



State Officer and Employee Ethics Rules Training Takeaways

September 2026

This training resource is designed to help conservation district directors and employees stay informed of key points discussed in recent web-based training. The document should be listed on the district's meeting agenda for discussion and review.

The Basics

- As a State Officer or Employee, you are a steward of citizen tax dollars and significant power. With power comes responsibility. Adhering to the ethics rules prevents corruption.
- Mixing work (on the clock time) and political activities, such as talking to legislators about work-related things on a regular basis (and not just in passing) is lobbying
 - If you reach out to legislators representing your District, while on the clock, that is lobbying and you must register as a lobbyist
- Conflicts of interest occur when a transaction between your workplace and another entity benefits someone, financially or otherwise, that you have a close relationship with.
- Violations are breaking the law, and the ethics commission can investigate you and fine you.

Misuse of Office

- State officers and employees generally cannot use their position in state government to benefit themselves or others.
- The general prohibitions do not apply if the act was customary for the state officer or employee's position, authorized by the state officer or employee's employment contract, or the act includes promotions or solicitations of community, civic or charitable events.
- State officers and employees generally cannot use their position in state government to coerce or induce another to benefit the state officer, employee or others.

Conflicts of Interest

- There are certain situations in which a state officer or employee must disqualify from a matter. Disqualification means the state officer or employee removes himself or herself from participation in the matter, including disqualifying from verbal and nonverbal participation. It is best practice to leave the room where the matter is pending if disqualification is required.
 - When the state officer or employee knows that a particular matter will likely have a direct and predictable effect on the material financial interest of the state officer or employee or his or her family member;
 - When the state officer or employee knows that a person with whom he or she has a business relationship (other than a routine consumer transaction) is a party to or represents a party to the matter; or
 - When the state officer or employee determines that circumstances would cause a reasonable person with knowledge of all the relevant facts to question his or her impartiality in the matter.
- A state officer or employee may seek official advice from the Ethics Commission for a binding decision.

Giving and Receiving Gifts

- General Gift Rules: State officers and employees:
 - are prohibited from giving or soliciting gifts for their superior or another's superior, with some exceptions
 - are generally prohibited from receiving meals and gifts from lobbyists and from vendors and a vendor's agent when engaged in a purchasing decision, with some exceptions
 - family member(s) may accept certain benefits/gifts
 - may accept certain benefits at conferences, seminars or similar events; so long as such benefits are offered to all attendees, speakers or panelists
 - may accept scholarships to attend conferences, seminars and similar events; a scholarship report may be required to be filed with the Ethics Commission
- Exception to all gift prohibitions: emergency rescue or relief efforts. State officers and employees may accept goods and services provided during rescue and relief efforts, so long as the goods and services are generally available to others.

Lobbying

- "Lobbying" generally means oral or written communications, on behalf of a an employer with regard to the passage, defeat, formulation, modification, interpretation, amendment, adoption, approval or veto of any legislation, rule, regulation, executive order or any other program, policy or position of state government.
- "Lobbying" specifically does not include individuals exercising their personal right to petition the government, uncompensated activities, or testimony.
- Generally, lobbyists and their employer are prohibited from providing meals and gifts to state officers and employees.

Political Activity

- Generally, state resources, funds and time cannot be used for political activities.

Enforcement

- Someone submits a complaint, and Ethics Commission begins preliminary investigation
- Ethics Commission decides to either dismiss complaint or proceed with formal investigation
- The accused and their attorney may request to appear before the Ethics Commission
- At any time, the Ethics Commission can -
 - Terminate the investigation
 - Initiate a civil action in District Court
 - Offer a settlement agreement
 - Refer to Appropriate Civil or Criminal Law Enforcement Authorities.

Additional Resources

- <https://oklahoma.gov/ethics.html>
- [State Officer and Employee Ethics Guide, October 2024 \(up to date\)](#)
- [Lobbying Guide, October 2024 \(up to date\)](#)