

Employee Code of Conduct

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The Town of Oakville (the town) is committed to the principles of integrity, accountability and openness and endeavors to maintain the highest level of public confidence in all that we do. Through staff commitment and effort we are able to demonstrate our values, deliver quality public service and strive to achieve the town's vision to make the Town of Oakville the most livable town in Canada.

These guidelines, referred to as the Code, explain the expected rules of behaviour required, and support the town's core values of:

Accountability

We deliver what we promised. We are accountable for our own actions and results. We are accountable for the efficient and effective use of public funds.

Dedication

We willingly take on responsibility. We are committed to serving our community. We take initiative and we take on our share of the work.

Honesty

Each of us demonstrates personal integrity, truthfulness and honesty in how we do our job. We inspire public confidence and trust in our government.

Innovation

We pursue innovation by being creative, showing initiative and taking risks. We encourage employees to exercise judgment in meeting customer needs.

Respect

We value an open, respectful and inclusive workplace. We value the cultural and social diversity of our community. We make it possible for every resident to participate in our community, and in our government.

Teamwork

We act as a team. We demonstrate high levels of trust and cooperation. We collaborate across departments to achieve our goals. We work in partnership with our community.

How does the Code affect me?

It is only through the commitment of our employees that we are able to deliver quality service and maintain public trust. To keep this confidence and trust, town employees must be above reproach in their professional dealings. They must demonstrate the highest standards of behaviour. As employees we are accountable to the town, our Council and citizens of Oakville and are responsible for the assets entrusted to us. It is with this in mind that every town employee is expected to comply with the Code of Conduct and other policies and procedures that govern employee behaviour.

Ethical questions

The Code of Conduct does not answer every question that may arise. It is designed to promote ethical decision making and behaviour and to make us think about how ethics and integrity must guide us in doing our jobs. The examples and frequently asked questions (FAQ's) are only a guide and not an exhaustive list. Just because an example is not specific or provided does not mean no violation would be found.

Ethical behaviour is not about finding all the right answers, it is about asking all the right questions such as:

- Am I putting my own interests before the town's?
- Would I make the same decision if my managers, the public or the media were watching me?
- Would I be embarrassed if my decision, comments or actions were on the front page of the newspaper?
- Would I hesitate to take this action or allow my employees to take this action if this were my own company?
- Will I owe someone a favour if I do this?
- Would I be offered this if I weren't an employee of the town?
- Could my comments on social media or in a public forum be considered negative, derogatory or taken as a criticism of the town, Council or a fellow employee?

If you answered "yes" to any of these questions, you may have an ethical dilemma. Seek advice. If you are still not sure, "ASK" again and keep asking until you get an answer. A simple rule to follow – "if in doubt, don't".

For advice or guidance related to this Code, speak to any of the supervisors, managers, leaders in the organization or your Human Resources consultant. Find someone you are comfortable speaking with and get the information you need.

Disclosure

It is the responsibility of all employees to disclose any real or what may be perceived as a conflict of interest or violation of the Code. If you think you may be in violation of the Code, address the situation and make full and prompt disclosure to your supervisor. Any suspected non-compliance by another employee must also be promptly reported. Anyone who knowingly makes a false accusation about non-compliance will be subject to disciplinary action.

Where an employee in good faith reports a violation of the Code, they will not be dismissed, disciplined or suspended or threatened with such. They will not be penalized and intimidation or coercion by another employee will not be tolerated.

Town time and assets

Town time and assets are used only for the performance of town duties. We will safeguard and protect town work time and assets. Employees must devote themselves exclusively to the performance of their employment duties during paid working hours. We will not use any town asset, including e-mail, internet services, or any other electronic communication devices, if such use could be offensive, inappropriate or fraudulent.

What does this mean?

Town employees are required to care for town assets, which includes all property, equipment, software, information, materials and time. Town assets are only to be used for town purposes or as approved by your supervisor.

Why is this important?

