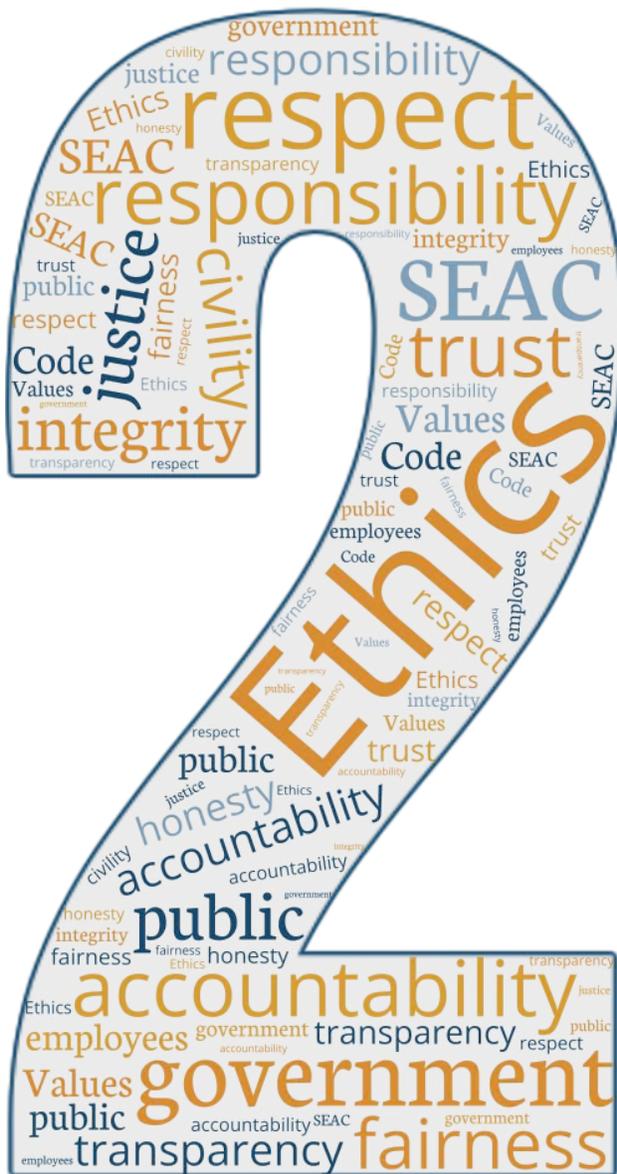




SHARED ETHICS ADVISORY COMMISSION
SERVING NWI SINCE 2005

2025 Annual Report

Celebrating 20 Years of Service





2025 Annual Report

January 21, 2026

Dear SEAC Member Community Leader,

Thank you for your membership and commitment in the Shared Ethics Advisory Commission (SEAC). 2025 was our 20th anniversary and SEAC is excited to share our accomplishments with you!

SEAC serves 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.

SEAC accomplishes 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 2025. This report is organized the following sections:

1. Structure and organization
2. Membership
3. Funding
4. SEAC Scope
5. 20th Anniversary Commemoration
6. Ethics Summit
7. Training
8. Outreach and Media Coverage
9. 2025 and 2026 SEAC Goals

NOTE: 2025 was not an election year, so SEAC did not undertake the Candidate Ethics Action Pledge Process.

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



2025 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, Communications and Summit. 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 uses our volunteers (Commissioners and Joint Board of Delegate Members) along with periodic outside assistance to help with administrative functions. SEAC also uses the NIRPC location in Portage for in-person meetings and SEAC material storage.



SEAC Committees

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
- Periodically conduct Employee Survey
- 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 (Co-Chairs: Julie Wendorf, Sheryl Corey)

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



2025 Annual Report

2. Membership

During 2025 SEAC 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.

Unfortunately, the Town of Highland decided to withdraw from SEAC in 2025. This was especially disheartening because Highland was one of our founding communities, along with Crown Point and Munster, both of which remain active members. We do not know why Highland withdrew, as no reason was given. SEAC membership involves some expense, though very modest, as well as a commitment of time and effort from participating communities. SEAC asks our members to appoint a private citizen to serve on the Commission; to identify employees to serve as ethics trainers; to give those trainers work release to receive ethics training and finally to build a place in the community's training schedule for ethics training for the entire staff. We don't know if this extra burden was what led Highland to withdraw, but SEAC is deeply grateful for our other twenty-two member communities who have found the extra effort to be beneficial to their employees and community.

