

**PLAIN LANGUAGE GUIDE TO  
NEW JERSEY'S EXECUTIVE BRANCH  
ETHICS STANDARDS**

**June 2006**

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## INTRODUCTION

This is a Guide for State officers and employees and special State officers and employees in the Executive Branch of New Jersey State Government. If you are one of these persons, you should read this Guide carefully. It explains the ethics rules and laws found in the New Jersey Conflicts of Interest Law (N.J.S.A. 52:13D-12 et seq.) and in the rules of the State Ethics Commission (N.J.A.C. 19:61-1.1 et seq.). In addition to those laws and rules, you are also bound by the unique ethics code adopted by the agency for which you work. You are responsible for knowing the laws and rules described in this guide, as well as the specific policies and procedures of your particular agency.

As we in State government do our work, it is important that the public have the highest degree of confidence in our conduct. Our fellow employees depend on us to make lawful, ethical decisions. This Guide provides general information on the minimum ethical standards and does not have the force and effect of law. It does not replace any actual laws or rules, and it does not address every ethical restriction contained in the laws and rules it summarizes. It does not cover the requirements contained in your agency's ethics code, to which you are also subject. Ethical issues may also be addressed in procurement, personnel, and travel rules, as well as in open meetings, open records, and criminal laws. The statutes creating your agency may also contain ethical prohibitions. In addition, members of particular professions (such as lawyers and accountants) are subject to their own codes of professional responsibility.

Information in this Guide derives from detailed statutes, regulations, and executive orders. There are, however, ten simple principles that will guide you through the details.

### TEN PRINCIPLES OF ETHICAL CONDUCT

- **Exploitation of Official Position.** You may not use your position to secure a job, contract, governmental approval or special benefit for yourself, a friend or family member.
- **Compensation for Official Duties.** Your paycheck is your only permitted compensation. You may not accept any other compensation for performing your job. You may not “moonlight” without the approval of your agency.
- **Gifts and Favors.** You may not accept any gift of more than nominal value (e.g., a tee-shirt or a pen) from anyone with whom your agency conducts business.
- **Attendance at Events: Honoraria, Activities, and Expenses.** You may not be “wined and dined” by people with whom your agency conducts business. You may not accept honoraria. Official travel reimbursements require prior approval from your agency or the Ethics Commission. If a donor conducts business with your agency, it is unlikely that you may accept such payments.
- **Outside Employment, Business Interests and Political Activity.** You must disclose to your agency any outside employment, business interests and political activities and secure approval.
- **Conflicts of Interest.** You may not act in any matter in which you, your family, or your close friends have a direct or indirect personal or financial interest that might tend to conflict with the proper discharge of your official duties. Rather, you should recuse yourself and ask someone else to perform the State task.
- **Prohibition on Use of Confidential Information.** You may not accept employment or engage in any activity that may require or induce you to disclose confidential information acquired through your position.

- **Nepotism.** You may not hire, promote, or supervise a relative.
- **Post-Employment Lifetime Restrictions.** After you leave public employment, you may not represent or assist a person concerning a particular matter if you were substantially and directly involved in that particular matter while in State employ. Further, you may not use or disclose any information not generally available to members of the public, gained during the course of your employment.
- **When in Doubt, Ask!** If you think you have a conflict of interest or are unsure of any of these rules, ask your Ethics Liaison Officer or the Commission. If you suspect any wrongdoing, report your suspicion. Complaints may be made anonymously to the Commission and are kept confidential.

If you have questions (and most of us do, from time to time), you should contact your supervisor, Department Head or Ethics Liaison Officer (“ELO”). Most of the reporting requirements discussed in this Guide refer you to your agency’s ELO. A list of ELOs is available at [www.nj.gov/ethics/agency](http://www.nj.gov/ethics/agency). You may also address questions directly to the State Ethics Commission (which we refer to in this Guide as the “Commission”). We urge you to ask before you do something, rather than need to try to explain what you did.

To obtain more information or to check for revisions to these rules, call the Commission at (609)292-1892 or 1-888-223-1355. You may also visit our web site at [www.nj.gov/ethics](http://www.nj.gov/ethics).

## GENERAL STANDARDS OF CONDUCT

These rules promote the principle that public office is a public trust. Where government is based upon the consent of its citizens, the public is entitled to have complete confidence in the integrity of government. The business of New Jersey is conducted in a manner intended to assure the citizens of our State that the character and conduct of its officials and employees are above reproach. To achieve this result, the State has ethics rules that are general in nature, as well as rules that deal with very specific situations. Under the general rules, you must not:

- have any interest, financial or otherwise, direct or indirect, or engage in any business or transaction or professional activity, which is in substantial conflict with the proper discharge of your duties in the public interest;
- use or attempt to use your official position to secure privileges or advantages for yourself or others;
- act in your official capacity in any matter in which you have a direct or indirect personal financial interest that might reasonably be expected to impair your objectivity or independence of judgment; or
- knowingly act in any way that might reasonably be expected to create an impression or suspicion among the public having knowledge of your acts that you may be engaged in conduct violative of your trust as an officer or employee of the State.

