

**City of San Diego
Code of Conduct
Boards and Commissions**

A. CONDUCT GUIDELINES

These Conduct Guidelines shall apply to individuals appointed to a City board or commission under San Diego Charter sections 41, 41.2, and 43 (members). These Conduct Guidelines are designed to describe the manner in which appointed members should treat one another, elected officials, City staff, constituents, and others they come into contact with while representing the City.

1. Members' Conduct with Each Other in Public Meetings

Members represent a wide variety of backgrounds, personalities, values, expertise, opinions, and goals. Despite this diversity, all have chosen to serve in public office to preserve and protect the present and the future of the community. In all cases, members should acknowledge this common goal even though individuals may not agree on every issue.

- a. *Honor the role of the chair in maintaining order*
It is the responsibility of the chair to run the meeting and keep the comments of members on topic during public meetings. Members should honor efforts by the chair to focus discussion on current agenda items. If there is disagreement about the agenda or the chair's actions, those objections should be voiced politely and with reason, following parliamentary procedure outlined in the applicable bylaws, if any, or Robert's Rules of Order.
- b. *Practice civility and decorum in discussions and debate*
Difficult questions, tough challenges to a particular point of view, and criticism of ideas and information are legitimate elements of debate by a free democracy in action. Free debate does not require nor justify public officials to make belligerent, personal, impertinent, slanderous, threatening, abusive, or disparaging comments.
- c. *Avoid personal attacks or comments that could offend other members*
If a member is personally offended by the remarks of another member, the offended member should make note of the actual words used and call for a "point of personal privilege" that challenges the other member to justify or apologize for the language used. The chair shall maintain control of this discussion.
- d. *Demonstrate effective problem-solving approaches*
Members have a public stage and have the responsibility to show how individuals with disparate points of view can find common ground and seek a compromise that benefits the entire community.

2. Members' Conduct with the Public in Public Meetings

Making the public feel welcome is an important part of the democratic process. No signs of partiality, prejudice, or disrespect should be evident on the part of individual members toward an individual participating in a public forum. Every effort should be made to be fair and impartial in listening to public testimony.

- a. *Be welcoming to speakers and treat them with care and gentleness.*
While questions of clarification may be asked, the member's primary role during public testimony is to listen.
- b. *Be fair and equitable in allocating public hearing time to individual speakers.*
The chair will determine and announce limits on speakers at the start of the public hearing process.
- c. *Practice active listening*
While active listening can be exercised differently by every individual, it can be disconcerting to speakers to have members not look at them when they are speaking. It may be fine to look down at documents or to make notes, but reading for a long period of time or gazing around the room can give the appearance of disinterest. Members should be conscious of facial expressions and avoid those that could be interpreted as "smirking," disbelief, anger, or boredom.
- d. *Maintain an open mind*
The public deserves an opportunity to address the members and to influence the thinking of elected and appointed officials.
- e. *Ask for clarification, but avoid debate and argument with the public*
Only the chair – not individual members – can interrupt a speaker during a presentation, including when a speaker is perceived to be disruptive. However, a member can ask the chair for a point of order if the speaker is off the topic.

3. Member's Conduct with the Public Outside of Public Meetings

- a. Members may represent themselves to the public as a member of a board or commission when performing official business as a member, or when authorized by the board or commission, or the City. When not performing official business or otherwise authorized, members should make clear they are not speaking on behalf of the board or commission, or the City.
- b. The City seal or logo may be used in compliance with the City of San Diego Visual Style Guide when conducting City business as a board or commission after securing (1) the approval by the board or commission at a public meeting to submit a request to the Mayor, and (2) the approval of the Mayor, or designee, of the request from the board or commission.

- c. Official positions and opinions of a board or commission must be established by approval of the board or commission at a public meeting, not by an individual member of a board or commission, and must be regarding the subject matter within the purview of the board or commission.
- d. Except for the Commission on Police Practices and Ethics Commission, press releases or other official communications with the media on behalf of the board or commission must be first provided to the Office of Boards and Commissions. Press releases and other official communications must be regarding the subject matter within the purview of the board or commission. The Commission on Police Practices must manage their press releases and other official communications with the media consistent with their authority under San Diego Charter section 41.2, Council-approved ordinances and procedures, and applicable federal and state law. The Ethics Commission must manage their press releases and other official communications with the media consistent with their authority under the San Diego Charter, Council-approved ordinances and procedures, and applicable federal and state law.

4. Members' Conduct with City Staff

Governance of the City relies on the cooperative efforts of elected officials, who set policy, appointed officials who advise the elected, and City staff who implement and administer the Council's policies. Therefore, members should make every effort to be cooperative and show mutual respect for the contributions made by each individual for the good of the community.