Below is the most up-to-date list of member communities and their appointed Commissioners and Delegates. SEAC currently has six communities in the process of finding new Commissioners and two communities in the process of finding new Board of Delegate members.

SEAC Commissioners and Joint Board of Delegates - Jan 6, 2026			
#	Community	SEAC Commissioner	Joint Board of Delegates Member
1	Burns Harbor	Neil Stout	Jennifer McHargue
2	Cedar Lake	Sheryl Corey	Jennifer Sandberg
3	Chesterton	Abbe Trent	Courtney Udvare, Treasurer
4	Crown Point	Julie Wendorf, Vice President	Andrew Kyres, Vice President
5	Dyer	Julie McElmurry	Mary Tanis
6	East Chicago		
7	Gary	Dr Vanessa Allen-McCloud	Myles Tolliver
8	Hebron	Thomas Chihocki	Don Ensign
9	Hobart		Deborah Longer, Secretary
10	Lake County	Cecile LaCombe Petro	Jerry Tippy
11	Lake Station		Bill Carroll
12	LaPorte County	Angie Carr	Randy Novak
13	Lowell	Cyndi Hughes*	
14	Merrillville	Richard Hardaway	Keesha Hardaway
15	Munster	Michael McIntyre	Wendy Mis
16	Ogden Dunes	Todd Larkin	Steve Grandfield
17	Portage		Austin Bonta
18	Porter County	Courtney Smith, President	Sue Neff
19	Schererville	Sandra Davis	Janice Malinowski, President
20	St John		Beth Hernandez
21	Valparaiso		Peter Anderson
22	Whiting	Tim Wajvoda*	Steve Spebar
	President Emeritus, at Large	Cal Bellamy	--
	Advisor, at Large	Michael Suggs	--
	Advisor, at Large	Karen Marben	--
	Advisor, at Large	Tom DeGiulio	--

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

"name*" = Advisor, not Commissioner (municipality employee)



2025 Annual Report

SEAC encourages any member 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.



SHARED ETHICS ADVISORY COMMISSION
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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, business executives, educators, and clergy.

Appointment:

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

Duties:

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

***Interlocal Agreement**

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Board of Delegates Members

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

Appointment:

<u>City</u>	<u>Town / County</u>
Nominated by Mayor	Nominated and
Approved by City Council	approved by Town/County 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. Commit to setting a strong example of integrity and high moral conduct.

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3. Funding

Member community dues continue to fund SEAC. The Joint Board of Delegates reviewed our financials, as is done multiple times per year, and recommended and acted on the rollover of a 180-day \$70,000 plus earned interest CD. This helps ensure that SEAC's financials stay healthy and grow. SEAC expects to have normal spending in 2026 with our largest expected expenditure to be the Ethics Summit in the Fall.

Courtney Udvare, the Clerk-Treasurer of Chesterton, acted as the fiscal agent for SEAC in 2025, helping to manage fee invoices and issue all SEAC checks. SEAC thanks Courtney and her staff for all their support assisting SEAC and look forward to her support in 2026.



2025 Annual Report

4. SEAC Scope

SEAC created a document in 2025 to assist our commissioners, member communities and the public in understating SEAC’s scope. The document below was created to clarify the organization’s role in ethics complaints, outlines the ethics cycle and explains that while the SEAC provides an ethics code and training, it does not handle reporting or investigation of ethics issues. This document has proven useful in dealing with member and public questions about SEAC’s scope and has been posted prominently on our website for clarity.

