



SUMMER 2023 NEWSLETTER VOLUME 19



City Of Atlanta | Ethics Office

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CELEBRATING THE 20TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ETHICS OFFICE

As we commemorate the 20th anniversary of the Ethics Office, we reflect on its pivotal role in upholding transparency, accountability, and fostering trust among employees and the public. Since its establishment in 2003, the Ethics Office has been at the forefront of cultivating a culture of ethical behavior within the City of Atlanta.

The enduring success of the Ethics Office owes its gratitude to the invaluable groundwork laid by former Mayor Shirley Franklin and the visionary leadership of the late Ginny Looney, the first Ethics Officer. With their remarkable dedication to ethical principles, Looney spearheaded the development of robust policies, procedures, and training programs that became the solid foundation of the City of Atlanta's ethical infrastructure. The expertise and unwavering commitment of both leaders have left an indelible legacy that continues to guide and shape the Ethics Office's ongoing achievements.

Throughout the past two decades, the Ethics Office has been a trusted and reliable resource for employees, providing invaluable support, guidance, and comprehensive education. Under the leadership of former Ethics Officer Nina Hickson and current Ethics Officer Jabu Sengova, the Ethics Office has upheld its commitment to provide training, offer expert advice, diligently investigate complaints, and manage the financial disclosure process. Our mission is to empower city officials and employees with the necessary knowledge and tools to make good decisions rooted in the values of honesty, integrity, accountability, and transparency. Our open-door policy and confidential reporting mechanisms ensure that matters are addressed promptly and impartially, safeguarding the integrity of our office.

As we celebrate this significant milestone, we recommit ourselves to the principles that have guided us from the beginning. The Ethics Office will continue to play a crucial role in promoting ethical behavior, upholding integrity, and ensuring the City of Atlanta remains a shining example of responsible governance for years to come.

Three gold trophies are arranged on a textured gold background. One trophy is in the foreground, slightly to the left, and two are behind it, one to the right and one further back and to the left. The trophies are ornate with handles and a central cup.

2023

TRANSPARENT DIAMOND AWARDS

The Transparent Diamond Awards is an annual presentation ceremony hosted by the Governing Board of the Office of the Inspector General and the Ethics Office. The ceremony honors city boards and departments for their leadership, diligence, and persistence in encouraging their employees to comply with the annual City Financial Disclosure requirements in a timely manner. We were happy to resume the event at City Hall this year after two years of a virtual ceremony due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In past years, city departments have enjoyed attending the event and participating in the awards ceremony.

This year, 3693 people were required to file the City Financial Disclosure Statement. The following city departments received the 2023 Transparent Diamond Award for achieving 100% compliance because all required filers in the respective departments completed their filing before the April 3, 2023, deadline:

- **Atlanta City Council**
- **Atlanta Citizens Review Office**
- **City Auditor's Office**
- **Department of Customer Service (ATL 311)**
- **Department of Law**
- **Office of the City Solicitor**
- **Office of the Public Defenders**
- **WorkSource Atlanta**

The following departments received the Honorable Mention Award for achieving a 90% or better timely filing rate:

- **Atlanta Information Management (AIM)**
- **Atlanta Police Department**
- **Department of Aviation**
- **Department of City Planning**
- **Department of Corrections**
- **Department of Enterprise Assets Management (DEAM)**
- **Department of Parks & Recreation**
- **Executive Offices**



Please join us in congratulating the recipients of this year's awards and recognizing their efforts for achieving this honor!

More importantly, we are grateful to these city departments for their commitment to supporting an ethical culture.

“ This year
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CAN ETHICAL LEADERSHIP BE SUCCESSFUL IN THIS NEW HYBRID WORK ENVIRONMENT?

By Natalie S. Lewis, CPA, CFF, CFE

Board Member, Governing Board of the Office of
Inspector General and the Ethics Office

In addition to being a member of the Governing Board for the Office of Inspector General for the City of Atlanta, I specialize in conducting fraud examinations and opining on accounting and financial issues in litigation matters. In many of the matters in which I have been engaged, I have been brought in to investigate an issue or concern within an organization, often including suspected fraud. On more than one occasion, the perpetrator's actions can be tied to poor internal controls and a weak compliance environment, such as a poor tone at the top, lack of oversight, and insufficient communication about ethical behavior.

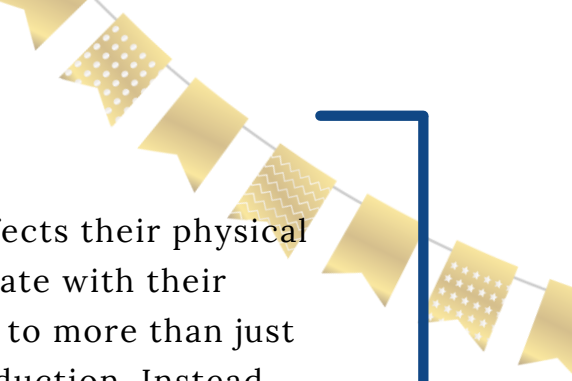
Leaders set the standard for the organization, especially for their teams. All leaders should strive to be ethical leaders, who are known to possess the following five traits:

- Respect others,
- Serve others,
- Just and fair,
- Honest, and
- Build community and sense of belonging.