These rules apply if you are a State officer or employee (holding office or employment in a State agency or a full-time New Jersey member of an interstate agency) or a special State officer or employee (holding office or employment in a State agency for which you receive no compensation, except possibly reimbursement of expenses, a part-time employee or a New Jersey member of an interstate agency if your duties are not full-time).

## GIFTS, FAVORS, SERVICES AND OTHER THINGS OF VALUE

You are not allowed to accept any gift, favor, service, or other thing of value from any person or entity under circumstances from which it might be reasonably inferred that the thing was given or offered in order to influence you in the discharge of your official duties. Some things of value are obvious, such as money, stock, debt forgiveness, real estate, or automobiles. But less obvious things also have value, including offers of employment, loans, labor, rebates, price discounts, entertainment, and meals.

***When an Interested Party is Involved.*** Regardless of the circumstances, you are always prohibited from soliciting or accepting any thing of value from an interested party. An ***interested party*** is:

- a person or entity that is or may reasonably be anticipated to be subject to the regulatory, licensing, or supervisory authority of your agency, or any employee, representative or agent of that person or entity;
- a supplier to your agency (meaning any private sector person or entity that is providing or is seeking to provide or may reasonably be expected to provide goods and/or services to your agency) or any employee, representative, or agent of a supplier;
- an organization that advocates or represents the positions of its members to your agency; or
- an organization a majority of whose members are interested parties.
- In general, an interested party is any person or entity that you or your agency deal with, contact, or regulate in the course of official business.
- Example: An employee inspects a business for health and safety violations. She may not accept a \$20 gift certificate from the business.
- Note: A separate set of rules applies to attending events sponsored by interested parties. See Attendance at Events: Honoraria, Activities, and Expenses, below.

***Reporting Requirement.*** You are required to disclose and hand over to your ELO any offer or receipt of a thing of value from any person or entity.

***Determination by Your ELO.*** If your ELO determines that it is inappropriate under the applicable ethics rules for you to accept the thing of value, he or she will return it to the donor or, if it is perishable, give it to a nonprofit entity in the name of the donor.

***Unsolicited Gifts of Nominal Value.*** From time to time, all of us receive unsolicited gifts or benefits of trivial or nominal value, such as complimentary articles offered to the general public (e.g., key chains, pencils, and calendars), and gifts received as a result of mass advertising mailings to the general business public. However inconsequential, you must disclose your receipt of these items to your ELO. If he or she determines that it will not create an impression of a conflict of interest or a violation of the public trust, you or your agency will be permitted to retain and use the items.

***Caution Against Inappropriate Uses.*** An item that is otherwise permissible to accept might be impermissible if it is used or displayed in an inappropriate manner. For instance, an official in a regulatory agency should not use a pocket calendar conspicuously marked with the name of a company that is regulated by the agency, as this might create the impression of favoritism. A State agency should not display in any of its offices a wall calendar from a vendor, as this might create the impression of an endorsement.

**Other Resources.** For a more complete discussion of this subject, see *Guidelines Governing Receipt of Gifts and Favors by State Officers and Employees*, [www.nj.gov/ethics/statutes/guide/giftcode.html](http://www.nj.gov/ethics/statutes/guide/giftcode.html), and N.J.A.C. 19:61-6.9 to -6.10, [www.nj.gov/ethics/statutes/rules/](http://www.nj.gov/ethics/statutes/rules/). You should also see *Advisory Opinions*, below, for information on advisory opinions that the Commission has issued on this topic and how to request an advisory opinion concerning your particular circumstances.

## COMPENSATION FOR OFFICIAL DUTIES

**Your State Paycheck is Your Only Permitted Compensation.** The only compensation or other thing of value that you are allowed to solicit or accept for doing your State duties is your State paycheck. Payment or reimbursement of your expenses for attending events is not compensation, and is addressed below under the heading “*Attendance at Events: Honoraria, Activities, and Expenses.*”

**Other Resources.** For a more complete discussion of this subject, see the Commission’s guidelines on various topics, at [www.nj.gov/ethics/statutes/guide/](http://www.nj.gov/ethics/statutes/guide/). You should also see *Advisory Opinions*, below, for information on advisory opinions that the Commission has issued on this topic and how to request an advisory opinion concerning your particular circumstances.

## ATTENDANCE AT EVENTS: HONORARIA, ACTIVITIES, AND EXPENSES

An *event* is any meeting, conference, seminar, speaking engagement, symposium, training course, ground-breaking, ribbon-cutting, meal, open house, cocktail party, fundraiser, holiday party, social function, or similar event that takes place away from your work location, is sponsored or cosponsored by a non-State government source and the invitation for which is extended to you because of your official position.

Meetings that you attend at other State agencies in the course of your official duties are not *events*.

- You must obtain prior approval from your ELO to attend any event.
- You are not allowed to accept an honorarium or fee for a speech or presentation at an event.
- You are not allowed to use your official title for the purpose of fundraising for a private organization (whether at an event or elsewhere).
- Regardless of the sponsor or the purpose of the event, you are permitted to accept nominal refreshments such as nonalcoholic beverages and snacks (doughnuts, pastries and cookies).

**If the Event is Not Sponsored by an Interested Party** (See above for definition.)

The State may pay your reasonable expenses associated with attending the event or it may permit you to accept (but not from an interested party) travel, meals, accommodation, waiver of conference or event fees or any other costs associated with attending the event, or reimbursement for such costs.

