



2023 Annual Report



Bringing Ethics Awareness and Training to our Communities

Visit us online at: www.sharedethics.com



2023 Annual Report

January 17, 2024

Dear SEAC Member Community Leader,

Thank you for your membership and commitment in the Shared Ethics Advisory Commission (SEAC).

SEAC represents the local government entities of Lake, Porter and LaPorte Counties who have voluntarily committed themselves to the Code of Shared Ethics and Values and who 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.

As required by Article 6(c) of our governing Interlocal Agreement, SEAC hereby submits this annual report to our member communities to share more details about our actions during 2023. We have organized the report into the following sections:

1. Structure and organization
2. Membership
3. Funding
4. Ethics Summit
5. Training
6. Candidate Ethics Action Pledge
7. Outreach and Media Coverage
8. 2023 and 2024 SEAC Goals

Thank you again for your membership and support of SEAC. Please feel free to reach out to me or your SEAC Commissioner with any questions.

Sincerely,

Courtney Smith, President SEAC
president@sharedethics.com

2023 Annual Report

1. Structure and Organization

SEAC is working effectively and efficiently with the current structure established in 2019 including the following committees: Executive, Training and Communications. This structure, along with regular Commission and committee meetings, has proven valuable in ensuring SEAC stays on track toward meeting our goals, while also discussing possible future projects and activities.

SEAC is no longer utilizing NIRPC for administrative assistance. We now use our volunteers (Commissioners and Joint Board of Delegate Members) along with periodic outside assistance to help with administrative functions. SEAC does continue to utilize the NIRPC location for in-person meetings and SEAC material storage.

2023 SEAC Committee Structure

Executive Committee (Chair: President, Courtney Smith)

- Members include:
 - Vice President (Julie Wendorf)
 - Training Committee (Cecile LaCombe Petro)
 - Communications Committee (Julie McElmurry)
 - President Emeritus (Cal Bellamy)
- Focus on overall Commission management
- Strategic Planning

Training Committee (Chair: Cecile LaCombe Petro)

- Focus on Train the Trainer, Board and Commissions and Managers training
- Conduct Employee Survey every few years
- Update training as needed

Communications Committee (Chair: Julie McElmurry)

- Manage the Candidate Ethics Action Pledge process
- Draft and manage distribution of Annual Report
- Manage website contractor
- Ensure all key documents are current
- Provide commissioners with communication schedule and materials
- Maintain contact with media

Summit (Chair: Julie Wendorf)

- Plan and host the Summit
- All Commissioners assist with Summit work

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2. Membership

During 2023 we saw various changes to our appointed Commissioners and Board of Delegates. This is not unusual given the nature of our volunteer organization including the fact that the Joint Board of Delegates is populated with elected officials. However, it can be disruptive to meeting our goals.

Most notably, our President, John Bowker, long time Commissioner for Valparaiso, and our Vice President, Art Russell, long time Commissioner for Merrillville, both stepped down and resigned from SEAC mid-year. We thank John and Art for their service, as well as all past and current Commissioners for their service and support of ethics! And we're thankful that Courtney Smith, Commissioner for Porter County, stepped up to be President and Julie Wendorf, Commissioner for Crown Point, agreed to serve as Vice President.


Below is the most up-to-date list of member communities and their appointed Commissioners and Delegates. We currently have eight communities in the process of finding new Commissioners and three communities in the process of finding new Board of Delegate members.

SEAC Commissioners and Joint Board of Delegates - JAN 1, 2024			
#	Community	SEAC Commissioner	Joint Board of Delegates Member
1	Burns Harbor	Joan Stewart	Jane Jordan
2	Cedar Lake		Jennifer Sandberg
3	Chesterton	Todd Elliott	James Ton
4	Crown Point	Julie Wendorf, Vice President	Andrew Kyres
5	Dyer	Julie McElmurry	Mary Tanis
6	East Chicago	Dick Morrisroe	Gilda Orange
7	Gary	Burgess Peoples	Darren Washington
8	Hebron	Thomas Chihocki	Don Ensign
9	Highland		Thomas Black
10	Hobart	Dale Combs	Deborah Longer
11	Lake County	Cecile LaCombe Petro	Jerry Tippy
12	Lake Station		Bill Carroll
13	LaPorte County		Joie Winski
14	Lowell	Manny Frausto	John Yelkich
15	Merrillville		
16	Munster	Michael McIntyre	Wendy Mis
17	Ogden Dunes	Todd Larkin	Steve Grandfield
18	Portage		
19	Porter County	Courtney Smith, President	Laura Shur Blaney
20	Schererville	Sandra Davis	Janice Malinowski, President
21	St John		
22	Valparaiso		Peter Anderson
23	Whiting	Ken Zubeck	Steve Spebar
	President Emeritus, At Large	Cal Bellamy	--
	At Large	Michael Suggs	--
	Advisor	Karen Marben	--
	Advisor	Tom DeGiulio	--

*Peach highlighted rows are members currently with no Commissioners or Board of Delegate members

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We encourage any communities with a vacancy to fill them soon. Below we have included information regarding the duties of these roles for reference. SEAC is looking for Commissioners and Board of Delegates members who are eager to support the Code of Shared Ethics and Values and ready to work toward our goals of heightening awareness of ethical issues within municipal government and assisting municipal employees with the practical tools to make ethical decisions.



