



SERVE THE PEOPLE

A civil servant's guide
for 2024 and beyond

**This guide does not constitute legal advice; we encourage you to consult an attorney for legal advice for your specific context.*

OVERVIEW: Resources for Federal Workers and Civil Servants

This guide does not constitute legal advice; we encourage you to consult an attorney for legal advice for your specific context.

This document is for U.S. government employees who want to better know their rights inside and outside the workplace and to consider strategies for balancing their obligations as federal employees or civil servants and their professional or personal values.

In 2025, federal employees will likely face hostile political leadership in the White House that has already signaled a willingness to violate laws and norms and undermine government programs that benefit the American people. They will also face a Congress skeptical of the functions of the federal government and likely be unwilling to challenge the Administration or hold it accountable. Their actions to undermine government across the board will create chaos, division, and fatigue. Employees should individually consider their values, commitments, and personal circumstances before deciding how to react. This guide provides some insights for employees facing these choices.

It is perfectly valid to focus on self-preservation and try simply to do no harm or to do the minimum to not be fired. For others, it will be important to question the legal or policy bases for actions and make clear when there are negative consequences for the public, even knowing speaking out could make them a target. Some will choose active resistance: slowing down implementation of or refusing actions they believe are illegal or immoral. However, each civil servant should soon identify the triggers that are likely to emerge that require us to reevaluate these choices. Feel free to circulate this document widely.

For guidance on offering an event to discuss this guide with others, see the facilitator's guide below starting on slide 43.

This civil servant's guide is organized into sections. When viewing it online, you can click through to the parts that most apply to you. For agency-specific advice, review information made available by your agency's [Inspector General](#) or ethics office. Consult them if you feel their staff can be trusted, and for legal advice, please consult a lawyer.

Document Outline

[Resources for Federal Workers and Civil Servants](#)

[Quick Tips: A Brief Overview of Topline Actions](#)

[What to do now or before January 20, 2025](#)

[What to do after January 20, 2025](#)

[What to know about Schedule F](#)

[What You Should Know About Your Power](#)

[What if? Going over the Constitutional Cliff](#)

[Actions and Strategies in the Face of Authoritarianism](#)

[Rights & Obligations of Federal Employees](#)

[Protests and Other Speech Resources For Federal Employees](#)

[Nonviolent Action: History, Strategy and Resources](#)

[Action Planning Support](#)

[Actions You Can Take as a Federal Employee](#)

[Solidarity outside of the workplace](#)

[Freedom of Information Act](#)

[Whistleblowing](#)

[U.S. Government Internal Resources](#)

[Non-government Legal Resources](#)

[Other Resources for federal employees](#)

[The Special Role of the Military](#)

[Union Resources](#)

[How do you know if you are in a union?](#)

[Digital Security: Protecting Your Data and Communications](#)

[Information security](#)

[Your online presence](#)

[Threat modeling](#)

[How to protect your info](#)

[Steps to Better Self-Care for Activists](#)

[Self Care and Community Resilience Resources](#)

[Further Reading](#)

[The 2024 Context](#)

[Lest we Forget... Federal Employee Resistance 2017-2020](#)

This document will be updated, so if you find incorrect information or want to suggest something to add, please email civilservants4democracy@protonmail.com

EDUCATE. ORGANIZE. TAKE ACTION.

As Federal civil servants, we take an oath of office by which we swear to support and defend the Constitution of the United States of America.

The Constitution not only establishes our system of government, it actually defines the work role for Federal employees:

"to establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty."

- [Oath For Federal Employees](#)

Quick Tips: A Brief Overview of Topline Actions

BEFORE JAN 20

AFTER JAN 20

AFTER SCHEDULE F

01

02

03

What to do now or before January 20, 2025

We will do the most good and prevent the most harm if we take steps as soon as possible, especially since some senior executives may try to preemptively implement actions that they anticipate will be welcomed by the incoming Administration. In some cases, the time horizon for optimal action is December 20, not Inauguration Day, because there may be disruptions due to the expiration of the current continuing resolution on federal funding appropriations.

- Use the relationships you have to [pressure Democrats](#) and sympathetic Republicans who can influence the Biden administration now. Let's get the most we can out of the last days of the Biden administration to make regression more difficult and politically costly.
- Build the relationships you may need later, and find the colleagues you can trust to stand with you (and which ones you can't) by having in-depth conversations (off government platforms).
- Once you identify trusted colleagues, make sure you have their personal cell numbers. Urge them to download the Signal messaging app on their personal phones and turn on disappearing messages.
- Connect with your unions or worker representatives and urge your union (national and local) to create a plan.
- Connect to trusted community groups for support. For more information, see [Block and Build: Syllabus Overview | Convergence](#) or [We Are Worth Fighting For](#).
- Employ digital hygiene by downloading the [Signal](#) app, setting up a Protonmail or other email address that does NOT link to your real name, and reviewing your privacy settings on social media.
- Archive files and data in an appropriate location. One of the first things new administrations do is wipe the websites of federal agencies and start fresh. Don't assume materials will remain accessible; download them (if legal) and share them with individuals or nonprofits who can use them.
- Identify areas in your work that are vulnerable to changes that will harm transparency and public accountability in the future or that may violate current laws and regulations. Let external stakeholders, such as [American Oversight](#), know about these and how they can most effectively use the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) to preserve the potential for authentic democracy.
- Know your rights as a federal employee and as an individual citizen and use them.

Quick Tips: A Brief Overview of Topline Actions

6

BEFORE JAN 20

AFTER JAN 20

AFTER SCHEDULE F

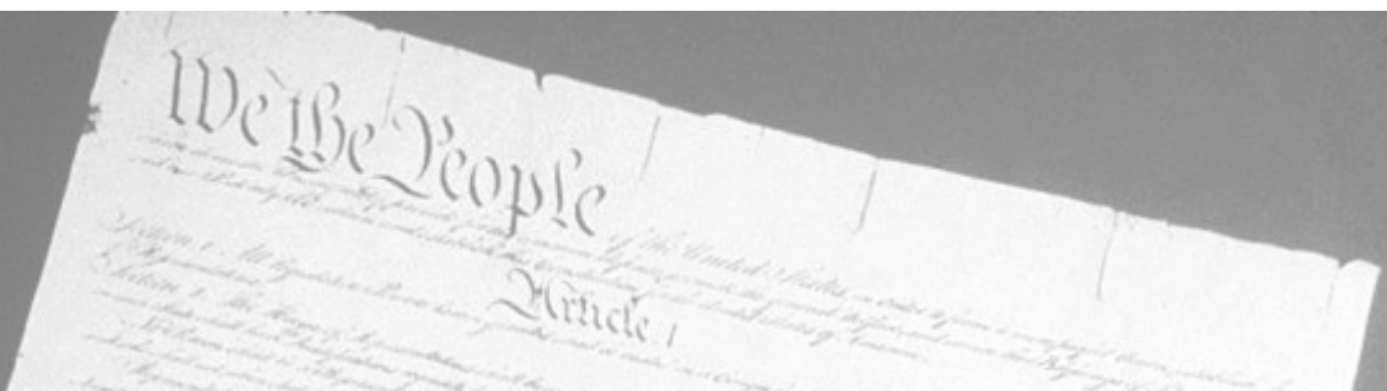
01

02

03

What to do after January 20, 2025

- Prevent clear and imminent *harm* when you can. What harm looks like varies a lot by department and agency, but don't assume everything will be ok or that someone else will act.
- Document and save everything that preserves transparency and accountability to the public or threatens the rule of law.
- Build connections with feds in other departments and agencies.
- Request specific legal analysis and justification for actions you are tasked with so that they get documented.
- Do not confide concerns, personal views, or skepticism about the policy agenda to anyone who is a Presidential appointee, or "Schedule C."
- Be aware that some senior career executives may feel they have to act in their own self-protection given their vulnerability to [relocation](#) and may not be able to provide steady allyship.
- Be scrupulous about administrative and personnel matters such as timekeeping, leave, and the use of government time and equipment; do not give anyone a technical reason for your discipline or dismissal.
- Review your position description and annual performance plan. These documents are the basis for what you can be ordered to do. Seek changes if there are areas of policy you do not wish to work on, and you believe your supervisor will support you.
- Do not isolate yourself. Form affinity groups with other civil servants.
- To the extent possible, engage in networks of civil servants in civil society and reach out to civilservants4democracy@protonmail.com.



