidate or an authorized committee if the person paying for the services is the regular employer of the individual rendering the services and if the services are solely for the purpose of ensuring compliance with state election or public disclosure laws; or

(ix) The performance of ministerial functions by a person on behalf of two or more candidates or political or incidental committees either as volunteer services defined in (b)(vi) of this subsection or for payment by the candidate or political or incidental committee for whom the services are performed as long as:

(A) The person performs solely ministerial functions;

(B) A person who is paid by two or more candidates or political or incidental committees is identified by the candidates and political committees on whose behalf services are performed as part of their respective statements of organization under RCW 42.17A.205; and

(C) The person does not disclose, except as required by law, any information regarding a candidate's or committee's plans, projects, activities, or needs, or regarding a candidate's or committee's contributions or expenditures that is not already publicly available from campaign reports filed with the commission, or otherwise engage in activity that constitutes a contribution under (a)(ii) of this subsection.

A person who performs ministerial functions under this subsection (15)(b)(ix) is not considered an agent of the candidate or committee as long as the person has no authority to authorize expenditures or make decisions on behalf of the candidate or committee.

(c) Contributions other than money or its equivalent are deemed to have a monetary value equivalent to the fair market value of the contribution. Services or property or rights furnished at less than their fair market value for the purpose of assisting any candidate or political committee are deemed a contribution. Such a contribution

must be reported as an in-kind contribution at its fair market value and counts towards any applicable contribution limit of the provider.

(16) "Depository" means a bank, mutual savings bank, savings and loan association, or credit union doing business in this state.

(17) "Elected official" means any person elected at a general or special election to any public office, and any person appointed to fill a vacancy in any such office.

(18) "Election" includes any primary, general, or special election for public office and any election in which a ballot proposition is submitted to the voters. An election in which the qualifications for voting include other than those requirements set forth in Article VI, section 1 (Amendment 63) of the Constitution of the state of Washington shall not be considered an election for purposes of this chapter.

(19) "Election campaign" means any campaign in support of or in opposition to a candidate for election to public office and any campaign in support of, or in opposition to, a ballot proposition.

(20) "Election cycle" means the period beginning on the first day of January after the date of the last previous general election for the office that the candidate seeks and ending on December 31st after the next election for the office. In the case of a special election to fill a vacancy in an office, "election cycle" means the period beginning on the day the vacancy occurs and ending on December 31st after the special election.

(21)(a) "Electioneering communication" means any broadcast, cable, or satellite television, radio transmission, digital communication, United States postal service mailing, billboard, newspaper, or periodical that:

(i) Clearly identifies a candidate for a state, local, or judicial office either by specifically naming the candidate, or identifying the candidate without using the candidate's name;

(ii) Is broadcast, transmitted electronically or by other means, mailed, erected, distributed, or otherwise published within sixty days before any election for that office in the jurisdiction in which the candidate is seeking election; and

(iii) Either alone, or in combination with one or more communications identifying the candidate by the same sponsor during the sixty days before an election, has a fair market value or cost of one thousand dollars or more.

(b) "Electioneering communication" does not include:

(i) Usual and customary advertising of a business owned by a candidate, even if the candidate is mentioned in the advertising when the candidate has been regularly mentioned in that advertising appearing at least twelve months preceding the candidate becoming a candidate;

(ii) Advertising for candidate debates or forums when the advertising is paid for by or on behalf of the debate or forum sponsor, so long as two or more candidates for the same position have been invited to participate in the debate or forum;

(iii) A news item, feature, commentary, or editorial in a regularly scheduled news medium that is:

(A) Of interest to the public;

(B) In a news medium controlled by a person whose business is that news medium; and

(C) Not a medium controlled by a candidate or a political or incidental committee;

(iv) Slate cards and sample ballots;

(v) Advertising for books, films, dissertations, or similar works (A) written by a candidate when the candidate entered into a contract for such publications or media at least twelve months before becoming a candidate, or (B) written about a candidate;

(vi) Public service announcements;

(vii) An internal political communication primarily limited to the members of or contributors to a political party organization or political or incidental committee, or to the officers, management staff, or stockholders of a corporation or similar enterprise, or to the members of a labor organization or other membership organization;

(viii) An expenditure by or contribution to the authorized committee of a candidate for state, local, or judicial office; or

(ix) Any other communication exempted by the commission through rule consistent with the intent of this chapter.