You are prohibited from accepting entertainment that is collateral to the event, such as a golf outing, or meals taken other than in a group setting with all attendees, or reimbursement for such items.

**Examples:** An employee of the Commerce, Economic Growth and Tourism Commission has been invited, by the Mexican Tourist Bureau, an agency of the Mexican government, to attend a series of meetings on promoting tourism in both countries. The employee will be giving a speech at a dinner on the final day of the meetings and has been offered a \$500 honorarium. The employee may attend the meetings, but is not permitted to accept an honorarium in connection with his speech. He may accept, directly or by reimbursement, actual expenditures for travel and reasonable subsistence for which no payment or reimbursement is made by the State, not to exceed the statutory limit of \$500.

A local non-profit organization would like to hold a dinner/fundraiser honoring a Technical Assistant from the Department of Banking and Insurance who has been a long-time supporter of the organization. The organization plans to use the Technical Assistant's picture, name, and official title on the promotional literature. The Technical Assistant may attend the event, but is prohibited from allowing the use of his official title for fundraising purposes.

***If the Event is Sponsored by an Interested Party.*** The State must pay your reasonable expenses associated with attending the event, and neither you nor the State can receive travel, meals, accommodation, waiver of conference or event fees or any other costs associated with attending the event, or reimbursement for such costs, from any source. There may be an exception to this rule if you take an active role in the event (see below).

***If You Take an Active Role in the Event.*** If an event is designed to provide training, dissemination of information, or the exchange of ideas, and you will be making a speech, participating in a panel at the event, or acting as an accompanying resource person for the speaker and/or participant, you must seek approval from your ELO. If he or she determines that doing so will not create a conflict or the appearance of one, your ELO can permit you to attend the event and permit the interested party sponsor to reimburse or pay for the following expenses associated with attending the event, if those expenses are not paid for by the State:

- ***Allowable Entertainment Expenses*** -the costs for a guest speaker, incidental music, and other ancillary entertainment at any meal at an event, provided they are moderate and not elaborate or excessive; but not the costs of personal recreation, such as being a spectator at or engaging in a sporting or athletic activity which may occur as part of that event.
- ***Actual and Reasonable Expenditures for Travel or Subsistence*** – include commercial travel rates directly to and from the event and food and lodging expenses which are moderate and neither elaborate nor excessive. For an event outside New Jersey, this amount must not exceed \$500 per trip, for expenditures for travel or subsistence and entertainment expenses that are not paid for by the State of New Jersey. The \$500 per trip limitation does not apply if the reimbursement or payment is made by:
  - a nonprofit organization and you are an active member of the organization because the State pays a membership fee or charge;
  - a nonprofit organization that does not contract with any State agency to provide goods, materials, equipment, or services;
  - any agency of the federal government or a private sector entity with a contract with a federal agency to provide meeting, conference, travel, etc. services;
  - any agency of another state or of two or more states; or
  - any political subdivision of another state.

**Examples:** An employee of the Department of Environmental Protection has been invited to attend a conference of the Association of Environmental Authorities and has been asked to present a short program to explain a new series of forms being proposed by the Department. The Association has offered to waive the \$200 conference fee; the conference program includes morning and afternoon refreshments and lunch. If the ELO approves the employee's attendance and participation in the conference, the employee may accept the waiver of the fee and the refreshments and meal included in the program. A copy of the ELO's approval must be forwarded to the Commission.

The Division of Motor Vehicles is considering the purchase of new pollution-testing equipment. One of the companies that plans to submit a bid invites several Division employees to a demonstration of the equipment to be held at a hotel conference center. A seafood buffet will be served after the demonstration. With proper approval, the employees may attend the demonstration, but because the company plans to submit a bid to provide this equipment, and is therefore an interested party with respect

to the Division, the employees may not partake of the seafood buffet at the expense of the vendor. The employees may, however, pay the cost of the buffet personally.

Three employees from different units of the Department of Transportation are responsible for weekly monitoring of a construction project. Each Friday morning, they meet with the contractor's representative at the site field office to review the week's progress and to assess projected schedules. The meetings generally last one to two hours; coffee is available, but no other refreshments or meals are served or offered. Because no direct or indirect benefits are offered or provided, and because the meetings are part of the employees' job responsibilities, the meetings are not considered "events" for the purposes of this Guide.

**Considerations in Granting Approval.** Your ELO must determine whether a legitimate State purpose will be served by your attendance at an event, and must consider applicable laws, regulations, ethics codes, guidelines, departmental administrative policies, and any other relevant considerations. These might include the identity of the sponsor and the other participants, the purpose of the event, whether the event will assist you in carrying out your official duties and support your agency's mission, and the value and character of the costs, benefits, and/or honoraria provided by the sponsor (including whether they are comparable to those offered to or purchased by other attendees). In some instances, the ELO is required to forward the approval to the Commission for review.

**Special Rules Applicable to Designated State Officers.** The Governor, the Attorney General, Commissioners of State agencies, heads of the other Executive Branch departments, specified members of the Governor's staff, and certain other persons are identified in N.J.S.A. 52:13D-24(d) as **designated State officers**. These persons are subject to stricter rules concerning compensation, honoraria, and other forms of income from any source other than their State paycheck. Designated State officers are required, in certain instances, and are urged in all others, to seek prior review and approval from the Commission before soliciting or accepting payment or reimbursement of their expenses in connection with an event from any outside source.