Quick Tips: A Brief Overview of Topline Actions

BEFORE JAN 20

AFTER JAN 20

AFTER SCHEDULE F

01

02

03

What to do about Schedule F

A new but very similar version of the 2020 [Schedule F](#) Executive Order (EO) will likely be issued. The EO would create a new personnel category that does not include civil service protections on dismissal. Under the EO, positions - including those currently encumbered - can be moved into Schedule F with very little recourse. This reorganization will happen unless Congress changes the law, which we do not believe is likely. Estimates [vary](#) on how many positions may be designated as Schedule F, but it is expected to reach some GS-12/13 and up to most GS-15s. While the stated goal is to address poor performance in the federal workforce, the clear goal is to silence dissent and allow dismissal without recourse of employees judged to be insufficiently loyal. This would open up additional employment to political loyalists, essentially making more of the workforce closer to political appointees.

If your position is designated Schedule F by your organization:

- Review your position description and whether your position was properly designated (e.g. [2020 EO](#): "confidential, policy-determining, policy-making, or policy-advocating character") under the EO. If your position was incorrectly included in Schedule F, appeal to your internal HR process. If your position description is inaccurate or out of date, ask for it to be revised.
- Don't panic - it will take a very long time for this to play out (e.g. there may be Congressional action and legal challenges) and longer for any individuals to be directly affected.
- The goal of Schedule F is to silence policy disagreements and prevent any dissent or contradictory positions in the internal deliberations; don't do their work for them by complying or resigning in advance.
- To avoid retaliation, avoid all partisan language at work (and, if you can stomach it, on public social media).
- Review specific regulations and guidance on causes for dismissal under the new EO and implementing regulations to inform your workplace engagements.

Quick Tips: A Brief Overview of Topline Actions

BEFORE JAN 20

AFTER JAN 20

AFTER SCHEDULE F

01

02

03

What to do about Schedule F

If your position is designated Schedule F by your organization (cont.):

- Document all disputes and any threats.
- Do not proactively resign - make them fire you.
- If the new EO is the same as the 2020 one, [Prohibited Personnel Practices](#) will still apply to Schedule F employees.
- The EO speaks to removal for poor performance; document all good performance reviews, formal or informal, and request them from career officials if you do not already have a current review.
- Schedule F cannot override current protections on civil servants who refuse to act on an illegal order. Be certain you have a legal analysis documented before refusing to comply. If your department/agency legal counsel has deemed something legal, you may not have any recourse.
- Do not isolate yourself. Form affinity groups with other civil servants.
- To the extent possible, engage in networks of civil servants in civil society and reach out to civilservants4democracy@protonmail.com.

If you are dismissed under schedule F:

- Reach out to your union if you are covered (see below).
- Reach out to civilservants4democracy@protonmail.com for alumni network being formed of former federal employees.
- Communicate to your Congressman/Senator or the one whose district you work in, depending on their stated views on Schedule F.

The initial wave of (Schedule F) firings will be much less, say, in the realm of 1,000-2,000. Why? It is more rational for the administration to scare the bureaucracy into submission, and then use their capacity to get things done, than it is to engage in mass firings and then realize they don't know how to run the government. Call this the "heads on pikes" strategy. ["What Happens Next?" by Don Moynihan. Can We Still Govern?](#)

What You Should Know About Your Power

With Donald Trump once again our President-elect, federal workers face a host of uncertainties and threats regarding the future of their jobs and agencies. In a worst-case scenario, we are facing the dismantling of the rule of law and the related administrative state, leading us to a rapid transition to authoritarian rule. **But that is not inevitable.**



One of the main reasons that so many injustices persist is not that the powerful can simply do whatever they want with impunity but that power is given willingly to authoritarian leaders because most people are ignorant of their own power. If we understand that we, the people, are governed only by providing our consent to those who govern, we recognize that we can withdraw that consent (see [General strike](#)) and collectively wield power. Note that since it is [illegal for federal employees to strike](#), other forms of withholding consent can be considered (see more in the charts below).

Using the [Pillars of Power analysis](#), we can imagine our government as the roof of a building, held up by pillars such as the education system, the courts, the military, federal employees, media, and so on. Each institutional pillar has the power to uphold or neglect democratic norms and principles and enable or hinder the government's ability to help rather than harm people.

Our institutions are made up of individuals, and federal employees or workers have the incredible power to uphold U.S. democratic institutions and ensure they serve their mission and purpose even in the face of authoritarian threat. If federal workers do so by disrupting or refusing to comply in undermining democratic norms, it will weaken and possibly collapse a key pillar, thus delegitimizing an authoritarian regime. However, doing this requires being prepared and knowledgeable about our rights and effective tactics.

Things to keep in mind:

- While we don't know exactly which actions the Trump administration will take, **the ones they have telegraphed portend a weakening of the Rule of Law and of protections**, particularly for marginalized groups.
- Federal employees are responsible for preventing harm to everyone in the United States. Our work right now is to **prevent clear and imminent harm as best we can**. In the long term, we can strive to preserve the potential of a democratic system post-authoritarianism.
- **Don't despair and run away from the moment; take the necessary breaks**. Build your community, as the only way through the next four or more years is with community and solidarity—including with your coworkers and fellow civil servants. This applies whether you are a federal employees' union member or not.
- **There is no MAGA mandate. One-third of the country did not vote, about one-third voted Democrat, and one-third voted Republican.** [MAGA policies are deeply unpopular](#), and are likely to foment more opposition as people react to the loss of social services, health care, etc.
- **Many civil servants have already found ways to navigate MAGA-controlled political environments**. . Despite the political landscape in states such as Florida and Texas, civil servants have moved pro-public and supportive community agendas. The City of Dallas, for example, has developed and started to implement the most ambitious racial equity plan in its history, spanning 40 agencies. Similarly, good work continues both above and under the radar in Florida. This type of work requires finding political allies, avoiding landmines where possible, and creating supportive relationships in civil society.
- **Progressive states from California to Washington to New York have already announced a policy of non-cooperation with harmful orders. They are accelerating programs to put them into place before the transition.** We must encourage and amplify those commitments and calls for non-cooperation and encourage possible regional state compacts to take up regional responsibilities abandoned by the federal government. Federal agencies that can explore and implement strategies to support those state strategies before the transition should do so. This could include moving funds more expeditiously, finding ways to make it harder for those funds to be clawed back, and sharing any needed information that may not be available in the future.

“They should absolutely stay,” said Eisen, who served as ethics counsel in President Barack Obama’s White House. **“That’s easy for me to say because I don’t have to deal with a boss who’s appointed by Donald Trump every day, but I know from my own experience in government that you can’t just show up and snap your fingers. And the continuity of that career civil service staff will be very, very important to the preservation of the republic.”**

- [“Many in government are worried about Trump’s return. At DOJ, they’re terrified.” POLITICO](#)

The weaponization of the DOJ has caused particular concern. Some prominent lawyers in Trump’s camp have talked of “gulags” and turned the tables on Special Counsel Jack Smith by prosecuting him for his actions against Trump. It can be difficult to know how much of the anti-DOJ rhetoric is political bravado and how much anyone with authority seriously intends to carry out. And we have already seen some resistance from the Senate, even with a Republican Majority.

Remember that we need career people there to ensure that those in charge just can’t run roughshod over federal laws and DOJ practice, as one current DOJ lawyer said about the past Trump Administration. **“I was able to tone down... briefs in a way that people who would have replaced me, would not have.”** Norm Eisen, one of Trump’s most prominent critics in the Washington legal community, strongly urged the Justice Department’s career staff to keep doing their jobs, as long as their personal and family circumstances permit.

What if?

Going over the Constitutional Cliff

We must stop being shocked at what lines get crossed without consequence and focus on the lines we can hold, individually or institutionally. Given the incoming Administration's rhetoric challenging the Rule of Law, there is a genuine risk of constitutional crisis in the near future. It is helpful to think through these scenarios and consider your response. Trump's first administration gave us lots of hints about how this might happen, and other hints come from scenarios we are familiar with from different historical contexts.

One dangerous pathway is abusing the Presidential power to call for a state of national emergency, during which the government can close down electronic communications, seize bank accounts, take land, and suspend the writ of habeas corpus (judicial review of arrests). See the [Brennan Center's analysis](#) for the complete list of emergency powers.

Other breakdowns of the Rule of Law that have been foreshadowed during the campaign or by actions under the previous Trump administration are:

- Imposing a loyalty oath to the President as an individual rather than our constitution.
- Defying Congressional mandates ([funding](#) or legislation) and oversight requests.
- Ignoring legal and regulatory requirements (because there is no recourse to object due to lack of standing and complicity of courts and Congress).
- Weaponizing the DOJ and IRS to punish opponents.
- Refusal to cooperate with and/or eliminating the independence of the Inspectors General and [using them to investigate staff](#).
- Use of federal contracts and grants to enrich loyalists.
- Withholding block grants and other kinds of funding to punish particular states or institutions that do not meet potential new tests of loyalty or political alignment.

