

# ATLANTA ETHICS



*In Action*



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## NEW E-LEARNING COURSE!

**Exciting news is on the horizon! The Ethics Division is launching a new Ethics E-learning Course for City of Atlanta employees.**

As we continue to navigate the virtual workspace as an organization, our Division recognizes that the way city employees were trained in the past must change to adapt to the current and future work environment. We looked at different educational and training opportunities that we could provide to properly train city employees on the City's Standards of Conduct and maintain accountability for their ethical conduct. We believe that in the remote work environment, where an employee's personal and work life may overlap, virtual training is important for the promotion and maintenance of a strong ethical culture at the City.



In the development of the e-learning course, our ideas of how adult learners absorb and retain information were challenged. We sought to create an engaging and effective training course that clearly communicated our ethics rules, while also accommodating a broad range of learning styles and technical capabilities. When we set out to build a new citywide e-learning course, we conducted research to review and explore best practices related to annual training requirements for municipal employees and officials in jurisdictions similar to Atlanta.

We found that most of the jurisdictions reviewed require ethics training for all new employees and officials, and annual training for all current employees and officials. Some jurisdictions require ethics training for other individuals, such as city board members, city contractors, registered lobbyists, and city volunteers, while another requires ethics training for employees who are leaving city employment. The most interesting jurisdiction reviewed was Chicago due to the fact that this city requires an ethics liaison for every department. The ethics liaison is responsible for ensuring that employees in his or her department complete the mandatory annual ethics training.

Based on the research conducted, our Division proposed legislation which now mandates annual ethics training for all full-time, part-time and contract city employees, and City Council and Mayor passed the new requirement into law. The legislation also requires all full-time, part-time and contract employees to attest to an Ethics Pledge, committing to follow the City's Standards of Conduct.

Finally, to develop the new course, we partnered with Compliance Wave, a division of Steele Compliance Solutions, a global leader and veteran company in government ethics and compliance training. We are also partnering with the Department of Human Resources to incorporate our course in the City's learning management system, which will allow all city employees to access the course via the ATL Learning Module in the City's Oracle environment.

The new course has an anticipated release date of January 2022, so be on the lookout for updates on the launch and how to take the course!





# Gaining Ethical Perspectives: Insights from our Staff

After attending conferences and participating in independent study, our staff wanted to share some insights with our readers. In this article, we share a few current trends in the field of ethics and compliance and the ways we apply them to the City of Atlanta.

At a recent ethics and compliance conference, the classic question was raised: “is there a difference between ethics and morals?”

Essentially, ethics and morals have one common principle, and that is “integrity.” Integrity speaks to honesty, soundness, and fundamental strength. For example, you expect that your home will be solid in its foundation (strength and longevity).

Likewise, you should expect that your government will have integrity rooted in its operations (honesty, competence, equity, and fairness).

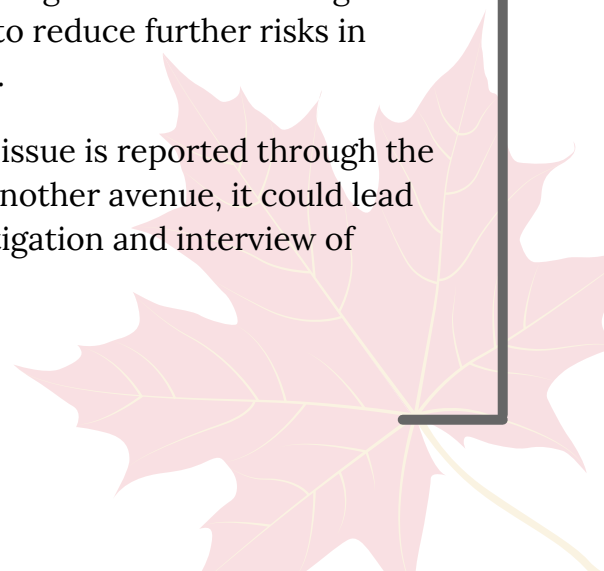
To distinguish between the two, morals are usually instilled when we are very young and guide us every day. We should know to help someone in need, (action) and not to steal, (inaction) and both are inherent, moral behaviors. Ethics, on the other hand, refers to specific rules and laws and is something we learn. These rules and laws are referred to by name, such as the “Ethical Code of Conduct,” the “Atlanta City Code,” or other laws and statutes. Citizens are responsible for abiding by these codes or laws.


Why would a person choose not to abide by established codes of conduct? It could be a result of pressure to keep a job or obtain a contract. When this happens, the Ethics Division has safety nets in place, which brings us to another important conference topic – an effective hotline.

An employee hotline is critical to an ethics program because it allows employees and citizens to report ethical concerns anonymously, without fear of retaliation. If an employee observes unethical conduct by a co-worker, he or she should feel confident to call the City’s Integrity Hotline.

Beyond a place to submit concerns, the hotline has many other advantages. A hotline is considered a cutting-edge tool to stay ahead of repeated issues and complaints. This is known as a “risk-based approach” because the substance and frequency of what is reported is reviewed by our Division and other city departments to identify underlying problems. Awareness of these issues or potential risks also assists our Division in developing targeted ethics training and messaging to reduce further risks in these areas.