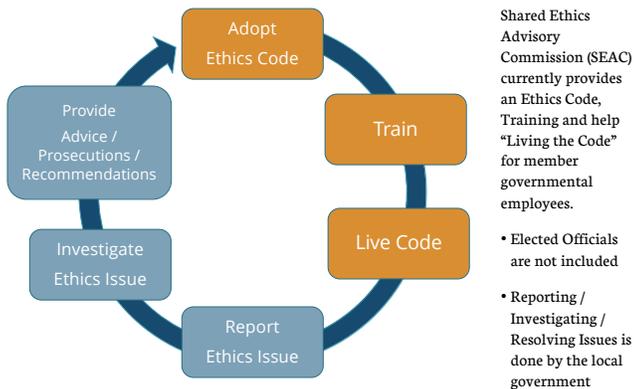


SEAC Scope

SEAC has been granted authority by its member communities to create and provide ethics training for their employees, department managers, board and commission members, and the public via our annual Ethics Summit.

However, SEAC does not have the authority to gather, investigate or enforce consequences to ethics complaints for our member communities, and we have no relationship with communities that are not members of SEAC.

The Ethics Cycle



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However, SEAC can give you suggestions for how to proceed if you have an ethics issue.

- If you are a **community employee**, first check your employee handbook or personnel policies for information on reporting issues. These usually include guidance on reporting issues to the Human Resources department or your supervisor. If that person(s) is a part of the problem, you can escalate to your town/city/county leaders, including elected officials.
- If you are a member of the **public**, we suggest you reach out to your town/city/county leaders, including elected officials to report your issue.
- In all cases if you believe your issue is a criminal matter, we encourage you to reach out to your county prosecutor.
- We also suggest that if you are not getting the response you need, you reach out to the local media who have reporters who investigate wrongdoing.

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2025 Annual Report

5. 20th Anniversary Commemoration

SEAC began our celebration of 20 years with Cal Bellamy sharing multiple articles with the local press. The celebration culminated at the Ethics Summit, where SEAC proudly shared highlights from our 20-year history through a handout and mementos of the occasion for our attendees, including SEAC lapel pins and pens.



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20 YEARS OF ETHICS TRAINING



CREATION: It was the Monday of Thanksgiving week 2005, November 21st to be exact. The temperature that evening was in the low 40s and the sky was overcast. But inside Teibel's restaurant, the spirit was lively and upbeat. Local history was being made. That evening, the town councils of Highland and Munster and the city council of Crown Point met together. A meeting of three councils at the same time and place is unusual, but these three communities had a common purpose: adoption of an interlocal agreement creating the Shared Ethics Advisory Commission (SEAC). They also approved the Code of Shared Ethics and Values which serves as the basis for SEAC's ethics training programs.

FORMATION: In the years between 2006 and 2010, SEAC began defining itself and its mission. In the earliest years, SEAC hosted general meetings discussing the concept of ethics, but soon realized that an organized training curriculum was needed. With the help of volunteers from Calumet College and Purdue Northwest, the first training curriculum was developed; volunteer trainers recruited from the staff of member communities; and formal ethics training began on an individual community basis. During this time, two additional communities joined SEAC, bringing the number to a total of five



GROWTH: SEAC's second five years was a period of rapid growth with a total of 17 additional communities joining between 2011 and 2015. To mark SEAC's fifth anniversary, they hosted the first Ethics Summit open to the general public free of charge. There has been an Ethics Summit every year since then except the COVID year of 2020. During this second period, SEAC began specialized ethics training for department heads and private citizens serving on their community's boards and commissions. During each election cycle, SEAC also initiated the Candidates Ethics Action Pledge asking every local candidate to sign, indicating their support of ethics training and whistleblower protection.

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MATURITY: During the years between 2016 and 2020, SEAC continued to offer and improve all the ethics training developed in the earlier periods. SEAC also welcomed two new member communities. See the full listing of SEAC's 22-member communities the website sharedethics.com. Internally, SEAC reorganized its structure. Previously, SEAC acted as a committee of the whole, but with the increasing membership and the variety of ethics training programs, a division of labor was needed. Three committees were formed - Training, Communication, Summit Planning and these are overseen by an executive committee consisting of the Commission president, vice president and committee chairs.



RENAISSANCE: Much of SEAC's training came to a halt during the period of COVID lockdown. SEAC took this pause as an opportunity to improve the presentation materials and refresh the SEAC logo and website. An all-new training curriculum was developed combining computer-based and in-person training. And a handy reference booklet was developed in 2021. This Ethics Guide is intended for distribution to every employee of SEAC member communities along with a copy of the Code of Shared Ethics and Values.