Beyond this, an authoritarian culture may take over some parts of the executive branch. Agency leaders could foster an atmosphere of fear and suspicion, encouraging employees to rat each other out for “disloyal” behavior. They may cultivate an acceptance that “orders from above” should not be questioned and that policies still on the books don’t matter. There will be censorship of research findings and internal investigations, as well as pre-emptive self-censorship, that is, not even exploring important issues because someone thinks they might receive negative attention from the administration. These are all aspects of authoritarian culture, not rules or laws, and they should be resisted.

Actions and Strategies in the Face of Authoritarianism

- Uphold the most exacting standards of personal and professional integrity.
- Showcase the loyal bipartisan service of your colleagues and call out attempts to impose partisan litmus tests.
- Extensively document decisions and their ramifications that are the result of word-of-mouth directives.
- Push back against loyalty tests, fostering frank internal debate and transparency with outside stakeholders whenever possible.
- Draw bright lines of principle and policy that can guide decision-making in future times of chaos and crisis.

Adapted from “[How to work for a president who loathes the civil service](#)” The Washington Post, 1/28/18

Federal employees have choices about how to do their work, and strategically choosing is always better than impulsively! However, everyone has different relationships with their managers, energy levels, and risk tolerances, so make the right strategic choices for you.

Rights & Obligations of Federal Employees

Because the country is experiencing a far-right MAGA trifecta, along with court capture, the more typical checks and balances the country has benefitted from may not function as before. Current legal remedies or protections may be reinterpreted or removed. However, the American public still expects legitimacy from its government, and you have clear rights you should exercise as needed. Understanding your rights can inform the spectrum of action available to you and options to protect both yourselves and the American people.

In general, you cannot take personal or public action while acting as a federal employee, on duty, or using any government resources (including computers). You may not take certain actions while noting your status as a federal employee. (See ethics responsibilities, particularly on “use of position” [here](#) (also see [EO 12731](#))). The best practice is if you are acting in your personal capacity, avoid anything that may give the appearance that you are acting in your official capacity.



img



img

Freedom of Speech

Federal employees have the same constitutional rights as other U.S. citizens, especially when unrelated to work. Even when speech is related to work, civil servants have a right to speak out on matters “relating to any matter of political, social or other concern to the community.” However, that expression of free speech cannot outweigh the interest in an efficient, disruption-free workplace. (This is known as the Pickering test from *Pickering v. Board of Education*). In addition to disruptive speech, any speech as part of one’s job duties is also not protected by the First Amendment if you speak counter to your job description/position/responsibilities. (See also social media, press, and public speaking below.)

The Hatch Act also limits federal employee rights outside the workplace, but this pertains only to political speech related to partisan elections. Other kinds of political speech (such as signing petitions and attending rallies) are protected as long as they are on your own time, for example, on your lunch break, on your own phone, or your home computer outside of work hours. Disagreement with an elected official's policy does not constitute a Hatch Act violation. Officials have used Hatch Act threats to intimidate employees. However, this course of action is less likely than other disciplinary actions under other rubrics.

[The Office of Special Counsel](#) has [FAQs](#) explaining these rights, but keep in mind that foreign service employees, among others, are subject to [additional restrictions](#).

If you are concerned about retaliation against you for a speech act, [learn what recourse is available to you](#). The [Merit Systems Protection Board](#) has more information on your rights as a federal government employee. Rules of thumb include:

- Protecting democracy is not partisan political speech.
- If you are a fellow, lab staff, or contractor and aren't sure if the Hatch Act applies to you, reach out to the General Counsel of the agency you support. In many cases, the Act may not apply, but it depends. We suggest posing your question(s) in vague terms.
- If you are not sure your desired speech meets the Pickering test please see the [ACLU know your rights guide](#).
- You still have freedom of speech and freedom of assembly as a federal employee.

Public speaking and publishing in your official capacity is generally prohibited without first receiving permission from your department/agency office of public affairs. If you act in your personal capacity at an event, you may also wish to ensure it is "closed press" with no recording, that the [Chatham House rule](#) is in effect, and that you indicate you are speaking in your personal capacity.

Lobbying Congress

Lobbying Congress: Federal employees are allowed to lobby members of Congress on policy issues on their own time. See guidance [here](#). Active duty personnel may wish to utilize the "appeal for redress" process described [here](#) to register policy concerns with Congress. Be cautious when contacting members, staff, and committees—research who is an ally on the issue you wish to raise. Be sure to provide information securely.



img

Protests and Other Speech Resources For Federal Employees

- [ACLU Protestors' Rights - federal employees](#)
- [Article on Feds and protesting](#)
- [General advice](#)
- [Why Feds Don't Strike - Government Executive](#)

Refusal to follow an illegal edict or order: Federal employees are protected from and, in fact, expected to refuse an order that violates the law.

“Although the president can fire Cabinet officials, such as the attorney general, for almost any reason, most government employees aren’t so easy to get rid of. Civil servants—that is, the rank-and-file members who make up the vast majority of the federal government—also take an oath to uphold the Constitution, some version of which has been used since the first Congress.

Moreover, federal law (5 U.S.C. §2302(b)(9)(D), if you’re curious) makes it illegal to remove a civil servant “for refusing to obey an order that would require the individual to violate a law.””

[“The Nervous Civil Servant’s Guide to Defying an Illegal Order,”](#)

Of course, if Schedule F is as widely used as it has been threatened or federal laws change, it will be important to reassess the landscape. We will update this handbook as the situation evolves.

Nonviolent Action: History, Strategy and Resources

18

- [Recommendations for Anti-Authoritarian Resistance](#) | Nov 2024 Scot Nakagawa
- [10 ways to be prepared and grounded now that Trump has won](#) | Waging Nonviolence
- [How to Harden Our Defenses Against an Authoritarian President](#) | Brennan Center for Justice
- [HOPE: Harnessing Our Power to End Political Violence](#) | End Political Violence
- [WRL Handbook for Nonviolent Campaigns](#) | A resource on nonviolent campaigning for grassroots groups in lots of different contexts
- [Beautiful Trouble](#) | A resource with creative tools for a more just world (books, web toolbox, strategy card deck, facilitation and training support)
- [A Force More Powerful](#) | PBS video and book that explores one of the 20th century's most important but least understood stories: how nonviolent power has overcome oppression and authoritarian rule worldwide.
- [International Center On Nonviolent Conflict](#) | Focuses on how ordinary people wage nonviolent conflict to win rights, freedom and justice
- [WagingNonviolence.org](#) | A source for original news and analysis about struggles for justice and peace around the globe.
- [Partisan Animosity and America](#) | The overwhelming majority of Americans reject political violence.
- [How the 'Great Replacement' Theory Has Fueled Racist Attacks](#) | TIME

Action Planning Support

- [Pre-During-Post Action Checklist](#)
- [Assertive Intervention/De-escalation Tips Handout](#)
- [Action Street Smarts & Personal Prep](#)
- [BATMo! – Modules for facilitators and trainers](#)
- [Emergent Fund Resources](#)

Actions You Can Take as a Federal Employee

Action	General Description	Potential Retaliation & For Your Consideration
Nonviolent Direct Action Protests / Rallies	<i>Can participate outside of work hours freely in person or during work hours if on annual leave.</i>	Whether online or in person, participation must not occur during work hours unless you are on leave. You must not wear any federal insignias or identification when participating.
Discuss Ethical Ramifications of Laws/Policies with Colleagues	<i>Discuss impacts, potentials, and unintended consequences with colleagues in strategy meetings or happy hours. Evaluate current events and impacts on work activities in terms of serving the Constitution.</i>	Do not force your views on other colleagues, particularly if you are a supervisor—instead, foster spaces of communication and inquiry.
Demand Direction in Writing to Implement	<i>Oftentimes, administrative officials will not want to admit their direction in a manner that could be forwarded, taken out of context, or leaked. Even just asking for direction in writing can weaken the intensity of the action being asked.</i>	Supervisors/colleagues may perceive you as difficult.
Go Public With Critiques	<i>Share information about issues, incompetence, or unethical behavior on social media, with trusted press, and certain congressional offices.</i>	If non-confidential information is shared after hours on social media, speech is generally protected. To protect professional status, it is safer to use anonymous or “alt” federal profiles.
Slowdown / Intentional Incompetence	<i>Reduce the pace of carrying out unethical activities (e.g., do fewer things). Malicious compliance - painstakingly adhere to every single detailed procedure and requirement</i>	Consider limitations of efforts that could cause work to be rerouted for efficiency.
Additional Workload	<i>Continue activities after hours or beyond written work scope to support the mission (e.g., do what they tell you to do, and also other things). Could be particularly important if capacity on your work has been reduced.</i>	Consider work/life balance limitations and self-care needs. Argue for the need to increase capacity.
Refuse and/or whistle blow illegal orders	<i>Request written legal authority for action Pursue legal counsel to argue against carrying out activities in opposition to Congressional authorization or direction.</i>	Could impact or even freeze other work efforts and result in FOIA requests. Ensure all information, including your spoken requests, is fully documented.
Fed Flu	<i>This would be an act of civil disobedience. But if presented with serious harm to the American public you can coordinate sick days across workforces</i>	Could be found to be misusing allotted sick days. Feds are not allowed to strike legally

