


Welcome to the
Ethics Seminar



**SHARED CODE OF ETHICS AND VALUES
OF THE COMMUNITIES OF**

Counties: Lake, LaPorte, Porter

Cities: Crown Point, East Chicago, Gary, Hobart, Portage, Valparaiso, Whiting

Towns: Burns Harbor, Cedar Lake, Chesterton, Dyer, Hebron, Highland, Lake Station, Lowell, Merrillville, Munster, Ogden Dunes, Schererville, St John, Westville

**CODE OF SHARED
ETHICS AND VALUES**

PREAMBLE

- For government to operate with transparency and accountability it is essential that public officials and employees conduct themselves in ways that uphold the public trust. The Shared Code of Ethics and Values provides guidance and support to public servants for the promotions and maintenance of the highest standards of personal and professional conduct. Because we wish to ensure the public confidence in the integrity of our government entities, it is proposed that all elected and appointed officials, employees, volunteers, and others who participate in government shall personally commit to being trained on the values and standards put forth in this document.

Our Values: Honesty/Integrity

- To exercise the moral courage to hold myself and others accountable for our actions
- To work within the law and in a way that will bear close public scrutiny
- To exhibit trustworthiness
- To employ decision making that promotes the public's best interest
- To avoid impropriety and refrain from misusing an official position to secure unwarranted privileges or advantages for myself or others
- To make no private promises of any kind that may unduly influence my public duties
- To refrain from engaging in business that would be directly or indirectly inconsistent with the conscientious performance of public duties
- To accept the responsibility to expose corrupt and/or unethical behavior
- To protect the public trust by exercising honesty and ensuring transparency

Our Values: Respect/Civility

- To treat every person with dignity and respect
- To accomplish the goals and responsibilities of my individual position while respecting my role as a member of a team and the community at large
- To act in a professional, responsive and courteous manner
- To reach decisions only after considering various points of view
- To work with others in a spirit of tolerance and understanding
- To work to build consensus and accommodate diverse opinions
- To utilize effective communication by listening, asking questions and responding in a way that adds value to the conversation
- To support the public's right to know the truth and encourage diverse and civil public debate in the decision-making process

Our Values: Accountability/ Responsibility

- To refrain from using official positions to secure unwarranted privileges or advantages for myself or others
- To remove myself from every decision-making process in which I, my business, my associates or my family may benefit and upon removing myself from decisions, I will show self-restraint and not voice my opinion on the question
- To conduct my private affairs in a manner that minimizes the risk of real, potential or perceived conflicts of interest
- To make full public disclosure of the nature of any conflict of interest prior to any considered action
- To respect the privacy of others by keeping confidential information that I acquire in the course of my professional duties protected unless a legitimate reason to disclose exists
- To refrain from taking advantage of information received in the course of my professional duties that is not available to the public
- To refrain from directly or indirectly using or allowing the use of government property for anything other than official activities
- To refrain from soliciting or accepting gifts or gratuities that may have a real or perceived influence on my objectivity in carrying out official responsibilities or placing me under obligation to the donor
- To refrain from competing with the community where I am employed or serve as an appointed or elected official

Our Values: Fairness/Justice

- To advocate and promote the most efficient and effective way to deliver public services without prejudice or discrimination
- To publicly acknowledge that the function of government is to serve the best interest of all citizens
- To refrain from granting preferential treatment to family and friends when making staffing decisions or awarding contracts
- To refrain from retaliation or condoning retaliation against those who have exposed corrupt or unethical behaviors
- To assess the effects of inadequate resources on diverse groups within the service population and develop plans to remedy and implement such plans
- To behave consistently and with respect toward all citizens

MOVIE: Government Ethics

We will watch a short video: 11 minutes in length

MOVIE

▶ TOPIC : GOVERNMENT ETHICS

- ▶ Reproduced from Advanced Concept Research

OBJECTIVE:

- ▶ By the end of the program employees will understand clearly the expectations the citizens have of them when it comes to ethics, and that every day they must remain very aware of what is and what is not a potential conflict of interest between their private interests and their obligations to the public.

OVERVIEW

- ▶ Employees learn they are expected to keep confidential government information confidential, must never show favoritism, must not seek special privileges and must never use government property for personal use.

OVERVIEW:

- ▶ They learn they must not conduct government business with companies in which they have a financial interest, they must take no outside employment that conflicts with their official duties, and they must not accept gifts from anyone if could be assumed it was intended to influence them in the conduct of their duties.

