

Free Speech and Expression

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Approved by Thomas F. Rosenbaum, President; Sonja and William Davidow Presidential Chair; Professor of Physics

The California Institute of Technology is committed to the free exchange of ideas and acknowledges that, in a diverse and thoughtful community, there will be conflicting beliefs and opinions. [Freedom of expression](#) is a core Institute value, central to Caltech's mission of creating knowledge and educating the next generation of intellectual leaders. We encourage open dialogue as a way of addressing differences, learning from one another, and finding common ground, while acknowledging the inevitability and value of community disagreement.

The right to free speech and expression at Caltech includes the right to peaceful dissent, protests in peaceable assembly, and orderly demonstrations. These activities are permitted at Caltech, subject to the procedures and approvals as set forth in this policy. They may proceed unless and until they disrupt Institute operations, educational and research activities, or otherwise infringe upon or significantly suppress others' rights to engage in free speech and expression, including the appropriate expression of unpopular, controversial, and dissenting perspectives.

It is not the role of the Institute to attempt to shield people from ideas and opinions they find unwelcome, disagreeable, or even deeply offensive, and the expression of objectionable speech on its own is not grounds for silencing. Furthermore, under California's [Leonard Law](#), Caltech is prohibited from disciplining students for engaging in protected speech, even speech widely deemed to be reprehensible or offensive.

At the same time, the Institute has an obligation to protect the safety and rights of all Caltech community members and enact reasonable time, place, and manner restrictions to ensure a healthy academic environment. Speech, rallies, marches, and other forms of expression that fall outside the protections afforded by state and federal law remain subject to Institute restrictions, sanction, and discipline, including but not limited to forms of expression that:

- establish or promote a genuine "true threat" toward a specific individual (i.e., the speaker disregards a substantial risk that their communications would be viewed as threatening violence)
- constitute unlawful harassment
- constitute defamation
- incite imminent lawless action
- disrupt or interfere with Caltech's research or educational activities or mission
- disrupt or interfere with Caltech's normal business operations
- violate Institute policies
- violate Caltech's Code of Conduct

In alignment with the foregoing principles and community values, the Institute requires all members of the Caltech community, including students, postdocs, staff, faculty, volunteers, and visitors, to adhere to the following guidelines while on Institute property. Please note that the "Rules of Conduct" set forth in Section "A" apply to both the organized forms of expression set forth in Section "B" as well as the rules governing banners, leaflets, and sound amplification set forth in Section "C".

Forms of Expression on Caltech Property

A. Rules of Conduct

Caltech welcomes the presentation of diverse viewpoints and believes that the appropriate response to an unpopular or controversial idea is a more powerful argument rather than censorship. To realize these goals in a manner that is consistent with our principles and policies, both community members and invited outside speakers must adhere to Institute rules and standards, including the Code of Conduct. The following rules of conduct apply to all persons, whether engaged in a formal event or otherwise:

- No one may interfere with, or block or impede, the normal access, ingress or egress to or from any building or facility, or portion of one.
- No one may interfere or tamper with any part of any emergency alarm system.
- Activities that interfere with the ability of vehicles to enter or exit a roadway or with the normal flow of vehicular traffic are prohibited.
- No one may engage in any activity that endangers personal safety, or results in damage to personal or Institute property.
- No one may engage in any activity that violates the privacy and/or confidentiality of other community members.
- No one may interfere with or disrupt normal Institute operations, including those activities taking place in classrooms, laboratories, offices, study facilities, libraries, or any other organized and authorized Institute activity inside or outside a campus building.
- Damage or destruction of property is prohibited. Should damage, destruction or clean up charges occur, the event sponsor will be responsible for all reasonable charges to address such damage, destruction, or clean up.

Violation of these rules will be subject to Caltech disciplinary proceedings following established processes and may include separation from the Institute. Assessment of violations will follow processes stipulated for students, staff, postdocs, and faculty, as appropriate.

B. Organized Forms of Expression

1. Overview. Speeches, rallies, marches, and/or other organized forms of expression held on Caltech property must have an authorized Caltech-affiliated event sponsor that is actively involved in the planning and management of an event.

a. Authorized Caltech-affiliated event sponsors are:

- academic departments, divisions, and research centers and institutes
- administrative offices and departments within and operating on behalf of the Institute
- independent organizations that are formally affiliated with the Institute, such as the Caltech Y or Caltech Alumni Association
- registered and approved student or employee groups, clubs, or organizations

b. Caltech-affiliated event sponsors must review this policy and work with the respective Institute academic and administrative offices designated below **before** accepting or extending any event invitations, securing space, or confirming and publicizing events:

- Students or student organizations shall contact the Office for the Vice President for Student Affairs.
- Faculty members, postdoctoral scholars, and faculty or postdoctoral organizations shall contact the Office of the Vice Provost.
- All other non-student sponsored event organizers, including divisions, departments, research centers, institutes, administrative offices and departments, and employee organizations, shall contact the Office of the Associate Vice President for Human Resources.

