

Human Resources Policy 09 – Standards of Conduct for BC Public Service Employees

Last updated: December 15, 2021

This policy statement applies to all persons and organizations covered by the Public Service Act. The policy statement supports the core policy objective that “public service employees exhibit the highest standards of conduct.”

Employees will exhibit the highest standards of conduct. Their conduct must instill confidence and trust and not bring the BC Public Service into disrepute. The honesty and integrity of the BC Public Service demands the impartiality of employees in the conduct of their duties.

The requirement to comply with these standards of conduct is a condition of employment. Employees who fail to comply with these standards may be subject to disciplinary action up to and including dismissal.

Loyalty

Public service employees have a duty of loyalty to the government as their employer. They must act honestly and in good faith and place the interests of the employer ahead of their own private interests. The duty committed to in the [Oath of Employment](#) requires BC Public Service employees to serve the government of the day to the best of their ability.

Confidentiality

Confidential information, in any form, that employees receive through their employment must not be disclosed, released, or transmitted to anyone other than persons who are authorized to receive the information. Employees with care or control of personal or sensitive information, electronic media, or devices must handle and dispose of these appropriately. Employees who are in doubt as to whether certain information is confidential must ask the appropriate authority before disclosing, releasing, or transmitting it.

The proper handling and protection of confidential information is applicable both within and outside of government and continues to apply after the employment relationship ends.

Confidential information that employees receive through their employment must not be used by an employee for the purpose of furthering any private interest or as a means of making personal gains. (See the Conflicts of Interest section of this policy statement for details.)

Public Comments

BC Public Service employees may comment on public issues but must not engage in any activity or speak publicly where this could be perceived as an official act or representation (unless authorized to do so).

Employees must not jeopardize the perception of impartiality in the performance of their duties through making public comments or entering into public debate regarding ministry policies. BC Public Service employees must not use their position in government to lend weight to the public expression of their personal opinions.

Political Activity

BC Public Service employees may participate in political activities including membership in a political party, supporting a candidate for elected office, or seeking elected office. Employees' political activities, however, must be clearly separated from activities related to their employment.

If engaging in political activities, employees must remain impartial and retain the perception of impartiality in relation to their duties and responsibilities. Employees must not engage in political activities during working hours or use government facilities, equipment, or resources in support of these activities.

Partisan politics are not to be introduced into the workplace; however, informal private discussions among coworkers are acceptable.

Service to the Public

BC Public Service employees must provide service to the public in a manner that is courteous, professional, equitable, efficient, and effective. Employees must be sensitive and responsive to the changing needs, expectations, and rights of a diverse public in the proper performance of their duties.

Workplace Behaviour

Employees are to treat each other with respect and dignity and must not engage in discriminatory conduct prohibited by the [Human Rights Code](#). The prohibited grounds are Indigenous identity, race, colour, ancestry, place of origin, religion, family status, marital status, physical disability, mental disability, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, age, political belief or conviction of a criminal or summary conviction offence unrelated to the individual's employment.

Further, the conduct of BC Public Service employees in the workplace must meet acceptable social standards and must contribute to a positive work environment. Bullying or any other inappropriate conduct compromising the integrity of the BC Public Service will not be tolerated.

All employees may expect and have the responsibility to contribute to a safe workplace. Violence in the workplace is unacceptable. Violence is any use of physical force on an individual that causes or could cause injury and includes an attempt or threatened use of force.

Employees must report any incident of violence. Any employee who becomes aware of a threat must report that threat if there is reasonable cause to believe that the threat poses a risk of injury. Any incident or threat of violence in the workplace must be addressed immediately.

Employees must report a safety hazard or unsafe condition or act in accordance with the provisions of the WorkSafeBC Occupational Health and Safety Regulations.

Employees must conduct themselves professionally, be fit for duty, and be free from impairment (for example: from alcohol or drugs).

Conflicts of Interest

A conflict of interest occurs when an employee's private affairs or financial interests are in conflict, or could result in a perception of conflict, with the employee's duties or responsibilities in such a way that:

- the employee's ability to act in the public interest could be impaired; or
- the employee's actions or conduct could undermine or compromise:
 - the public's confidence in the employee's ability to discharge work responsibilities; or
 - the trust that the public places in the BC Public Service.