TODAY: 20 years later, SEAC is still going strong. SEAC is an all-volunteer organization that arranges ethics training for communities that wish to join. This practical ethics training includes programs for front-line employees, department heads and private citizens serving on their community's boards and commissions. SEAC also hosts an annual Ethics Summit open free-of-charge to the general public. Also, during each local election, candidates are asked to commit to providing ethics training and strong whistleblower protection.



WHAT CAN YOU DO? Promoting ethics in local government requires the involvement of everyone. Ask your local political leaders if your town, city or county is a member of SEAC. If so, thank them. If not, ask them why not.

TOGETHER, WE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

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2025 Annual Report

6. Ethics Summit

SEAC held a very successful Ethics Summit the morning of October 30th at Avalon Manor in Merrillville. The Summit was free of charge, open to the public and 210 people attended from all over NW Indiana. The keynote panel of mayors was very well received with Pete Land from Crown Point, Angie Nelson Deutch from Michigan City and Jon Costas from Valparaiso. And as always, the ethics case study discussions were lively and interesting, moderated by Dr. Marlon Mitchell. Based on registrations, actual attendees, and evaluations it is clear that our NWI community still wants these annual Ethics Summits!

SEAC thanks all who attended and expect the 2026 Ethics Summit to be held sometime in the Fall of 2026.

2025 Ethics Summit

Panel of Mayors



Mayor Pete Land
Crown Point



Mayor Angie Nelson Deutch
Michigan City



Mayor Jon Costas
Valparaiso



THURSDAY, OCTOBER 30, 2025

8:00 - 8:30am	Registration & Breakfast
8:30 - 11:30am	Program

AVALON MANOR
3555 U.S. 30
Merrillville, Indiana

EVENT OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Pre-Register Online at sharedethics.com
Please RSVP: By Friday, Oct 17

Free Event
Registration required!



SHARED ETHICS ADVISORY COMMISSION

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2025 Annual Report

7. Training

The Training Committee continued to be very busy in 2025 providing a series of “Train the Trainer” sessions throughout the year. Below is a table of the trainer sessions completed in 2025, 2024 and 2023

“Train the Trainer” Sessions		
2025	2024	2023
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Burns Harbor, Ogden Dunes and Portage - Apr 22 • Lake County, Apr 29 • Lake County, June 3 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hobart, Feb 8 • Valparaiso, July 30 • Gary, Oct 17 • Cedar Lake, Oct 21 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lake County, Sept 21 • Lake County, Dec 6 • Porter County, Nov 28 • Schererville, Dec 12

SEAC held a successful Board & Commissions Ethics Training event for all our member communities at Avalon Manor in Merrillville on the evening of May 29th. This event was free for member communities and there were 98 attendees. Dinner was served, and SEAC had a great program and ethics case studies discussion led by David Limardi of Limardi Consulting, LLC.

SHARED ETHICS ADVISORY COMMISSION
SERVING NWI SINCE 2005
CELEBRATING 20 YEARS

2025
Ethics Training for Board & Commission Members

THURSDAY, MAY 29, 2025

5:30 - 6:00 pm Registration
6:00 - 8:30 pm Program & Dinner

AVALON MANOR
3555 U.S. 30
Merrillville, Indiana

FREE EVENT
for SEAC Member Community Board & Commission Members
Pre-Register Online at sharedethics.com

SPEAKER
David Limardi
Limardi Consulting, LLC

Dinner will be served

Please RSVP: By Friday, May 16
Registration required!



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2025 Annual Report

SEAC also held a training session for our member community ethics trainers on November 7th. This first of its kind training was called, “How to be a more effective trainer: Increase YOUR training skills workshop” and was focused on giving our community trainers the skills they need to be more effective trainers. The speakers were professors Susan E. Zinner and Monica Solinas-Saunders from Indiana University Northwest. There were 42 attendees and all were engaged and enjoyed the material!

How to be a More Effective Trainer: Increase YOUR Training Skills Workshop



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FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 7, 2025

7:45 - 8:30 am Registration & Breakfast
8:30 - 11:30 am Training

DEAN AND BARBARA WHITE
COMMUNITY CENTER
NORTH ENTRANCE
6600 Broadway

FREE EVENT
for SEAC Member Community Trainers
Register Online at sharedethics.com
Please RSVP: By Friday, Oct 24
Registration required!



