



# ATLANTA ETHICS

IN ACTION



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## A Stronger Foundation: City of Atlanta Enhances Ethics Oversight

This year brought significant changes to the City of Atlanta Ethics Office — changes that we want every city employee to know have made our office stronger, more stable, and better positioned to serve them.

In a major move to strengthen ethical governance, the Atlanta City Council passed a series of amendments to the City Charter that separated the oversight responsibilities of the Ethics Office and the Office of the Inspector General (OIG). These changes established a new, independent City of Atlanta Ethics Board—dedicated solely to ensuring that the City's Code of Ethics is upheld with clarity, consistency, and fairness.

## Why the Change?

Previously, both offices were overseen by a joint board. While well-intentioned, this structure often created blurred lines between investigative responsibilities, ethics oversight and jurisdictional boundaries between the two offices.

Following careful evaluation and thoughtful input from a special review task force composed of legal experts, civic leaders, and members of City Council, the Charter was amended to clarify roles and maximize the impact of each office.

## What Has Changed?

- **Oversight:** The Ethics Office and the Office of the Inspector General now operate under separate governing boards. This change ensures that each office can focus fully on its mission without overlapping and outlines responsibilities more clearly.
- **New Ethics Board:** The new Ethics Board is composed of five individuals nominated by legal, civic and professional organizations including the Atlanta Bar Association and League of Women Voters.

Board members are confirmed by the City Council and subject to approval by the Mayor and serve staggered three-year terms. These individuals bring diverse perspectives and deep commitment to ethical public service.

- **Boundaries and Responsibilities:** The Ethics Office is exclusively responsible for interpreting and enforcing the City's Code of Ethics. The OIG focuses on issues like waste, fraud, and abuse of authority.
- **Enhanced Qualifications for Leadership:** To ensure qualified oversight, the Chair of the Ethics Board must have at least *five* years of investigative experience and hold a law degree. This requirement strengthens leadership and guarantees informed decision-making.
- **Employee Rights & Protections:** If you are ever asked to participate in an Ethics matter, you are now entitled to advance notice and the right to legal or union representation. These changes enhance fairness and due process while maintaining the integrity of our procedures.

## 2025 COGEL Conference Comes to Atlanta!

The Council on Governmental Ethics Laws (COGEL) is a professional organization for government agencies and other organizations working in the areas of campaign finance, open government, governmental ethics, elections, and lobbying. COGEL is primarily comprised of U.S. and Canadian governmental members, but also includes members in good government, academia, think tanks, and private enterprise.

The annual COGEL Conference is the premiere activity of the organization, which dates back to 1978 and brings together attendees from throughout North America and beyond. The 2024 conference took place in Los Angeles with an attendance exceeding 500 people. This year, our annual conference will be in Atlanta, Georgia on December 7-10, 2025, at the Atlanta Marriott Marquis.

The Atlanta Ethics Office has been a member of COGEL since its inception, and the ethics staff have attended and participated in the annual conference and other related events. Further, we are very engaged with the COGEL community, and the Ethics Officer has served on the COGEL board and the annual conference program committee. The COGEL community is looking forward to the Atlanta conference, and excitement is building up for December!

Atlanta's local scene is vibrant and culturally diverse, making it an excellent location for a governmental ethics conference. The City offers a wealth of cultural, political, and historic attractions, including the Martin Luther King Jr. Center and the National Center for Civil and Human Rights, as well as diverse dining and entertainment options, sports and entertainment venues, and beautiful green spaces and outdoor vibes. We look forward to welcoming the COGEL community to our City!

## Avoiding Conflicts of Interest

Sometimes it is difficult for us to recognize our own conflicts of interest, so it is important for all of us to be attentive to potential conflicts of interest that may take place around us. We all must take steps to avoid situations that compromise—or appear to compromise—our ability to do our jobs and make decisions without prejudice or preferential treatment of anyone.