**Other Resources.** For a more complete discussion of this subject, see N.J.A.C. 19:61-6.1 to -6.8, at [www.nj.gov/ethics/statutes/rules/](http://www.nj.gov/ethics/statutes/rules/). You should also see *Advisory Opinions*, below, for information on advisory opinions that the Commission has issued on this topic and on how to request an advisory opinion concerning your particular circumstances.

## POLITICAL ACTIVITY

You are permitted to be involved in partisan political activities, provided there is no provision in your departmental code of ethics prohibiting those activities. The Ethics Codes of the Election Law Enforcement Commission, the State Ethics Commission, and several other agencies have specific provisions prohibiting such activities. Under no circumstances may you use State time or State resources in pursuit of political activities. You should notify your ELO prior to engaging in partisan political activities so that your situation can be reviewed to determine what, if any, restrictions apply.

The restrictions on your soliciting or accepting things of value do not apply to the solicitation or acceptance of contributions to the campaign of an announced candidate for elective public office. However, you cannot accept a campaign contribution if you know it is being given in lieu of a payment that you would otherwise be prohibited from accepting.

**Federal Hatch Act.** The Hatch Act restricts the political activity of an individual principally employed by a state or local executive agency in connection with a program financed in whole or in part by federal loans or grants. There is a misperception that the Hatch Act only applies if one's salary is federally funded. The Act may apply more broadly than that.

### **Covered State and Local Employees May:**

- run for public office in nonpartisan elections;

- actively campaign for candidates for public office in partisan and nonpartisan elections; and
- contribute money to political organizations and attend political fundraising functions.

***Covered State and Local Employees May Not:***

- be a candidate for public office in a partisan election (this does not eliminate being a candidate for school board, a nonpartisan office in New Jersey);
- use official authority or influence to interfere with or affect the results of an election or nomination; or
- directly or indirectly coerce contributions from subordinates in support of a political party or candidate.

The Hatch Act is a federal statute, not under the jurisdiction of the Commission. Any interested party may request advisory opinions from the Office of Special Counsel, Hatch Act Unit, 1730 M Street, N.W., Suite 300, Washington, D.C. 20036-4505. Telephone: 800-85-HATCH (800-854-2824) or 202-653-7143. You may also visit the website of the United States Office of Special Counsel, at [www.osc.gov](http://www.osc.gov).

***Other Resources.*** For a more complete discussion of this subject, see “State Employees’ participation in Political Activities,” [www.nj.gov/ethics/statues/guide/political\\_activities.html](http://www.nj.gov/ethics/statues/guide/political_activities.html). See *Advisory Opinions*, below, for information on advisory opinions that the Commission has issued on this topic and on how to request an advisory opinion concerning your particular circumstances.

## **OUTSIDE EMPLOYMENT**

You may have a second job, outside volunteer activity, or personal business interest only if it is compatible with your agency rules and your State responsibilities. You must not:

- undertake any employment or service which might reasonably be expected to impair your objectivity and independence of judgment in the exercise of your official duties;
- engage in any business, profession, trade, or occupation that is subject to licensing or regulation by a specific agency of State Government, without promptly filing notice of that activity with the Commission;
- engage in any business, transaction, or professional activity that is in substantial conflict with the proper discharge of your duties in the public interest; or
- use state time, personnel, or other resources for the other job or activity.

Neither you nor your immediate family members can hold employment with, hold an interest in, or represent, appear for, or negotiate on behalf of a holder of or applicant for a casino license unless the Commission grants a waiver. To ask for a waiver, contact the Commission.

Prior to engaging in any outside employment or other activity, you must get approval from your agency. Ask your ELO.

If you are not certain whether you are permitted to take on a job or other outside activity according to these rules, you should ask the Commission for an advisory opinion. These cases are frequently very fact-sensitive, and the Commission decides each individually.

***Other Resources.*** For a more complete discussion of this subject, see *Guidelines Governing Outside Activities*, at [www.nj.gov/ethics/statues/guide/outsideact\\_guide.html](http://www.nj.gov/ethics/statues/guide/outsideact_guide.html). See also, *Outside Activity*

*Questionnaire*, at [www.nj.gov/ethics/statues/guide/outsideact.html](http://www.nj.gov/ethics/statues/guide/outsideact.html). See *Advisory Opinions*, below, for information on how to find advisory opinions that the Commission has issued on this topic and on how to request an advisory opinion concerning your particular circumstances.

## CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

As a State officer or employee or special State officer or employee, you are prohibited from acting in your official capacity in any matter in which you have a direct or indirect personal financial interest that might be expected to impair your objectivity or independence of judgment. As a practical matter, this means that you should not participate in any decision, even informally, on a matter in which you have a financial interest.

***You could have a financial interest through such things as:***

- A purchase, sale, lease, contract, option, or other transaction;
- Property or services; and
- Employment or negotiations for prospective employment.

The Conflicts Law contains an exception that permits you to represent yourself in negotiations or proceedings concerning your own interest in real property.