SPEAKERS
Susan E. Zinner, MSJ, MHA, JD
Monica Solinas-Saunders, Ph.D.
from
Indiana University Northwest

SEAC encourages all member communities to focus on completing ethics training for all their employees and expects to provide more “Train the Trainer” sessions to help meet that goal. SEAC continues to hear positive feedback for the updated training curriculum and videos!



2025 Annual Report

8. Outreach & Media Coverage

The work of the Commission has received widespread media coverage in 2025. Thanks are owed to local media for their strong support of our efforts to promote ethics. 2025 Media coverage is listed below.

SEAC Media Coverage in 2025	
Date	Coverage
Dec 7, 2025	NWI Times, "Government Ethics: Now and the Future" by Cal Bellamy Link to article
Dec 4, 2025	The Regional News, "Government Ethics: Now and the Future" by Cal Bellamy
Nov 20, 2025	The Regional News, "SEAC Caps Off 20 th Anniversary at Ethics Summit"
Sept 28, Oct 5, 15, 19, 2025	NWI Times, free ad for Summit
Sept 26, 2025	Lakeshore Public Radio, "2025 SEAC Ethics Summit"
Sept 25, 2025	LaPorte Herald Dispatch, "SEAC to hold 2025 Ethics Summit"
Sept 11, 2025	The Regional News, "Celebrating 20 Years of Ethics Training" by Cal Bellamy
Sept 7, 2025	NWI Times article, "COMMENTARY: Celebrating 20 years of ethics training" by Cal Bellamy Link to article
Jul 17, 2025	The Regional News, "Common Decency" by Cal Bellamy
Jul 15, 2025	Post-Tribune, "Commissioner Jim Biggs doesn't show at council meeting as controversy continues over dispatch" by Jim Woods and Shelley Jones. Link to article
Jul 13, 2025	NWI Times article, "COMMENTARY: Common decency is at the heart of good ethics" by Cal Bellamy Link to article
Jul 3, 2025	Post-Tribune, "Plan commission member cleared for conduct during meeting" by Jim Woods
Mar 13, 2025	The Regional News, "Working toward ethical government" by Cal Bellamy
Mar 9, 2025	NWI Times article, "Working toward ethical government" by Cal Bellamy Link to article
Jan 5, 2025	NWI Times article, "Celebrating Northwest Indiana women in leadership" by Cal Bellamy Link to article
Jan 2, 2025	The Regional News, "Celebrating Northwest Indiana women in Leadership" by Cal Bellamy



2025 Annual Report

9. 2025 and 2026 SEAC Goals

SEAC is happy to share that we completed ALL our 2025 goals. It was an aggressive set of goals, including an added training session for our member community ethics trainers and actions to commemorate our 20th anniversary.



SHARED ETHICS ADVISORY COMMISSION
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SEAC - 2025 Goals

1. Host Ethics Summit **COMPLETED**
2. Host Board & Commission Training **COMPLETED**
3. Commemorate SEAC 20 Year Anniversary **COMPLETED**
4. Explore feasibility of providing a “Train the Trainer” event to enhance the skills of ethics trainers within the SEAC member communities **COMPLETED**
5. Support our member communities in getting Ethics Training completed for all their employees **COMPLETED**
6. Provide regular updates via the media on SEAC activities and goals **ONGOING** Continue the focus on filling SEAC vacancies and expanding membership to municipalities who have yet to join, especially in LaPorte County **ONGOING**

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SEAC approved the 2026 Goals as listed below at our January 2026 meeting. We plan to continue our hosting of the Ethics Summit and Manager Training in 2026, and we will continue our focus on aiding member communities in their employees’ ethics training.



SHARED ETHICS ADVISORY COMMISSION
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SEAC - 2026 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. Provide support for our member community ethics trainers, helping to enhance their training skills
5. Support our member communities in getting Ethics Training completed for all their employees
6. Provide regular updates via the media on SEAC activities and goals
7. Continue to fill SEAC vacancies and focus on expanding membership to local municipalities who have yet to join
8. Increase SEAC awareness in LaPorte County

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