Many Tools in the Toolbox

Type of Role	General Description	Actions for Everyone	Actions for Some if Strategic
Policy Enforcement	Roles in environmental management, regulatory commissions, customs, and border patrol. Little wiggle room to interpret rules or orders, but can apply enforcement insights based on personal expertise.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ Determine your own lines in the sand ★ Explain what it means for democracy to be under attack to family, friends, colleagues ★ Use strong cyber-hygiene ★ Share opinions on social media outside of work hours ★ Talk to your colleagues about what is happening 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ Refuse orders ★ Strike in coalition as a form of civil disobedience ★ Slow-walk enforcement, gum up bureaucratic processes ★ Question legal authority for action ★ Stage a sick out as a form of civil disobedience
Research, Development & Program Management	Roles in researching, developing, validating, managing, and evaluating government tools, resources, programs. Functions more open to interpretation within mission.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ Foster safe spaces for your coworkers ★ Talk to your union leaders about actions, statements (if applicable) ★ Attend rallies / protests after work, on weekends 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ Rebrand work but continue thrust of efforts ★ Publicly refuse orders ★ Strike in coalition as a form of civil disobedience ★ Continue work in volunteer capacity

Many Tools in the Toolbox

Type of Role	General Description	Actions for Everyone	Actions for Some if Strategic
Administrative Management & Logistics	Roles in budget management, human resources, and general operations. Have clear directives but often complex bureaucratic policies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ Take leave to attend protests during work ★ Demand all administrative direction in writing ★ Strategize with non-federal /external organizers, unions, religious groups ★ Question legal authority for action 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ Publicly refuse orders ★ Strike in coalition as a form of civil disobedience ★ Strategically slow-walk certain activities ★ Stage a sick out as a form of civil disobedience
Armed Service	Roles in Army, Air Force, Coast Guard, Marine Corps, Navy, & Space Force. Over 1M in armed service.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ Question legal authority for action 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ Refuse orders ★ Strike in coalition as a form of civil disobedience ★ Strategically resign ★ Question legal authority for action
Political Appointee	Oversee implementation of administrative priorities. Also subject to Hatch Act and other laws from Congress.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ Publicly denounce attacks on democracy ★ Leak information (see section on on leaking for risks and consequences) ★ Publicly resign

Solidarity outside of the workplace

Networking outside of the workplace with co-workers and friends from other divisions or agencies is one of the best tactics for sharing information and strategizing about collective responses to troubling situations at work. Start a weekly lunch or happy hour away from work where you can game out your options given various scenarios - and start a support network before you need it. You can also build solidarity with your agency's partners and constituents and reach out beyond internal civil servant organizing to develop alliances and support from and with civil society groups whenever possible. This can help them to help you advocate for good policy.

Sharing knowledge with, and support, others. Share this document! If you would like to organize a workshop for federal government employees to learn more about their rights and strategies to build solidarity in the workplace, please feel free to use and adapt the [facilitators' guide](#).

"Federal workers can seek out like-minded colleagues in other agencies (particularly important when internal efforts have been unsuccessful) to coordinate responses. They can bring a legal matter to the national security interagency lawyers' group to receive joint opinions on the legality or illegality of a particular action or policy. Particularly when two or more agencies are in dispute, high-level officials have the option of requesting an opinion from the Office of Legal Counsel at the Department of Justice. Even without a formal complaint, self-organizing with colleagues from within the same bureau and across government agencies can help build trust and confidence as federal workers navigate difficult terrain together."

- ["Staying true to yourself in the age of Trump: A how-to guide for federal employees"](#)

The Washington Post, 2/10/17

Freedom of Information Act

[FOIA](#) can be a great tool to shed light on agency decision-making under the new administration. One thing you can do now is to educate external stakeholders in your sphere (including reporters, if applicable) about what they should plan to FOIA - for example, internal reports, memos, etc. - with as much specificity as possible, including names and keywords. Identify the correct department and staff contact and any insights you have on making FOIA applications more likely to succeed. Once the administration begins and the applications start coming in, do what you can to expedite them.

Whistleblowing

FOIA can be a great tool to shed light on agency decision-making under the new administration. One thing you can do now is to educate external stakeholders in your sphere (including reporters, if applicable) about what they should plan to FOIA - for example, internal reports, memos, etc. - with as much specificity as possible, including names and keywords. Identify the correct department and staff contact and any insights you have on making FOIA applications more likely to succeed. Once the administration begins and the applications start coming in, do what you can to expedite them.

Employees (including contractors) may disclose allegations of waste, fraud, abuse, or mismanagement to the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) with jurisdiction over the federal department/agency you are concerned about. IGs do not look at "policy" decisions or disagreements but rather violations of law and noncompliance with regulations/laws/procedures. If you believe you are being asked to violate the law, that is a [Prohibited Personnel Practice](#), that can be reported.

The IGs are intended to be independent but can be [fired](#) by the President (and [several were](#) by Trump); some may not be trustworthy or could be weaponized by Trump to go after the "Deep State." Also, information provided to the IGs and used in any investigation may be brought to the attention of Department/Agency officials. Therefore, you may wish to ensure you are not identifiable as the source. You can report anonymously and withhold certain identifiable information to protect yourself.

Hotline complaints can be made anonymously online. You can also call and speak to an investigator. Find an OIG [here](#): You can report to the OIG for the department/agency where you are employed or where the policy issue resides. Any reporting is more powerful if you have firsthand information, including contemporaneous notes and/or documents. Include citations of specific laws, regulations, procedures, and/or policies that have been violated. Be sure to take care when handling any sensitive or classified information. Relevant OIGs will have a classified hotline option.

To be frank, many whistleblowers have found that [they are not fully protected](#) when they go through proper channels – including the Merit Systems Protection Board – or when proper channels fail them. The Office of Special Counsel could also be compromised as the President appoints its head. If you have any concerns, we recommend talking to a lawyer familiar with whistleblowing before you take any action.

Resources on whistleblowing

- [OSC whistleblower information](#)
- [MSPB Prohibited Personnel Practice - Retaliation](#)
- [MSPB whistleblower appeal information](#)
- [Whistleblower FAQs](#)
- [Whistleblower Resources](#)
- [U.S. House Office of the Whistleblower Ombuds](#)
- [Retaliation](#)
- [Report retaliation](#)

[The Project on Government Oversight \(POGO\)](#) explains whistleblower protections for federal government employees. Founded in 1981, POGO is a nonpartisan independent watchdog that champions good government reforms. See their [Survivor's Guide to Being a Successful Whistleblower in the Federal Government](#).

Leaking to the press can highlight certain issues to the public and may create demands for action. However, doing so puts you at risk and can shut down communication within your office, making it harder to document future actions. Leaking can also result in negative consequences for entire groups of people with access to the information. So, someone considering leaking information should be very strategic and ensure the issue is high stakes enough to take these risks.

Be sure to vet reporters and contact them securely. Ensure the person you are speaking to is who they say they are. Speak to them only anonymously and “on background.” ([Here is an explanation of what the levels of attribution are](#)). Agree in advance on how your information will be used. Some reporters may require knowing your name/job before using your information. Some will have “drop box” type ways to provide documents. Do not share classified documents without having a plan. We recommend speaking to a non-governmental lawyer first.

“In the riskier category of dissent options, federal workers can leak information about pending or actual policies with journalists, activists and influential people on the outside. A senior official at the Bureau of Land Management in the Clinton administration described the leaking of internal documents to interest groups as a particularly effective strategy.

Leaking should be used judiciously, and only on truly significant matters. Most disclosures outside of formal, internal whistleblowing frameworks are, at minimum, a violation of contractual duty and may put leakers at significant legal risk. If the information is classified, then the employee can be fired or criminally prosecuted.

Leaks are among the riskiest of strategies. Once they happen, they can shut down the internal sharing of government documents. Colleagues will face heavy scrutiny, and individuals (besides the leaker) can be penalized. This happened recently when an unknown official leaked the transcript of Trump’s telephone call with the Australian prime minister, resulting in a near-total ban on sharing presidential call transcripts.”

- [An inside-outside strategy for defending the US Republic](#)



img

“The new administration is entitled to use the official channels of government – whether they be press briefings or websites or social media accounts – to put out its own messages, and it can decide what federal employees are allowed to communicate when they are on the job. But the First Amendment still protects those employees’ ability to speak in their private capacities, on their own time, about matters that concern the public.”