DISCUSSION BEFORE VIEWING

- ▶ What are your ethical obligations as a government employee?

Instructor only slide –hidden

- ▶ (Answers will give the discussion leader an idea of the current awareness the employees have about their ethical responsibilities, which can later be compared with the ethical concepts in the program. The answers will also cause the employees to begin thinking about their attention during the viewing of the program.)

VIEW MOVIE

- ▶ Let's take a look at the movie and see if you are on the right track.



DISCUSSION AFTER VIEWING

- ▶ #1:
- ▶ Why are you expected to keep confidential government information confidential?

ANSWER #1:

- ▶ (This information is always of a private nature and like taxpayer information, medical records, criminal histories, and juvenile records, it may be against the law to disclose it. You are also no ever permitted to use the confidential information for your own private gain or give that information to anyone who has not been authorized.)

QUESTION #2:

- ▶ Most of us already know government employees should never show favoritism, but why?
- ▶ (We work for all the citizens and are hired to treat all citizens equally).

QUESTION # 3:

- ▶ If you violate the code of ethics, you could be disciplined. What are the forms of discipline an employee can receive?
- ▶ ANSWER: (Unethical behavior can result in anything from a letter of reprimand to suspension and even termination.)

QUESTION #4:

- The program states you may not personally profit from government business. What does that mean?
- **ANSWER:** (You cannot direct business to any company in which you have a direct or indirect financial interest. You also cannot conduct personal financial business with any company you have contact with in your role as a government employee.)

QUESTION #5:

- It would be possible to list all the business activities that might conflict with your duties, so if you're thinking of engaging in outside financial interests, what is the first thing you should do?
- **ANSWER:** (The correct action is for you to first obtain proper approval from your supervisor.)

QUESTION #6:

- When is unethical for you to receive a gift from someone?
- **Answer:** (It is unethical for you to accept a gift under any circumstances in which it could be reasonably assumed that the gift was intended to influence you in the conduct of your official duties.)

QUESTION #7:

- When is it permissible to use government property for your personal use?
- **(Never. Use of government owned property is restricted at all times to official government business only.)**

QUESTION #8:

- You are going to meet staff members who will become good and loyal friends, and if you see your friend violating the government code of ethics, what are you going to do?

ANSWER #8

- **(As a government employee you want to be clear in your mind that it is your obligation to report to your supervisor immediately any illegal or unethical behavior by fellow staff members that you observe. It is worth remembering, experience has shown that those staff members who break the law are unusually eventually caught, and those who protected them are also caught. Both are disciplined.)**

WHAT WOULD YOU DO?



DIRECTIONS:

- ▶ For each of the following ethical dilemmas, participants are to identify the course of action they would take, the issues that are involved, and the potential consequences of each option.

QUESTION #1:

- ▶ A colleague whom you consider a friend has been taking petty cash. You have just learned about your friend's actions. What would you do?
- ▶ ____ Tell the appropriate authority what you know.
- ▶ ____ Keep quiet. You do not want your friend to be fired over such a small matter.
- ▶ ____ Other:

KEY POINTS: #1

- ▶ **Key points:** This situation pits personal and organizational loyalties against each other. Even though the amount stolen may be minimal, this situation is very serious because it involves theft of government funds.
- ▶ By saying nothing, a manager or supervisor is in reality condoning the act and could be held accountable. It could also be argued that if you say nothing, your friend might try more serious embezzlement in the future. Some participants might believe that a better course of action would be to confront the employee and insist that he or she come clean; if this course of action is taken, it is critical that the manager or supervisor be prepared to turn in the employee if the employee refuses to come clean. Paying back the money is not sufficient; the employee must admit to the theft and make restitution.

QUESTION #2:

- ▶ You have worked with a local government supplier for many years and have developed a good relationship with the sales representative. He mentions that he has some season tickets for the local professional basketball games that he cannot use. He suggests that you and your spouse accept them as a gift. What would you do?
- ▶ ____ Accept the tickets and list the tickets on your financial disclosure form. The sales representative is a friend and is not asking for anything in return.
- ▶ ____ Turn down the offer of the tickets. You believe that the gift might compromise your objectivity or others' perception of your objectivity in your relationship with this and other suppliers.
- ▶ ____ Other:

KEYPOINT #2:

- ▶ **Key points:** Many local governments have rules about gifts; this would be a good time to review these rules. Regardless, it is critical that employees follow guidelines prescribed by state financial disclosure laws, which usually require public employees to disclose all gifts. Most government employees find that their lives are less complicated, however, if they make it a practice not to accept gifts of any kind from those who do business with local government.

