



Wyoming
Association of
Municipalities
Building Strong Communities

Municipal Ethics and Integrity

2025 WAM WINTER CONFERENCE

NEWLY ELECTED BOOT CAMP

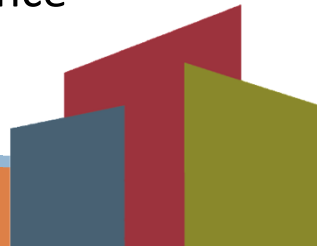
Course Objectives

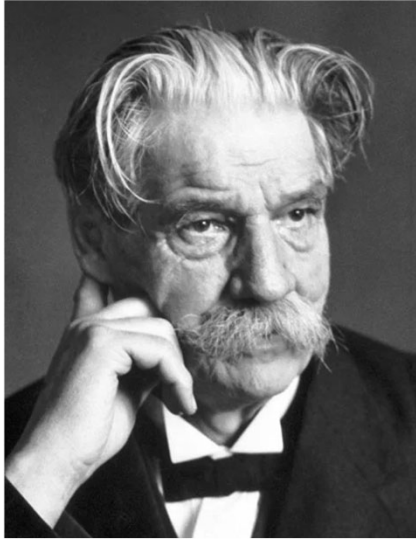


Know your legal and ethical responsibilities



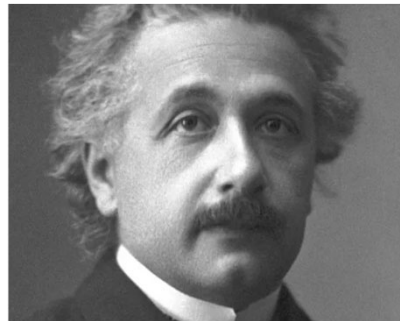
Learn how to apply ethics to operations and achieve compliance





“I don't know what your destiny will be, but one thing I do know: the only ones among you who will be really happy are those who have sought and found how to serve.”

Albert Schweitzer, Nobel Peace Prize 1952



“Only a life lived for others is a life worthwhile.”

Albert Einstein, Nobel Prize in Physics 1921

Photos from the Nobel Foundation archive
<https://www.nobelprize.org/>



Yes, Ethics ARE Important!

Ethics are the standards that govern our conduct

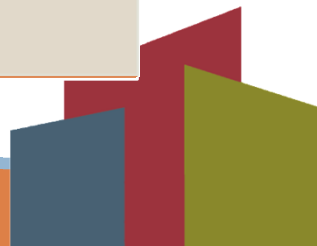


Our democracy depends on public trust, which is strengthened by:

**Commitment to highest
ethical standards**

Transparency

Compliance



What is a conflict of interest for elected leaders and public officials?

ANY difference between what's good *for you* and what's good *for the public*



Sources of conflict of interest:

Financial

Professional

Personal

Prejudicial

Characteristics of an ethical municipality



**SENSE OF
RESPONSIBILITY
TOWARD
COMMUNITY AS A
WHOLE**



**HIGH STANDARDS
IN QUALITY OF
WORK
PERFORMED**



**EVERYONE
TREATED WITH
HONESTY AND
RESPECT**



**FREQUENT, OPEN,
AND HONEST
COMMUNICATION**



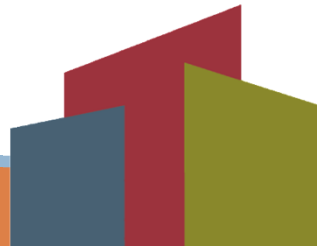
**DEEP REGARD FOR
FAIRNESS**



**REFLECTION OF
HONESTY AND
INTEGRITY**



**BELIEF IN
DEMOCRATIC
PROCESS**



What happens when municipalities act unethically? *How can elected officials manage that risk?*

An entire organization can be held criminally liable for any of its employees' illegal actions

Fraud, environmental waste discharge, and tax offenses are frequent municipal crimes

Sentencing guidelines recognize the value of municipalities adopting and following a compliance program

Effective compliance programs can reduce criminal fines by up to 95%

START HERE

1. Adopt policies
2. Train employees
3. Enforce policies



Legal standard – identification of what is permitted (or not) by **law**. Usually defines the minimum required and the outer boundary of what is prohibited.