- Government Employees Get to Have Opinions, Too

U.S. Government Internal Resources

- Legal Counsel - Internal department/agency officials in offices such as general counsel work for the department/agency, not employees. Despite this, it may be beneficial to seek advice from your ethics counsel.
- [US Merit Systems Protection Board](#) (but see above note regarding whistleblowers)
- The Office of Special Counsel
 - [Most agencies have their own Inspector General Office](#)
Before contacting them, research to ensure your IG or Ethics office is trustworthy and in your court.

Non-government Legal Resources

- ["Retaliation – Public Employees and First Amendment Rights"](#)
- Progressive lawyers at Just Security produced [this guide](#) to dissenting from within 2017

Other Resources for federal employees

- ["Dear Bureaucrat, My Job Wants Me to Lie"](#)
- ["How to work for a president who loathes the civil service"](#)
- [To Dissent or Not to Dissent? Principles of Ethical Resistance for US Federal Servants](#)
- [Government Employees Get to Have Opinions, Too](#)
- ["The Nervous Civil Servant's Guide to Defying an Illegal Order,"](#)
- [Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility](#) (PEER) is an organization that works nationwide with government scientists, land managers, environmental law enforcement agents, field specialists, and other resource professionals committed to the responsible management of America's public resources. PEER supports those who are courageous and idealistic enough to seek a higher standard of environmental ethics and scientific integrity within their agency.
- [A union action to oppose restrictions on EPA employees in the first Trump administration](#)
- A Discussion guide on the [role of the federal civil service in a vibrant democracy](#) to help fed workers identify their values and ethics, using recent news articles as fodder for the discussion questions
- [EPA Ratifies Contract to Protect Employees' Scientific Integrity](#)
- [AFGE one-pager on the Hatch Act](#)
- [AFGE Encourages Locals to Prepare for 2nd Trump Administration](#)
- [NLRB Bans Anti-Union 'Captive Audience' Meetings | HuffPost Latest News](#)
- "Agenda 47" https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agenda_47

The Special Role of the Military

Military personnel must be scrupulously nonpartisan and refrain from personal critique of electoral leaders, especially if they are in the chain of command. However, they can discuss political issues, particularly policies and implementation, as long as they remain nonpartisan.

There is a [long, powerful legacy of courageous military personnel](#) who have taken action to ensure public visibility and/or accountability for unlawful, unethical, and unjust situations carried out by or within the U.S. military.

Political Speech

There is a widespread misconception within the ranks (often due to ignorance of commanders or intentional misinformation to discourage such actions) that military members are not allowed to be involved in any form of political speech or activism. In truth, military personnel who want to stay within regulations must be scrupulously non-partisan and refrain from personal critique of elected leaders, especially if they are in the chain of command (President, Vice President, DoD appointees, etc.). However, military personnel can legally speak to political issues, particularly policies and implementation, as long as they remain non-partisan.

Because regulations can shift readily, it's critical to stay up to date and take the time to learn all you can about the laws that govern your military branch and the process you should follow to protect yourselves. Keep up with any annual adjustments on the latest rules and limits, and under what branch there are regulatory changes. Active military personnel—Army, Navy, Marines, Coast Guard, NOAA-commissioned officers, and Public Health Service commissioned corps operate under the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) rather than civilian law and report to the Department of Defense (DOD).

For example, the Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) manages Army military regulations for ME and EEO. TRADOC periodically updates the ME/EEO guidance through Army Regulation 600-20.

General tips to consider when engaging in political speech publicly as military personnel:

- Consider timing and method of communication - if you are physically at a government or otherwise official post, using government-issued phones or computers, wearing your uniform, or on duty when you engage in political activities, you will be at greater risk for UCMJ action
- If you post online or speak to the press, include clarifying disclaimers that clearly state that you are a military member not representing the DOD or speaking in any official capacity.
- Avoid the perception of partisanship by avoiding events with or for elected officials or candidates, refraining from uplifting partisan content on social media (reposting and linking to sources affiliated with a political party), or directly naming specific officials or political parties in your own content.

Waste, Fraud, Abuse and other Ethical Concerns

- **Equal opportunity complaints** - Military personnel and civilians in the DOD should exercise caution when approaching their respective EEO or MEO officials with inquiries, as representatives are often required to report such inquiries to the Office of their respective Secretariat, and your office will be alerted. Branch members could consider using representatives of sister military branches to report issues with a measure of anonymity. There are also anonymous resources available that help to protect your identity during the early phase of inquiry.
- **Whistleblowing** - There are laws protecting “whistleblowers” who seek to raise the alarm about waste, fraud, or abuse they have witnessed through certain channels. Learn more about those protections and procedures [here](#).
- **Appeals for redress** - The U.S. Constitution, federal law, and DOD regulations protect the right of military personnel to communicate directly with Congress, but risk is still involved. Learn more about this option [here](#).

Resigning, exiting or otherwise refusing orders

- **Public resignation** - This has historically been an effective tool for raising awareness about unethical or unlawful military operations. Individuals typically write a letter describing their reasons and submit it to members of the press. There are countless [examples](#) of this approach in recent history. The consequences of this approach will be shaped by whether the individual was eligible for resignation, contract status (service time owed, for example), and other factors. It's prudent to consult a lawyer if you are unsure and want to avoid certain direct consequences.
- **Conscientious objection** - Individuals who are interested in submitting their Conscientious Objection packet and becoming conscientious objectors can learn more about this process and access support through the [Center on Conscience and War](#).
- **Going AWOL** - Historically, thousands of military personnel have gone “absent without leave” rather than carrying out orders they found unethical or unjust. AWOL is a serious offense that violates the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ), which is the military's code of conduct. Penalties for AWOL can be severe, including confinement, reduction in rank, and forfeiture of pay. If you are AWOL or considering going AWOL and want to understand the possible consequences in order to make an informed decision, you can contact the [G.I. Rights Hotline](#).

Resources to access support for Military personnel

- [GI Rights Hotline](#)
- [Center on Conscience and War](#)
- [National Lawyers Guild - Military Law Taskforce](#)
- [Encrypted form to report incidents or request support](#) (Organized by anti-war Veterans - Anonymous Active Duty incident report form AND method for active duty personnel looking for peer support to explore options)

Further Military Information

- [What is the Appeal for Redress v2? | Veterans For Peace](#)
- [Trump transition team compiling list of current and former U.S. military officers for possible courts-martial](#)
- Army Regulation 600-20: [Army Command Policy](#)
- [Meet the US soldiers and bureaucrats defecting over Gaza | Waging Nonviolence](#)
- [Antiwar Soldier: How to Dissent Within the Ranks of the Military](#), 2008, [Jonathan W. Hutto](#) ;
- [Frameworks for Dissent and Principled Resignation in the US Military: A Primer - Georgetown Journal of International Affairs](#)
- [Why U.S. Army Major Harrison Mann Resigned Over Gaza](#)

Federal employees' unions operate under different laws than other unions. It is [illegal](#) for Federal employees to strike, but a union can play a number of other roles. For example:

- Defend Federal employees against improper political pressure.
- You can bargain with the agency (which is legally required to bargain in good faith) over [certain conditions of employment](#), which do not include salary but include important issues such as telework.
- Ensure your [legal right](#) to a union representative with you at any meeting with management that might lead to disciplinary action.
- Seek mediation and legally binding decisions from the [Federal Labor Relations Authority](#) in the event that an agency violates a legal requirement for dealing with its unionized employees.
- The Federal Labor Relations Authority is headed by three Authority Members appointed for fixed terms and cannot be fired by the President.
- An individual bargaining member can also file a grievance against any disciplinary or adverse action and, in many cases, ask the union to take their case to an independent arbitrator. The arbitrator can then order the agency to reinstate the worker, with back pay and attorney fees to be paid by the agency. Such orders are generally enforceable via the FLRA and, if necessary, in federal court.

During the first Trump administration, some unions expanded beyond the narrow understanding of "working conditions" to include employees' right to do their jobs without improper political interference. For example, the union representing employees of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency started promoting an [EPA Workers' Bill of Rights](#) that included:

- "The right to scientific integrity in EPA work,"
- "The right to enforce environmental laws without political interference," and
- "The right to work on control of greenhouse gasses, to discuss solutions to climate change, and to conduct climate change research."

The union eventually incorporated some of these principles into a [binding contract](#) with the agency. When employees publicize such issues as representatives of their union, rather than as individuals or another type of group, they have additional defense against retaliation by management, because the [law](#) protects an employee's right to present the union's views as its representative. For example, the Federal Labor Relations Authority [ordered](#) the Veterans Administration to rescind the punishment of an employee who had told a television reporter about her union's concerns that understaffing was reducing the quality of care to patients.



How do you know if you are in a union?