(22) "Expenditure" includes a payment, contribution, subscription, distribution, loan, advance, deposit, or gift of money or anything of value, and includes a contract, promise, or agreement, whether or not legally enforceable, to make an expenditure. "Expenditure" also includes a promise to pay, a payment, or a transfer of anything of value in exchange for goods, services, property, facilities, or anything of value for the purpose of assisting, benefiting, or honoring any public official or candidate, or assisting in furthering or opposing any election campaign. For the purposes of this chapter, agreements to make expenditures, contracts, and promises to pay may be reported as estimated obligations until actual payment is made. "Expenditure" shall not include the partial or complete repayment by a candidate or political or incidental committee of the principal of a loan, the receipt of which loan has been properly reported.

(23) "Final report" means the report described as a final report in RCW 42.17A.235(11) (a).

(24) "Foreign national" means:

(a) An individual who is not a citizen of the United States and is not lawfully admitted for permanent residence;

(b) A government, or subdivision, of a foreign country;

(c) A foreign political party; and

(d) Any entity, such as a partnership, association, corporation, organization, or other combination of persons, that is organized under the laws of or has its principal place of business in a foreign country.

(25) "General election" for the purposes of RCW 42.17A.405 means the election that results in the election of a person to a state or local office. It does not include a primary.

(26) "Gift" has the definition in RCW 42.52.010.

(27) "Immediate family" includes the spouse or domestic partner, dependent children, and other dependent relatives, if living in the household. For the purposes of the definition of "intermediary" in this section, "immediate family" means an individual's spouse or domestic partner, and child, stepchild, grandchild, parent, stepparent, grandparent, brother, half brother, sister, or half sister of the individual and the spouse or the domestic partner of any such person and a child, stepchild, grandchild, parent, stepparent, grandparent, brother, half brother, sister, or half sister of the individual's spouse or domestic partner and the spouse or the domestic partner of any such person.

(28) "Incidental committee" means any nonprofit organization not otherwise defined as a political committee but that may incidentally

make a contribution or an expenditure in excess of the reporting thresholds in RCW 42.17A.235, directly or through a political committee. Any nonprofit organization is not an incidental committee if it is only remitting payments through the nonprofit organization in an aggregated form and the nonprofit organization is not required to report those payments in accordance with this chapter.

(29) "Incumbent" means a person who is in present possession of an elected office.

(30)(a) "Independent expenditure" means an expenditure that has each of the following elements:

(i) It is made in support of or in opposition to a candidate for office by a person who is not:

(A) A candidate for that office;

(B) An authorized committee of that candidate for that office;

and

(C) A person who has received the candidate's encouragement or approval to make the expenditure, if the expenditure pays in whole or in part for political advertising supporting that candidate or promoting the defeat of any other candidate or candidates for that office;

(ii) It is made in support of or in opposition to a candidate for office by a person with whom the candidate has not collaborated for the purpose of making the expenditure, if the expenditure pays in whole or in part for political advertising supporting that candidate or promoting the defeat of any other candidate or candidates for that office;

(iii) The expenditure pays in whole or in part for political advertising that either specifically names the candidate supported or opposed, or clearly and beyond any doubt identifies the candidate without using the candidate's name; and

(iv) The expenditure, alone or in conjunction with another expenditure or other expenditures of the same person in support of or opposition to that candidate, has a value of one thousand dollars or more. A series of expenditures, each of which is under one thousand dollars, constitutes one independent expenditure if their cumulative value is one thousand dollars or more.

(b) "Independent expenditure" does not include: Ordinary home hospitality; communications with journalists or editorial staff designed to elicit a news item, feature, commentary, or editorial in a regularly scheduled news medium that is of primary interest to the general public, controlled by a person whose business is that news medium, and not controlled by a candidate or a political committee; participation in the creation of a publicly funded voters' pamphlet statement in written or video form; an internal political communication primarily limited to contributors to a political party organization or political action committee, the officers, management staff, and stockholders of a corporation or similar enterprise, or the members of a labor organization or other membership organization; or the rendering of personal services of the sort commonly performed by volunteer campaign workers or incidental expenses personally incurred by volunteer campaign workers not in excess of two hundred fifty dollars personally paid for by the worker.

(31)(a) "Intermediary" means an individual who transmits a contribution to a candidate or committee from another person unless the contribution is from the individual's employer, immediate family, or an association to which the individual belongs.

(b) A treasurer or a candidate is not an intermediary for purposes of the committee that the treasurer or candidate serves.

(c) A professional fund-raiser is not an intermediary if the fund-raiser is compensated for fund-raising services at the usual and customary rate.

(d) A volunteer hosting a fund-raising event at the individual's home is not an intermediary for purposes of that event.

(32) "Legislation" means bills, resolutions, motions, amendments, nominations, and other matters pending or proposed in either house of the state legislature, and includes any other matter that may be the subject of action by either house or any committee of the legislature and all bills and resolutions that, having passed both houses, are pending approval by the governor.