Bringing Ethics Awareness and Training to our Communities

Commissioners

Qualifications:

1. Not an employee of the appointing entity.
2. "... persons who live, work in or hold property in Lake, Porter or LaPorte Counties, Indiana." *
3. "These members should be persons of good character" *
4. Past and current members have included private citizens active in their community, such as retired officials or judges, lawyers, educators, and clergy.


Appointment:

<u>Cities</u>	<u>Town</u>
Nominated by Mayor	Nominated and approved by Town Council
Approved by City Council	

Duties:

1. Faithfully attend regular Commission meetings (every other month) and also special meetings and Commission events as needed.
2. Actively participate in the discussion, planning and execution of the Commission's work.
 - Ethics Summit
 - Training activities
 - Ethics Pledge
 - Communication activities
3. Regularly update and maintain contact with community leadership and trainers serving your community.
4. Advocate and promote ethics in local government.
5. Committed to setting a strong example of integrity and high moral conduct.

*Interlocal Agreement



Bringing Ethics Awareness and Training to our Communities

Board of Delegates Members

Qualifications: Preferably an elected official from the member community, but a senior staff member is acceptable.

Appointment:

<u>Cities</u>	<u>Town</u>
Nominated by Mayor	Nominated and approved by Town Council
Approved by City Council	

Duties:

1. Faithfully attend Board of Delegate meetings (two to four meetings a year, called by the chairperson)
2. Elect a chairperson and determine which member community's clerk-treasurer will serve as fiscal administrator
3. Receive reports from the Commission on SEAC activities and programs
4. Review and set member community dues for the coming year
5. Review and approve SEAC's budget for the coming year
6. Advocate and promote ethics in local government.
7. Committed to setting a strong example of integrity and high moral conduct.

2. Funding

Member community dues continue to fund SEAC. 2023 was a low spending year, with our major expenditure being the annual Ethics Summit. The Joint Board of Delegates reviewed our financials, as is done multiple times per year, and recommended and acted on the purchase of a 180-day \$70,000 CD. This will help ensure that SEAC's financials stay healthy and grow.

We expect more spending in 2024 as we kick off a Brand & Website Refresh project which will include a one-time project cost of around \$17,000 and then an ongoing annual maintenance cost of around \$2,400. SEAC continues to look for ways to modernize our materials and provide new benefits to our members. We expect 2024 to be a full year!

Mark Herak, the Clerk-Treasurer of Highland acted as the fiscal agent for SEAC, helping to manage fee invoices and issue all SEAC checks. We thank Mark and his team for all their service and advice.

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3. Ethics Summit

SEAC held its 12th Ethics Summit on the morning of October 24th. This annual, free to the public, Summit was very well received with around 140 people attending. The program included a panel discussion moderated by SEAC President, Courtney Smith with Brian Snedecor, Mayor of the City of Hobart, Leigh Morris, Former Mayor of the City of LaPorte, and Dan Klein, Former Mayor of the City of Crown Point making up the panel. And, as always that presentation was followed by a lively discussion of ethics cases. Over 54% of the Summit attendees filled out an evaluation with 100% of those people finding the Summit satisfactory; 62% more than satisfactory!

We thank all who attended and expect the 2024 Ethics Summit to be held sometime in the Fall of 2024.

Shared Ethics
ADVISORY COMMISSION
BRINGING ETHICS AWARENESS AND TRAINING TO OUR COMMUNITIES

2023 Ethics Summit

Ethics Panel
Moderator: Courtney C. Smith, SEAC President
Panel:
Brian Snedecor, Mayor, City of Hobart
Leigh Morris, Former Mayor, City of LaPorte
Dan Klein, Former Mayor, City of Crown Point

**TUESDAY,
OCTOBER 24, 2023**
8:00 a.m. Registration / Breakfast
8:30 a.m. Presentation

EVENT OPEN TO THE PUBLIC
Pre-Register Online at
[sharedethics.com](https://www.sharedethics.com)