The town, like any organization, should not waste time, money or resources. We serve all the citizens of Oakville and our work is paid for by their tax dollars. To do our jobs properly, we need to have all resources available at all times. Whether the asset in question is work time, a town vehicle or a computer, it must be ready and available to do the assigned task.

Things to do

- Respect town assets and take proper care of them
- Use town assets only for town work
- Reimburse the town promptly for any personal costs (long distance calls, photocopying)
- Devote time at work to performing assigned job duties
- Obtain approval for exemptions
- Ensure all town forms, documentation and requisitions are completed accurately

Things not to do

- Take home town assets for personal use without prior approval
- Use a town vehicle for personal business
- Install personal software on town computers
- Download software on town equipment without prior approval
- Store large amounts of non-work-related data on town computers
- Access, communicate, distribute or display racial or ethnic slurs, threats, insults, obscenities, abuse, defamation or lewd or sexually explicit material on town computers
- E-mail or use of any other electronic communication devices for non-work-related material without permission from your supervisor

FAQ's

Q. Can I photocopy my son's hockey schedule for him and his teammates?

A. One or two copies is not an abuse of town assets. Multiple copies, or repeated use of town equipment, require supervisor approval and reimbursement to the town.

Q. Can I help myself to things the office is throwing away or declaring surplus?

A. No. Articles in the garbage are still considered town assets. If you are interested in purchasing an item that has been declared surplus, speak with your supervisor.

Q. Can I use the Internet at work to plan my vacation and book my airline tickets?

A. Yes, provided you do it on your own time (i.e. lunch, coffee breaks), there are no costs to the town and your activity does not place town computer systems at risk.

Q. Is it appropriate to sell chocolates or raffle tickets or collect money for charitable associations at my work site during normal working hours?

A. Yes, subject to approval by your immediate supervisor.

Q. I noticed a colleague of mine has submitted an expense form for a conference she told me she didn't attend. Should I inform my supervisor?

A. Yes, you must report this as it is considered fraud. You can speak directly with your supervisor or file a report anonymously through the Ethics and Efficiency Hotline.

Q. Can I access town assets for occasional personal use? What about infrequent phone calls? Can I call my child's daycare or make a medical appointment?

A. Yes. Incidental use of town assets for personal reasons is allowed as long as there is no negative impact on your performance, no abuse of paid work time or no added cost to the town. This includes telephone and cellular phone use.

Q. Can I do personal work at my workstation during lunch hour?

A. Incidental use of your work station is permissible as long as you are doing the work on your own time (i.e. lunch, breaks) and there is no cost to the town.

Q. What should I do if I receive chain letters or offensive jokes and pictures at my work e-mail address?

A. Delete them immediately and tell the sender to stop sending them to your town address. You should also consider informing your supervisor depending on the frequency or content of the emails. We are all responsible for ensuring the town's email and systems are used appropriately.

Q. What should I do if I see an employee siphoning gas from a town vehicle?

A. Report the incident to your supervisor.

Q. Can I borrow a piece of town equipment to use over the weekend to do a personal job?

A. Personal use of town resources is prohibited unless authorized.

Q. I am permanently assigned a Town of Oakville vehicle. Can I use it to run errands on the weekend?

A. No. The vehicle can only be used for work related purposes including travel from home to and from work sites.

Q. My colleague has asked me to call in sick for my shift this weekend because she needs the overtime. Can I do this?

A. No. This is sick leave fraud and you will be disciplined.

Related policies and procedures

- Ethics and Efficiency Hotline Procedure (HR-MNG-006-002)
- General Use of Town Vehicles, Equipment and Facility Resource(s) Procedure (A-BMG-002-001)
- Information Technology General Use and Practices Procedure (A-ISS-001-001)
- Banking Services Procedure (F-FOC-001-001)
- Petty Cash Procedure (F-FOC-001-005)
- Cash Handling Procedure (F-FOC-001-006)
- Attendance Policy (HR-MNG-001)
- Absence Reporting Procedure (HR-MNG-001-001)
- Purchasing By-law
- Retention By-law

Gifts and gratuities

We will not accept or provide any gift, benefit or favour in exchange for special consideration or influence, or where it may be perceived to be in exchange for special treatment.