A conflict of interest exists when an individual's personal interests unfairly influence his or her actions, judgments, or decisions in the workplace. Not all conflicts of interest are unlawful; however, concealing them or neglecting to disclose them is. Even the appearance that one can be influenced unfairly can damage the effectiveness or reputation of an individual or the City of Atlanta as an organization.

City officials and employees are required to complete and submit a Conflict of Interest Disclosure Form if they have a financial or personal interest in any decision, piece of legislation, or matter that is under consideration either by the individual or their respective agency. This disclosure requirement ensures transparency and accountability in the decision-making process and provides safeguards against potential conflicts of interest. It is important to note that the disclosure form must be filed within 7 days from the date the decision or of a pending matter.

The City of Atlanta's Code of Ethics serves as a conflict-of-interest law designed to uphold government integrity and foster public trust. It achieves this by prohibiting conflicts of interest, mandating financial disclosures, and ensuring a fair enforcement process. If you have questions regarding actual or potential conflicts of interest, please reach out to the Ethics Office at [ethicsofficer@atlantaga.gov](mailto:ethicsofficer@atlantaga.gov).

*\*Adapted for the City of Atlanta Ethics Office from the Library of Diligent Compliance and Ethics Training*

## Ethics in the News

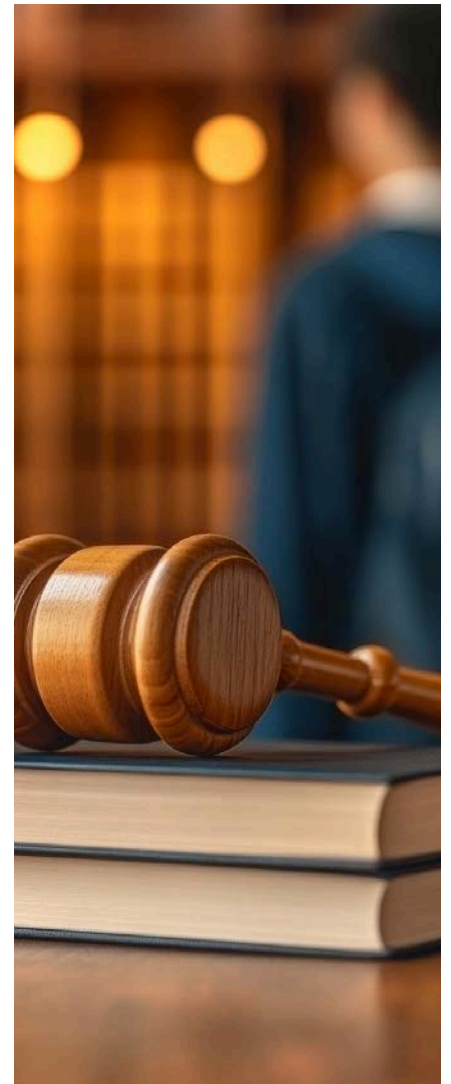


Cities across the United States are reforming their ethics rules to make government more honest and accountable. Some places are focusing on positive values, while others are tackling corruption or improving training for officials. These efforts reflect a growing recognition of the importance of transparency and ethical leadership in fostering public trust and effective governance.

- **“Elk Grove Updates Ethics Code”** - In California, **Elk Grove** has changed its ethics code to focus on **values** instead of punishment. The new guidelines encourage positive and inclusive behavior and were developed with help from the city's **Diversity and Inclusion Commission**.

- **“Los Angeles Faces Ethics Challenges”** – Meanwhile, **Los Angeles** has struggled with ethics reform after several corruption cases. Leaders have proposed stronger rules, including **higher penalties** for violations, but recent changes have reduced the power of the city’s ethics commission. Many worry that this could make it harder to enforce ethical standards.
- **“New York City Expands Ethics Training”** – In **New York City**, officials are taking a different approach—education. A new training program will help city employees and elected leaders understand ethics rules and avoid conflicts of interest. The program includes **mandatory workshops** and updated guidelines to ensure accountability.