(33) "Legislative office" means the office of a member of the state house of representatives or the office of a member of the state senate.

(34) "Lobby" and "lobbying" each mean attempting to influence the passage or defeat of any legislation by the legislature of the state of Washington, or the adoption or rejection of any rule, standard, rate, or other legislative enactment of any state agency under the state administrative procedure act, chapter 34.05 RCW. Neither "lobby" nor "lobbying" includes an association's or other organization's act of communicating with the members of that association or organization.

(35) "Lobbyist" includes any person who lobbies either on the person's own or another's behalf.

(36) "Lobbyist's employer" means the person or persons by whom a lobbyist is employed and all persons by whom the lobbyist is compensated for acting as a lobbyist.

(37) "Ministerial functions" means an act or duty carried out as part of the duties of an administrative office without exercise of personal judgment or discretion.

(38) "Participate" means that, with respect to a particular election, an entity:

(a) Makes either a monetary or in-kind contribution to a candidate;

(b) Makes an independent expenditure or electioneering communication in support of or opposition to a candidate;

(c) Endorses a candidate before contributions are made by a subsidiary corporation or local unit with respect to that candidate or that candidate's opponent;

(d) Makes a recommendation regarding whether a candidate should be supported or opposed before a contribution is made by a subsidiary corporation or local unit with respect to that candidate or that candidate's opponent; or

(e) Directly or indirectly collaborates or consults with a subsidiary corporation or local unit on matters relating to the support of or opposition to a candidate, including, but not limited to, the amount of a contribution, when a contribution should be given, and what assistance, services or independent expenditures, or electioneering communications, if any, will be made or should be made in support of or opposition to a candidate.

(39) "Person" includes an individual, partnership, joint venture, public or private corporation, association, federal, state, or local governmental entity or agency however constituted, candidate, committee, political committee, political party, executive committee thereof, or any other organization or group of persons, however organized.

(40) "Political advertising" includes any advertising displays, newspaper ads, billboards, signs, brochures, articles, tabloids, flyers, letters, radio or television presentations, digital communication, or other means of mass communication, used for the purpose of appealing, directly or indirectly, for votes or for financial or other support or opposition in any election campaign.

(41) "Political committee" means any person (except a candidate or an individual dealing with the candidate's or individual's own funds or property) having the expectation of receiving contributions or making expenditures in support of, or opposition to, any candidate or any ballot proposition.

(42) "Primary" for the purposes of RCW 42.17A.405 means the procedure for nominating a candidate to state or local office under chapter 29A.52 RCW or any other primary for an election that uses, in large measure, the procedures established in chapter 29A.52 RCW.

(43) "Public office" means any federal, state, judicial, county, city, town, school district, port district, special district, or other state political subdivision elective office.

(44) "Public record" has the definition in RCW 42.56.010.

(45) "Recall campaign" means the period of time beginning on the date of the filing of recall charges under RCW 29A.56.120 and ending thirty days after the recall election.

(46) "Remediable violation" means any violation of this chapter that:

(a) Involved expenditures or contributions totaling no more than the contribution limits set out under RCW 42.17A.405(2) per election, or one thousand dollars if there is no statutory limit;

(b) Occurred:

(i) More than thirty days before an election, where the commission entered into an agreement to resolve the matter; or

(ii) At any time where the violation did not constitute a material violation because it was inadvertent and minor or otherwise has been cured and, after consideration of all the circumstances, further proceedings would not serve the purposes of this chapter;

(c) Does not materially harm the public interest, beyond the harm to the policy of this chapter inherent in any violation; and

(d) Involved:

(i) A person who:

(A) Took corrective action within five business days after the commission first notified the person of noncompliance, or where the commission did not provide notice and filed a required report within twenty-one days after the report was due to be filed; and

(B) Substantially met the filing deadline for all other required reports within the immediately preceding twelve-month period; or

(ii) A candidate who:

(A) Lost the election in question; and

(B) Did not receive contributions over one hundred times the contribution limit in aggregate per election during the campaign in question.

(47) (a) "Sponsor" for purposes of an electioneering communications, independent expenditures, or political advertising means the person paying for the electioneering communication, independent expenditure, or political advertising. If a person acts as an agent for another or is reimbursed by another for the payment, the original source of the payment is the sponsor.



(b) "Sponsor," for purposes of a political or incidental committee, means any person, except an authorized committee, to whom any of the following applies:

(i) The committee receives eighty percent or more of its contributions either from the person or from the person's members, officers, employees, or shareholders;

(ii) The person collects contributions for the committee by use of payroll deductions or dues from its members, officers, or employees.

(48) "Sponsored committee" means a committee, other than an authorized committee, that has one or more sponsors.