What does this mean?

Employees must not give or receive gifts if in doing so there is a perception that their decisions are being influenced or their integrity appears to be compromised.

Why is this important?

Although most gifts come with no strings attached, there is always the chance that something is expected or perceived to be expected in return.

Things to do

- Decline cash tips or in kind gifts
- Decline gifts that could be viewed as an exchange for a favour
- Decline gifts from potential vendors or interested parties during or in anticipation of the purchasing or tendering process
- If unsure, decline the gift or ask your supervisor

FAQ's

Q. The town is in the process of awarding a contract and I am involved in the decision process. One of the bidders has offered to take me to a Leafs' game. Can I accept the invitation?

A. No. The perception is that the bidder could be given special consideration or favours in return for the ticket(s).

Q. I'm a transit driver. Some of the seniors on my route like to give me a cash tip at Christmas. I don't want to be impolite by rejecting what is a kind and sincere gesture. How should I respond? Can I accept any gifts?

A. Politely explain that you appreciate the gesture but the town already compensates you. It is unacceptable to accept cash, loans, free services or individual discounts. Town employees may accept:

- Small holiday gifts showing appreciation (cards, cookies, chocolates)
- Advertising material (calendars, scratch pads, disposable pens, t-shirts, caps)
- Protocol items (symbolic or ceremonial gifts)

Q. The town paid for me to attend a conference and I won a door prize. Can I accept it? Can I accept an honorarium?

A. You can accept the door prize but if the prize is of significant value, you should advise your supervisor. You are not permitted to accept a cash honorarium.

Q. A vendor my department uses regularly has invited me to play golf with him. Can I attend?

A. Only if prior approval has been given by your supervisor or manager. If approved, this should be on your time – after work or vacation time.

Related policies and procedures

- Ethics and Efficiency Hotline Procedure (HR-MNG-006-002)

Personal conduct

We will perform our duties with honesty and integrity and in a manner that is helpful, respectful and courteous. We will not behave in a manner that could result in a conflict of interest.

What does this mean?

Employees will do their jobs to the best of their abilities, treat those we work with and serve with respect and courtesy. We respect the dignity and diversity of our colleagues and the public.

Why is this important?

It takes the effort of each and every employee to make the Town of Oakville a great place to live, learn, work and play. The best way to maintain good working relationships is to treat every person the way you want to be treated.

This is particularly important for municipal employees because we are often seen as ambassadors of the town. We must work to maintain the public's confidence by acting courteously and responsibly and by providing the best possible level of service.

Things to do

- Practice common courtesies, such as “please” and “thank-you”
- Treat people as you want to be treated
- Represent the town in a positive way
- Be honest with people and in all your dealings with the town
- Make every person feel important
- Take on a customer-service focus
- Exercise diplomacy and tact when dealing with difficult people
- Respond promptly to requests for information or assistance
- Recognize that we are the public face of the town so dress appropriately

FAQ's

Q. Do I have to follow the Code of Conduct when I'm off duty but still in my town uniform?

A. Yes. When you are in uniform, the public identifies you as a town employee and may assume you are performing town duties.

Q. Can I use social media venues such as Twitter, Facebook or my personal blog to voice my opinions about Council decisions, fellow employees or my workplace?

A. Always adhere to the town's Social Media Guidelines and policy on personal use of computers at work. If you identify that you are an employee of the town on a personal site, make it clear that you are expressing personal views, not necessarily those of the town. You are accountable for your comments and any comments, statements or opinions about Council decisions, fellow employees or your workplace that are or perceived to be negative, derogatory etc. may result in disciplinary action.