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Merrillville, Indiana

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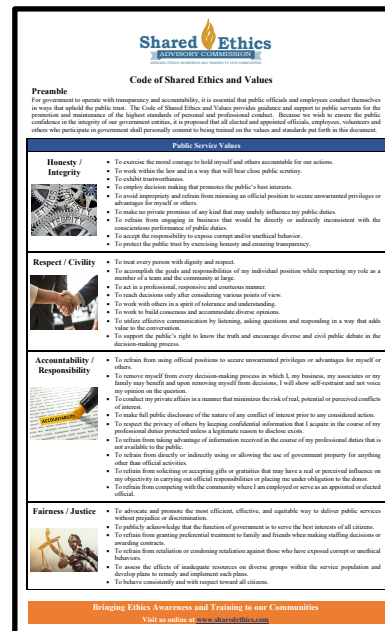
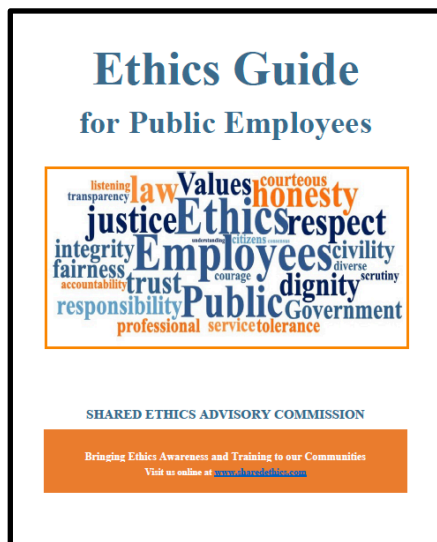
Please RSVP: By Friday, Oct 13
Free Event Registration required!

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5. Training

The Training Committee continued to be very busy in 2023:

- They continued to distribute the Employee Ethics Guide along with copies/posters of the “Code of Shared Ethics and Values” to current member community employees along with elected officials and other appointed board and commission members.



- The Training Committee also provided a series of in-person “Train the Trainer” sessions. We are grateful for all the member community trainers for their commitment to ethics, and assistance in getting this new and improved training out to their employees.
 - September 21st - Lake County (1st wave of trainers)
 - November 28th - Porter County
 - December 1st - Schererville
 - December 6th - Lake County (2nd wave of trainers)

We’re encouraging all member communities to focus on completing ethics training for all their employees by mid-2024 and expect to provide more “Train the Trainer” sessions to help meet that goal. We continue to hear positive feedback for the updated training curriculum and videos!

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6. Candidates Ethics Action Pledge

SEAC once again invited candidates for all town and city offices in Lake, LaPorte and Porter Counties to sign our Candidate Ethics Action Pledge for both the Primary and the General elections in 2023. The Pledge is very straight-forward: it asks candidates to commit to providing ethics training for all employees for whom they are responsible, to support a comprehensive ethics policy with vigorous enforcement, and to support whistleblower protection for employees filing ethics complaints.

For the Primary election cycle response rates varied from county to county with 42% of Lake County candidates signing the pledge, 14% of LaPorte County candidates and 39% of Porter County candidates signing. Overall, the response rate was a disappointing 37% (compared to 38% in 2022, 37% in 2020 and 43% in 2019), or 147 candidates out of 398 in our three-county area formally committing to ethics training for municipal employees.

For the General election cycle response rates were much lower than previous years across the counties with 52% of Lake County candidates signing the pledge, 14% of LaPorte County candidates and 52% of Porter County candidates signing. Overall, the response rate was a disappointing 43% (compared to 66% in 2022 and 67% in 2020), or 160 candidates out of 368 in our three-county area formally committing to ethics training for municipal employees.

2023 PRIMARY ELECTION SEAC CANDIDATE ETHICS PLEDGE STATISTICS			
ALL PRIMARY CANDIDATES			
County	Total # of Candidates	# of Candidates who signed the Pledge	% of Candidates who signed the Pledge
Lake County	258	108	42%
LaPorte County	64	9	14%
Porter County	76	30	39%
TOTAL	398	147	37%

2023 GENERAL ELECTION SEAC CANDIDATE ETHICS PLEDGE STATISTICS			
ALL GENERAL CANDIDATES			
County	Total # of Candidates	# of Candidates who signed the Pledge	% of Candidates who signed the Pledge
Lake County	199	104	52%
LaPorte County	85	12	14%
Porter County	84	44	52%
TOTAL	368	160	43%

SEAC changed how we reported the results of the ethics pledge signing to the media in 2023. We purchased ads to run in the NWI Times a few times before the election. We hoped this would encourage more candidates to sign the pledge and made the information regarding who signed easily available to voters. We will be reviewing how the media can be further involved to improve the response rate.

SEAC has been asking candidates to sign the Pledge for the last 9 years and we are committed to challenging all local candidates to support the Pledge, recognizing that it represents a commonsense approach that leads to an obvious community benefit. SEAC ethics training helps prepare public employees to apply ethical decision-making in circumstances encountered in the course of their day-to-day duties.