For Federal employees, there is a difference between being in the “bargaining unit” and being a member of the union. The bargaining unit is all the employees covered by a particular bargaining agreement (“union contract”) between a union and the agency, based on what part of the agency the job is in and the nature of the work. An employee in the bargaining unit can decide whether or not to join the union. The union represents all employees in the bargaining unit, whether or not an individual employee has joined the union, and all employees in the unit have the same rights under the union contract. If an employee joins the union, they will have union dues deducted from their paycheck, they will be able to vote for union officers and on ratification of union contracts, and they will be eligible to be appointed as shop stewards or other representatives of the union.

Your bargaining unit should be shown on the Standard Form 50 that the agency sends you as notice of each personnel action, such as a change in salary. Box 37 of the form should show a four-digit code for Bargaining Unit Status. You can look up the union for each four-digit code at <https://www.opm.gov/flis/#/profiles>. If the four-digit code is 8888, then management asserts that you are not eligible to be in the bargaining unit. A few types of jobs are excluded by [law](#) from being in bargaining units, such as employees engaged in personnel work that is not purely clerical. If management asserts your job as not eligible (code 8888) and they do not give you a satisfactory explanation of why it is excluded by law, then you can take the matter to the union that represents other workers in your part of the agency. The union can petition the Federal Labor Relations Authority to include your position in the bargaining unit if your position does not meet any of the legal exclusions.

If the Bargaining Unit Status for your job is 7777, it means management asserts that there is not currently any union contract that includes jobs of your type in your part of the agency, even though your job would be eligible if there were a union contract. You can contact the union that covers other workers in your agency, which you can find at <https://www.opm.gov/flis/#/profiles> about disputing management’s assertion that your job is not included in the bargaining unit or about organizing a bargaining unit that does include jobs like yours.

- The American Federation of Government Employees ([AFGE](#)) is the largest federal employee union representing 700,000 federal and D.C. government workers nationwide and overseas.
- The National Federation of Federal Employees ([NFFE](#)) is a national union representing approximately 110,000 blue and white collar government workers across the United States.
- [Council 20](#) of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) is a coalition of 18 local unions at the following federal agencies: the Library of Congress, the Department of Justice, the Department of Agriculture, the Federal Aviation Administration, the Peace Corps, the Corporation for National and Community Service, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, the Voice of America and the Architect of the Capitol. It is affiliated with the 1.4 million-member [AFSCME International Union](#) and the [AFL-CIO](#).
- The National Treasury Employees Union ([NTEU](#)) is a national union representing over 150,000 federal employees in 33 departments and agencies. NTEU members are present within parts of the following Departments and Agencies: Department of Agriculture, Department of Commerce, Department of Energy, Department of Health and Human Services, Department of Homeland Security, Department of the Interior, Department of Treasury, Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, Environmental Protection Agency, Federal Communications Commission, Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, Federal Election Commission, National Credit Union Administration, Nuclear Regulatory Commission, and Securities and Exchange Commission.

Digital Security: Protecting Your Data and Communications 3 4

Information security

Remember that communications over government equipment, including emails, are not private. Forwarding emails from your government account to your private account also makes your home computer subject to scrutiny. Try to keep a clear line between your work and personal devices.

Note that there are some cases when recordkeeping is beneficial. FOIA and Inspectors General can be your friends when the legal or ethical climate becomes murky. Creating a paper trail (electronic and printed) using government email can be helpful when orders are on shaky ethical ground or are coming to you verbally.

But if you and your coworkers want to discuss questionable orders, political harassment, or other potentially sensitive issues that you do not wish to be discovered in a legal process, it is best to start a group chat on your personal device using an encrypted service such as Signal. Signal allows messages to disappear from your device after a set number of hours or days.

Your online presence

If your social media profiles include your full name, position, and department/agency, you may want to remove the details or reduce prominence (e.g. not at the top of your profile) and/or state that "all opinions are my own" or similar. Current guidance on social media is here:

- [Official government-wide ethics policies on personal social media](#)
- [OPM guidance](#)
- [Social Media guidance with regard to Hatch Act](#)
- Check your individual department/agency guidance/policies on social media.

However, adhering to the official rules may still make you vulnerable under this Administration. Select who can see what you post on social media (e.g., "friends only"). AI may be used to harvest public social media posts to detect whether government employees are "loyal" or not. Anything you post publicly in your personal capacity has the potential to be linked to your job and could be used against you.

Threat modeling

When considering the precautions you must take to keep your information and communications from prying eyes, we suggest mapping the threats you face. The Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF) has a threat modeling explainer [here](#). To quote EFF, “Trying to protect all your data from everything all the time is impractical and exhausting. But... security is a process, and through thoughtful planning, you can create a plan that’s best for you. Security isn’t just about the tools you use or the software you download. It begins with understanding the unique threats you face and how you can counter those threats.”

Understanding who your adversaries are likely to be is a key piece. Is it the government itself? (The government has many tools to get ostensibly private or secure information.) Or bad actors on the far-right who might doxx, hack, SWAT, or “expose” you? (These have fewer tools to work with.) This can help you determine the level of protection you need. If it’s the government, how likely are they to care what you’re doing? If you’re talking privately with coworkers about how much you hate your political appointee boss, then maybe not so much (although certain actors would likely be more than happy to “expose” your text messages). If you leaked a document that’s very embarrassing for the administration, they might care a little more.

Note that, in general, the federal government cares more about leaks/whistleblowing in the area of national security than in housing policy, so if you work with national security materials or in a security agency, you will likely need to take extra precautions. If so, we suggest contacting a reputable whistleblower organization to advise you on tech. We also recommend consulting a lawyer before taking any action.



How to protect your information

Unfortunately, it’s extremely difficult to be completely anonymous on the internet. If this is an important goal for you, we suggest consulting with a tech expert. But this isn’t a reason to take NO precautions. You shouldn’t make it easy for adversaries - especially non-government actors - to track your actions and access your data.

Here are some things you can do to protect yourself from adversaries gaining access to your information:

- **Keep work and activism tech as separate as possible.** Keep your communications related to your activism on personal accounts you do not access at work. This applies to cell phones that you use for communication and may connect to workplace wifi.
 - Know that the federal government can and does track what you do on government devices, including printers. Agency IT departments can see which websites you accessed (so, for example, we don't recommend doing a search for "whistleblower resources" on your government device) and which documents you've edited, shared, printed, or taken a screenshot of.
- **Lock down your social media accounts** if you use them for activism or speech that an adversary could target. Remember that privacy is a powerful tool that benefits you and everyone standing with you.
 - Set accounts to private
 - Go through your list of friends/followers and remove people you no longer speak to, any suspicious accounts, or anyone you suspect may rat you out
 - Consider changing your settings so it's more difficult to find you
 - Consider changing your name
 - Enable two-factor authentication
- **Use encrypted messaging, email, file sharing, and meeting platforms.** Platforms with disappearing messages and where the providers don't hold onto your data are best.
- **Create an email address** (or more than one) that's not tied to your real name. Protonmail is best. Consider tying it to a Google Voice number or burner phone number.
- **Enable two-factor authentication** on all platforms you sign into.
- If something is really sensitive, don't record it anywhere.

More guidance and suggestions for tools to use based on your personal threat/risk assessment here:

- [EFF's Surveillance Self-Defense Guide](#)
- <https://digitalfirstaid.org/>
- [Other Resources \(Front Line Defenders\)](#)
- [Anti-doxxing Guide for Activists | Equality Labs](#)
- [Security In a Box: Digital Security Tools and Tactics](#)
- [DIGITAL SECURITY HELPLINE - Access Now](#)
- [Post-Election Digital Security 101 Resources](#)
- [The WIRED Guide to Protecting Yourself From Government Surveillance](#)

Steps to Better Self-Care for Activists

When you take care of yourself, you make better, sounder decisions. Put your own oxygen mask on first.

Your digital self, work self, and personal self are not mutually exclusive. These identities are closely intertwined, especially when it comes to activism work that is so near to your core values. It's hard to prioritize our personal needs, our mental health, and how we navigate the world when it seems like each crisis is worse than the last. But we can't let the sense that these problems are so much bigger than we are put pressure on us to ignore our own well-being. During these next few years, as you navigate through the stress of this work, we encourage each of you to place self-care on your task list DAILY. The following 5 steps will assist you in making your mental health a priority.

REMEMBER
YOUR WHY

01

TAKE CARE
EACH DAY

02

DETERMINE
YOUR LIMITS

03

URGENT V.
IMPORTANT

04

TAKE TIME
AND SPACE

05

BUILD
COMMUNITY

06

GIVE GRACE

07

Steps to Better Self-Care for Activists

01 REMEMBER YOUR WHY

Take 5 minutes to write down your WHY. Why are you doing this work? What makes it so important for you and our nation? What is your motivation? Why does this matter? Keep that paper in an easily accessible place. When you are in a high-stress moment (facing a tough decision, working with an unethical colleague, etc.), re-read your why. Those moments of negativity do not defeat your higher purpose. Your work matters. It is important.