Ethical standard – body of principles or values governing a particular culture or group. Many professional **groups** (and organizations) have formally adopted ethical guidelines.



Moral standard – founded on the fundamental principles of right conduct, rather than legalities or customs. This is the highest **personal** standard.

Effective compliance programs require much more than just adopting policies

Key to success:
Elected leaders must be fully engaged with management of the entire organization.

Compliance standards and procedures

Oversight by high-level personnel

Due care in delegating authority

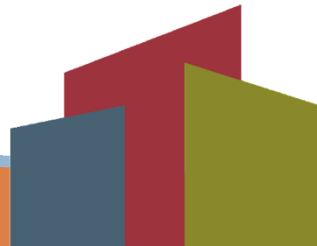
Effective communication with all employees

Reasonable steps to achieve compliance

Consistent enforcement, including discipline

Must address violations/prevent recurrences

Ethical and conflict of interest guidance is everywhere!





— STATE OF WYOMING —
68th LEGISLATURE

All Wyoming State Statutes,
Constitution, and Agency
Rules & Regulations are online
<https://www.wyoleg.gov/>

STATE STATUTES & CONSTITUTION ▾ STATE FINANCES ▾ PUBLICATIONS & RESEARCH ▾ CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT ▾ MEDIA ▾

68th Wyoming Legislature

Members of the Senate

Members of the House

Committee Assignments

Find My Legislator



Applicable Wyoming State Statutes

Title 6 – Crimes and Offenses

- **Chapter 5** – Offenses Against Public Administration, Offenses by Public Officials

Title 9 – Administration of the Government

- **Chapter 13** – Government Ethics for Public Officials, Members and Employees

Title 15 – Cities and Towns

- **Chapter 1** – General Municipal Powers

Title 16 – City County State & Local Powers

- **Chapter 6** – Public Property, Public Works and Public Contracts

The Wyoming Legislature's website provides the most current versions of all state laws, Constitution, and state agency rules/regulations. Some are annotated. But while reading these laws is easily accomplished, municipal leaders should still seek legal counsel to understand precisely how they apply. That's why you have a Town or City Attorney. There are many good ways to manage your legal costs, so communicate with your attorney to work out what's best in your situation.

Wyoming Ethics and Disclosure Act (9-13-101)



No one can use their office or position for their private benefit



No one can use public funds, personnel, time, facilities or equipment for their private benefit



No one can disseminate official information obtained through their office or position

Who is covered by WY Ethics Act? (9-13-102)



APPLIES TO ***ELECTED
OFFICIALS ONLY***



DOES NOT APPLY TO
MUNICIPAL EMPLOYEES

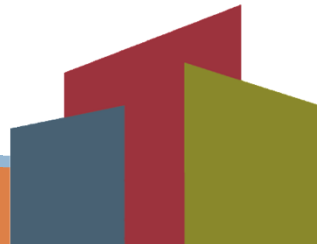
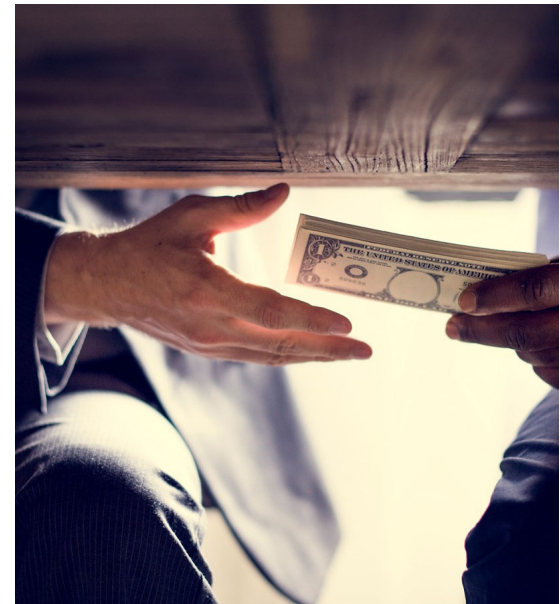


No Gifts or Favors (9-13-102)

Wyoming Ethics and Disclosure Act prohibits acceptance of any gift or favor resulting from holding office

- "Gift" includes anything of value to the extent that consideration of equal or greater value is not exchanged
- Very short list of exclusions from the definition (such properly handled and accounted for campaign funds)