2. External Speakers. External speakers and community members may be invited and hosted by an authorized Caltech-affiliated event sponsor so long as official arrangements have been made with the Institute, as required by this policy.

a. Members of the Caltech community who invite external speakers to campus shall be considered the hosts of such speakers and will be held accountable for the speakers' conduct.

b. The expectation of all members of the community and invited outside speakers is that they adhere to the highest standards of intellectual engagement—expressing their ideas and opinions freely, but also creating space to listen and respond to those who want to present an alternative view.

c. An event should align to the goals and purpose of the Caltech sponsor's organization.

3. Demonstrations and Protests. The right to free speech at Caltech also includes the right to engage in peaceful dissent, protests in peaceable assembly, and orderly demonstrations that may include picketing and the distribution of leaflets. However, these activities shall not disrupt the regular or essential operations of the Institute or significantly infringe on the

rights of others, including the right to listen to a speech or lecture.

- a. Caltech does not have designated free speech zones or areas. However, the use of specific campus space for such sponsored activities shall be designated by the responsible office or group, in consultation with Caltech Campus Security.
- b. Event sponsors are responsible for underwriting reasonable costs associated with organized forms of expression, including facility use fees and ticketing services (where applicable), and any added expenses or costs to the Institute related to security, transportation, and parking.

4. Camping.

- a. For the purposes of this policy, camping is:
 1. The establishment of, or attempt to establish, temporary or permanent living quarters at any location on Institute property other than residence halls, apartments, or other Institute managed housing;
 2. Sleeping outdoors with or without bedding, tent, hammock, or similar device, structure, protection or equipment between the hours of 10:00 p.m. and 8:00 a.m.; or
 3. Sleeping overnight in or under any parked vehicle;
- b. Institute grounds and facilities may not be used for the purpose of camping without Institute permission.

5. Memorials and Other Visual Displays. Community members may create visual displays for the community. Examples of these include shrines, make-shift memorials, flag displays, and flowers. These can be in honor of a holiday, marking the death of a colleague, or in response to world events.

- a. Displays are allowable on the patio on the south side of the Hameetman Student Center and in the Foyer of the Center for Student Services. Community members can contact the Office of Student Experience at ose@caltech.edu to reserve space in these locations.
- b. These displays may remain in the reserved space for up to 7 days. After the allotted time elapses, the organizer of the display is expected to remove the items. If the organizer does not remove the display in a timely fashion, the Institute will dispose of it. Open flames and candles are not permitted. Failure to comply with these rules may constitute violation of campus policy, subject to sanction.
- c. Please note that the Institute assumes no responsibility for these displays. Members should recognize that displays can be damaged by weather.
- d. Displays must otherwise comply with Institute policies and state/federal law.

6. Outside individuals or groups who are not sponsored as set forth in Section B1a do not have a right to access the Caltech campus for the purpose of engaging in speeches, rallies, marches, and/or other organized forms of expression.

C. Banners, Leaflets, and Sound Amplification

1. Banners/Signage. Only Caltech academic departments, divisions, research centers, institutes, and registered student, postdoc, or employee organizations are eligible to display banners and posters in and adjacent to the Hameetman Student Center, the Beckman Mall, and on designated building and community bulletin boards across campus. All banners, signage, posters, leaflets, and other written materials must be posted in accordance with stated requirements and clearly identify:

- the organization or individual(s) presenting the event or topic of speech
- the title, date, and location of the event, if applicable
- contact information for the responsible organization or individual(s).

Outdoor banners and signs in other non-designated areas, apart from individual campus residences which are governed by Caltech housing policies, are not permitted elsewhere on campus.

The use and installation of banners on the light poles along campus walkways is restricted for Institute business only, and subject to the review and approval of the Office of Strategic Communications. Request can be submitted to communications@caltech.edu.

2. Sound Amplification. Use of electronic sound amplification is generally prohibited outdoors, except where such amplification will not interfere with normal operations in an academic environment.

D. Fundraising, Commercial, and Political Activity

1. Campus space may not be used for fundraising or commercial activity, unless the activity complies with the Institute's 501c(3) status, complies with Institute policies, and is pre-approved by the appropriate Caltech administrative office.

2. There is a separate Institute policy governing activities that constitute political campaigning on behalf of, or in opposition to, any candidate for public office. This policy can be found on the Institute's [external relations website](#).

E. Non-Endorsement Language. To avoid any confusion, event sponsors must include conspicuous non-endorsement language in all written materials prepared for the event. The language should clearly communicate that the views, opinions, and activities of the event sponsor(s) or speaker(s) are theirs and not representative of Caltech.

Related Policies and Guidelines

- [Unlawful Harassment and Abusive Conduct Policy](#)

- [Code of Conduct](#)

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