

ETHICS

The most basic source of ethics is the local official's oath of office in which he or she swears to "faithfully discharge the duties" of the office; these official duties include the "performance to the best of his or her ability" and the nonperformance of forbidden acts. Wis. Stat. § 19.01(1) and (3). The Code of Ethics for Local Government Officials is found in [ch. 19](#), Wis. Stats.

As a local official, you should familiarize yourself with the Eau Claire County Code of Ordinances and with the statutory Code of Ethics for Local Government Officials. In addition to checking existing information, a local official may wish to obtain advice. Under the Code of Ethics for Local Officials, an individual may request a confidential advisory ethics opinion from the unit's attorney. See Wis. Stat. § 19.59 (5). Following this advice provides the local official with a legal defense if later prosecuted for a violation. The Office of the Corporation Counsel provides this service in county government.

A simplified outline of the concepts embodied in ethics compliance and standards of conduct are outlined below.

- A. PURPOSE. [3.50.001](#) of the County Code
 - 1. That public officials and employees are independent, impartial and responsible to the people.
 - 2. That government decisions and policy are made within proper channels.
 - 3. That public office is not used for improper personal gain.
 - 4. That conflicts between private interests and public responsibilities are avoided.
- B. PROHIBITS. [3.50.005](#) of the County Code
 - 1. Conduct which yields a direct or indirect monetary or other material benefit to a public official.
 - 2. Accepting "anything of value" (\$25).
- C. PROHIBITS CONTRACTS WITH THE COUNTY. [3.50.020](#) of the County Code
 - 1. Of more than \$3,000 in 12 months if there is a 10% or greater ownership interest without written disclosure to county board.
 - 2. Of more than \$15,000 in a year.
 - 3. Exceptions stated in [3.50.020 B.](#) of the County Code
- D. SPECIFIC CONFLICTS PROHIBITED [3.50.010](#) of the County Code
 - 1. Incompatible employment.
 - 2. Disclosure of confidential information.
 - 3. Gratuities or kickbacks.
 - 4. Failure to disclose interest in legislation.
- E. POLITICAL ACTIVITIES [3.50.070](#) of the County Code
- F. DIRECT QUESTIONS TO CORPORATION COUNSEL.
You can rely on Corporation Counsel's advice.