While the government recognizes the right of BC Public Service employees to be involved in activities as citizens of the community, conflict must not exist between employees' private interests and the discharge of their BC Public Service duties. Upon appointment to the BC Public Service, employees must arrange their private affairs in a manner that will prevent conflicts of interest, or the perception of conflicts of interest, from arising. Employees who find themselves in an actual, perceived, or potential conflict of interest must disclose the matter to their supervisor, manager, or ethics advisor. Examples of conflicts of interest include, but are not limited to, the following:

- An employee uses government property or equipment or the employee's position, office, or government affiliation to pursue personal interests or the interests of another organization;
- An employee is in a situation where the employee is under obligation to a person who might benefit from or seek to gain special consideration or favour;
- An employee, in the performance of official duties, gives preferential treatment to an individual, corporation, or organization, including a non-profit organization, in which the employee, or a relative or friend of the employee, has an interest, financial or otherwise;
- An employee benefits from, or is reasonably perceived by the public to have benefited from, the use of information acquired solely by reason of the employee's employment;
- An employee benefits from, or is reasonably perceived by the public to have benefited from, a government transaction over which the employee can influence decisions (for example, investments, sales, purchases, borrowing, grants, contracts, regulatory or discretionary approvals, appointments);

- An employee accepts from an individual, corporation, or organization, directly or indirectly, a personal gift or benefit that arises out of employment in the BC Public Service, other than:
 - the exchange of hospitality between persons doing business together;
 - tokens exchanged as part of protocol;
 - the normal presentation of gifts to persons participating in public functions; or
 - the normal exchange of gifts between friends; or
- An employee accepts gifts, donations, or free services for work-related leisure activities other than in situations outlined above.

The following four criteria, when taken together, are intended to guide the judgment of employees who are considering the acceptance of a gift:

- The benefit is of nominal value;
- The exchange creates no obligation;
- Reciprocation is easy; and
- It occurs infrequently.

Employees will not solicit a gift, benefit, or service on behalf of themselves or other employees.

Conflict of Interest Guidelines

To assist employees, managers, ethics advisors and deputy ministers in managing conflict of interest issues, the BC Public Service has established guidelines, tools and other resources. Please see the [MyHR section of the BC Government website](#) for more information.

Allegations of Wrongdoing

Employees have a duty to report any situation relevant to the BC Public Service that they believe contravenes the law, misuses public funds or assets or represents a danger to public health and safety or a significant danger to the environment. Employees can expect such matters to be treated in confidence, unless disclosure of information is authorized or required by law (for example, the [Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act](#)). Employees will not be subject to discipline or reprisal for bringing forward to a Deputy Minister, in good faith, allegations of wrongdoing in accordance with this policy statement.

Employees must report their allegations or concerns as follows:

- Members of the BCGEU must report in accordance with Article 32.13;
- PEA members must report in accordance with Article 36.12; or
- Other employees must report in writing to their deputy minister or other executive member of the ministry, who will acknowledge receipt of the submission and have the matter reviewed and responded to in writing within 30 days of receiving the employee's submission. Where an allegation involves a deputy minister, the employee must forward the allegation to the Deputy Minister to the Premier.

These reporting requirements are in addition to an employee's obligation to report to the Comptroller General as outlined in [Section 33.2](#) of the *Financial Administration Act*. Where an employee believes that the matter requires a resolution and it has not been reasonably resolved by the ministry, the employee may then refer the allegation to the appropriate authority.

If the employee decides to pursue the matter further then:

- Allegations of criminal activity are to be referred to the police in accordance with the Procedure for Reporting Employee Misconduct in Non-Emergency Situations to the Police (please see the MyHR section of the BC Government website for more information);
- Allegations of a misuse of public funds are to be referred to the Auditor General;
- Allegations of a danger to public health must be brought to the attention of health authorities; and
- Allegations of a significant danger to the environment must be brought to the attention of the Deputy Minister, Ministry of Environment.

Employees may also report wrongdoing under the [Public Interest Disclosure Act](#) to their supervisor, ministry designated officer, Agency designated officer or the Ombudsperson. Employees can find information about what types of wrongdoing may be reported under the Act and the process for reporting in [HR Policy 24 – Public Interest Disclosure](#) and the [Procedures for Managing Disclosures](#). Please see the [MyHR section of the BC Government website](#) for more information.

Employees who are unsure about whether their concerns could be considered under the [Public Interest Disclosure Act](#) can seek advice from a supervisor, a designated officer or the Ombudsperson.

An employee reporting a wrongdoing under the [Public Interest Disclosure Act](#) to the Ombudsperson is not required to report the same wrongdoing to their employer unless the Ombudsperson does not investigate or does not refer their disclosure. Reporting a wrongdoing to the Ombudsperson does not affect an employee's obligations to cooperate in any investigation into the subject matter of the wrongdoing.

Legal Proceedings

Employees must not sign affidavits relating to facts that have come to their knowledge in the course of their duties for use in court proceedings unless the affidavit has been prepared by a lawyer acting for government in that proceeding or unless it has been approved by a ministry solicitor in the Legal Services Branch, Ministry of Attorney General. In the case of affidavits required for use in arbitrations or other proceedings related to employee relations, the Labour Relations Branch of the BC Public Service Agency will obtain any necessary approvals. Employees are obliged to cooperate with lawyers defending the Crown's interest during legal proceedings.