QUESTION #3:

- Your local government's policy allows for a per diem for meals when employees travel on business. You have decided to stay with old friends rather than at a hotel and plan to eat dinner at their home. As you fill out your travel expense form, you reflect on the per diem. What would you do?
- ____ Claim the per diem. After all, on some trips the per diem has not covered all of your expenses.
- ____ Claim only those expenses you incurred.
- ____ Other:

KEY POINT #3:

- **Key points:** It may be tempting to accept the per diem—after all the employee has saved the government money by forgoing a hotel stay. It is critical to be honest and accurate when asking for reimbursement of expenses, however, and to avoid misrepresenting expenses or misuse of travel funds. The per diem is intended to cover expenses; if no expenses were incurred, accepting the per diem is dishonest. What would you do?

QUESTION #4:

- The governing body has just approved a staff recommendation to refurbish the community's parks with the latest playground equipment. The manufacturer of this equipment has offered to pay for your trip to nearby resort town to see the layout of the equipment in use.
- ____ Accept the offer. The governing body has already approved the purchase, so having the company pay for your trip is merely part of a public-private partnership that will save the taxpayers money.
- ____ Insist on having the local government pay for the trip. You want to avoid any appearance of influence.
- ____ Other:

KEYPOINT #4:

- **Key points:** This situation poses a conflict between the value of saving money for the agency and of accepting a gift from a business that may secure a contract with the county. If the employee believes that it is in citizens' best interest to make the trip, the local government should pay. If there is nothing to be gained from the trip, the employee should not go, regardless of who is paying. What would you do?

QUESTION #5:

- An employee whom you supervise is having personal problems that are affecting her work. The employee is frequently late and has failed to meet several important deadlines. What would you do?
- ____ Document the problems carefully, tell the employee that her performance is unacceptable, and draft a performance improvement plan. Hold the employee accountable for any lapses.
- ____ Look the other way. Since the problems are due to personal issues, performance will improve once the employee resolves these issues. You sympathize with the employee and want to avoid adding to her problems.
- ____ Other:

KEY POINT #5:

- **Key points:** It is critical to address any performance problem promptly and objectively. Ignoring an employee's poor performance, does a disservice to the organization, places more responsibility on others, and tacitly supports negative behavior. Moreover, the employee is being paid for work that she is not doing that he is getting paid for work he is not doing, which is essentially a falsification of payroll records. The supervisor needs to let the employee know that her performance is hurting the quality and timeliness of work and help develop an improvement plan that clearly identifies goals, the steps that the employee must take to improve, and the consequences of failing to achieve stated goals.
- Since the supervisor believes that the performance problems are due to some personal issues, the supervisor should also offer some support in addressing these issues, such as the local government's employee assistance program. The supervisor cannot mandate this help, however.

QUESTION #6:

- You were recently promoted to a job as a building inspector. You have just learned that some of the inspections that your predecessor claimed to have completed were never undertaken. What would you do?
- ____ Keep the problem to yourself. Your job is to do the inspections that are scheduled now, not to check up on someone else's work. There is no way to hold the building official responsible, so there is no reason to risk word getting out to the media.
- ____ Inform your supervisor or the department head, even if it means that you have to "reinspect" the buildings.
- ____ Other:

KEYPOINT #6:

- **Key points:** Although there could be short-term embarrassment to the city or department if this problem is reported, the public outcry would be far worse if citizens learned of a "cover-up." Moreover, if a building that had not been inspected experienced a fire or structural problem, the government could be held liable.

QUESTION #7:

- The government recently purchased plants for several parks and has several left over after planting them. One of your best employees has approached you to ask if he can take the plants home. What would you do?
- ____ Let the employee take the plants. Since they are going to be thrown away otherwise, you consider the plants a reward for good work.
- ____ Explain the employee that letting him take the plants could appear to be inappropriate. The press might make a big deal out of this type of thing.
- ____ Other:

KEY POINT #7:

- **Key points:** This situation appears innocuous, but giving the plants away could be construed as misuse of government funds. Purchasing more of any item than necessary is wasteful and could also be considered a breach of ethics, as ethical decision making requires making the best use of government funds. The supervisor needs to discuss this situation with his or her manager or department head to find the optimal solution. If there is no other park or government property where the plants could be used, it might be a better option to allow the public to purchase them at cost.