While these cities may not be our home, we want to emphasize that an ethical government leads to **effective governance**. Like the cities highlighted above, the Ethics Office has undergone significant changes and remains dedicated to earning the public’s trust. Everyone in Atlanta contributes to shaping its reputation, and our office relies on the active participation of employees, citizens, and community members to cultivate a culture we can all take pride in. Through our training and disclosure programs, we ensure accountability and enforce penalties for noncompliance. Our Ethics Office has a track record of fairness, benefiting both those within the city’s government and the public. We take pride in the fact that elected leaders and city officials consult us for guidance on how to avoid conflicts of interest, demonstrating a commitment to ethical conduct. Although the news often highlights ethical challenges, we confront these obstacles and use the lessons learned as motivation for more good governance.





## Lessons Learned

### 2025 National Compliance Week Conference - Washington, DC

The 2025 National Compliance Week Conference wasn't just another professional development opportunity. It was a much-needed reset. Ariyan Marshall, Management Analyst, and Ethics Officer, Jabu Sengova, attended on behalf of the City of Atlanta Ethics Office, returning with fresh insight and renewed energy for the work ahead.

Throughout the conference, one central message stood out: compliance isn't just about rules, it's about building relationships. Trust is at the heart of any effective program, and that kind of trust is built through consistency, honest communication, and a genuine willingness to listen. This means listening as much as informing and creating space for people to engage with compliance not out of obligation, but out of shared ownership.

Attendees were encouraged to rethink how value is defined in this space. Value is not limited to policies and audits; it's reflected in follow-through, accountability, and systems that make ethical decision-making feel like second nature rather than a burden.

The conference also highlighted the slow burn of cultural change. It takes time, intentional strategy, and patience. But small wins matter, whether it's greater engagement, open dialogue, or visible leadership support. Compliance professionals are more than rule enforcers; they are culture-shapers, connectors, and steady hands in the moments that count.

Ariyan and Jabu came back with a renewed sense of purpose and a shared understanding that meaningful compliance work isn't about checking boxes. Our work is about creating systems where people feel seen, supported, and empowered to do the right thing, together.

# Ethics Trivia

## MULTIPLE CHOICE

### How To Play:

The first 7 people to email the correct answers to [ethicstraining@atlantaga.gov](mailto:ethicstraining@atlantaga.gov) by July 8, 2025, will win ETHICS SWAG!!!

**1 Can a city employee accept a free event ticket from a company trying to get a city contract, if the employee isn't part of the decision-making process?**

- a) Yes
- b) No

**2 Leslie, a senior manager in Watershed Management, uses her assigned city vehicle to pick up her kids from school during her lunch break a few times a week. She argues that it saves her time and doesn't cost the city anything.**

**Which of the following is true?**

- a) Leslie's use is fine if it doesn't interfere with her work duties.
- b) Leslie can use the vehicle if her supervisor approves.
- c) Leslie is misusing city property for personal gain.
- d) Leslie is allowed to use the vehicle during her lunch break since it's her personal time.

**3 Accepting a gift from a prohibited source always violates the ethical rules.**

- a) True
- b) False





# Announcements

## THE CITY OF ATLANTA ETHICS OFFICE PRESENTS: **ETHICS WEEK**



**OCTOBER 13TH-17TH**  
**LET'S SPEND THE WEEK**  
**BUILDING TRUST TOGETHER**



### **Ethical Boundaries: The Risks of Accepting Sporting Event Tickets**

Government employees must uphold integrity and public trust by avoiding improper gifts, including sporting event tickets. Accepting tickets from individuals or organizations with governmental business interests can create conflicts of interest or the appearance of impropriety. If you are offered tickets, consider whether acceptance could influence decision-making or erode public trust. When in doubt, consult the Ethics Office.