### ***Prohibitions on Contracts with a State Agency***

***Special State Officers and Employees.*** You may not knowingly undertake or execute any contract, agreement, sale or purchase valued at \$25 or more with the State agency with which you are affiliated if you have any duties or responsibilities in connection with the purchase or acquisition of property or services. This prohibition also applies to your partners and to any corporation that you control, or in which you own or control more than 1% of the stock. The prohibition does not extend to other State agencies.

***State Officers and Employees.*** You, along with your partners or any corporation you control or in which you own or control more than 1% of the stock, may not knowingly undertake or execute any contract, agreement, sale or purchase valued at \$25 or more with any State agency, *whether or not* it is the agency for which you work.

***Limited Exceptions to these Prohibitions.*** Three categories of contracts are exempt from the general prohibition on contracting with the State. However, before entering into a contract falling within any of these categories, approval must first be obtained from the Commission. The three categories are:

- Those purchases, contracts, agreements, or sales that are made after public notice and competitive bidding. The Commission typically approves such contracts unless the contract in question is with the State employee's own agency. In these situations, the Commission has determined that such contracts raise the issue of an appearance of impropriety under section 23(e)(7) of the Conflicts Law.
- Those contracts that may be awarded without public advertising and competitive bidding pursuant to N.J.S.A. 52:34-10.
- Any contract of insurance entered into by the Director of the Division of Purchase and Property, Department of Treasury, pursuant to N.J.S.A. 52: 27B-62.
- In addition, there are two statutory exemptions that do not require advance approval by the Commission:

- Contracts for the development of scientific or technological discoveries or innovations: Section 19.1 of the Conflicts Law excepts contracts for the development of scientific or technological discoveries or innovations in which the State agency has a property right, if the State agency has a procedure in its code of ethics authorizing these contracts that minimizes actual conflicts of interest, and the contract complies with the code procedure.
- Certain rental agreements with State agencies: Section 19.2 of the Conflicts Law excepts rental agreements with a State agency that operates a facility which rents space or provides services to assist small businesses employing fifty people or less, pursuant to the same terms and conditions as those offered to members of the public generally.

***Prohibitions on Representing Parties other than the State.*** There are severe restrictions on your ability (and that of any partnership, corporation, or firm in which you have an interest) to represent, appear for, or negotiate on behalf of a person other than the State in connection with any cause, proceeding, application, or other matter, including a negotiation concerning the acquisition or sale of property of any sort, pending before any State agency. See N.J.S.A. 52:13D-15 and -16.

Representation does not only involve personally appearing before a State agency on behalf of an individual or entity. Under Commission precedent, representational activities also include:

- correspondence to a State agency on behalf of a third party;
- telephone calls to a State agency on behalf of a third party; and
- a State employee's signature on an application or other document submitted to a State agency on behalf of a third party (e.g., an engineering report).

You should carefully review these restrictions or consult with your ELO if you are considering taking any action on behalf of another person or entity that might be considered representing, appearing for, or negotiating on behalf of that person or entity in opposition to the State or before a State agency.

For special State officers or employees, the restriction on representing parties other than the State is limited to their own agencies.

***Advisory Opinions.*** If you think that you may have a conflict of interest, you should ask your ELO or the Commission for an opinion. These cases are frequently very fact-sensitive, and the Commission decides each individually. See *Advisory Opinions*, below, for information on how to find advisory opinions that the Commission has issued on this topic and on how to request an advisory opinion concerning your particular circumstances.

## **RULES REGARDING PUBLISHED WORKS**

The Commission staff frequently receives inquiries concerning State employees' activities in connection with authoring and publishing research papers, articles, and books. Based on applicable rules and Commission precedent, you may accept compensation for published works only if you meet all of these conditions:

- There is no prohibition governing that activity in your department's enabling legislation or code of ethics;
- You obtain prior approval from your ELO;

- The published work does not use or disclose information that is not generally available to the public;
- You do not use State time or resources in connection with the published work;
- You do not use your official title in connection with publication or promotion of the published work;
- You indicate that your views do not represent those of the State;
- You do not promote, advertise, or solicit sales of the published work to co-workers or individuals or entities with whom you have official dealings;
- You do not contract to sell the published work to the State, except in compliance with section 19 of the Conflicts Law; and
- The published work is not prepared as part of your official duties.

Note that the term *published work* includes not only research papers, articles, and books, but also any tangible mediums of expression, such as literary, pictorial, graphic and sculptural matter, sound recordings, and software.

**Examples:** As part of his official duties, a Department of Transportation employee evaluates surveying equipment and trains Department employees on its use. The employee recently completed an in-depth evaluation of ten different types of surveying instruments and made a recommendation to the purchasing unit. The employee would like to publish the entire report in Transportation Magazine. He has been offered \$500 for the article. The Department must make a policy decision as to whether the article may be published. The employee is prohibited from accepting compensation for the article, even if the Department grants permission for the publication, since it was created as part of his official duties prepared on State time and utilizing State resources.

An Environmental Technician at the Department of Environmental Protection has been asked to write an article for an environmental journal on how New Jersey's automobile emission standards differ from those of Pennsylvania. He has been offered \$500 for the article. The Environmental Technician is permitted to publish the article and receive compensation since it is on a subject matter related to, but not part of, his official duties, so long as he prepares the article at home, on his own time, without using any State resources.

