

August
2018

Promoting
Milwaukee County
Government
Integrity

E T H I C A L L Y

S P E A K I N G

Milwaukee County Ethics Board

Conflicts of Interest

Generally speaking, a conflict of interest is a situation in which an individual has competing interests or loyalties. In matters that concern public employees and officials, government ethics rules and principles exist to ensure employees and officials place their public duties and responsibilities (public interests) before their private interests. Such rules also promote commitment to transparency and a healthy government reputation. Conflict of interest is defined in the Milwaukee County Ethics Code as **an official's or employee's action or failure to act in the discharge of his or her official duties which could reasonably be expected to produce or assist in producing a substantial economic or personal benefit for such official, his or her immediate family or an organization with which he or she is associated.**

Let's break this definition down and look at some examples:

<p><u>Action</u></p>	<p>Government officials and employees need to act in the best interests of the public rather than the best interests of themselves or other individuals.</p>	<p>A public official helps a family member who owns a business receive a contract for work with the County.</p>
<p><u>Failure to Act</u></p>	<p>The inverse of above: should an official or employee fail to step in or act when appropriate can create a conflict of interest.</p>	<p>An employee fails to mention they are related to a new hire that falls under their supervision. A candidate for office fails to disclose their business or financial interests.</p>
<p><u>Official Duties</u></p>	<p>An employee or official using paid work time for their personal economic advantage.</p>	<p>A job trainer promotes a side business they operate to trainees that offers better training at a premium. An employee passing out fliers during work time for a charity event on behalf of a non-profit they work for part-time.</p>
<p><u>Reasonable Expectation</u></p>	<p>If a general member of the public saw or heard what occurred and might think a benefit was gained (even if there was no actual benefit).</p>	<p>A County official is seen at an event that is accessible to the public in a VIP area, even though the official was not invited into the VIP area and leaves shortly thereafter.</p>
<p><u>Substantial Benefit</u></p>	<p>Anything worth more than twenty-five dollars</p>	<p>A fancy dinner or concert tickets.</p>

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Disclaimer

The scenarios in this publication should not be used for general application to other facts or scenarios. If you have questions concerning a potential conflict of interest, we encourage you to contact the Ethics Board. Pursuant to the Ethics Code, your request will remain closed to public inspection unless you request in writing that it be made a public record.



About the Ethics Board

The Ethics Board meets quarterly (February, May, August, & November). The Board is the primary source of interpretation of the Ethics Code and provides Advisory Opinions and enforces the Code through investigation, hearings, and resolution processes. Any County official, appointee, employee, or citizen may bring a matter or question before the Board.

SEI Results

The 2018 SEI drive is complete and we had a record year for County employees filing on time! Over 95% of required filers had their Statement of Economic Interests in on time, up from 83% in 2017 and 90% in 2016. Special recognition is due to the Audit Division, which was the first multi-filer department to have all their SEIs turned in.

Keep an eye out for the next drive at the end of October. We're hopeful that this year you'll be able to fill out your SEI online, making things a lot simpler for County officials and employees!

Take the time to read Section 9.02 and 9.03 of Milwaukee County's Code of Ethics. If you think you fit the definition of a required filer, talk to your supervisor or department head.



Campaigning

It's that time of year when political campaigns are in full swing! That makes it all the more important to be weary of political activity at the workplace.

Check out Section 9.06 of the Ethics Code to know what is permissible. If you notice any questionable conduct, just reach out to our office. Our staff is available to discuss any concerns you may have.



Contact the Ethics Board

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