Criminal statutes prevent very minor breaches from being prosecuted: It is not a crime if the use does not interfere with governmental functions AND either the value is *de minimis* or is reimbursed (6-5-110)





Nepotism (9-13-104)

Cannot advocate or cause employment, appointment, promotion, transfer or advancement of family member

Cannot supervise or manage a family member (includes discipline matters)

Extremely broad and absolute prohibitions



Misuse of Office 9-13-105

Prohibition against using public funds, time, personnel, facilities or equipment for private benefit

- Cannot use public funds, etc. to support political campaign
- Cannot disseminate to another person official **information** obtained through his position that is not available to the general public



Official Decisions and Votes (9-13-106)

Public has a **right to know** if a public official is furthering their own financial interests by voting a particular way

- ✓ A public official or employee shall not make or vote on any official decision if the official or employee has a substantial financial interest in the matter under consideration
- ✓ Must abstain from voting in clear cases of personal or private interest - weight against importance of his or her right to represent his or her constituency

Municipal government elected leaders and employees have **additional burdens** beyond the Wyoming Ethics & Disclosure Act in Title 9

No Money From Any Public Contracts (15-1-127)

Applies to mayors and council members and immediate family

Prohibits monetary or any other economic benefit from municipal contracts

Violations mean contract will be deemed null and void (any money paid on the contract may be recovered)

Statute identifies very specific steps to take to appropriately handle such conflicts of interest

Gratuities (15-1-128)

Prohibition against soliciting or receiving anything of value applies to mayor, council members, *and employees*

- No one can solicit or receive any benefit, profit or advantage
- No freebies/No discounts
- Violations can lead to removal from office



Unlawful Interest in public contracts or works (16-6-118)

Illegal for any government official to have a personal interest in any contract in which they may be called upon to act or vote

- ❖ Also prohibits accepting gifts/bribes for influence
- ❖ *If official discloses interest to everyone and absents himself during the considerations and vote, and does not attempt to influence the vote, then the rest of Council can approve the contract*
- ❖ Violations: Illegal contract become retroactively null and void, and offender may be removed from office
- ❖ Criminal punishment can include 10 years prison and major fines

“null and void” means proceeding as if the contract never existed – any money that changed hands must be paid back (in addition to other consequences)





Financial Disclosure (6-5-118)

- Public servants who have authority to invest public funds must disclose their personal interests prior to investing in or contracting with any entity
- Annual disclosures required to be in public meeting and minutes
- Failure to comply is misdemeanor

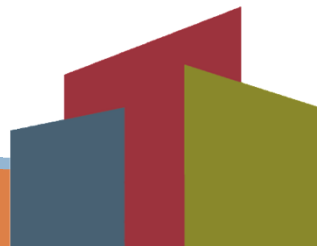
This is a criminal statute

Penalties Vary by Statute

Title 6: Felony crime for some offenses (up to 10 years in jail, \$5,000 fine, removal)

Title 9: Misdemeanor crimes (up to one year in jail, \$1,000 fine, removal from office)

Title 15: Any violation is sufficient cause for removal from office





Responsible choices require careful consideration of those we serve

*Does the decision provide for the **greatest good** for the greatest number?*

*Does the decision **respect** the rights of the individuals involved?*

*Is the decision **fair, equitable and impartial**?*

The “Appearance” Test

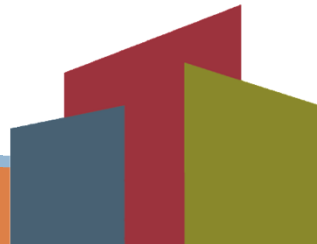
Who do you see when you look in the mirror?

Many of us think we are better than we really are, and some of us think the rules do not apply to us

Public officials must:

- Discern
- Disclose
- Disengage

How are you going to look on the front page of tomorrow’s local newspaper?





The toughest choices you make as a government official are not between right and wrong, but between right and right



Questions about Municipal
Ethics and Integrity?



Thank You!

This presentation was prepared by Community Builders, Inc., a Wyoming-based consulting firm specializing in community and economic development, under contract and in cooperation with the Wyoming Association of Municipalities.

Contact Info:

Joe Coyne, Principal Consultant
(307) 631-2413
Joe@consultCBI.com



Wyoming
Association of
Municipalities
Building Strong Communities