If an ethics issue is reported through the hotline or another avenue, it could lead to an investigation and interview of witnesses.





Our staff also attended a session on the need to consider parties' emotions during interviews and the impact those emotions can have on an investigation. The session provided a good perspective on how to recognize different emotional states in investigations both in person and while working remotely. When working remotely, being able to identify emotional nuances can be even more important. Emotions often continue to evolve during an investigation, and addressing a person's emotions may help gain his or her trust and can make a difference in how an investigation is resolved.

Our studies in the ethics and compliance field continue as the workplace evolves, and we will bring you more insights as we gain them.

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## **Promoting Ethical Behavior Among Local Government Employees: The Roles of Ethical Leadership, Ethics Codes, Training and Audits**

The most important factor of promoting ethical behavior is an organization's leadership. Ethics Codes and training may also improve the culture; however, the "tone at the top" carries the most weight.

Research has shown that ethical leadership is a critical factor in encouraging employees to be ethical (Elmore, 2011, p.4).

Interviews were conducted with 25 city auditors in ten states. From the research, the auditors indicated that ethical leadership is the most important tool for promoting ethical behavior among employees. According to the research, most of the auditors argued that ethics codes and training are necessary to develop an ethical organizational culture. Some of them also stated that audits can be useful as an oversight measure to help monitor employee behavior. However, not all of the auditors agreed that audits are a good tool for promoting ethical behavior. They argued that very few of their audits cover ethics and as such, cannot be a tool for promoting ethical behavior (Elmore, 2011, p.4).

It is not uncommon for government organizations to have written ethics codes, offer training on ethical issues, and have auditors on staff to ensure that the leadership is ethical. Questions have been raised as to whether auditors should monitor the work of leadership, ensuring they practice good ethics and take action to promote transparency and accountability. Unfortunately, this does not always happen (Elmore, 2011, p.16).



**"Many times the right choice is the tough choice."**



For government leaders, ethics is particularly important because they are responsible to many people, including citizens and elected officials. They face different levels of scrutiny and oversight and are expected to be ethical and responsible. Government leaders operate in a complex environment and are frequently faced with ethical dilemmas requiring special skills for effective resolution. Because they are public stewards who manage government property and finances, these leaders must take actions that represent society as a whole. This requires ethical behavior.

Government leaders must create an ethical climate in an organization and provide examples of ethical behavior for employees to follow. Further, leaders must support and embrace ethics training programs which have been proven to be the most effective strategy to instill ethics in an organization. Training can also help them develop the moral reasoning skills needed to handle ethical dilemmas (Elmore, 2011, p.41-42).

**"Government leaders must create an ethical climate in an organization and provide examples of ethical behavior for employees to follow."**

Ethical leaders make sure ethics rules are implemented and enforced, and when they do so, the likelihood increases that they will make decisions for the benefit of the public. When government leaders practice ethical behavior, citizens have more assurance that they are making decisions based on merit. As a result, citizens are less likely to question leaders' motives (Elmore, 2011, p.41-42).

Finally, it is important that leadership is communicating and demonstrating expected ethical attitudes and behavior, as well as supporting any existing ethics programs. Elmore, T. P. (2011). Promoting Ethical Behavior Among Local Government Employees: The Roles of Ethical Leadership, Ethics Codes, Training and Audits (dissertation).



# Reporting Misconduct in the City of Atlanta

Observing and reporting employee misconduct while working remotely may not seem as obvious as it is while working onsite. After all, if people are not in the office, they should not be doing anything unethical, right? Unfortunately, that is not always the case. Ethical misconduct and fraud can happen even in a remote workplace, and the opportunity to do so, rationalizing why it happens, as well as the pressure to behave improperly, remain present.

If you notice anyone engaging in ethical misconduct or fraud, misusing a city position or city funds or resources, it is important that you call the **Integrity Hotline** at **1-800-884-0911**. The complaints are sent directly to the **Office of the Inspector General** and thoroughly reviewed by the **Ethics and Compliance Divisions**. If you are not comfortable providing your name, you can file an anonymous complaint and your call will be confidential. You can also visit [www.atlantaga.ethicspoint.com](http://www.atlantaga.ethicspoint.com) to file a complaint online. The site is confidential and secure. We want to hear from you, and we take all complaints seriously.



## INTEGRITY HOTLINE

# Special Announcements

NEW E-LEARNING COURSE COMING!!!

## ETHICS REMINDERS FOR THE 2021 CITY OF ATLANTA MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS

The City's Code of Ethics bans the use of city property for private advantage. To assist elected officials, employees, and candidates for municipal office, the Ethics Division has established guidelines which apply to the use of city property during campaigns.

Below are some key reminders to consider as the campaign season begins. We also strongly encourage you to review the **Elections Advisory** by [clicking here](#).

**City officials and employees** may not use city computers, phones, copiers, vehicles, or staff to promote a candidacy of any individual running for elective office.

**City employees** may not endorse candidates, participate in political advertisements, or engage in political activity while on city time, wearing an official uniform, or using a city vehicle.

**City officials** may not campaign, distribute, or post political campaign literature in a city building or on a city vehicle.

**City property** may be used for political forums (such as town halls or debates) when the forum is open to all candidates in a specific race and the general public is invited to attend the event.

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