

# ATLANTA ETHICS

IN ACTION



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## LET'S CELEBRATE ETHICS DAY!

Kevin Schukle, *Ethics Advisor I*

The Ethics Office celebrated its first ever Ethics Day on October 29, 2024, marking a significant step forward in promoting transparency, integrity, and accountability, which are critical to sustaining an ethical work environment. The event was held at City Hall and brought together city employees and officials from various departments for a thoughtful discussion of ethical decision-making. Employees had the opportunity to learn that ethics extends beyond the workplace and encourages principled, informed decisions in all aspects of life. As attendees arrived in the City Hall Atrium, they were greeted by Ethics Office staff and received branded ethics merchandise to showcase their commitment to ethical principles.

Senior Ethics Advisor Ibi Onabanjo welcomed attendees to the event, followed by remarks from Deputy Ethics Officer Carlos Santiago, who delivered a heartfelt thank you to all participants on behalf of the entire Ethics Office team. Dr. Andrew I. Cohen, a distinguished professor of philosophy at Georgia State University, Director of the Jean Beer Blumenfeld Center for Ethics, and current member of the Governing Board of the Office of the Inspector General and the Ethics Office, led an insightful session on the deeper meaning of ethics rules and why it takes more than following rules to lead an ethical life. Dr. Cohen engaged the audience with real-world examples and interactive exercises that challenged our ideas of ethical dilemmas, focusing on the intersection of thought and action in ethical decision-making. For example, when we have thoughts of stealing, but we don't commit the act of stealing, is the thought alone enough to be considered unethical?



Following the keynote discussion, Ethics Officer Jabu Sengova addressed the attendees and invited them to enjoy a catered lunch and a lively trivia contest, which tested their knowledge of Atlanta's history, the Ethics Code, and a variety of fun topics from geography to popular fast-food slogans. The trivia session concluded with a reminder for employees that they are the backbone of the city's commitment to ethical governance.

With strong attendance and enthusiastic feedback, our inaugural Ethics Day was a success. The Ethics Office looks forward to expanding the event in the years to come.



# MEET “GENIE”: THE AUDIT BOT

LaDamian Boatwright, Management Analyst, Sr.



The City of Atlanta Ethics Office is gearing up for a major leap forward in its auditing process. Every year, more than 3,500 Financial Disclosure Statements flood the office, which are submitted by city officials, employees and board members. These documents are crucial for maintaining transparency and ensuring accountability within the City, yet the existing manual process presents a daunting challenge for the Ethics Office.

Currently, the Ethics Office is limited to auditing a subsection of disclosure statements because of the tedious nature of the existing manual process. The existing method limits the office's ability to analyze all submissions and increases the risk of overlooking incomplete or inaccurate statements. Recognizing this deficiency, the Ethics Office has established an automated audit program which is slated for implementation in 2025.

Meet “Genie,” the innovative automation program designed to revolutionize the way our Ethics Office manages submissions. The bot “Genie” is expected to review every entry, examining mountains of data with an unmatched efficiency that human eyes would miss.

The bot’s mission is clear: to identify errors, omissions, and discrepancies that may require deeper investigation. When anomalies surface “Genie” will flag these unusual findings for review. This will enable the Ethics Office to examine and verify the information through additional research and request necessary corrections to maintain the highest level of accuracy.

The Ethics Office owes much of its foundational strength to the invaluable contributions of its first Ethics Officer, Virginia “Ginny” Looney, who served from 2003 until 2011. It is in her honor that the automation program, aptly named “Genie” after Looney, was developed. The development of “Genie” serves as a reminder of her contributions. “Genie” embodies the principles of accountability, diligence and transparency that Ginny championed throughout her career. This program not only honors Ginny's memory but also enhances the city’s commitment to ethical governance.



## THE ETHICS OF GIVING AND RECEIVING GIFTS

Gift giving is a valued and widely practiced tradition, both in our culture and throughout the world. But giving and receiving gifts in a government setting carries certain ethical implications of which we need to be aware. Soliciting, accepting or providing gifts or hospitality (that is, meals and entertainment) considered to be “lavish” or “excessive” is one way in which a conflict of interest—or the appearance of a conflict of interest—can arise in government.

When it comes to giving and receiving gifts, we are required to follow the Atlanta Code of Ethics. The Code of Ethics bans anything of value given by or received from a prohibited source. There is no de minimis (minimum) exception for gifts. Employees may not accept personal gifts of cash, meals, tickets, or honoraria. City officials and employees generally may not accept free tickets to any entertainment or athletic event that is offered because of the individual's position with the City, unless they are performing an official duty (a task related to one's job or responsibilities) at the event.

City of Atlanta employees and officials are responsible for making sure that, in our dealings with customers, vendors and suppliers, we avoid even the appearance of a conflict of interest. Our gifts policy applies to directors, officers, employees, consultants and contractors. Be alert for signals that a city employee may be expecting something in exchange for the gift or hospitality.

Inform your manager if you or a colleague is offered a gift or hospitality of significant value. If you are unsure about whether a specific situation falls under the City's code, please consult the Ethics Office before you give or receive a gift of any kind.