Q. In my job, I'm in regular contact with angry people. How do I deal with abusive and profane language?

A. Pay genuine attention to the person and project a positive, courteous attitude. Be helpful and do what you can to resolve the issue. If the behaviour is abusive or profane language is used, ask the person to stop the behaviour and remind them of the town's Rzone procedure. If the aggressive behaviour continues despite your best efforts, ask your supervisor for help and report the incident on the Rzone Incident Form.

Q. Can I stop for a beer on my way home from work if I'm wearing my town uniform?

A. No. Although you are on your own time, your uniform leads people to believe otherwise.

Related policies and procedures

- Corporate Vision, Mission and Values
- Respectful Conduct Procedure (HR-MNG- 008-002)
- Accommodation Procedure (HR-MNG-008-003)
- Rzone Procedure (HR-MNG-008-001)
- Occupational Health, Safety and Workplace Violence Policy (HR-MNG-005)
- Workplace Violence Procedure (HR-MGN-005-002)
- General Use of Town Vehicles, Equipment and Facility Resource(s) Procedure (A-BMG-002-001)
- Information Technology General Use and Practices Procedure (A-ISS-001-001)
- Social Media Guidelines (A-ISS-002-002)
- Dress Code Guidelines

Personal gain, benefit or favouritism

We will not participate in any decision process that may result in a real or perceived personal gain or benefit. We will remove ourselves from situations where there is a real or perceived risk of favouritism. We will use information collected by the town only for purposes consistent with the use for which it was collected. When we have access to confidential information relating to any competition open to the public, we are ineligible to compete. We will not recommend or endorse products, services or suppliers.

What does this mean?

Employees must remove themselves from any decision process that may result in actual or perceived personal gain, favouritism or benefit. Awarding of town tenders, job opportunities, land sales and disposal of surplus assets will be carried out impartially – without any advantage or favouritism to themselves or others.

Why is this important?

All town business must be conducted fairly and impartially. Employees are compensated for their service with tax dollars. A town employee should not benefit from his or her job beyond the compensation paid for the job.

Things to do

- Use information only for the purpose for which it was collected
- Remove yourself from any decision process that may result in actual or perceived personal gain, benefit or favouritism

FAQ's

Q. My sister just bid on a town contract in my work area. What should I do?

A. You must disclose the relationship to your supervisor at the beginning of the process. If you are in a position to evaluate the bid, influence the selection of the successful bidder or manage the bidder's performance, there is a potential conflict of interest. Your supervisor must ensure you are not involved in the decision-making process and do not have access to information regarding the process which could be used to influence decision makers.

Q. In my job, I drive a town pickup truck that is being declared surplus. Can I buy it?

A. Yes. Once the town has properly declared the truck surplus and it is available for sale to the public at large through a third party, you may make an offer to buy it. You will not get any greater consideration in the sale process than any other member of public offering to purchase the vehicle through an open sale process.

Q. My brother-in-law is qualified for a job I directly supervise. Can he be hired for that position?

A. No. Immediate family members may not work in the same department where there is direct or indirect supervision. Furthermore, no one may be hired, transferred or promoted to a position over which a relative can be perceived to have influence over their promotion or supervision.

Q. I work in Corporate Services and my brother has a consulting agreement with another department. What should I do?

A. Nothing. Since you were not involved in the decision process that awarded his contract and do not have any involvement with that business, there is no conflict.

Q. I have started a romantic relationship with my supervisor. What should I do?

A. The town discourages workplace relationships which can result in conflicts of interest, complaints of favouritism, claims of sexual harassment and other employee morale problems. In this situation, you and your supervisor must promptly disclose this relationship to the manager of your work area. The manager must take steps to address the supervisory-subordinate working relationship in order to remove actual or perceived favouritism along with any other potential conflicts. This may include modifying the reporting relationship and/or a change in position for one or both employees involved.

Q. My daughter wants to work for the summer at the town. Can I contact the hiring manager and ask them to hire her?

A. No. Town employees may not advocate for the employment of any individual.

Q. My neighbour has applied to a position at the town. Can I contact the hiring manager and ask them to look at his resume?

