



# Summary of Ethics Laws

The following is a summary of important ethics rules that apply to City officers and employees. This summary was created by the San Francisco Ethics Commission. City law requires the distribution of this summary to City officers and employees annually.

This summary is a general overview of some important ethics rules and is not a substitute for advice about how the laws apply in particular circumstances. Please contact the Ethics Commission for advice on how these rules may apply to your specific situation.

The fastest and easiest way to contact the Ethics Commission for advice is through our [online advice portal](#). You can also learn more about ethics rules by visiting the [Ethics Commission's website](#) or reviewing the City Attorney's [Good Government Guide](#).

## Conflicts of Interest

You are prohibited from making, participating in, or attempting to influence any governmental decision if you have a financial interest in the decision. In general, you have a financial interest in a decision if it is reasonably foreseeable that the decision will have a material financial effect on one or more of your personal financial interests. In general, your financial interests include sources that have provided you with income or gifts in the last 12 months, properties that you own, and organizations in which you invest or hold a position or management. Your financial interests also include the interests of your spouse, registered domestic partner, and dependent children.

Additionally, you cannot be involved in planning for, reviewing, or approving a government contract if you are financially interested in that contract.

You are also prohibited from participating in any decisions that might affect an organization with which you are discussing potential future employment.

Please be aware that even if you do not have a financial conflict of interest regarding a particular governmental decision, you must [publicly disclose](#) any personal, professional, or business relationship you have with a person who is involved in that matter.

If you are unsure if you have a conflict of interest or have questions about how these rules apply to you, please [contact the Ethics Commission](#) for advice.

## Gift Rules

### *Gifts from Restricted Sources*

City officers and employees are prohibited from accepting gifts from certain restricted sources. A gift is anything that provides a personal benefit to the recipient, where equal or greater consideration is not provided. This includes rebates or discounts that are not also provided to the general public.

Restricted sources include City contractors who do business with your department, people who have attempted to influence you in the last 12 months, people who have sought licenses or permits from your department, lobbyists, and permit consultants. Before accepting a gift from anyone you know through your role with the City or anyone who might be a restricted source for you, you should determine if the source of the gift is a restricted source.

Generally, if you have reason to know that the gift is from a restricted source, you may not accept the gift. In some situations, there may be an exception that would still allow you to accept the gift. When in doubt, you should either not accept the gift or [contact the Ethics Commission](#) for advice to determine if you are prohibited from accepting the gift.

### *Gift Limit*

City officers and employees who file a Form 700 are subject to the State gift limit. If you file a Form 700, you are prohibited from accepting gifts with a total value of more than \$630 from a single source.

### *Gifts from Subordinates*

City officers and employees are generally prohibited from soliciting or accepting gifts or loans from their subordinates. Limited exceptions to this rule exist.

## Incompatible Activities Rules

There are several rules that prohibit non-City activities, also known as outside activities, that are incompatible with the duties of City officers and employees. The following are prohibited incompatible activities:

### *Activities Subject to Your Department's Jurisdiction*

You may not engage in outside activities that could fall within the jurisdiction of your department. This includes activities that are subject to the control, inspection, review, audit, permitting, enforcement, contracting, or other type of authority of your department.

These activities include, but are not limited to:

- Contracting with your department or serving on the Board of Directors of any entity contracting with your department. If you are a City officer, you are prohibited from contracting with *any* City department.
- Acquiring an ownership interest in a real property, if you personally and substantially participated in the permitting or inspection of the property within the last 12 months.

- Having or acquiring a financial interest in any financial products issued or regulated by your department.

If you have questions about how these rules apply to outside activities you would like to engage in, please [contact the Ethics Commission](#) for additional information.

#### ***Selective Assistance***

You may not provide special assistance or advice that is not generally available to the public if the information would provide an advantage to any person who is doing business or seeking to do business with the City.

#### ***Use of City Resources***

You may not use City time, facilities, equipment, or supplies for personal purposes.

#### ***Use of City Work Product***

You may not sell, publish, or otherwise use any non-public materials that were prepared on City time or using City resources if you are doing so in exchange for anything of value and without appropriate City authorization.

#### ***Use of Prestige of Office***

You may not use any marker (badge, uniform, business card, etc.), prestige, or influence of your City position for private gain or advantage.

#### ***Acting as an Unauthorized City Representative***

You may not hold yourself out as a representative of the City unless authorized to do so. This includes the use of City letterhead, title, e-mail, business card, or other resources for any communication that may lead the recipient of the communication to think that you are acting in an official capacity when you are not.

#### ***Compensation for City Duties or Advice***

You may not accept payment from anyone other than the City for performing your City duties or for providing advice about City processes.

#### ***Lobbying Activity***

You may not accept payment from anyone other than the City in exchange for communicating with a City officer or employee within your department for the purpose of influencing any administrative or legislative action. If you are a City officer, you cannot accept payment to communicate with *any* other City officer or employee (from *any* department) with the intent to influence them.

## Political Activities

City officers and employees may not:

- Solicit campaign contributions from other City officers or employees,
- Engage in political activities in uniform, or
- Engage in political activities on City time or premises.

City officers may not solicit campaign volunteers from any subordinate employee for a campaign for or against any ballot measure.

Members of City board or commissions may not engage in fundraising on behalf of their appointing authority, any candidate for the office held by their appointing authority, or any committee controlled by their appointing authority.

## Leaving Your City Position

The City also has rules that apply after you leave City service. Specifically, you are prohibited from:

Being employed by, or receiving compensation from, any person or entity that entered into a contract with your department in the last 12 months if you personally and substantially participated in the award of the contract.

Communicating with officers or employees of your former department with the intent to influence a government decision. This applies for one year after you leave City service.

Representing any other person (except the City) in connection with any particular matter in which you participated personally and substantially in your role with the City.

If you have questions about how these or any other ethics rules apply to you, please submit your questions through the Ethics Commission's [online advice portal](#).