QUESTION #8:

- Your spouse works for a small company that is building a new office. The company is considering hiring a consultant to help with the permitting process and the paperwork that is required. A colleague in the planning department has talked about getting some consulting work on the side and suggested that he might be a good candidate. He is not directly involved in the plan review or permitting process, but he has learned enough about these processes to be of great help to your spouse's company. He has asked you to talk to your spouse, making this connection could be a real boost for your spouse's career. What would you do?
- ____ Give him your spouse's phone number, and let them work it out. After all, it doesn't really involve you.
- ____ Suggest to your colleague that such action represents a conflict of interest. Tell him that he should not be accepting jobs as a consultant when he still has a job with the city.
- ____ Other:

KEY POINT #8:

- **Key points:** Any time an employee who works for the government accepts a consulting job in his or her area of expertise, there is a potential conflict of interest. It simply would not look good to have an employee in the planning department moonlighting as a consultant. It is the job of managers and supervisors to help promote ethical decision making throughout the organization, so this should be seen as an opportunity to educate the planning department employee about the importance of protecting the government's image and considering the public's perception when making decisions.

QUESTION #9:

- A prominent developer is about to put up a new housing development. You and your spouse would love to buy one of these premier homes, but you have just sold your house and need to move somewhere quickly—sooner than the homes will be ready. There is a waiting list on rental units in a nearby development. You know the developer well from past experience in the planning department: when you casually mention your dilemma, he offers to rent you a unit temporarily at a reduced price while he builds your home.
- ____ Turn down the offer. Although there are no legal barriers to this offer, it could be perceived by the public or press as unethical.
- ____ Accept the unit. You have no influence on zoning or permit decisions, and you don't expect any issues involving the developer to come before the council in the near future.
- ____ Other:

KEY POINT #9:

- **Key points:** It is important not to take a gift from anyone who is or may be doing business with the government. This includes most developers. Some participants might suggest taking the unit but insisting on paying full rent, but this option also represents a misuse of the employee's position with the local government, as the employee would be receiving something that is not available to the general public. There are two important issues. Furthermore, it is important not to assume that just because you are not involved with a vendor today that you won't be involved in the future. The employee cannot be sure that he or she will not have to make a recommendation on an issue involving this developer. Even if the employee discloses the rent subsidy and recuses him- or herself from making recommendations on future issues, it may lead others to question the objectivity of the employee.

QUESTION #10:

- You are on a self-directed work team that has been in place for three months. The team has no "official" leader, but you have emerged as a leader of sorts, partly because you have more experience than some of the other team members. Lately, you have noticed that one of the members of the team has been absent quite a bit, and the team is struggling to figure out how to catch up on the work that has lapsed as a result. One of the other members of the team confided in you yesterday that this employee has been taking "mental health days" to use up some of her sick leave. Your colleague asked you to keep the conversation confidential. What should you do?
- ____ Nothing. You are not in charge, and saying something would betray your colleague's confidence.
- ____ Bring up the employee's continued absence at your next team meeting. The employee is misusing sick leave, and the team is suffering as a result. You should decide as a team what to do.
- ____ Other:

KEY POINT #10:

- **Key points:** When a self-directed work team is formed, its members need to discuss expectations and ground rules. When one or more team members do not support the team's mission, the team must give that individual the feedback needed to improve performance. The employee's use of sick leave is having negative consequences for the rest of the team, creating an unfair work environment. Although the supervisor is not the government-appointed leader, he needs to use his leadership skills to further the mission of the team and the organization. Point out that in cases like these ethics and leadership are closely related.

QUESTION #11:

- You have been interviewing candidates for several summer jobs. The application deadline was last week, and you expect to finish your interviews by next Friday. The mayor called you this morning to tell you that her niece's completed application was on the way and to ask you to squeeze her into the interview schedule. What would you do?
- ____ Tell the mayor that the deadline for applications has already passed, so it would be unfair to interview any additional candidates.
- ____ Schedule a meeting with the mayor's niece, but hold her to the same standards as all the other candidates. The important thing is to hire the best people for the job.
- ____ Other:

KEY POINT #11:

- **Key points:** Unless you have extended the deadline, it would be unethical to interview the mayor's niece. By bending the rules, you have already lowered—or changed—the standards for different candidates. This is not only unethical, it may be illegal. It is important to be direct with the mayor and clearly explain the situation.

