



Ethics-Centered Government

Douglas County's Ethics-Centered Government model shapes the environment in which we serve our citizens, taxpayers, and communities. As such, employees of Douglas County must carry out their job responsibilities in accordance with the following principles:

- We are stewards of the public trust, responsible for the property and resources of Douglas County;
- We make decisions and policies using the proper channels of the government structure, free of improper influence;
- We shall act in the best interests of Douglas County, our citizens, taxpayers and communities, and not for any personal interest or for the interest of family, friends, business or political associates;
- We should avoid any action that would give a reasonably prudent person the impression that we are using our public employment for private gain; giving special treatment to any person or group; or failing to be neutral in conducting County business.
- We must ensure that policies, practices and decision-making processes are free from the undue pressure of any special group, individual or organization;
- We conduct all Douglas County business in accordance with all federal and state laws and regulations.

Definitions (solely for purposes of Ethics Centered Government section – other areas of the handbook may have definitions that are different).

- A. *Employee* shall include full-time, part-time, and temporary employees.
- B. *Gift* shall mean anything of money, value, or forgiveness of indebtedness from any person, without such person receiving lawful consideration of equal or greater value in return from the employee. The term includes a refund or discount in the price of anything of value unless it is made in the ordinary course of business to a member of the public without regard to that person's status as a County employee.

Exemptions:

- An unsolicited token or award of appreciation in the form of a plaque, trophy, desk/wall memento, or similar item.
- Unsolicited informational material, publications or subscriptions related to the recipient's performance of county duties;
- Unsolicited items of nominal or trivial value (such as a pen, note pad, or calendar).

Should an employee have any questions or concerns about any related issue, they may contact the County Attorney's Office or Human Resources.

- C. *Relative* shall mean a spouse, parent(s), child(ren), brother(s), sister(s), aunt(s), uncle(s), grandparent(s), or grandchild(ren), including "in-law" and "step" relatives.
- D. *Confidential information* shall include any information an employee may learn solely because of their employment with Douglas County, which is not otherwise publicly known.

Conflicts of Interest

A. Contracting/Goods and Services

No employee shall have any interest, financial or otherwise, direct or indirect; or engage in any business, employment, transaction, or professional activity; or incur any obligation of any nature that is in substantial conflict with their employment.

No employee shall offer for sale or sell goods or services to the County without disclosing such interest in writing and in advance of any final County decision. Employees shall not contract with or take any direct or official action on any matter in which the employee or any relative or business associate has any substantial employment, contractual, or financial interest in the contract. Any such action must first be disclosed to all appropriate County decision makers in writing and in advance of a decision.

Supervisors shall disclose any personal financial transactions with a subordinate employee where a reasonably prudent person would believe it is likely to influence the employee's or supervisor's duties for Douglas County.

B. Confidential Information

No employee shall use any information received as a result of that employee's employment for any private purpose. This includes but is not limited to commercial purposes, financial gain, or offer of future employment. "Private purpose" includes benefits received by the employee, relatives, and/or a business with which the employee or his/her relatives are associated. Employees may only use confidential information in the conduct of their official County duties.

C. Political Solicitations

1. An employee shall not engage in political campaigning, or authorize anyone else to campaign on their behalf, at County meetings or public hearings. No employee shall use public resources for political campaigning. This includes but is not limited to engaging in telephone solicitations or campaigning during County business hours.
2. County employees may give financial or other support to political parties and candidates for elected office as they see fit, provided they use their personal resources and/or time. Such support may not be a condition linked to their current or future employment.

D. Employment of Relatives

1. No employee shall personally appoint, hire, or advocate, when not solicited by the hiring party, for the appointment or hiring of any person who is the employee's relative.
2. No employee shall participate directly or indirectly in the recruitment and selection process that involves a relative.
3. No employee shall supervise or be supervised, directly or indirectly, by any relative of the employee.
4. No employee shall audit, verify, receive or be entrusted with monies received or handled by a relative.
5. No relative of an employee shall have access to that employee's confidential information, including payroll processing and personnel records within his/her organization.
6. Employment relationships existing prior to the upcoming revision of the Employee Handbook (scheduled for Dec. 2010) are exempted.

E. Gift Ban Policy

1. Departmental Ban. No department shall accept any gift of value equal to or greater than \$59, from any vendor, without disclosure to the County Manager. This includes but is not limited to any applicant for a license, applicant for a land use approval, or any other person having pending business with that department.
2. Individual Ban. No employee shall receive any gift, nor shall such employee's spouse or dependent children receive any gift, where such gift is given with the intent of influencing the employee's official actions or duties for Douglas County. In addition, no employee shall receive any gift, where a reasonably prudent person would believe it is likely to influence the employee's official actions or duties for Douglas County.
3. An employee who accepts a gift in violation of this policy must notify the County Manager of the violation of the policy. Disciplinary action may occur as a result of the violation. The employee must return the gift to the donor or if the gift cannot be returned, the employee must compensate the donor for the full monetary value of the gift. Additional legal requirements may also apply.
4. The County conforms to state ethics laws and may hold employees to a higher standard than applicable state law. The County may rely on opinions from the State of Colorado Ethics Commission in interpreting these guidelines. Opinion letters issued by the Ethics Commission for situations such as gifts given for special occasions such as holidays or birthdays between governmental employees and citizens or neighbors have been determined to be exempted. Information related to all of the opinion letters may be found at the following website:
<http://www.colorado.gov/cs/Satellite/DPA-IEC/IEC/1225277043918>

F. Use of County Property

1. Except as noted below, no employee shall use, request, or permit the use of any County-owned equipment, services, materials, machinery, or property except for purposes of conducting official Douglas County business. Personal use of County equipment, materials, or property may be permitted on a limited and incidental basis with the prior approval of the employee's department director or the County Manager. Such personal use must not result in any increased cost, liability, or expense to the County.
2. Employees should refrain from creating or participating in any situation that would raise questions about how Douglas County uses public resources.

Accountability and Additional Resources

- Employees are responsible for knowing and following the standards set forth above, and for raising questions if uncertain about County policy.
- Employees who are concerned whether these standards are being met, or are aware of violations of these standards or applicable law should contact the Human Resources department or the County Attorney's Office.
- Employees are encouraged to use the EthicsPoint hotline to anonymously report issues that appear to be in conflict with our Ethics Centered Government.
- An additional resource for reference is the *Principle and Ethics-Centered Governance* document, which may be viewed at www.douglas.co.us.
- The attached supporting document, *Customer Service Guiding Principles*, provides additional information about how employees help support and advocate for citizens, taxpayers, and co-workers.