

## Human Resources Procedures/Guidelines Appendix 1 Sample Questions & Answers

Relates to: **Conflict of Interest Policy**  
Category: **Working Environment**

### **Sample Questions and Answers**

The specific rules and examples that follow do not exhaust the possibilities for conflict of interest, but they do identify obvious situations covered by the policy. The accompanying questions and answers are merely illustrations to help explain each rule.

### ***Special Treatment***

Employees are not allowed to use their positions to give anyone special treatment that would advance their own interests or that of any member of the employee's family, their friends or business associates.

*Sample question:* "A member of my family asked me to bring home an extra permit. I could get an extra permit because I work in the Permits Office, but won't do that. Everyone has to follow the standard procedure for permit applications. Am I right?"

*Answer:* Yes, you are right. Bending the rules to favour a family member or friend would be a conflict of interest.

### ***Receiving Fees or Gifts***

Employees may not accept gifts, money, discounts or favours including a benefit to family members, friends or business associates for doing work that the city pays them to do. The exceptions to this are promotional gifts or those of nominal value e.g., coffee mug or letter opener with the company's logo or the occasional lunch.

*Question:* "What should I do if a client gives me a gift or some money to thank me for doing a good job?"

*Answer:* Politely refuse the gift or money. You could explain that while you appreciate the offer, accepting it would not be proper according to the city's conflict of interest policy. Someone might interpret the gift as a bribe to get special treatment.

### ***Outside Work or Business Activities***

Employees may not engage in any outside work or business activity:

- (a) that conflict with their duties as city employees;
- (b) which use their knowledge of confidential plans, projects or information about holdings of the corporation; and
- (c) that will, or is likely to, negatively influence or affect them in carrying out their duties as city employees.

*Question:* "I am a buyer in the Purchasing & Materials Management Division and a friend who is bidding on a city contract has asked me to coach him on the preparation of his bid. Am I permitted to assist him?"

*Answer:* No, you cannot assist him even if you are not directly involved in the assessment of the contract on which he is bidding. Your knowledge of city contracts could lead to the perception that your friend would have an advantage over other bidders.

*Question:* "I am a paramedic and I have been asked by an accredited institution to teach a course on CPR. I will be paid a fee for this course. Am I permitted to teach the course?"

*Answer:* Yes, as long as you are not teaching individuals that you would normally be teaching as part of your job and do not wear a city uniform when teaching the course.

*Question:* "I am a licensing enforcement officer and I own an adult entertainment establishment. Is this a conflict of interest? What should I do?"

*Answer:* This may well be a conflict. You must disclose this involvement in writing to your executive director, general manager or division head.

### ***Using City Property***

Employees may not use, or permit the use of, items of city property, facilities, equipment, supplies or other resources for activities not associated with their work. Any exceptions to this must be expressly approved by either Council or the Deputy City Manager of the affected division.

*Question:* "Sometimes I'm allowed to take one of my division's pick-up trucks home overnight so I can go directly to my work site in the morning. Would it be all right for me to use the truck to help a friend move to a new apartment?"

*Answer:* No, it would not be acceptable to use a city vehicle for that kind of thing.

*Question:* "I do a lot of charity and volunteer work. Can I use my position and access to city property to assist those charities in their fund raising or other activities?"

*Answer:* No. Your volunteer work is important to the community and while the city supports volunteerism, use of city property is not appropriate.

### ***Confidential Information***

Employees may not disclose confidential or privileged information about the property, or affairs of the organization, or use confidential information to advance personal or others' interests. Employees cannot divulge confidential or privileged information about the city's employees without those employees' written authorisation.

*Question:* "In my work I sometimes learn confidential information about prices the city intends to offer for property purchases. I assume it would be wrong for me to share that information with a friend who works for a development company that sometimes competes with the city to buy sites. Am I correct?"

*Answer:* Yes, you are right. That would be a conflict of interest.

**Note on confidential information:** The rule against giving out confidential information does not apply to an employee who alleges wrongdoing on the part

of the city or its Council members, officers, employees, agents or contractors - as long as the disclosure of such information is not frivolous, vexatious or slanderous - and making the disclosure serves the public interest and is made in accordance with the provisions of this policy. This reporting of wrongdoing is known as whistle-blowing.

### ***Financial Interest***

Employees who knowingly have financial interests in a city contract, sale or other business transaction, or have family members, friends or business associates with such interests, must not represent or advise the organization in such transactions.

*Question:* "I own a piece of land in Toronto that the city wants to buy for a new park it is planning. Would that prevent me, a city official, from serving as an advisor to the city on land-assembly for the park?"

*Answer:* That's right. You should declare your conflict of interest and the city would probably assign somebody else to replace you on that particular project.

### ***Guidelines for Management and Professional Staff***

Some positions in the organization are more susceptible than others to conflicts of interest. The following two sections are specifically for managers and employees who give professional advice or assistance, or who work on program policies or budgets, and also refer to employees in confidential positions working with any of those staff.

### ***Representing Others***

Staff described in the paragraph above may not appear before Council or a city committee on behalf of a private citizen other than himself/herself, his/her spouse, his/her parents, or his/her minor children, where the employee is either paid, or is involved in any way in the issue/policy.

*Question:* "I am a management employee and I supervise an outside work crew. Does that prevent me from speaking on behalf of a friend before the Committee of Adjustment?"

*Answer:* You could speak for your friend before the Committee of Adjustment, as long as you are not being paid to do it and as long as the issue before the Committee of Adjustment is not in any way related to your work at the city.

### ***Appointments***

Staff who hold positions described above may not seek or accept appointment to a city committee or board (except in the capacity of a city employee) and require permission from their executive directors/general managers/division heads or designates before accepting appointments to other municipal, provincial or federal commissions boards and committees.

*Question:* "I work in program and policy development so this section of the policy applies to me. Does that mean I cannot serve as a member of a TV Ontario Advisory Council?"

*Answer:* It means you must have the permission of your executive director/general manager/division head or his/her designate before seeking that office.

Staff who hold positions as board members on community agencies that deal

with issues related to their work at the city should inform their executive directors/general managers/division heads or designates of their appointments. When agency issues arise that create potential or actual conflicts of interest, these should be declared by the employee.

*Question:* "I am a professional employee in Social Services and I am on the board of a community agency that delivers service to clients who are on welfare. If the board decides to submit a brief that argues for increased level of service to welfare recipients what role (if any) should I take in this process?"

*Answer:* You should declare a conflict of interest when this issue arises and make it clear that you cannot contribute to the brief or any lobbying that follows.

**Requirement to Report  
Conflict of Interest**

If employees or their relatives have a personal or financial interest that might present a conflict or bias in connection with their duties as a city employee, they must report this conflict to their executive directors/general managers/division heads or designates in writing.

*Question:* "My husband works for the XYZ Printing Company. I work for the city and sometimes issue outside printing contracts to bidders that include XYZ. Does that mean I should inform my executive director/general manager/division head or designate about the situation?"

*Answer:* Yes, you should inform your executive director/general manager/division head or designate in writing about your potential conflict in cases where XYZ is bidding.

**Approved by**

City Council (Clause 20, Report No. 16 Administration Committee)

**Date Approved**

August 4, 2000

**Related Information**

[Conflict of Interest Policy](#)  
[Appendix 2 Supplementary Guidelines](#)  
[Appendix 3 Conduct Respecting Lobbyists](#)