**Other Resources.** For a more complete discussion of this subject, see *Guidelines Governing Outside Activities*, at [www.nj.gov/ethics/statutes/guide/outsideact\\_guide.html](http://www.nj.gov/ethics/statutes/guide/outsideact_guide.html), *Guidelines Governing Published Works*, at [www.nj.gov/ethics/statutes/guide/published\\_works.html](http://www.nj.gov/ethics/statutes/guide/published_works.html), and *N.J.A.C. 19:61-6.7*, at [www.nj.gov/ethics/statutes/rules/recusal.html](http://www.nj.gov/ethics/statutes/rules/recusal.html). See *Advisory Opinions*, below, for information on advisory opinions that the Commission has issued on this topic and on how to request an advisory opinion concerning your particular circumstances.

### CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION

You may not divulge any information that you obtain in the course of your official duties that is not generally available to members of the public. You may not use any such confidential information for your own benefit, whether direct or indirect. These restrictions continue even after you are no longer a State employee.

## USE OF OFFICIAL STATIONERY

Agency stationery can only be used for agency purposes. Use of official stationery for personal purposes will result in disciplinary action by the agency or administrative action by the Commission.

See *Guidelines Governing the Use of Official Stationery*, at [www.nj.gov/ethics/statues/guide/stationery.html](http://www.nj.gov/ethics/statues/guide/stationery.html).

## POST-EMPLOYMENT RESTRICTIONS

***Seeking Future Employment.*** If you have direct and substantial contact with any consultants or vendors doing business with the State, you must refrain from circulating resumes or in any manner seeking employment with those firms while you are still in State service. If you are solicited for potential employment by a firm with which you have direct and substantial contact, that solicitation must be disclosed immediately to your management and to your ELO to avoid a situation where you may appear to be using your official position to gain an unwarranted advantage. If you do not have direct and substantial contact with a particular consultant or vendor doing business with the State, you may circulate your resume and enter into discussions concerning potential employment with that firm, so long as you avoid any situation that may give rise to an unwarranted advantage. Your discussions, interviews, and negotiations should not take place on State time.

If the agency in which you are employed regulates non-State entities, solicitation or discussion of employment with those regulated entities (or their representatives) which have a specific cause, proceeding, application, or other matter before your agency is not permitted. If the entity does not have a specific cause, proceeding, application, or other matter before your agency, the situation must be reviewed by your ELO or the Commission on a case-by-case basis, and you can not proceed with any job-seeking activities related to that entity unless you obtain prior approval.

***Dealing with the State after your Departure.*** As a former employee, you will be prohibited from representing or assisting a person concerning a particular matter if you were substantially and directly involved in that particular matter while in State employment. This prohibition does not extend to “determinations of general applicability or to the preparation or review of legislation that is no longer pending before the Legislature or the Governor.” In addition, you may be banned from assisting or representing persons in any matter that is pending before your former agency. The statute, rules, and precedent governing these prohibitions are complex. Questions about the nature of matters with which you had involvement during the course of your official duties should be directed to the Commission, for determination on a case-by-case basis.

***Special Rules for the Casino Industry and for Lawyers.*** Additional, and more stringent, rules will apply to your post-employment activities if you file a Financial Disclosure Statement pursuant to law or executive order, or have responsibility for matters affecting casino activity, or are engaged in the practice of law. Questions concerning post-employment casino-related activities should be directed to the Commission. Lawyers may request advice on the application of the Rules of Professional Conduct from the Supreme Court Advisory Committee on Professional Ethics.

***Contracting with your Former Agency.*** Nothing in the Ethics Laws prevents an agency from contracting directly with a former employee.

***Other Resources.*** For a more complete discussion of this subject, see *Post-Employment Restrictions for State Employees*, at [www.nj.gov/ethics/statues/guide/empl\\_restrictions.html](http://www.nj.gov/ethics/statues/guide/empl_restrictions.html). See *Advisory Opinions*, below, for information on advisory opinions that the Commission has issued on this topic and on how to request an advisory opinion concerning your particular circumstances.

## NEPOTISM

The Commission staff frequently receives inquiries concerning the propriety of State officials interacting in the course of their official duties with family members. The majority of inquiries concern relatives employed by the same State agency, or interactions with family members employed in the private sector. Prior to 2006, the New Jersey Conflicts of Interest Law, N.J.S.A. 52:13D-12 et seq., did not contain a nepotism provision. However, the statute was amended, effective March 16, 2006, to prohibit certain relatives of certain State officials from holding particular government positions and also to prohibit State officials from supervising, or exercising authority with regard to personnel actions over, a relative of the State official.

If a relative (defined as an individual's spouse or the individual's or spouse's parent, child, brother, sister, aunt, uncle, niece, nephew, grandparent, grandchild, son-in-law, daughter-in-law, stepparent, stepchild, stepbrother, stepsister, half brother or half sister, whether the relative is related to the individuals or the individual's spouse by blood, marriage or adoption.) is employed by or is an applicant for an unclassified position with the agency where you are employed, please contact your ELO to determine if you or your relative are affected by the statutory restrictions.

***Family Members Working for the Same Agency.*** In the case of relatives who work for the same agency, supervisor/subordinate relationships are not permitted.