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7. Outreach & Media Coverage

The work of the Commission has received widespread media coverage in 2023. Thanks are owed to local media for their strong support of our efforts to promote ethical decision making. Articles in print and other citations of media coverage are listed below. Please note that the print articles and the same articles from the Internet, where links are provided, may have slightly different titles, and some online articles may only be provided for a limited period.

SEAC Media Coverage in 2023	
Date	Coverage
February 27, 2023	Post Tribune article titled, “Shared Ethics Advisory Committee adds 5 members”
April 6, 2023	Westville Indicator and The Reginal News articles titled, “Ethics Commission Challenges Local Candidates”
April 26 & 30, 2023	NWI Times Ads highlighting 2023 Primary Candidates who signed the SEAC Candidate Ethics Action Pledge
May 14, 2023	NWI Times article titled, “Surely NWI can do better” by Cal Bellamy. Link to article
June 17, 2023	NWI Times article titled, “New leaders for NWI ethics group” Link to article
August 24, 2023	Westville Indicator and The Reginal News articles titled, “Ethics Summit being Planned” by Cal Bellamy.
August 26, 2023	Post Tribune article titled, “CP touts ethics training” by Jim Masters
August 27, 2023	NWI Times article titled, “Ethics Summit being planned” by Cal Bellamy. Link to article
September 7, 2023	Westville Indicator and The Reginal News articles titled, “Greater commitment for codes of ethics for local government?” by Leigh Morris
September 7, 2023	The South Bend Tribune article titled, “A code of ethics needed for local governments in Indiana” by Leigh Morris
September 17, 2023	NWI Times article titled, “Greater commitment to codes of ethics for local government?” by Leigh Morris Link to article
September 21, 2023	Westville Indicator and The Reginal News articles titled, “Registration open for SEAC Ethics Summit”
September 24, 2023 – October 22, 2023	NWI Times free ads for 2023 SEAC Ethics Summit (Sunday and Wednesday papers)
October 8, 2023	NWI Times article titled, “Time to adopt a code of ethics” by Leigh Morris
October 22, 2023	NWI Times Ad highlighting 2023 Candidates who signed the SEAC Candidate Ethics Action Pledge
October 25, 2023	NWI Times article titled, “Panel: Ethics key element in gaining public trust” Link to article
November 5, 2023	NWI Times Ad highlighting 2023 Candidates who signed the SEAC Candidate Ethics Action Pledge
December 3, 2023	NWI Times article titled, “Local government ethics: 2023 update” by Cal Bellamy. Link to article
December 14, 2023	Westville Indicator and The Reginal News articles titled, “Local Government Ethics: 2023 Update”

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8. 2023 and 2024 SEAC Goals

SEAC is happy to share that we were able to complete most of our 2023 goals. We agreed as a Commission to move the Manager Training to 2024 so we could focus the Training Committee's efforts on providing "Train the Trainer" sessions for our members. We are pleased that we were able to provide training to the public via our annual Summit. Great progress was made in our training with increased interest in getting member community trainers trained which will lead to more member community employee training in 2024. This along with the continued work on the Candidate Ethics Action Pledge made for a busy and productive year for SEAC!

SEAC – 2023 Goals

1. Host Ethics Summit **COMPLETED**
2. Host Manager Training **MOVED TO 2024**
3. Solicit signatures of the Candidate Ethics Action Pledge from primary and general election candidates and publicize the results. **COMPLETED**
4. Support our member communities in getting Ethics Training completed for all their municipal employees. **ONGOING**
5. Provide regular updates via the media on Commission activities and goals. **ONGOING**
6. Continue the focus on filling Commission vacancies and expanding Commission membership to municipalities who have yet to join, especially in LaPorte County. **ONGOING**

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SEAC approved the 2024 Goals as listed below at our January 2024 meeting. We plan to continue our hosting of the Ethics Summit and Manager Training presentation in 2024, and we will also again ask Primary and General election candidates to sign the Candidate Ethics Action Pledge. Also, a special focus in 2024 will be completing a SEAC Brand & Website Refresh project which will include a media rollout. Finally, 2024 will focus on assisting our member communities to get their employees the updated ethics training.

SEAC – 2024 Goals

1. Host Ethics Summit
2. Host Manager Training
3. Solicit signatures of the Candidate Ethics Action Pledge from primary and general election candidates and publicize the results.
4. Support our member communities in getting Ethics Training completed for all their employees.
5. Complete the SEAC Brand & Website Refresh project, including a rollout via local media.
6. Provide regular updates via the media on Commission activities and goals.
7. Continue the focus on filling Commission vacancies and expanding Commission membership to municipalities who have yet to join, especially in LaPorte County.