

Ontario Public Service

GUIDE TO PUBLIC SERVICE ETHICS AND CONDUCT

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In partnership with:

Ontario Internal Audit Division, Ministry of Finance
Corporate Services Division, Ministry of Transportation

Effective: January 7, 2011
Revised:



Table of Contents

1. INTRODUCTION	2
2. PURPOSE	2
3. MISSION, VALUES AND OBLIGATIONS	3
3.1. OPS mission and organizational values	3
3.2. Obligations of public servants	5
3.3. Obligations of managers	5
3.4. Obligations of ethics executives	6
3.5. Obligations to persons external to the OPS	6
4. ETHICAL CONDUCT	7
4.1. Oaths of allegiance and office	7
4.2. Conflict of interest	7
4.3. Political activity rights and restrictions	8
4.4. Disclosure of wrongdoing	8
5. WORKPLACE ENVIRONMENT	9
5.1. A safe, healthy and supportive work environment	9
5.2. Prevention of discrimination, harassment and workplace violence	9
5.3. A learning organization	10
6. WORKPLACE ASSETS	10
6.1. Securing public/ministry assets	10
6.2. Securing confidential information/government data	11
7. STEWARDSHIP AND TRANSPARENCY OF USE OF PUBLIC RESOURCES	12
7.1. Stewardship of public resources	12
7.2. Accountability for the use of public funds	12
7.3. Keeping accurate records	12
8. RISK MANAGEMENT	13
9. MONITORING AND COMPLIANCE	14
9.1. Monitoring and compliance	14
9.2. Disciplinary action	14
Appendix A – Terms and definitions	15
Appendix B – Ministry-specific information	17

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1. INTRODUCTION

The people of Ontario are entitled to a public service that conducts itself with integrity and impartiality. They rightfully expect their public servants to uphold the public trust and provide the highest level of service quality.

Being a member of the Ontario Public Service (OPS) is a privilege that comes with important ethical responsibilities. These responsibilities are set out in *Public Service of Ontario Act, 2006* (PSOA) and related regulations, corporate directives, policies and guidelines.

As public servants, ethical conduct is a critical part of who we are and what we do regardless of our assigned roles and responsibilities. Acting with integrity, and complying with all applicable laws, is essential to our reputation and long-term success as we work hard to earn and constantly maintain the trust of the public. The same qualities are also essential for the personal and professional success of each employee.

2. PURPOSE

This **Guide to Public Service Ethics and Conduct** provides an overview of some of the key expectations for employees in OPS ministries in conducting ourselves in an ethical manner. It covers requirements of the ethical framework under the PSOA, other applicable legislation, corporate directives, policies and guidelines.

This **Guide** provides:

- public servants in ministries with an accessible reference tool summarizing acceptable workplace conduct and behaviour. It highlights critical elements that must be observed and practiced by all employees.
- ministries with a corporate OPS-wide overview that may be customized to the needs and core businesses of each ministry (Appendix B – Ministry-specific information).

Disclaimer: This guide provides an overview and highlights of applicable legislation, corporate directives, policies and guidelines. It is not an exhaustive or definitive source of information, interpretation or guidance in every situation. In the event of a conflict or inconsistency between this guide and any applicable legislation, corporate directive, policy or guideline, the latter instruments prevail.

As an OPS employee, you are encouraged to become familiar with the noted references. For more context, you should login to the OPS [directives and policies](#) in MyOPS to review associated guidelines and best practices. To ensure that you are taking the appropriate course of action in a given situation, you may wish to seek the advice of your manager and/or your bargaining agent.

For ease of reference, this **Guide** has nine sections:

- **Introduction** – obligation to integrity that we all share
- **Purpose** - explanation of how this Guide supports and relates to, but does not override, legal or more detailed obligations
- **Mission, values and principles** - OPS mission and organizational values
- **Ethical conduct** – PSOA ethical framework elements (oaths of office and allegiance, conflict of interest rules, political activity rights and restrictions, protected disclosure of wrongdoing)
- **Workplace environment** – workplace health and safety, workplace discrimination and harassment prevention, workplace violence prevention, learning environment
- **Workplace assets** – physical, electronic, data protection
- **Stewardship and transparency of use of public resources** - effective management of public funds for the achievement of value for money in government and public-sector operations (e.g. capital investments, transfer payment, travel, meal and hospitality expenses, etc.)
- **Risk management** - direction and guidance on when you must act or make decisions under conditions of uncertainty
- **Monitoring and compliance** – guidance on how the underlying requirements summarized in the **Guide** are to be monitored and enforced.

This **Guide** is primarily designed as an electronic resource tool to ensure ready access to references posted on the MyOPS intranet and related legislation ([e-laws](#)) posted on the Internet. This approach is in keeping with the OPS greening strategy.

3. MISSION, VALUES AND OBLIGATIONS

3.1. OPS mission and organizational values

The [OPS mission and organizational values](#)¹ set out, at the highest level, the framework for the conduct of employees.