(49) "State office" means state legislative office or the office of governor, lieutenant governor, secretary of state, attorney general, commissioner of public lands, insurance commissioner, superintendent of public instruction, state auditor, or state treasurer.

(50) "State official" means a person who holds a state office.

(51) "Surplus funds" mean, in the case of a political committee or candidate, the balance of contributions that remain in the possession or control of that committee or candidate subsequent to the election for which the contributions were received, and that are in excess of the amount necessary to pay remaining debts or expenses incurred by the committee or candidate with respect to that election. In the case of a continuing political committee, "surplus funds" mean those contributions remaining in the possession or control of the committee that are in excess of the amount necessary to pay all remaining debts or expenses when it makes its final report under RCW 42.17A.255.

(52) "Technical correction" means the correction of a minor or ministerial error in a required report that does not materially harm the public interest and needs to be corrected for the report to be in full compliance with the requirements of this chapter.

(53) "Treasurer" and "deputy treasurer" mean the individuals appointed by a candidate or political or incidental committee, pursuant to RCW 42.17A.210, to perform the duties specified in that section.

(54) "Violation" means a violation of this chapter that is not a remediable violation, minor violation, or an error classified by the commission as appropriate to address by a technical correction. [2022 c 71 s 14; 2020 c 152 s 2; 2019 c 428 s 3. Prior: 2018 c 304 s 2; 2018 c 111 s 3; prior: 2011 c 145 s 2; 2011 c 60 s 19; prior: 2010 c 204 s 101; 2008 c 6 s 201; prior: 2007 c 358 s 1; 2007 c 180 s 1; 2005 c 445 s 6; 2002 c 75 s 1; 1995 c 397 s 1; 1992 c 139 s 1; 1991 sp.s. c 18 s 1; 1990 c 139 s 2; prior: 1989 c 280 s 1; 1989 c 175 s 89; 1984 c 34 s 5; 1979 ex.s. c 50 s 1; 1977 ex.s. c 313 s 1; 1975 1st ex.s. c 294 s 2; 1973 c 1 s 2 (Initiative Measure No. 276, approved November 7, 1972). Formerly RCW 42.17.020.]

**Findings—Intent—2022 c 71:** See note following RCW 28B.10.930.

**Findings—2020 c 152:** See note following RCW 42.17A.417.

**Effective date—Finding—Intent—2019 c 428:** See notes following RCW 42.17A.160.

**Finding—Intent—2018 c 304:** See note following RCW 42.17A.235.

**Effective date—Short title—Findings—Intent—Implementation with existing funds—2018 c 111:** See notes following RCW 42.17A.207.

**Findings—Intent—2011 c 145:** "The legislature finds that timely and full disclosure of election campaign funding and expenditures is essential to a well-functioning democracy in which Washington's voters can judge for themselves what is appropriate based on ideologies, programs, and policies. Long-term voter engagement and confidence depends on the public knowing who is funding the multiple and targeted messages distributed during election campaigns.

The legislature also finds that recent events have revealed the need for refining certain elements of our state's election campaign finance laws that have proven inadequate in preventing efforts to hide information from voters. The legislature intends, therefore, to promote greater transparency for the public by enhancing penalties for violations; regulating the formation of, and contributions between, political committees; and reducing the expenditure thresholds for purposes of mandatory electronic filing and disclosure." [2011 c 145 s 1.]

**Effective date—2011 c 145:** "This act takes effect January 1, 2012." [2011 c 145 s 8.]

**Part headings not law—Severability—2008 c 6:** See RCW 26.60.900 and 26.60.901.

**Effective date—2007 c 358:** "This act takes effect January 1, 2008." [2007 c 358 s 4.]

**Legislative intent—1990 c 139:** "The provisions of this act which repeal the reporting requirements established by chapter 423, Laws of 1987 for registered lobbyists and employers of lobbyists are not intended to alter, expand, or restrict whatsoever the definition of "lobby" or "lobbying" contained in RCW 42.17.020 as it existed prior to the enactment of chapter 423, Laws of 1987." [1990 c 139 s 1.]

**Effective date—1989 c 280:** "This act shall take effect January 1, 1990." [1989 c 280 s 14.]

**Effective date—1989 c 175:** See note following RCW 34.05.010.

**Effective date—1977 ex.s. c 313:** "This 1977 amendatory act shall take effect on January 1, 1978." [1977 ex.s. c 313 s 9.]

**Severability—1977 ex.s. c 313:** "If any provision of this 1977 amendatory act, or its application to any person or circumstance is held invalid, the remainder of the act, or the application of the provision to other persons or circumstances is not affected." [1977 ex.s. c 313 s 8.]