02 TAKE CARE EACH DAY

Take one actionable step each day to take care of your mental health. Examples include but are not limited to decompressing by venting to a friend or taking five minutes to breathe and ground yourself, enjoying a glass of wine and a holiday movie, taking a bath with lavender and candles, watching pointless but hilarious YouTube videos, treating yourself to a favorite food, etc.

03 DETERMINE YOUR LIMITS

Determine your 'absolutely nots' and your 'triggers.' What words/threats/messages/actions cause you to be less productive or feel burned out on your activism work? Determining your line in the sand is an ongoing process that may become more apparent as you continue your work.

Communicate these with those that you are working with. Allow yourself to take a step back when your line is crossed and give that task to someone else. No guilt here. They have their lines drawn and will need you, too.

04 URGENT VS. IMPORTANT

Determine what tasks are **URGENT** versus what tasks are **IMPORTANT**.

URGENT: Your life or someone else's life is in IMMEDIATE danger. There is an immediate deadline (i.e. due in two hours).

IMPORTANT: This is for you to determine. When workloads begin to pile up, as they will these next few months, it is helpful to look at each email and item on your to-do list and rank them by importance. This will help you determine what can wait and what absolutely cannot.

During times of high stress, everything feels urgent. IT ISN'T. Don't let your brain lie to you. If everything is feeling urgent, we recommend the following:

Take a few deep breaths. Place your hand on your stomach and feel your stomach as it rises and falls. Look around the room and start to call out items in your space (my feet are on the carpeted floor, I see a clock in front of me, there is a table and a laptop), start noticing the sounds, the smells, and what your hands are touching. This process allows you to become grounded in your space and begin to gain a true sense of reality and present time. Now, take another look at that email, those tasks yet to be done, and honestly assess what can wait. Just because you wait until tomorrow to complete the task doesn't mean it's not important, it is, but it's not urgent.

05 TAKE TIME AND SPACE

Replenish with the things that bring you joy - and by taking time and space away from the work.

It's okay to take a break. It's okay to sleep. It's okay to eat. It's okay to go to the bathroom. It's okay to refill your water bottle. It's okay to take a step out into the world and away from your laptop. In fact, it's recommended. Our brains do not function promptly, accurately, or appropriately when we are under stress. Doing this work right is important, so allow yourself the ability to delight in self-care, your body, your co-workers, and your cause will thank you for it.

06 BUILD COMMUNITY

Find and build community. Find people who get it, commiserate with them, and/or plan to take action together.

07 GIVE GRACE

Give yourself, and others, grace.

This work is hard, and being alive during this time is hard. People will react in various ways - and you might too. Try to remain soft rather than hard, including toward yourself.

Self Care and Community Resilience Resources

- [Protect Yourself Resources](#) - quick reference list for help with protecting yourself and others with sections on mental health, rights, reproductive health, LGBTQI+, immigrants, etc.
- [Tipping Point UK's Tech Hub](#)
- [12 Building Resilience: Self-care and community care for the long haul](#)
- ["How to build a resilient culture of resistance in hard times"](#) by Daniel Hunter, February 10, 2017
- [Get Into Formation: A Community Safety Toolkit](#) | [VisionChangeWin](#)

Further Reading

The 2024 Context

- ★ [How Joe Biden Can Still Slow MAGA Fascism & Save American Lives](#)
- ★ [Block and Build: Syllabus Overview | Convergence](#)
- ★ [What Happens Next?The administrative state under a second Trump term](#)
- ★ [The Game Theory of Democracy - The New York Times](#) October 2024
- ★ [Trump Draft Executive Order Would Create Board to Purge Generals - WSJ](#)
- ★ [Meet the US soldiers and bureaucrats defecting over Gaza | Waging Nonviolence](#)
- ★ [The 2024 Election - A Crowdsourced Bibliography](#)
- ★ [How to Harden Our Defenses Against an Authoritarian President | Brennan Center for Justice](#)
- ★ [Many in government are worried about Trump's return. At DOJ, they're terrified. - POLITICO](#)
- ★ ['We know what is coming': Federal bureaucrats wrestle with fight-or-flight response to Trump election - POLITICO](#)
- ★ [This interview with States United CEO Joanna Lydgate is an overview of Project 2025](#)
- ★ [This is an index of the columns Joyce Vance wrote about Project 2025 prior to last July](#)
- ★ [Norms Watch by Just Security](#): a weekly email from *Just Security* tracking how and when the Trump administration's policies and actions break from custom, practice, and precedent in politics and law. We'll also be on the lookout for when norms are violated as a response to Trump.
- ★ [The Authoritarian Playbook - Protect Democracy](#) How reporters can contextualize and cover authoritarian threats as distinct from politics-as-usual Protect Democracy
- ★ [Eric Liu, "You're More Powerful Than You Think"](#)

Lest we forget... Federal Employee Resistance 2017-2020

"Civil servants can sue the agency when more subtle approaches fail. This can generate outside support and pressure, particularly when the individual(s) have strong connections to advocacy groups and grassroots organizations on the outside. Border agents from Immigration and Customs Enforcement, who objected to President Obama's directives regarding undocumented immigrants, saying they required them to violate federal law, took this route."

-["Staying true to yourself in the age of Trump: A how-to guide for federal employees"](#)
The Washington Post, 2/10/17

- ★ [Post Carrier Union Endorses Biden for Its Survival](#)
- ★ [Washington State Postal Service Reinstates Sorting Machines](#)
- ★ [The State Department's Entire Senior Management Team Just Resigned](#)
- ★ [Trump Fires Acting Attorney General over Immigration Memo](#)
- ★ [Washington Bureaucrats Are Chipping Away at Trump's Agenda](#)
- ★ [Federal Twitter Accounts Multiply](#)
- ★ [The Resistance Begins](#)
- ★ [Bobbleheads, yes. Official tweets, no. Federal workers wonder where the lines are in the Trump era](#)
- ★ [10 ways movements can encourage and support whistleblowers](#)
- ★ [Save EPA](#) and their [Practical Guide For Resisting The Trump De-Regulatory Agenda](#), written by former EPA staff, this is an EPA-specific version of the [Indivisible Guide](#).
- ★ [If You're a Conscientious Civil Servant, Trump's Newest Executive Order Could Be a Disaster for You](#)

Facilitator's guide to a “know your rights” training for civil servants & federal workers under political pressure

Introduction: This facilitator's guide is for anyone to use and adapt for their own purposes. The purpose is to support trainers in leading empowering workshops for federal employees to learn about their rights in a rapidly changing legal environment, build solidarities in the face of political pressure, and plan individual and small group actions to take in the near future that will be protective of both individuals and the public. It provides clear guidance on how to organize the training in ways that will foster engagement, risk mitigation, and practical action planning. The guide equips facilitators to navigate complex dynamics and inspire participants to play a role in supporting democratic norms.

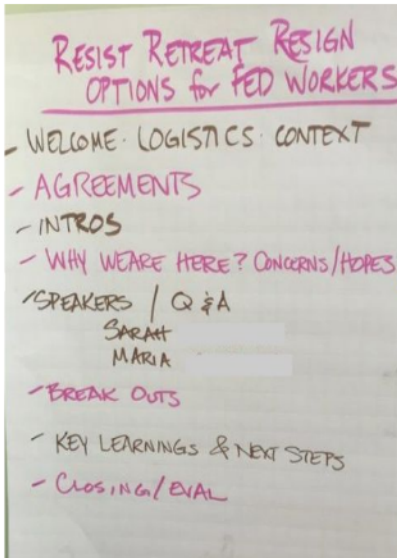
Outreach and publicity: consider segmented messaging about this training, communicating at a higher level of generality for some audiences and in more specificity or with a particular perspective with others. In public communications, consider how to frame this training in ways that make it harder to distort and misrepresent the legal and rightful convening that it is. Frame communications about (and for some audiences, within the workshop) in neutral, nonpartisan terms that capture at the most general level what this training is for. Here is an example of what that might look like removed of any political context (low risk, low clarity), with suggestions in brackets (slightly higher risk, higher clarity):

Title: Understanding Your Workplace Rights: Strategies for Building Community and Finding Support

Description: Are you a federal employee/civil servant looking to connect with others about common challenges [related to the politicization of your work] and explore ways to foster collaboration? Join us for an engaging, nonpartisan workshop designed to share insights into workplace rights and practical steps for building support systems across agencies. Whether you're curious about your rights or eager to strategize solutions to workplace concerns [emerging under the current Administration], this session offers a space to learn and share.

Format: A 2-3 hour session with two guest speakers; lecture, discussion, action planning

Online: a shorter version of this training can be done online, but we strongly encourage security precautions if that is the case. “Infiltration” by someone hostile to the topic is not just a hypothetical, it has happened in the past. Please see the section below on “security considerations,” and take into account the risk mitigation practices that make sense for your group.