A written opinion prepared on behalf of government by any legal counsel is privileged and is, therefore, not to be released without prior approval of the Legal Services Branch.

Working Relationships

Employees involved in a personal relationship outside work which compromises objectivity, or the perception of objectivity, should avoid being placed in a direct reporting relationship to one another.

For example, employees who are direct relatives or who permanently reside together may not be employed in situations where:

- A reporting relationship exists where one employee has influence, input or decision-making power over the other employee's performance evaluation, salary, premiums, special permissions, conditions of work and similar matters; or
- The working relationship affords an opportunity for collusion between the two employees that would have a detrimental effect on the employer's interest.

The above restriction on working relationships may be waived provided that the deputy minister is satisfied that sufficient safeguards are in place to ensure that the employer's interests are not compromised.

Human Resource Decisions

Employees are to disqualify themselves as participants in human resource decisions when their objectivity would be compromised for any reason or a benefit or perceived benefit could accrue to them.

For example, employees are not to participate in staffing actions involving direct relatives or persons living in the same household.

Outside Remunerative and Volunteer Work

Employees may hold jobs outside government, carry on a business, receive remuneration from public funds for activities outside their position or engage in volunteer activities provided it does not:

- interfere with the performance of their duties as a BC Public Service employee;
- bring the government into disrepute;
- represent a conflict of interest or create the reasonable perception of a conflict of interest;
- appear to be an official act or to represent government opinion or policy;
- involve the unauthorized use of work time or government premises, services, equipment, or supplies; or
- gain an advantage that is derived from their employment with the BC Public Service.

Employees who are appointed as directors or officers of Crown corporations are not to receive any additional remuneration beyond the reimbursement of appropriate travel expenses except as approved by the Lieutenant Governor in Council.

Responsibilities

Agency Head

- Provide timely advice to managers, ethics advisors and deputy ministers respecting the application of this policy statement including guidance on an appropriate employer response to transgressions of the policy statement.
- Coordinate the development of awareness, training, and communication programs in support of this policy statement.
- Establish procedures for managing investigations of serious wrongdoing under the [Public Interest Disclosure Act](#) and reporting annually.

Deputy Ministers

- Advise employees of the required standards of conduct and the consequences of non-compliance.
- Designate a senior staff member in their organization as ethics advisor for matters related to the Standards of Conduct.
- Promote a work environment that is free of discrimination.
- Deal with breaches of this policy statement in a timely manner, taking the appropriate action based upon the facts and circumstances.
- Seek out guidance and advice from the Agency Head on issues that are complex and/or cannot be easily resolved.
- Waive the provision on working relationships under the circumstances indicated.
- Delegate authority and responsibility, where applicable, to apply this policy statement within their organization.
- Designate a ministry designated officer for the purposes of providing advice to employees and receiving disclosures from employees under the [Public Interest Disclosure Act](#). The designated officer may be the ministry ethics advisor or another senior official.

Ethics Advisors

- Provide advice on Standards of Conduct issues to employees and managers in their organization, including in regards to assessing and addressing possible conflicts of interest.
- Seek out guidance and advice from the BC Public Service Agency on issues that are complex and/or cannot be easily resolved.
- Determine whether an issue requires consideration and/or decision by the deputy minister and provide briefings to the deputy as necessary.

- Document any advice provided and/or decisions made.
- Participate as ministry representative in working with the Corporate Ethics Lead to ensure a consistent and coordinated approach to ethics management across the public service.

Ministry Designated Officers

- Receive disclosures and provide advice to employees under the [Public Interest Disclosure Act](#).
- Transfer disclosures to the Agency Designated Officer in a timely manner.

Line Managers

- Provide comprehensive orientation to new employees related to the Standards of Conduct.
- Advise staff on Standards of Conduct issues, including in regards to assessing and addressing possible conflicts of interest.
- Respond to reports of bullying, breaches of the Standards of Conduct and wrongdoing, or refer them to the next level of excluded manager not involved in the matter.
- Engage the ministry-designated ethics advisor and seek advice from the BC Public Service Agency as may be appropriate in the circumstances.
- Document any advice provided and/or decisions made.
- Contribute to a work environment that is free of discrimination.
- Provide advice to and receive disclosures from employees under the [Public Interest Disclosure Act](#).
- Transfer disclosures to the Agency Designated Officer in a timely manner.

Employees

- Objectively and loyally fulfill their assigned duties and responsibilities, regardless of the party or persons in power and regardless of their personal opinions.
- Disclose and cooperate with the employer to resolve conflicts of interest or potential conflict of interest situations in which they find themselves.
- Maintain appropriate workplace behaviour.
- Report incidents of bullying, breaches of the Standards of Conduct and wrongdoing.
- Avoid engaging in discriminatory conduct or comment.
- Check with their supervisor or manager when they are uncertain about any aspect of this policy statement.