***Hiring Family Members.*** With respect to the hiring of family members, the Commission looks at the totality of circumstances surrounding the hire to determine whether any unwarranted privilege has been afforded the family member. Note that the Conflicts Law prohibits hiring in some circumstances. See N.J.S.A. 52:13D-21.2.

***Interacting with Family Members in the Private Sector.*** With respect to interactions with family members or their private sector employers, the Commission generally recommends recusal from matters involving the relative and/or the relative's employer, in order to eliminate any appearance of impropriety.

***Dating and Other Relationships.*** The Commission's policy concerning spouses who work in the same agency is also applicable to non-related individuals who share the same household with the same financial interdependence that the Commission views as creating a conflict in spousal situations. In the case of individuals involved in a dating relationship, the Commission has found violations of the unwarranted privilege and appearance sections of the statute in situations where the State employee had official involvement in a matter affecting the individual with whom he/she had a dating relationship.

***Casino-Related Conflict Issues.*** Only the casino-related provisions of the Conflicts Law contain prohibitions that specifically apply to a State official's immediate family members (defined as the person's spouse, child, parent, or sibling residing in the same household). Waivers of these prohibitions may be requested by contacting the Commission. Waivers will be granted if, in the Commission's judgment, the employment will not interfere with the responsibilities of the State officer or employee and will not create a conflict of interest or reasonable risk of the public perception of a conflict of interest.

***Other Resources.*** For a more complete discussion of this subject, see *Official Interactions with Family Members/Cohabitants and Dating Relationships*, at [www.nj.gov/ethics/statutes/guide/famcode.html](http://www.nj.gov/ethics/statutes/guide/famcode.html). See *Advisory Opinions*, below, for information on advisory opinions that the Commission has issued on this topic and on how to request an advisory opinion concerning your particular circumstances.

## RECUSAL

Sometimes, conflicts situations occur because of your personal relationships or financial circumstances. For example, you may be involved in reviewing vendor qualifications for a contract your agency is preparing to issue, and discover that your sibling's company has submitted a proposal. To avoid that inherent conflict of interest, you must formally recuse yourself from the review by assigning

another individual to handle the matter (or advising your supervisor of the need to do so), and by ensuring that you are screened from any communications about the review. See the Commission's rule on recusal, at [www.nj.gov/ethics/statutes/rules/recusal.html](http://www.nj.gov/ethics/statutes/rules/recusal.html), for more information about when and how to recuse yourself.

## **THE COMMISSION**

The Commission is responsible for providing advice and investigating matters pertaining to ethics and related rules governing the official conduct of State officers and employees and special State officers and employees. You are encouraged to seek guidance from the Commission or your ELO whenever you have questions about what you should do.

## **COMPLAINTS AND INVESTIGATIONS**

Allegations come to the Commission from various sources and can be made orally or in writing. The complainant may remain anonymous. If the complainant does identify him/herself, that information remains confidential.

Allegations may also be filed with the State agency employing the State officer or employee, in accordance with the procedures established by the agency. Upon receipt of an allegation, the State agency is required to file a copy with the Commission. It is within the discretion of the Commission to direct the State agency to transfer the matter to it.

When the Commission receives an allegation, the staff first reviews it for an initial determination as to whether the alleged conduct falls within the jurisdiction of the Commission. Once it has been determined that the Commission has jurisdiction, the staff initiates a preliminary investigation which may include interviews of the complainant, the State officer or employee involved, and any other individuals who possess knowledge of the circumstances surrounding the alleged conduct. Interviews are conducted under oath and are tape-recorded. An attorney or a union representative may accompany the interviewee, if he/she so desires, but such representation is not required. It is not appropriate for an interviewee to be accompanied by the agency's ELO. A copy of the taped interview will be provided to the interviewee upon his/her request, after the Commission has reviewed the matter. Interviews are occasionally conducted via telephone. Investigations also frequently involve the review of documents.

If the Commission determines that the testimony of any person is required, and that person refuses to appear, a subpoena may be issued.

During the course of a preliminary investigation, no information concerning an allegation is made public. Upon the conclusion of the preliminary investigation, a written report is presented to the entire Commission. The Commission's meeting is not a formal hearing. No witnesses appear. A full due-process hearing is held at the Office of Administrative Law ("OAL"), if and when the Commission determines that indications of a violation exist. The Commission meeting dates are posted on the Commission's website, at [www.nj.gov/ethics](http://www.nj.gov/ethics). Its meetings are open to the public. Reports of the Commission's preliminary investigations are privileged communications between the staff and Commission members, and are considered in closed session.

If the Commission finds that there has been no violation of the Conflicts Law or the relevant department's code of ethics, as alleged, it will dismiss the allegation. This occurs in an open public session. If the Commission determines that there are indications of a violation warranting further proceedings, a complaint is issued for a hearing at the OAL, pursuant to the requirements of the Administrative Procedure Act, N.J.S.A. 52:14B-1 et seq., and the Uniform Administrative Procedure Rules, N.J.A.C. 1:1. Although the Commission is also authorized hold hearings that is not normally done, due to time constraints. Prior to an OAL hearing, witnesses may be interviewed by the investigative staff. After the OAL hearing is concluded, a decision is issued in accordance with the time frame set forth in the Administrative Procedure Act.