Credit <https://www.compliancewavelibrary.com/articles/20121205> as adapted by LaDamian Boatwright to reflect the City of Atlanta Ethics Code

# HOW WE APPLY OUR ETHICS TRAINING IN THE WORKPLACE

Have you attended the City of Atlanta ethics training and completed an online ethics e-learning course? If so, you should have a good understanding of the Atlanta Code of Ethics. This is the time to apply what you've learned about ethics to the workplace, and the way you use the city's resources and property. This is also a good time to ask yourself about the atmosphere in your department. Are communications with vendors and contractors honest and ethical? Remember to look not only at actions, but at the way those actions might be perceived by others, what we call "appearances of impropriety."



In your personal life, do you have any financial or personal interests that may conflict with your city job? If you have completed our ethics training, you should feel confident in contacting the ethics office to ask. The answer may be a simple disclosure of that conflict.

If you're struggling with something that doesn't seem right, but you aren't sure whether it's ethical, it would be a good idea to seek advice from the ethics office.

Any of these things that seem small, may represent larger, underlying issues. It is better to be safe and do the right thing, since our actions, and the way the public perceives our actions, can impact our jobs and the reputation of the city.

# LESSONS LEARNED AT SCCE

Juan Hernandez, *Investigator Specialist*

As the Investigator Specialist for the Ethics Office, Juan Hernandez attended the Society of Corporate Compliance and Ethics (SCCE) Experienced Investigator Workshop with Investigation Manager, Sr. Larry Mason. Both staff members learned about ethics and compliance investigation practices from renowned industry leaders, Odell Guyton and Art Weiss. Mr. Guyton served as a Compliance Director for Microsoft, where he helped establish their compliance program. Mr. Weiss teaches global compliance at Loyola University and serves as a building materials company's Chief Compliance and Ethics Officer. Larry and Juan also collaborated with professionals from other local governments and transnational corporations to explore and share best practices conducting internal investigations.

Larry and Juan attended sessions focused on developing best practices in reviewing Ethics complaints with integrity, discipline, and respect. Additionally, the two investigators increased their knowledge of the roles and responsibilities of an advanced investigator, handling complaint intake and assessments, interviewing mechanics, and report writing. Through networking, Larry and Juan interacted with other compliance professionals and learned about available resources. The Experienced Investigator Workshop provided the Ethics Investigators with invaluable resources and practices from across the industry. Larry and Juan plan to incorporate these practices into ethics investigations to better protect employees, manage cases more efficiently, and produce thorough investigative reports.







# Ethics Challenge: Test Your Knowledge!!!

## How To Play:

The first 10 people to email the correct answers to [ethicstraining@atlantaga.gov](mailto:ethicstraining@atlantaga.gov) by December 6, 2024, will win ETHICS SWAG!!!

What should city officials/employees do if they are not sure if their actions comply with the Ethics Code?

- A Consult the Ethics Office or speak with their supervisor
- B Seek advice from friends outside the workplace
- C Discuss with colleagues outside of the department
- D Use Google to find the right answer

A Parks and Recreation employee works at a city recreation facility and officiates a youth football game.

Which of the following would the employee be allowed to accept?

- A A \$25 gift card from a vendor serving food at the game
- B A leftover box of brand name t-shirts from one of the team coaches
- C A hand towel from the little league quarterback
- D A pour of wine from a parent at the game

Monica, a former city employee, was hired to be the campaign manager for a city council candidate.

Which could Monica do that would not violate the Ethics Code?

- A** Film a campaign promotional video inside of City Hall
- B** Request volunteers or donations for the campaign by reaching out to former colleagues and city employees via their work emails
- C** Hand out campaign flyers on the sidewalk outside of City Hall
- D** All of the above

Why is it important for city officials and employees to do the right thing?

- A** To maintain the respect of their peers and coworkers
- B** To avoid potential public embarrassment resulting from misconduct
- C** To earn the trust and confidence of the public, so they can be confident that their tax dollars are being used responsibly
- D** All of the above



# Reporting Misconduct in the City of Atlanta

Observing and reporting employee misconduct while working remotely may not seem as obvious as it is while working onsite. After all, if people are not in the office, they should not be doing anything unethical, right? Unfortunately, that is not always the case. Ethical misconduct and fraud can happen even in a remote workplace, and the opportunity to do so, rationalizing why it happens, as well as the pressure to behave improperly, remain present.

If you notice anyone engaging in ethical misconduct or fraud, misusing a city position or city funds or resources, it is important that you call the **Integrity Hotline** at **1-800-884-0911**. All complaints are thoroughly reviewed. If you are not comfortable providing your name, you can file an anonymous complaint, and your call will be confidential. You can also visit [www.atlantaga.ethicspoint.com](http://www.atlantaga.ethicspoint.com) to file a complaint online. The site is confidential and secure. We want to hear from you, and we take all complaints seriously.



## INTEGRITY HOTLINE



# **ETHICAL REMINDER**

## **GIFT RULE**

Officials and employees may not accept gifts of cash, meals, tickets, entertainment, or travel, including the following:

- Personal gifts, cash, or gift cards
  - Private meals or receptions
- Individual travel unless related to a speech, or attendance at a conference
- Free or reduced-price tickets to entertainment and sports events
- Anything of value intended to influence an official act

# Special Announcements

## NEW STAFF MEMBER!

### **KEVIN SCHUKLE**

joined our office in August as an Ethics Advisor, where he researches and interprets ethics laws, provides verbal and written ethics advice to city employees and vendors, and conducts ethics training for new employees on the Atlanta Code of Ethics. He graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from the University of Georgia and completed his Juris Doctor at Georgia State University. He has previously worked as a Corporate Compliance Specialist and is a former Assistant Solicitor General out of Cobb County.

