



Ethics Guide for Public Employees

SEAC represents local government entities of Lake, Porter and LaPorte Counties who have voluntarily resolved to adopt to the Code of Shared Ethics and Values and work together to achieve the Commission's primary goals of:

- Heightening awareness of ethical issues within municipal government.
- Assisting municipal employees with the practical tools to make ethical decisions.

We accomplish this mission through regular training sessions, training materials, advocacy articles and an ongoing collaborative effort to enhance ethical behavior within participating governments.



Contact Us

President@sharedethics.com

SHARED ETHICS ADVISORY COMMISSION

Bringing Ethics Awareness and Training to our Communities

Visit us online at www.sharedethics.com

Welcome!

Our community, as a member of SEAC (Shared Ethics Advisory Commission), has voluntarily resolved to adopt the Code of Shared Ethics and Values. This brochure will introduce you to that Code and address potential ethical issues that you may encounter.

The Code

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 Code of Shared Ethics and Values provides guidance and support to public servants for the promotion and maintenance of the highest standards of personal and professional conduct. The following sections give further guidance on the Code's public service values.

Honesty / Integrity



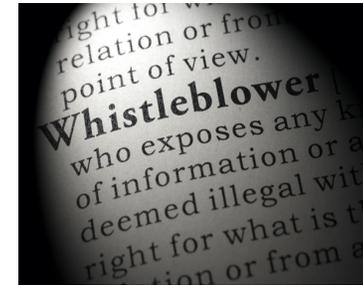
Ethical behavior expects you to exercise the moral courage needed to hold yourself and others accountable and further to expose corrupt and/or unethical behavior. You are expected to work within the law and to employ decision-making that promotes the public's best interests, avoiding the misuse of position to secure privileges for yourself or others. You are expected to protect the public trust by displaying honesty and ensuring transparency.

Harassment and Bullying



Everyone deserves a workplace that is safe and where they are respected and valued regardless of their gender, ethnicity, religion or sexual orientation. Ethical behavior requires us all to act in a professional and courteous manner, treating all coworkers and community members consistently and with dignity and respect. There is no room for harassment or bullying of any kind. But what do you do if you feel unsafe, or if you witness one of your coworkers or community members being harassed or bullied? You must be brave and report any wrongdoing to your supervisor or a local leader.

Whistleblower Protection



You are striving to be an honest, dedicated public servant. You expect to be devoted to your career in public service and take pride in what you accomplish. Hopefully, you'll spend your whole career serving your community alongside co-workers who share your commitment to honor and excellence.

But... what if you see a co-worker doing their job in a way that endangers the public's health or safety? What if you see a colleague wasting your department's budget? What if you see a supervisor or elected official violating a law? What should you do?

Be brave and be smart: report any wrongdoing to your supervisor or a local leader. The Code calls for whistleblowers to be protected. Reporting any wrongdoing is part of what it means to be a public servant, taking pride in doing your part to protect our community and the people it serves. One person can make a difference.

Misuse of Public Property



The goal of the Code is to assure taxpayers that community resources are being used only for community purposes. Does that mean you shouldn't make a dentist appointment from your work phone, or read a newspaper online at your lunch hour? Of course not. As long as you're delivering an honest day's work to the taxpayers you don't need to be concerned about occasional use of your phone or computer for personal purposes. (However, you should learn and follow your department's policies, which may be stricter than the Code.) Here are some examples of activities that would violate the Code:

- Using community resources to conduct a private business. If you have a second job, make sure you do it on your own time, so that the community isn't paying you to work for someone else. Make sure you're not using community facilities or equipment to conduct that second job. Even if you're using your own equipment, you shouldn't conduct a private business from your community work site.
- Using community resources for campaign purposes. Even if you're using your own equipment, you shouldn't do campaign work from your community work site, or on job time. Campaign activity should be voluntary, away from your work site and on your own time.
- Using confidential information you learn through your community work for a non-community purpose.

Again, these situations are examples of behavior inconsistent with ethical decision-making.

Respect / Civility



Ethical behavior calls you to act in a professional and courteous manner, treating everyone with dignity and respect. You understand that you are a member of a team and the community at large. Ethical decisions are made by building consensus and support the public's right to know the truth, encouraging diverse and civil public debate, working with others in a spirit of tolerance and understanding different points of view.

Accountability / Responsibility



You should not use your position to secure unwarranted privileges. Gifts that could influence objectivity in carrying out your duties cannot be accepted. Private matters should be conducted in such a manner as to minimize conflicts of interest and conflicts should be reported prior to any action. Confidential information must always be protected, and you should not take advantage of information that is not available to the public. Government property should not be used for anything other than official activities.

Fairness / Justice



To act ethically, you must behave consistently and with respect toward all citizens and deliver public services without discrimination or preference. The function of government is to serve the best interests of all citizens and to assess the effects of inadequate resources on diverse groups and work to remedy the situation. Special treatment should not be given to family and friends.

Those who have exposed corrupt or unethical behaviors should not experience retaliation.

Common Ethical Dilemmas

What if you are faced with an ethical dilemma yourself, or see a colleague who isn't following the values stated in the Code? Here are some common issues and guidelines that we hope can help. As always, if you have any questions or doubt please reach out to your supervisor or a local leader.

Favoritism



Accepting favors from people you do community business with calls into question your ability to be impartial in your dealings with them. Are you going to come down hard on a contractor for missing a costly deadline when that contractor has just bought you a meal and let you use their Blackhawks season tickets? Even if you are sure you won't let that interfere with your judgement, how will the public view the matter? Accepting

favors calls your integrity into question, reflecting poorly on you and the community.

Before you take any gift or favor from someone with whom you have or expect to have dealings in your official capacity, it's best to check in with your supervisor or local leader. If you're involved in regulatory or contractual dealings with the person offering you a meal or tickets, you're probably going to have to decline. But if it's a small gift of modest value and especially if you can share it with your coworkers, or the person offering you a meal isn't someone you have or expect to have official dealings with, then it may be permissible. But the rules are complex, so it's best to get advice from your supervisor or a local leader before accepting gifts or anything of value. Offers of tickets, meals, electronic devices, etc. should always raise a warning flag.

Conflicts of Interest

It doesn't happen every day, or even every year, but sometimes your responsibilities as a public employee could have an impact on your life away from the workplace. In such a situation, ask yourself these questions:

- Do I have a personal financial interest in a matter I'm supposed to be working on?
- Does someone in my immediate family, or someone who lives with me, or someone with whom I have a personal relationship have a financial interest in this matter?
- Does a business or non-profit that I serve as an officer, director, trustee, partner or employee have a financial interest in this matter?



If your answer to any of these questions is "yes," you should disclose the conflict and disqualify yourself from working on the matter, subject to the specific direction of your fully informed supervisor. One of the key values in the Code is that public employees do their work impartially, without any conflict between their duties to the public and their personal interests.

What if you answer "no" to all of the questions about financial interests, but there is still something about your role in a project that might be questionable. For example, what if you're serving on an interview panel and your brother's girlfriend is a candidate? She's been attending family celebrations and vacations for years; should you really be helping decide whether she gets a job in your department? Wouldn't your supervisor, or another person being interviewed, question your motives if they knew about the relationship?

In these cases, another one of the key values of ethical decision making... transparency... comes into play. Be open. Notify your supervisor or a local leader and put it on record that you have some connection that could cause someone to question your independence. When in doubt, always ask your supervisor or a local leader for guidance.