A. No. Town employees may not advocate for the employment of any individual.

Q. I have been asked to speak at a conference by a software company to share the town's experience with their product. Can I attend?

A. Yes, with prior approval from your department head. Your presentation must include a statement that you are not endorsing or recommending the product.

Related policies and procedures

- Recruitment Policy (HR-RCT-001)
- Purchasing By-law

Use, collection and disclosure of information

We will use, collect and disclose information only in accordance with the *Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (MFIPPA)* and for the purposes of carrying out town duties.

What does this mean?

Many employees have access to personal information about other employees or access to personal or financial information of members of the public. This information must be kept confidential and secure, and must only be used for the purpose for which it was collected.

Why is this important?

Employees have a responsibility to maintain and to protect business and financial information of the public and personal information about identifiable individuals. MFIPPA governs the way municipalities use, collect and disclose information. Employees are required to keep all personal information private and not to disclose it. In addition, any business or financial information of the public is confidential and can only be used for the purpose for which it was gathered. Employees are not allowed to use this information for personal gain or benefit of any kind.

Things to do

- Maintain confidentiality
- Keep information secure
- Use information only for the purpose for which it was collected
- Handle sensitive and confidential information with care and disclose only in accordance with MFIPPA.

FAQ's

Q. I have been asked to give a job reference for a former town employee. Can I share my opinions about this individual?

A. Yes, with the employee's written permission. All reference information must be consistent with documented performance in the employee's file. Direct questions must be answered honestly but information should not be volunteered. If you have any doubts, you should speak with your supervisor or your human resources consultant.

Q. Who can access an employee's file?

A. Employee files are accessed for work-related purposes and only if you are authorized to do so (ie. direct supervisor, manager or human resources). Access to employees' files is restricted to the necessity to fulfill job duties.

Q. I am a firefighter who attended a medical call on my friend's street. My friend asked why their neighbour was taken to the hospital. Can I tell them?

A. No. Personal information you obtain regarding a member of the public cannot be disclosed and must be kept confidential.

Q. I was called to an accident scene to assist in the clean-up. The car was totaled and I took a picture with my cell. Can I send it my friends and post it on my Facebook page?

A. No. You should not be taking personal pictures of work events or situations unless specifically authorized by your supervisor. This is personal information regarding a member of the public. It is not to be disclosed and must be kept confidential.

Q. I operate a small, home-based business that sells baby clothes. In my job, I have access to personnel files and I've noticed a few town employees are on maternity leave. Can I call them at home to let them know I'm in business?

A. No. Employees provide their phone numbers and family information to the town for work-related purposes. It is a severe breach of conduct to use this information for anything other than town work.

Q. I handle the Human Resources files for my office and discovered my co-worker's 40th birthday is coming up. Can I plan a surprise party?

A. No. If you found out about the birthday through town records, the information is considered confidential and cannot be shared with colleagues or used to plan a party.

Q. I have information that suggests a contract was not handled according to town policy. Should I tell the public or the media?

A. No. This information must be directed to your manager or commissioner.

Q. I have been contacted by the media to comment on a town project or issue. Should I make a comment or share details?

A. No. Direct the caller to speak with staff in the Strategy, Policy and Communications department who will respond directly to the media or will refer the individual to the appropriate department spokesperson.

Q. I run a children's program at a town facility. A parent wants to give out birthday party invitations for their child and has asked me for the addresses of some of the kids in the program. Can I give them to her?

A. No. Personal information you obtain regarding a member of the public cannot be disclosed and must be kept confidential.

Related policies and procedures

- Municipal Act
- Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (MFIPPA)
- Records Retention By-law
- Access to Records and Information Policy (G-GEN-004)
- Information Technology General Use and Practices Procedure (A-ISS-001-001)
- Video Surveillance Procedure (A-SCC-001-001)

Other employment and activities

We will only engage in other employment and activities that do not conflict with our town duties.

What does this mean?