QUESTION #12:

- One of your employees has just received a promotion that will require him to spend significant time out in the field. The government has strict rules about the use of cell phones. They are to be used sparingly to call supervisors and colleagues only. You have become aware that this employee is using the phone to check in with his son, who is alone in the afternoons after school. What would you do?
- ___ Remind the employee of the policy regarding cell phone use and demand that he stop using it for any other purpose.
- ___ Ignore the calls. You respect the employee's commitment to his family, and a short call every afternoon has no impact on his ability to get the job done.
- ___ Other:

KEY POINT #12:

- Key points:** It is the supervisor's job to enforce the rules. Ethics requires enforcing the rules equally for all employees. If the supervisor feels that there should be exceptions to the policy, he or she should bring the issue up with the department head to change the policy. One solution may be to require employees to reimburse the government for any personal calls.

QUESTION #13:

- You are a supervisor in the parks department. During a recent storm, one of your employees experienced significant property damage. More than a dozen trees were knocked over, and one tree hangs precariously over his house. Several of the employees on your work team are planning to work this weekend to help the employee cut up and haul away the damaged trees. The employees have asked you if they can borrow a chainsaw from the department to use over the weekend. What would you do?
- ___ Let them use the chainsaw, but remind them that it needs to be returned first thing Monday morning.
- ___ Decline their request. The chainsaw is government property.
- ___ Other:

KEY POINT #13:

- Key points:** The supervisor should take this opportunity to explain to the work team that any use of government property for personal projects is a breach of ethics. Personal use adds wear and tear to the equipment, perhaps making it necessary to replace it sooner than necessary. There are also liability issues to consider. Insurance would be unlikely to cover an injury that occurred off hours; the government could be held liable if someone got hurt.

QUESTION #14:

- Because your job requires you to work on utilities projects all over the city, you have the use of a marked city car, which you park at your home overnight. Your son's preschool is next to the public works office where your workday always begins. He is small enough to need a car seat, which you have secured in the back seat of this vehicle. This short time together is enjoyable to both you and your son, and you make sure to leave plenty of time to drop him off, so that you are never late for work. One morning you suddenly realize that you were supposed to bring breakfast treats to the preschool today. If you hurry, you can load up your son, stop by Target on the way, and still get him and yourself where you need to be. What should you do?
- ___ You should not be driving your son around in a city car in the first place.
- ___ The morning trip to preschool is okay because it does not involve any further driving and thus does not cost anyone anything. However, you should not make that detour to Target.
- ___ The well-being of the community's children—yours and the others at the preschool—is something this city prides itself on and seeks to encourage in every way. Within limits—for instance, if Target is not too far out of the way—it is fine to use the car in all these ways.

KEY POINT #14:

- Key points:** This car is paid for by taxpayers. Some cities have clear regulations regarding how those with city cars can use them, and if these rules allow a trip like the morning trip to preschool, which does not require any extra mileage, and if your supervisor knows about this and approves it, this use may be acceptable in your city. However, even in cases such as this, seeing a city car being used in this way may make taxpayers suspicious about your use of government resources. Spotting the booster seat in the back as you work at various locations may raise further questions. This is something city governments and employees should consider as a general matter of policy, taking account of public perceptions as well as employees' convenience.

QUESTION #15:

- Your city has a presence on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and other social media outlets. Your job is in the parks department and you have no interaction at work or outside work with the people responsible for the city's work in social media. However, you enjoy spending personal time outside of work checking out social media and you sometimes check the city's pages. One day you notice that a number of negative citizen comments have been posted about "the kind of kids" who hang out in one of the city parks. You sense racial overtones in these comments and angrily post a comment charging these citizens with racism. The next morning you tell your supervisor what you have seen and written online. Have you acted ethically?
- ____ No. Because you work for the parks department, you should not post comments related to parks department business, even on your own time.
- ____ Yes. You spoke out against racism, expressing a strongly held value of your city government, and you were honest with your supervisor about what you had done.
- ____ Other.

KEY POINT #15:

- **Key points:** It is good that you informed your supervisor of what you read online so that the city can be aware of this conflict in the larger community and take steps to address tensions. It is also good that you were transparent about your own participation in the online comments. However, as a government employee you should not post public comments on matters related to the city, and especially on matters related to your own area of work. Your comments might be seen by citizens as official government pronouncements, even if you say things the whole government would support. Others in city government should be managing the city's online presence—including addressing any prejudicial remarks that may appear there.