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# Ethics

## Practical Advice for the Political Season

Here is a quick primer on how to keep your ethical radar operating during the political season.

**1.** Your cousin is running for the state legislature in another state and has asked you for a financial contribution.

**Answer:** Decline politely and explain that the ICMA Code of Ethics has a guideline that makes it clear that you cannot give a financial contribution to any candidate—even to your favorite cousin.

**2.** The mayor had bought a ticket to attend the “Barbecue for Governor Bob,” but at the last minute she can’t go. She asks if you would go in her place.

**Answer:** Tell the mayor that you can’t stand in for her because your profession has a code of ethics that prohibits your attendance at fund-raising events for political candidates. Perhaps another one of the council members will be able to attend.

**3.** The county council has endorsed a school bond issue and wants you to speak about it at community meetings.

**Answer:** The guideline on “Presentation of Issues” allows you to assist the governing body in explaining the issues involved in referenda and the county council’s position to support it.

**4.** Can I vote in the Democratic or Republican primary? Everyone on the council is a Republican, but I am interested in voting in the Democratic primary.

**Answer:** Yes, ICMA members can vote in primaries. ICMA members have the right and responsibility to vote just as every citizen does. Some ICMA members choose to register as Independents to avoid any appearance of partisanship.

**5.** I feel strongly about a state ballot measure that addresses an important human rights issue. Can I speak at public forums to advocate my views on this issue?

**Answer:** Members have the right to voice their opinions on public issues. At the same time, they need to be careful if this is an issue that is not supported by their governing body. Equally important, members should not use their official title, public time, or public resources when advocating for a personal cause.

**6.** There is a vacancy on the school board, and I’ve been asked to run. School board members are elected on a nonpartisan basis. I live in the town where the school board is located but work for town government in the neighboring community.

**Answer:** The guideline on elections does not permit active ICMA members to run for any office, including nonpartisan elections.

**7.** I retired two months ago after serving as city manager for 20 years. Now I want to run for the city council. Is this allowed?

**Answer:** Members who are retired may run for office. They are required to support Tenets 1 and 3 of the ICMA Code of Ethics, which outline the member’s responsibility to support democratic local government and to maintain the highest ideals of honor and integrity. Running for city council soon after retiring as the manager can sometimes raise issues for the profession.