

## Ethics

The public asks, and expects, its leaders to uphold and maintain high standards in the performance of their public duties. Trustees, as public officials, are expected to model and uphold high ethical standards.

It is essential for trustees to recognize there are different standards of conduct for public officials than for private citizens and must become familiar with laws that regulate public officials.

Each board should develop and live by a code of ethics as a standard policy. Codes of ethics usually define specific expectations for individual trustees. Codes address the responsibility of governing board members to promote the public trust. Ethical trustees do not limit themselves to special or single interests. The codes reinforce the concept that board members have no power as individuals, and that the only authority the board has is as a unit. Ethical trustees do not act alone.

Governing boards usually include in their codes of ethics descriptions of how trustees should treat each other and should conduct themselves. Ethical trustees do not insult each other, treat their president or other employees with disrespect, or exhibit a lack of civility.

Legal conflicts of interest are defined in law. They include conflicts related to private economic interests, including investments and other sources of income, which may be affected by the trustee's exercise of his or her official duties. Trustees should review the specific implications of those laws and regulations to ensure they avoid problems. Trustees should also be aware of activities that create the perception of favoritism or personal gain. Public perceptions that board members are furthering their own interests rather than those of the district harm the college. Being sensitive to situations for potential conflicts and understanding their negative impact will help avoid problems.

A first step in determining if an action is ethical is for the trustee to ask:

- Am I doing to others what I would want done to me?
- Would I mind seeing what I am doing on the front page of a newspaper?
- Am I comfortable with members of my family knowing what I am doing?
- Do I want to encourage employees and students to do this?