To ensure continued commitments to service levels, employees are expected to avoid other employment or activities that interfere with their town duties or are contrary to the interests of the town.

Why is this important?

Employees of the town work hard and are dedicated to ensuring the town's success. During paid working hours your attention must be devoted to your work at the town. You cannot have other employment or engage in other activities that conflict with or undermines your ability to perform your town duties effectively.

Things to do

- Refuse work that could be perceived as a conflict of interest
- Advise our supervisors where we have any involvement with an external organization that could be considered a conflict of interest.
- Ensure other employment is not adversely affecting your town responsibilities.

FAQ's

Q. I'm off work and receiving disability benefits. I can't do the heavy, physical labour my town job demands but I can run my home-based bookkeeping business. Is this a violation?

A. Yes. The town's Disability Claims Coordinator must approve all outside employment while you're on disability leave.

Q. I work as a mechanic for the town and would like to get a part-time job as a mechanic. Is this permissible?

A. Yes. You can take the job as long as the service is not in conflict with your work at the town and the service is not performed on town time or using town resources.

Q. Can I hold more than one job with the town?

A. Yes. You can hold more than one job however the total hours worked in any week cannot exceed 35 hours.

Q. I am a real estate agent. Can I answer a call at work from a client regarding a listing I have?

A. No. Work related to outside employment must not be conducted on town time or use town resources.

Related policies and procedures

- Attendance Policy (HR-MNG-001)
- Absence Reporting Procedure (HR-MNG-001-001)
- Collective Agreements

Political activity

We must not engage in any political activity or electioneering during normal working hours at our place of work.

What does this mean?

Political activities such as canvassing, campaigning, or fundraising that aim to advance an individual's or group's political interests will not be permitted in the workplace during normal working hours. All employees have the right to take part in political activity and electioneering, but only on their own time.

Why is this important?

The fact that we work for a municipal government presents a unique situation; our workplace is a highly political environment where opinions vary widely and strongly. In order to respect all beliefs, political activity is not allowed in the workplace. Political views and activities are important to many employees, but the work environment and time should be devoted to town business.

Things to do

- Get written permission from your direct supervisor before you engage in any non-work activity at your place of work.

FAQ's

Q. Can town employees run for political office?

A. Yes. If you are running for Town Council in Oakville, you must first seek a leave of absence for the time period between the day you are nominated to voting day, in accordance with the *Municipal Elections Act, 1996*. If you are elected, it will be understood that you have resigned from your employment with the town immediately before taking your elected seat on Council.

Q. I want to put up some election signs during my lunch hour for the candidate I am supporting. Can I do this?

A. Yes. Such activity must be as a citizen and not as, or appear to be as a representative of the town. You should not be driving a town vehicle, sporting town logo wear or a town uniform.

Q. My spouse is running for political office. Can I accept contributions to the campaign while I'm at work?

A. No. Town employees are not permitted to raise or to contribute funds to political campaigns while at their place of work.

Q. I am attending a political fundraising event. Can I use my corporate credit card to purchase a ticket?

A. No. Town employees are not permitted to use town funds to attend political events.

Related policies and procedures

- Municipal Elections Act
- Attendance Policy (HR-MNG-001)
- Absence Reporting Procedure (HR-MNG-001-001)
- Unpaid Leave of Absence Procedure (HR-MNG-004-001)

Professional codes of conduct

Employees with professional designations may be subject to more than one code of conduct. If a situation arises that may cause conflict or confusion between the applicable codes, speak with your manager.

Compliance

Managers must ensure each employee receives a copy of the Code of Conduct.

Each employee must sign the enclosed declaration form to acknowledge receipt of the Code of Conduct.

Questions concerning the application, interpretation or disclosure procedures of the Code of Conduct should be directed to your supervisor.

Violation of the Code of Conduct may result in disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal.

If you think you are or may be in conflict with the Code of Conduct, you must notify your supervisor by submitting the Code of Conduct Notification Form.