

Integrity at Work



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City of Atlanta | Board of Ethics

Ethics Matters

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Introduction

"The Integrity at Work campaign really begins with each and every one of our City's employees and their pledge to act ethically and responsibly," said Mayor Kasim Reed at the formal launching of the Ethics Office's initiative on Tuesday, August 21, 2012. The event, which drew attendance of several hundred city employees, provided an opportunity for city staff to learn about the City of Atlanta's Ethics Code and the six values which undergird it—Honesty, Integrity, Trust, Accountability, Transparency and Respect.

In addition to the Mayor, the program featured City Council President Caesar Mitchell, City Councilman C.T. Martin, Ethics Board Chairperson Caroline Johnson Tanner and Ethics Officer Nina R. Hickson. Evelyn Braxton, Trina Braxton, and Towanda Braxton of the "Braxton Family Values" television program were also present as celebrity hostesses.

During the event, city employees were also encouraged to report any unethical, fraudulent or illegal conduct by calling the Integrity Hotline at 1-800-884-0911.





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Nina R. Hickson Appointed Ethics Officer

On June 21, 2012, Nina R. Hickson began a five-year term as the Ethics Officer for the City of Atlanta. An attorney with 28 years of experience, the former Fulton County juvenile court judge and interim East Point City manager heads an office which is responsible for bringing the City into compliance with the Atlanta Code of Ethics and instilling a culture of ethics within city government. As director of the smallest department in city government, Ms. Hickson reports to the seven-member Board of Ethics, which is composed of city residents appointed by business, civic, educational and legal organizations.

Ms. Hickson has indicated that her priority for the office will be to provide education to city employees and officials about the requirements of the Ethics Code and to work to incorporate ethical behavior and decision making as a part of the city's day-to-day business. "Ethics or 'Integrity at Work' is essentially doing the right thing, in the right way, for the right reason," says Hickson.

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Board Names Ten Persons to Delinquent Filers Roll

In its September 20, 2012 meeting, the Board of Ethics found the following persons in violation of the Ethics Code for their failure to timely file financial disclosure forms without

good cause:

- Tameka Ashmon
- Darius Curry
- Maxwell Nwosu
- Jose Velez
- Jonnie Williams
- John Harris
- Ebony Johnson
- Kevin Kowalzyk
- Edward Myers
- Michael Nichols

Despite this number of individuals, the Board is quite pleased to report that there were no current employees on this list.

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Financial Disclosure Season Begins January 2013 with February 15, 2013 Deadline

The City of Atlanta's Code of Ethics Section 2-814 requires certain City officials and employees to annually file financial disclosure statements. This disclosure is filed electronically and maintained by the Ethics Office. Among the information to be provided includes any employment positions held by the official or employee in any business during 2012, each source of income from any business they received in excess of \$5000, any benefit received by the employee or official or their immediate family members from city agencies, direct ownership in real property by the employee or official and any stocks, blind trusts, bonds, debentures and other forms of debt obligations held by the official or employee at any time during 2012 worth more than \$10,000. However, mutual funds, personal checking accounts, time deposit accounts, savings or retirement fund accounts do not have to be reported.

Among those officials and employees who must file the Financial Disclosure forms are the Mayor, President of City Council, members of City Council, Municipal and traffic court judges, the Chief Operating Officer and the deputy Chief Operating Officers, Chief of Staff and deputy Chiefs of Staff, all employees of the office of the Mayor who report directly to the mayor, all Commissioners, Deputy Commissioners, Department Heads and their equivalents, Bureau Directors, Assistant Bureau Directors, and Managers, Division Heads, Executive Directors or city boards, commissions, authorities, NPU officers and similar bodies. For a more complete list of filers, please check Section 2-814 of the Ethics Code, which can be found at www.atlantaethics.org.

Because the Code does not contain a complete list and there have been changes to certain job classifications, it is important to verify with the Ethics Office whether you as an official, employee or appointee are required to file a Financial Disclosure report before February 15, 2013. Also, if you held a position that requires you to file any time since February 15, 2012, regardless of how long you held the position, you still have an obligation to file a financial disclosure report. Failure to meet this requirement in a timely manner can subject you to sanctions up to \$1000.

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Ask the Ethics Officer: Can I accept a travel gift from a vendor?

I am a city employee and I have been invited to visit another location where a subcontractor which provides customer services is having a success. The subcontractor has offered to pay for my travel to this out-of-state location so that I can obtain recommendations on how to improve operations in the city of Atlanta. Can I accept this travel?

Yes, the Ethics Code allows the subcontractor to pay for your travel under very limited circumstances:

- The gift of travel must be to the City or one of its agencies
- The donor should not designate any particular official or employee as the recipient or user
- The City or its agencies must disclose the gift on an online Gift to the City Report
- The gift must be used solely for travel in an official capacity on official city business
- The travel expenses should be reasonable and cover only customary and ordinary expenses allowed under the city's travel policy, such as air fare, meals, and lodging
- Officials and employees whose travel is funded in whole or in part by the travel gift program should receive advance approval and file a Travel Disclosure Report after the trip

This fact-finding trip appears to be the type of trip contemplated by the Board of Ethics when it adopted the exception. The gift is related to travel that benefits the City more than any individual because it supports the City's customer care goals and will ultimately benefit the citizens of Atlanta; further, this travel will be in an official capacity on official city business. However, the other conditions must also be met. If the gift of travel is accepted, it must be disclosed on an online Gift to the City Report; the travel expenses must be reasonable, covering normal expenses such as airfare, meals and lodging; and each official or employee that travels will need to file a Travel Disclosure Report after the trip.

The disclosure forms will be due within 30 days of the travel. You may contact our office after the trip so we can give access to the forms in the Electronic Disclosure System and filing instructions.

For more information about the exception for gifts of travel to the City, go to http://www.atlantaethics.org/docindexer/FAO2008-3_travel_gift_to_city.pdf.

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Ethics Matters is produced by the City of Atlanta Ethics Office.

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