A leader's task of building a community and sense of belonging has become considerably more difficult in this new hybrid work environment that emerged from the COVID-19 pandemic. According to a recent survey by management consulting firm McKinsey & Company, approximately 58 percent of Americans, the equivalent of 92 million people, work from home at least one day a week.[1] Further, 35 percent of respondents to McKinsey's survey reported to having the option to be fully remote.[2]

[1]McKinsey American Opportunity Survey Spring 2022, <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/real-estate/our-insights/americans-are-embracing-flexible-work-and-they-want-more-of-it>.

[2] Ibid.



For companies, this change in location not only affects their physical office space, but also the way managers communicate with their employees who are working remotely. This applies to more than just day-to-day conversations about workflow and production. Instead, managers are adapting their leadership and communication styles to ensure that employees understand expectations and ethical responsibilities. Leaders need to ensure that employees do not fall into the trap of “out of sight, out of mind” when it comes to ethics and compliance.

For employees to recognize and report unethical behavior, they must first understand and be able to identify various types of illegal or corrupt conduct, such as conflicts of interest with vendors, acceptance of bribes or gifts from customers or vendors, and improper recordkeeping and timekeeping practices, among others. Educating staff on ethics and compliance must occur regularly; this training is not a one-and-done activity. Additionally, employees need to feel comfortable reporting improprieties to their supervisors and not fear retaliation. Providing an open and safe line of communication is crucial for a company to ensure ethics and compliance are being upheld to the highest standards. The reporting methods may include one-on-one conversations with management or anonymous tips provided through a hotline. According to the Occupational Fraud 2022: A Report to the Nations by the Association of Certified Fraud Examiners, approximately 42 percent of frauds were detected through tips, and more than half of these tips originated from employees.[3]

As we embrace the hybrid work environment, we as leaders should all strive to be ethical leaders and possess those five traits. Find ways to inspire your team, not only for the sake of production, but also by encouraging ethical behavior. Maintaining a strong focus on an ethical foundation within your organization can reduce the opportunity for a bad actor to harm your organization.

[3]Occupational Fraud 2022: A Report to the Nations, Association of Certified Fraud Examiners.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank [Natalie Lewis](#) for providing insight and expertise that greatly assisted this research.

[Natalie Lewis](#) is a Senior Vice President in J.S. Held's [Financial Investigations: Economic Damages & Valuations](#) practice. As a Certified Public Accountant and Certified Fraud Examiner, who is also certified in financial forensics, Natalie specializes in forensic accounting and the analysis of economic damages. She provides consulting and expert services for both plaintiff and defense law firms throughout the country. Natalie has conducted fraud investigations for companies of all sizes as well as government entities. Her investigations have spanned the globe and include various internal investigations, embezzlement, Ponzi schemes, commercial crime insurance claims, Foreign Corrupt Practices Act (FCPA), and asset misappropriation.

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Natalie S. Lewis is a principal in the litigation services practice for Windham Brannon, LLC, a certified public accounting and consulting firm. Ms. Lewis was nominated to the Board by the Georgia Chapter of the Association of Certified Fraud Examiners.

Ethics Challenge: Test Your Knowledge!!!

How To Play:

The first 15 people to email the correct answers to

ethicstraining@atlantaga.gov by July 28, 2023, will win ETHICS SWAG!!!

The Demonstration

A city vendor wants to provide lunch for a team of Procurement Specialists during a demonstration of the vendor's new product.

Can the vendor provide lunch during the demonstration?

A. Yes

B. No

The Birthday Dinner

Kim is a Contract Compliance employee. She is currently overseeing a project for a construction company whom she used to work for. She has been invited by the company to a birthday celebration at a restaurant for one of the company's employees.

Can Kim attend the birthday celebration?

A. Yes, as long as this is not during city work hours.

B. No, because this is a private event and the invite is from a prohibited source.

C. Yes, as long as she discloses her attendance to her department.

The Gift Card

A customer mails a \$50 gift card addressed to you thanking you for all your help. The customer's name and return address is listed on the envelope.

What should be done with the gift card?

- A. Send a "thank you" note to the citizen.
- B. If possible, return the gift card to the citizen.
- C. Use the gift card to buy something for everyone in the office.

It's Only a Ticket

A city vendor that works closely with you and your division has offered you five discounted tickets to an upcoming Atlanta United game to show their appreciation.

Is it ok to accept the tickets and go to the game?

- A. No. You cannot accept the discounted tickets.
- B. Yes, since you still have to pay for the discounted tickets.
- C. Yes, you may accept the tickets if you donate the tickets to a charity.
- D. No, unless the vendor offers you free tickets.



ETHICAL REMINDER

TRAVEL DISCLOSURE FORMS

Section 2-815(a) of the Ethics Code requires any official or employee who has received travel reimbursements to disclose those reimbursements on a travel disclosure form.

This form is located in the Ethics E-filing system at: <https://cityofatlanta.ethicsfilingportal.com> and should be completed within 30 days of receipt of reimbursements.

If you have traveled to a conference, speaking engagement, or other event for which you have received travel reimbursements, and have questions about this requirement, please contact the Ethics Office.

Special Announcements

NEW STAFF MEMBER!

- Farrah Sims serves as the Executive Assistant for the Ethics Office. Her role involves managing the day-to-day administrative and operational functions of the Ethics Office. Ms. Sims brings her experience and knowledge from providing 12+ years of support to C-suite executives. Before joining the City of Atlanta Ethics Office, Ms. Sims was in the Quality Assurance department at InCommunity and was responsible for the Training and Documentation of 500+ staff; she spent ten years as Executive Assistant to the InCommunity CEO. Outside work, she enjoys reading, traveling, and spending time with her family. Ms. Sims is an active member of the Service Providers Association for Developmental Disabilities (SPADD).

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