In the past, the Commission has permitted individuals to enter into consent agreements with the Commission, either prior to or after the issuance of a complaint. Consent orders are included in the individual's personnel file. Consent orders and complaints are public records.

**Other Resources.** For a more complete discussion of this subject, see *Investigative Process*, at [www.nj.gov/ethics/procedures/investigative/](http://www.nj.gov/ethics/procedures/investigative/). See *Advisory Opinions*, below, for information on advisory opinions that the Commission has issued on this topic and on how to request an advisory opinion concerning your particular circumstances.

## PENALTIES

When a person is found to have violated the Conflicts Law or a particular agency's code of ethics, the Commission can levy fines ranging from \$500 to \$10,000 and may order restitution, demotion, censure or reprimand. The Commission is also authorized to order that the violator be suspended or dismissed from office or employment. If the person willfully and continuously disregarded the provisions of the Conflicts Law or a particular agency's code of ethics, the Commission may order that the person be barred from holding any public office or employment in this State, in any capacity whatsoever, for a period of up to five years.

## ADVISORY OPINIONS

Most of us working for the public will, at some point, find ourselves facing an ethics dilemma. It might concern whether we can accept a favor or gift from an agency contractor or vendor. Perhaps it will arise in connection with a second job or volunteer work. Maybe a spouse's business will want to do business with your agency.

One of the primary functions of the Commission is to respond to questions from State employees and others concerning how a particular situation might be analyzed under State ethics rules and to offer advice.

This can happen in a number of ways, ranging from very informal advice, to official written opinions. In many cases, questions can be answered with a telephone call or a visit with Commission staff. In other cases, employees might want to get a written opinion from the staff that is "unofficial," but documents the advice sought and received.

An "official" advisory opinion is one that is presented to the full Commission at a public meeting. Such an opinion is given in situations that are less clear, or for which there is little precedent. If you receive formal advice and guidance from the Commission, you will be immune from charges of violations of the provisions of the Conflict Law. You cannot gain immunity from the provisions of the Code of Criminal Justice, governing crimes such as bribery.

***If You Want to Request an Advisory Opinion Concerning Your Situation.*** To obtain an official advisory opinion from the Commission, you should write to the Executive Director of the Commission. You should provide as much information as possible concerning the request, and include any relevant documentation. In the event that additional information is required, a Commission investigator will contact the appropriate individuals or organizations. Requests for advisory opinions and replies to requests for advisory opinions may be made available to the public, after consideration by the Commission at a public meeting. For further information, see *Requests for Advice*, at [www.nj.gov/ethics/procedures/requests/](http://www.nj.gov/ethics/procedures/requests/). If you are unsure which level of response is most appropriate in your situation, give the Commission a call at (609) 292-1892. The most important thing is that you seek advice, before engaging in a potentially questionable activity.

***If You Want to Review Existing Advisory Opinions.*** To review official advisory opinions issued in the past by the Commission, contact the Commissions staff at (609) 292-1892 or 1-888-223-1355, or visit the Commission offices between 9:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. on business days. While a review of prior opinions

may be useful, bear in mind that every situation is unique, and that responses to one person may not necessarily apply to another, due to subtle factual differences between situations or to subsequent changes in the applicable laws or rules. Also, bear in mind that advisory opinions are only binding with respect to the facts and circumstances reviewed and considered in the specific request. Summaries of many of the Commission's opinions are available in the Commission's newsletters, at [www.nj.gov/ethics/publications/newsletters](http://www.nj.gov/ethics/publications/newsletters).

## **FINANCIAL DISCLOSURE**

Some State officers and employees and special State officers and employees are required by statute, executive order, or other law to file annual financial disclosure statements with the Commission. Information about financial disclosure requirements, forms, and instructions are available on the Commission's webpage, at [www.nj.gov/ethics](http://www.nj.gov/ethics). The Commission is empowered to impose a civil penalty of \$50 per day for failure to file a required disclosure.

State officers and employees who must file financial disclosures, and their immediate family members and new employers, are subject to a two-year casino-related post-employment restriction. See N.J.S.A. 52:13D-17.2(c). This restriction does not apply to most of the special State officers and employees who file financial disclosures.

## **INFORMATION ON RELATED OFFICES**

### ***Legislative Ethics***

Joint Legislative Committee on Ethical Standards  
Office of Legislative Services  
P.O. Box 068  
Trenton, NJ 08625-0068  
Phone: (609) 292-4840  
Toll Free: (800) 792-8630  
TDD: (609) 777-2744  
Toll Free: (800) 257-7490  
Fax: (609) 777-2440

### ***Local Government Ethics***

Local Finance Board  
Department of Community Affairs  
P.O. Box 803  
Trenton, NJ 08625-0803  
Phone: (609) 292-6613  
Fax: (609) 292-9073

### ***School Ethics***

School Ethics Commission  
P.O. Box 500  
Trenton, NJ 08625-0500  
Phone: (609) 984-6941

### ***Lobbyist Registration and Disclosure***

Election Law Enforcement Commission  
P.O. Box 185  
Trenton, NJ 08625-0185  
Phone: (609) 292-8700  
Fax: (609) 633-9854