OPS Mission: Our mission is to serve the public interest and uphold the public's trust:

- *We support the elected government by providing ministers with honest, impartial and objective advice.*
- *We carry out the decisions and policies of the elected government and administer public service to the highest professional standards.*
- *We conduct ourselves with integrity.*
- *We exercise responsible stewardship of public resources and information.*

¹ Framework for Action Report, 2006
Guide/enterprise/publicserviceconduct_final6

- *We fulfill all our duties in accordance with the law, including the Public Service of Ontario Act, 2006 and in compliance with our public service oaths of office and allegiance.*
- *We are accountable for how we fulfill our public service roles.*

Organizational Values:

Trust	<i>We act honourably and honestly in all our relationships with the people we service, work with and who rely on us. We do our best to keep our commitments and fulfill expectations.</i>
Fairness	<i>We deal with others in an open, impartial and non-discriminatory manner. We ensure that the processes we use and the decisions we make are fair and seen to be fair.</i>
Diversity	<i>We celebrate our differences and draw on the strengths and capabilities of all of Ontario's communities. We welcome and respect divergent points of view to inform and enlighten us. We depend on and value each other.</i>
Excellence	<i>We strive for and recognize competence and excellence. We work hard to provide the best policy advice and the highest quality services that respond to the needs of Ontarians.</i>
Creativity	<i>We create new solutions by listening and learning and by being innovative and open to new ideas and approaches.</i>
Collaboration	<i>We work with team members, colleagues and partners to build consensus, solve problems and share responsibility.</i>
Efficiency	<i>We make careful, prudent and effective use of the hard-earned public dollars, assets and resources entrusted to us.</i>
Responsiveness	<i>We engage with clients, stakeholders, bargaining agents, the general public and our staff to find out how we can do better. We monitor and measure to make sure we are meeting our goals.</i>

As public servants, we must uphold the public trust and provide the highest level of service quality. In carrying out our duties and responsibilities, we are accountable for applying the following principles:

- **Ethical behaviour** - Serve with honesty and integrity, in a manner that places public interest above personal interests.
- **Prudent and lawful use of public resources** - Use public resources to achieve authorized purposes in accordance with rules and procedures that govern their use.

- **Value for money** - Use public resources with due regard for economy, efficiency and effectiveness.
- **Quality service** - Deliver affordable, accessible and responsive programs and services to clients and customers.
- **Fairness and equity** - Treat the public and employees in an impartial manner when administering programs and services and responding to problems.
- **Openness and transparency** - Provide full disclosure of publicly accessible information while respecting statutory, regulatory or administrative rules governing confidentiality and the protection of privacy.

References:

- [Public Service of Ontario Act, 2006](#)
- [Accountability Directive](#)
- [HR Management Directive](#)
- [Framework for Action Report, 2006](#)
- [Accessible Customer Service Policy](#)
- [Diversity Strategy](#)

3.2. Obligations of public servants

The ethical framework in the *Public Service of Ontario Act, 2006*, binds every public servant. Ethical elements include:

- [Oath of allegiance and oath of office](#)
- Conflict of interest
- Political activity rights and restrictions
- Disclosure of wrongdoing

We are required to meet our performance commitments, in context with the ethical framework, according to our job description and related roles and responsibilities. For more detailed information, read [Section 5 – Ethical Conduct](#)

3.3. Obligations of managers

In addition to fulfilling the obligations of a public servant, managers have a distinct responsibility to demonstrate leadership and act as mentors. Managers are expected to foster and maintain a productive and supportive working environment, in which employees and clients alike are treated fairly, honestly, and with respect. As a manager, you should:

- actively support employees.
- encourage employee participation and engagement.
- foster professionalism, competence, responsibility and accountability.
- provide guidance and frameworks to protect the rights of every person in an ethical work environment.
- establish clear accountabilities to clarify what the organization expects
- appreciate sound, competent performance; celebrate successes and recognize outstanding achievements.

- provide opportunities to achieve personal growth through training, career development, mentoring and regular feedback regarding job performance.

References:

- [Public Service of Ontario Act, 2006](#)
- [O. Regulation 381/07 – Conflict of interest rules for public servants \(ministry\) and former public servants \(ministry\)](#)
- [Accountability Directive](#)
- [HR Management Directive](#)
- [HR Management Delegation of Authority Directive](#)
- [Performance Management Operating Policy](#)
- [Workplace Discrimination and Harassment Prevention Policy](#)

3.4. Obligations of ethics executives

Under the PSOA, all ministry employees have an ethics executive (EE)².

- Current employees – Deputy minister
- Former employees – Public Service Commission
- Current deputy minister – Secretary of the Cabinet
- Former deputy minister and former Secretary of the Cabinet – Conflict of Interest Commissioner
- Secretary of the Cabinet – Conflict of Interest Commissioner
- Conflict of Interest Commissioner – Integrity Commissioner

The EE has specific responsibilities in determinations relating to conflict of interest³, political activity rights and restrictions⁴ and disclosure of wrongdoing⁵.

References:

- [Public Service of Ontario Act, 2006](#)
- [Disclosure of Wrongdoing Directive, PSC](#)
- [PSOA Fact Sheet](#)
- [Conflict of Interest Commissioner website](#)

3.5. Obligations to persons external to the OPS

The OPS is committed to treating all people in a fair and equitable manner with respect, dignity, courtesy, and sensitivity to individual needs. We are expected to respond courteously with fairness, timeliness and honesty to inquiries and requests for information or assistance from the public and external organizations.

We have to bear in mind that our actions and comments reflect on the public service as a whole. It is particularly important for employees who regularly interact with the public or members of the media to be accurate, current and professional when acting or speaking on behalf of the government.

² [PSOA Section 62](#)

³ [PSOA Section 65](#)

⁴ [PSOA Section 84](#)

⁵ [Disclosure of Wrongdoing Directive, PSC](#)

References:

- Public Service of Ontario Act, 2006
- O. Regulation 381/07 – Conflict of interest rules for public servants (ministry) and former public servants (ministry)
- Accountability Directive
- Freedom of Information Guide for Decision Makers
- Procurement Directive on Advertising, Public and Media Relations and Creative Communications Services
- OPS Service Directive

4. ETHICAL CONDUCT