

# **Ethics, Public Service and the Public's Trust: A Multi-lateral Statement of Principles**

## **Washington County and City Boards of Ethics and Elections Commissions**

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It is our belief that most people who choose to work for local governments share an attitude of mind, a way of looking at their work as public servants. We believe they want to serve the public in a transparent manner that earns trust and respect, and that they wish to abide by all relevant laws and codes of ethics.

The ethics codes in effect across the state at county and city levels of government are similar to one another in that they reflect similar principles, values, and experiences. They are meant to offer guidance, assistance and support – especially in situations that may appear ambiguous to public employees.

The purpose of this document is to outline in clear language the common elements shared by these codes of ethics. We believe they reflect attitudes and a shared spirit among public employees that favor fair and honest decisions and actions. We also believe an understanding of the commonalities will foster common bonds among public employees, enhance the public's trust in local government, and facilitate principled, ethical approaches and practices in our local governments.

### **Just and Equitable Treatment**

Public servants are expected to treat all citizens similarly, without giving preferential treatment to anyone or treating anyone unfairly. Further, they are expected to refrain from using their positions to obtain any favors for friends, relatives, business associates or themselves.

### **Use of Government Property**

Government employees must avoid using government property or resources for political purposes or personal gain.

### **Avoiding Conflicts of Interest**

A conflict of interest occurs when a person has personal or financial interests in any matter in which he or she has professional responsibilities. Such interests could influence, or appear to influence, professional judgments and official decision making.

A common cause for concern and uncertainty is the extent of influence or appearance of influence caused by gifts to government employees. Government employees must generally avoid accepting gifts and pay for their own meals.

## Post-employment Restrictions

Public servants have restrictions placed on them about the work they perform or participate in once they leave their government jobs.

## Transparency and Disclosure

In order that the public may be assured that government employees are not making decisions or taking actions in a manner designed to benefit themselves, many public servants are required to sign a declaration of their financial interests on an annual basis. Further, they are asked to make all their decisions in a transparent manner that can be examined by the public.

## Complaints, Hearings, and Appeals Processes


Many codes of ethics include processes allowing for complaints from citizens or other government employees, and they often include procedures for hearing the complaints and appealing any judgments.

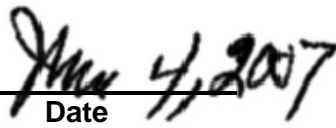
## Ethics Consultation

At each government level, personnel offer consultation to anyone who would like help. In all cases, they want to assist employees to make ethical decisions, and thereby enable members of the public to have confidence in those employees.

This overview describes common principles that the local governments indicated below utilize in applying their respective ethics codes. For details, please consult the relevant county and city codes and regulations.


Executed by

  
Lois Price Spratlen, Chair  
King County Board of Ethics

  
Date

  
Bruce E. Heller, Chair  
Seattle Ethics and Elections Commission

  
Date

  
Al French, City Council Member  
City of Spokane

  
Date