



The King County Code of Ethics

Helping Employees Make Ethical Decisions

- It's the third annual Ethics Survey Quiz!
- Take the challenge to test your ethics knowledge and tell us what you think about ethics in King County.
- It's free! It's fun! It only takes 10 minutes! And it's confidential.
- Your participation will help the Board of Ethics to better serve you. Questions? Call the Ethics Help Line at 296-1586.

Please complete your survey-quiz by October 31, 2006.

THANK YOU!

Your personal responses are confidential, but group results will be made available at a later date.

Good luck!

1. You open your email to find a broadcast message from one of your staff who cannot use his tickets to The Greatest Show On Earth. He's offering his tickets at a good price. How do respond? (Use of county resources)

- a. Use this as an opportunity to inform and educate your agency on appropriate use of county resources.
- b. Email back as quickly as possible since you've always wanted to see the show.
- c. Inform the staff member he is on two weeks administrative leave without pay.

a. Use this as an opportunity to inform and educate your agency on appropriate use of county resources.

Explanation: To ensure that taxpayer dollars are used wisely, county resources may only be used for official county business and not for personal convenience or profit. If this is a first occurrence for this employee, education may be a better approach than discipline, and might be a good time to let all employees know about these policies. Contact the ethics office for a presentation tailored to the needs of your staff at 296-1586. [KCC 3.04.020(A)]

2. A vendor has done a great job for the county and, since you are the project manager, they ask you to write a testimonial for their use. How should you respond? (Conflict of interest – testimonials and references)

- a. Write a very complimentary paragraph and let them use it however they wish.
- b. Tell them you will be happy to be listed as a reference for future jobs, but may not write a testimonial.
- c. Suggest that they take you to lunch so you can properly assess their qualifications.

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Explanation: We are obligated to treat all citizens fairly and equitably and may not use our county position to provide any special treatment to one over another. So, providing a testimonial for one vendor could be seen as giving them a competitive advantage, although you may always be listed as a reference. In addition, your statement could be problematic to the county should there be difficulties with that vendor in the future. Once given to the vendor, you lose control over how and when the testimonial is used. [KCC 3.04.020(B)(C)]

3. How do I know if I have a potential conflict of interest in my county work? (Conflict of interest)

- a. Your personal interests overlap with your official job responsibilities.
- b. You speak with your supervisor or the Ethics Help Line about an ethical dilemma in the workplace.
- c. Your financial interests overlap with your official job responsibilities.
- d. All of the above will tell you whether you have a potential conflict of interest.

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Explanation: Ethical dilemmas arise every day in our workplace. This is natural and normal. The important thing is to recognize them and take quick and appropriate action. If you have a personal or financial interest related to your job responsibilities, talk to your supervisor or call the Ethics Help Line for information. They are here to help you. (KCC 3.04.030 & KCC 3.04.037)

4. While you are conducting an inspection at a swanky restaurant, the manager offers you a free meal for you and your family? May you accept? (Gifts and meals)

- a. Yes. You are an honest person and the meal would never affect your inspection findings.
- b. Yes. You had planned to eat there anyway, and besides, no one will ever know.
- c. No. We may not accept gifts or meals from those doing business, or seeking to do business, with the county.

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Explanation: To avoid the appearance of conflict with our county jobs, employees must decline gifts, meals, and things of value from those entities involved in actions or transactions with the county – particularly when we have official job responsibilities related to those entities. By following these ethics values, we help to ensure the public's trust in government. (KCC 3.04.030 & KCC 3.04.015)

5. A county employee wants to add a second personal line on her county cell phone. May she? (Use of county resources)

- a. No. Adding a personal line to a county phone is use of county resources for personal convenience.
- b. Sure! Whatever!
- c. Yes. It is too cumbersome for her to carry two cell phones.

a. No. Adding a personal line to a county phone is use of county resources for personal convenience.

Explanation: Use of county resources – including cell phones, vehicles, computers, and facilities – is a taxpayer expense. Generally, employees may only use county-owned property for official county business. [K.C.C. 3.04.020(A)] Questions? Check with your supervisor or call the Ethics Help Line at 296-1586.