In-person room set-up:

- A big circle of chairs or a couple of concentric U shapes are preferable so people can see each other.
- If you have lots of tables, you could pre-organize round tables by agency or group of agencies

Objectives (write these up on a big piece of paper/board at front of room): for federal employees to

- know their rights to dissent and organize in the workplace
- know their rights as a private citizen
- have a digital security check-up/reality check
- strategize about how to build solidarities in the workplace
- scenario plan around ethical and legal dilemmas
- build a local network across agencies/departments

Who to invite for speakers:

- A lawyer or union leader to speak on federal employee rights
- An expert on digital security or experienced activist with digisec skills
- An organizer or activist to speak on strategy, tactics, and solidarity building
 - Ask your speakers how they want to be identified; if they are federal employees themselves, they probably will not want their agency named
 - NOTE: We strongly recommend that you include activists/organizers on your panel. Often lawyers on their own will focus on limitations that can be off-putting and result in a less than empowering session.

Materials needed:

- Registration sign-in sheets, clipboards, pens, name tags (first names only)
- Note cards or small sheets of paper, pens (the papers might say “my concern or hope is…” and a second set say “I intend to _____ in the next week and _____ in the next month” or you can give out blank paper with just verbal instructions)
- White board or flip chart and large markers

Options to consider:

- Group agreements: this is a brief exercise to establish the norms of the group and consent to any ground rules. For this workshop, some sort of confidentiality agreement should be included, as well as norms about respect. Here is some suggested language:
 - Ask everyone to speak for themselves, as they are and think today, not for others
 - “What’s learned in the room can leave with you, but what is said in the room stays in the room.”
 - More ideas are at the bottom of this document

- Pre-registration - if possible, have some way to contact registrants in case of changes due to weather, etc. Keep the list secure, though. Encourage people to use an alternate email address to register and then make sure the registration list is password protected.
- Infiltration: keep in mind that it is possible that some of the people in the room are not there with good intent. They may be interested in inciting people to more radical actions than they are comfortable with, they may be planning a long-term infiltration with a particular group, or they may just be reporting back to someone who is opposed to what we are doing. The facilitator doesn't need to do anything about this because everything in this workshop is legal, nonviolent, and in the open. However, it might be good to remind the whole group that
 - public gatherings like this workshop are not a good place for specific planning or discussion of high risk actions
 - suggest that when people are talking about particular situations relating to themselves, that they phrase their question or suggestion hypothetically, "if someone were considering doing X, what would the issues be?"
 - online meetings are always vulnerable to being secretly recorded. Participants in online meetings should be strongly encouraged to keep their cameras off and to change their display names. Again, this is not because there is anything wrong with them attending this workshop but we know that anyone who is identified may be targeted.
- Suggest a place for people to go afterwards for coffee or drinks in case they want to continue the conversations.

Set-up (3 people recommended):

- Configure the chairs, designate a place for people to put coats
- Write up on the board/post large papers with the workshop objectives, the top-line agenda items, the draft "group agreements," and the overview of the action planning exercise
- Have 2 greeters at the door to offer optional name tags - first names or nicknames only. If you have done a pre-registration, each greeter can have the registration list on a clipboard, organized alphabetically by first name. Just check off people as they come in and if unregistered people show up, assign them a number in case there is room for them.
- If you are taking optional donations for space rental, etc., have a basket or jar set up by the door labeled "donations"
- Pre-print the agency names/groupings in a large font and, based on the number in each group, figure out where in the room they will meet. Recommended groupings: security, intelligence and international affairs; health and science; regulatory, tax, and congressional; environment, agriculture, and parks; justice; other.
- Pre-print the snowball and action planning papers (optional) or ask people to bring pen and paper to the event

Draft agenda:

- Facilitator/team introduces themselves, discusses logistics (toilets, e.g.) and reviews the agenda (2 minutes)
- Group agreements (2 minutes): the facilitator gives any caveats about trust and safety issues (without going into issues about infiltration but emphasizing that it's okay if people look out for themselves) and lays out the proposed ground rules (first names only unless you want to share, what's said in the room stays in the room unless you say otherwise, any members of the press must identify themselves) and then asks for other rules or group norms that people want and writes them on the board. Then the facilitator asks everyone who consents to these rules to raise their hand, anyone who does not consent to raise their hand. If someone does not consent, ask what changes to the rules would help them consent, or negotiate a no-judgement exit for the person.

- Depending on the size of the group:
 - Introductions (name, agency, experience with activism) (5 minutes) OR
 - For a large group, ask folks to share name, agency and experience with activism with two of their neighbors

- Airing of concerns (10 minutes)
 - Snowball exercise: facilitator hands out paper and makes sure folks have pens, then asks everyone to anonymously write down one concern/hope about what is going to happen in their workplace. Then ask them to crumple them and have a “snowball” fight - keep it going for 30 seconds so the snowballs get shuffled. Then everyone picks one snowball out and reads it aloud while a facilitator scribes the main categories of hopes/concerns on a paper at the front.

- Speakers and discussion (45-60 minutes - ask speakers to be concise and general in their presentation so they have time to address specific questions and concerns that come up)
 - Speaker 1 on legal right of federal employees (10-12 minutes), q&a (5 minutes)
 - Speaker 2 on digital security, safety and wellbeing (10-12 minutes), q&a (5 minutes)
 - Speaker 3 on activist tactics and organizing (10-12 minutes), q&a (5 minutes)
 - Open discussion (15-20 minutes) - take 2-3 questions at a time

- Overview of the small group action planning (bolded parts also written on board/paper):
 - 1) each group should decide on a moderator and reporter (someone to report back to the large group at the end)
 - 2) the small group will brainstorm ideas for further action. Ideas to consider: do you want to exchange email addresses/Signal numbers and form an ongoing support group? Do you want to pick accountability buddies to follow up with on your actions? (10-15 minutes)
 - 3) each individual - write down actions you intend to take - one in the next week and one they intend to take in the next month that will address their hope or fear - they don't have to share it. For example, one action in the next week could be to organize lunch outside the office with like-minded colleagues. One action in the next month could be for you and your trusted colleagues to draft a statement of principles that you collectively agree to abide by in a worst case scenario (2-3 minutes)
 - 4) we will share back with the larger group some of your great action ideas (10-15 minutes)

- Wrap-up and next steps for the large group, if any (5 minutes)
 - Announcements/handouts
 - Ask: What next steps would you like the group or the organizers to take, if any?
 - Closing: Popcorn one word take-away (people spontaneously call out one word that describes how they feel now or what they are taking with them from the workshop)

OPTIONAL LANGUAGE FOR GROUP AGREEMENTS:

1. Assume good intent from other speakers but attend to the impact of our words on each other
2. Move up (speak if you're quiet), move back (if you're vocal, use W.A.I.T. - ask yourself, Why Am I Talking?)
3. Respect & listen to each other: one person, one mic; be on time.
4. No hate speech, bigotry, or oppressive behavior
5. Use appropriate language (family friendly, polite)
6. Embrace the work & the journey. We are not going to figure it all out immediately.
7. (Especially with 100+ groups) Use hand signals, ASL clap/twinkle fingers for agreement, Slow down motion; Volume motion.
8. For confidentiality, if needed: What is learned here, can leave here. What is said here, stays here (a variation of Chatham House rules).

Security considerations for online meetings (hosts and participants, depending on risk tolerance)

- Use an email address that is not linked to your personal or professional identity for registration or workshop communications.
- Use secure and anonymous communication platforms (e.g., Signal) rather than social media for sharing.
- If anonymity is critical, use a first name or nickname that does not directly identify you.
- Ensure your personal devices are updated with the latest software and antivirus protections. Obviously, keep everything to do with this meeting off your work devices.
- Avoid using your video unless necessary, and do not include identifying features like your background or full name.
- Only access the meeting through the official invitation link. Only share the link with others you trust.
- If possible, require pre-registration. Enable features like a waiting room for additional security.
Zoom-specific recommendations:
 - require pre-registration and include some customized questions; manually approve registrations or follow up with any that are questionable. Be aware that people who are risk averse may not provide the information you are asking for even if they are legit, so try to balance risk and inclusion.
 - check to see if Zoom has yet enabled a forthcoming feature to hide the meeting link on the pre-registration page and make sure the link is only sent to the email the person registered with
 - alter the email that is sent upon approval of pre-registration. If possible, share the link close to the date of the meeting.
 - enable the waiting room and admit those who match a pre-registration list
 - change the default options for display names, camera on, etc. to provide anonymity by default; those who want to be seen or known can then opt-in.
- When discussing future actions, keep conversations hypothetical.
- Do not engage in discussions about illegal activities or actions that could be misconstrued as extreme or radical.