- a. *Treat all City staff as professionals*
Clear and honest communication that respects the abilities, experience, and dignity of each individual is expected. Poor behavior and personal attacks towards City staff are not acceptable. Any member who has concerns about the employment performance of an individual City staff should contact the City staff's manager or supervisor. The members of the Commission on Police Practices are expected to act in a manner consistent with their authority under San Diego Charter section 41.2, Council-approved ordinances and procedures, and applicable federal and state law.
- b. *Do not disrupt City staff from their jobs*
Members should not disrupt City staff while they are in meetings, on the phone, or engrossed in performing their job functions to have their individual needs met. Do not attend City staff meetings unless requested by staff – even if the member does not say anything, their presence implies support, shows partiality, may intimidate staff, and hampers staff's ability to do their job objectively.
- c. *Requests of City staff*
Except for members of the Commission on Police Practices and Ethics Commission, members of boards and commissions must request assistance from City staff through the chair to the assigned liaison and not the City staff directly. The assigned liaison will be responsible for coordinating with the Office of Boards and Commissions as appropriate. The Commission on Police Practices must request assistance from City staff consistent

with their authority under San Diego Charter section 41.2, Council-approved ordinances and procedures, and applicable federal and state law. The Ethics Commission must request assistance from City staff consistent with their authority under the San Diego Charter, Council-approved ordinances and procedures, and applicable federal and state law.

d. *Expenditure of Funds*

Except for the Commission on Police Practices, members must receive prior approval from the Office of Boards and Commissions for any expenditure of funds, personal or otherwise, for any board or commission business. Members of the Commission on Police Practices must expend funds, personal or otherwise, for any Commission on Police Practices business consistent with their authority under San Diego Charter section 41.2, Council-approved ordinances and procedures, and applicable federal and state laws. Members of the Ethics Commission must expend funds, personal or otherwise, for any Ethics Commission business consistent with their authority under the San Diego Charter, Council-approved ordinances and procedures, and applicable federal and state law.

B. ETHICS

Members of boards and commissions who are required to file economic interest disclosure forms, Statements of Economic Interests Form 700 (SEIs), under a conflict of interest code must comply with the City of San Diego's Ethics Ordinance, San Diego Municipal Code sections 27.3501 – 27.3595. The City of San Diego Ethics Commission enforces the Ethics Ordinance and provides training to members of boards and commissions who are subject to SEI filing. The Ethics Commission's Fact Sheets and Frequently Asked Questions are located on its website [Ethics Commission | City of San Diego Official Website](#), and you may contact the Ethics Commission at ethicscommission@sandiego.gov or (619) 533-3476 with questions regarding your compliance with the Ethics Ordinance. Please note that the Ethics Commission gives advice about future conduct only, not about actions already taken.

C. ATTENDANCE

Members shall attend all open and public meetings of the group unless excused in accordance with applicable bylaws, if any. Except for the Commission on Police Practices and Ethics Commission, members should communicate to the chair or the assigned liaison in advance, if possible, if they will miss a meeting. Meetings that are cancelled at the last minute due to a lack of quorum compromises the credibility of the board or commission and inconveniences members, City staff, and the public. The Executive Director of the Commission on Police Practices will record and track absences of members of the Commission on Police Practices. The Executive Director of the Ethics Commission will record and track absences of members of the Ethics Commission.

D. IMPLEMENTATION

This Code of Conduct is intended to be self-enforcing and is an expression of the standards of conduct for members expected by the City. It therefore becomes most effective when members are thoroughly familiar with it and embrace its provisions.

For this reason, this document will be included in the regular orientations for applicants to boards and commissions. Members entering office shall sign a statement acknowledging they have read and understand this Code of Conduct. In addition, this Code of Conduct shall be periodically reviewed by the Office of Boards and Commissions and updated as necessary.

1. Acknowledgement of Code of Conduct

Members must sign an acknowledgement that they have read and understand this Code of Conduct.

2. Behavior and Conduct

This Code of Conduct expresses standards of conduct expected for members of City Boards and Commissions. Members themselves have the primary responsibility to ensure that such standards are understood and met.

3. Ethics Training for Local Officials

Upon appointment, members who are required to file SEIs must file an Assuming Office SEI online within 30 days of appointment. The filing of an Assuming Office SEI should alert the Ethics Commission to add you to the list to attend the Ethics Commission's training on the Ethics Ordinance. Members should contact their board or commission liaison and may contact the Ethics Commission at ethicscommission@sandiego.gov to ensure they are signed up for required training at the first available opportunity. Members who are subject to the Ethics Ordinance are required by Council Policy 000-04 to take their first training course within 90 days of their appointment and to attend the course every two years thereafter. Members subject to the Ethics Ordinance are required to comply with its laws and to attend all required trainings. Members will receive notices regarding future training requirements.

E. ALLEGED VIOLATIONS

Except for the Commission on Police Practices and Ethics Commission, an alleged violation of this Code of Conduct may be reported to the Office of Boards and Commissions. An alleged violation of this Code of Conduct by a member of the Commission on Police Practices may be reported to the Executive Director of the Commission of Police Practices. An alleged violation of this Code of Conduct by a member of the Ethics Commission may be reported to the Executive Director of the Ethics Commission. For those members subject to the Ethics Ordinance, an alleged violation of the Ethics Ordinance may be reported to the Ethics Commission.

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Acknowledgment**

I have read the City of San Diego Code of Conduct Boards and Commissions, attached to this Acknowledgment, and understand its expectations.

Print

Signature

Date