6. In your spare time, you serve on the board of a non-profit organization that accomplishes Great Things. You learn that it is applying for a grant from your agency. What do you do? (Conflict of interest; Duty to notify supervisor)

- a. Call the Ethics Help Line for information and assistance.
- b. Email your supervisor right away for direction about these circumstances.
- c. Ensure that your supervisor responds quickly in writing to resolve the matter and to give you the direction you need.
- d. All of the above.

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Explanation: If you have a personal or financial interest in any matter related to your official job responsibilities, you probably have a conflict of interest. But there's help! Notify your supervisor in writing about the dilemma; your supervisor must respond to you in writing in a timely way resolving the problem. If either of you need information or assistance, contact the Ethics Help Line at 296-1586 to help you make a sound ethical decision. (KCC 3.04.030; KCC 3.04.037)

7. Why do we have a Code of Ethics anyway? (Policy)

- a. To keep the county out of legal trouble.
- b. To help ensure the public's trust and confidence in county government.
- c. To provide guidance to county employees and elected officials.
- d. Both b and c.

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Explanation: King County believes that public confidence in government is essential and is sustained by establishing and enforcing rules to assure the impartiality and honesty of elected officials and employees in all public transactions and decision. The code provides a road map for employees when they are faced with ethics dilemmas in their work life. When employees have knowledge of the code, they are more likely to sustain public trust and less likely to violate its provisions. (KCC 3.04.015)

8. I was hired by King County last month. Before that, I worked for ABC corporation. Now I've been assigned as project manager on developing a contract with ABC. Is this a problem? (Former employers)

- a. No. This way you can reward the good guys at ABC.
- b. It could be a problem for ABC if they don't follow through with your generous severance package.
- c. Yes. You are being assigned to contract matters related to your former employer and you should notify your supervisor right away.

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Explanation: To ensure trust in all of our decision-making, new county employees must refrain for one year from awarding a county contract or participating in a county action benefiting that former employer. In some cases, participation other than contract award may be authorized by a formal memo written by the employee's appointing authority; the memo must be filed with the Board of Ethics. [KCC 3.04.030(A)(7)]

9. My boss and I share an interest in real estate and we've set up a small business outside of our work at the county. Are there any ethical concerns about this? (Conflict of interest)

- a. No. This is a great way to make extra money.
- b. No. Since your boss is involved, he can give you extra time off to work on the business.
- c. Yes. Supervisors may not engage in an outside business with anyone who reports to them.

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Explanation: No employee may enter into a business relationship outside county government with any other employee for whom he or she has any supervisory responsibility. This relationship is prohibited since it could potentially disrupt the agency environment with concerns about fair and equitable treatment for all employees, retaliation related to outside dealings, and imbalance of work authority between the partners. [KCC 3.04.030(A)(10)]

10. Someone left "Support I-123" fliers on everyone's chairs last night after work. Is this okay? (Just and equitable treatment; Campaign activities)

- a. Yes. If passed, I-123 will save county jobs.
- b. No. County employees may not take part in campaign activities using county resources.
- c. Maybe – if it was your boss who left the fliers.

b. No. County employees may not take part in campaign activities using county resources.

Explanation: County employees are encouraged to participate in the political process on their own time and outside of the workplace by working on campaigns for elective office or any ballot proposition. However, they may not use or authorize the use of county resources for that purpose. And, no employee or elected official may use the power of their position to induce or coerce any other employee on matters related to such campaigns. [KCC 3.04.020(E) & KCC 3.04.020(C)]

11. “ I know where to turn to discuss ethical concerns or seek information.” If true, please list all places or people you would turn to with ethical concerns or to seek information.

(Open-ended box for comment)

12. If I had an ethics-related question or concern at work, I know management would take it seriously.

Agree strongly

Agree somewhat

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree somewhat

Disagree strongly

13. I feel confident that I could report an unethical practice without fear of retaliation.

Agree strongly

Agree somewhat

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree somewhat

Disagree strongly

14. Overall, I think King County has an ethical work environment.

Agree strongly

Agree somewhat

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree somewhat

Disagree strongly

15. What advice would you give to King County’s management to help reinforce or strengthen the county’s commitment to ethical conduct?

(Open-ended box for comment)

Your department

(Selection box)

Do you supervise others?

Yes

No

I would like the ethics staff to contact me. Here is how I may be reached.

(Information box)

~End~