

FEATURES

Ethics

12 Steps for Ethical Leadership

1. **Hold yourself to a higher standard than is required.** Your action may be legal but unethical. Some people see a line in the sand and ask how close they can get to it without crossing it. This line, however, is a starting point. Stay as far away from the "unethical" line as possible, to avoid even the appearance of impropriety. Be sure your local government has an ethics law or ordinance. Just as important, actively promote and reinforce the ethical values that your organization supports.
2. **Openly share information.** Go beyond the technical requirements to disclose any personal or financial interest you may have. You gain public trust when you fully disclose information in a timely way.
3. **Stay out of politics.** Exercise your right to vote, and be a good advocate for your local government's position with the state legislature and Congress. But do not show favoritism to members of your governing body or to any candidate for office. Just say "no" when candidates ask you to sign their petitions, give them a contribution or endorsement, or help them with their fund-raising activities. And do not run for elected office yourself unless you are no longer employed in an appointed local government position.
4. **Keep your word.** If you accept a job, honor this commitment unless the fundamental terms of employment change.
5. **Don't accept or solicit gifts.** Some special interests or powerful individuals may assume they can buy your influence. If your organization doesn't have a policy, establish one so that employees understand the reasons they cannot accept inappropriate gifts.
6. **Tell the truth, and take care to be accurate.** Your resume should be complete and accurate. Likewise, your local government's financial and operational reports should reflect the highest standards of accuracy and clarity of information.

7. **Remember the powerless.** Your responsibility is to serve the best interests of all the people, not just to be a referee for competing interests that have power. Children, the elderly, the disabled, troubled teenagers, and those who are struggling to make ends meet all count on you to remember their voices.
8. **Keep improving your knowledge and skills, and generate a learning environment for your organization.** Competence is critical to using public resources wisely.
9. **Use fairness and merit in all personnel actions.** Be sure your organization has positive programs to ensure meaningful employment opportunities for all segments of the community.
10. **Treat your colleagues with respect and courtesy.** Employees deserve your best self, as do your colleagues in the profession. Let administrators in other communities know if their elected officials or staff have contacted you for advice.
11. **Ask for advice, and encourage your staff to ask for advice.** You can call ICMA staff or a trusted colleague for advice if you are wrestling with a difficult issue. Do your employees know whom to contact if they need advice?
12. **Share your passion for public service and its stewardship responsibilities.** If you can inspire those you work with, your contributions will multiply to leave your community in better shape than you found it.

—Elizabeth Kellar
Deputy Executive Director
ICMA

Ethics advice is a popular service provided to ICMA members. The inquiries and advice are reviewed by the Committee on Professional Conduct, the ethics committee of the ICMA Executive Board. Some of the inquiries are revised and published as a regular feature in PM, to give guidance to members in the big and little ethical decisions they make daily. If you have a question about your obligations under the ICMA Code of Ethics, call Elizabeth Kellar at 202/962-3611; e-mail, ekellar@icma.org; or Martha Perego at 202/962-3668; e-mail, mperego@icma.org.

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