



ETHICAL PRACTICES BOARD

2024


Minneapolis
City of Lakes
Annual Report

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Introduction

The Ethical Practices Board (“EPB”) was created in 2003 with the passage of the City’s Ethics in Government Ethics Code codified at M.C.O. Ch. 15. Section 15.210 of the Ethics Code establishes the EPB and outlines the powers and duties of the EPB, which include issuing advisory opinions and investigating complaints from City employees and members of the public that the Ethics Code has been violated. The Ethics Code provides specific standards which no City official or employee should violate and creates aspirations for ethical conduct that go beyond the minimum requirements of the Ethics Code.

The Ethics Code requires that the EPB prepare an annual report. Section 15.210(f) states:

The ethical practices board shall prepare and submit an annual report to the mayor and the city council detailing the ethics activities of the board and the city during the prior year. The format of the report must be designed to maximize public and private understanding of the board and city ethics activities. The report may recommend changes to the text or administration of this Code. The city clerk shall take reasonable steps to ensure wide dissemination and availability of the annual report of the ethical practices board and other ethics information reported by the board.

This annual report is respectfully submitted to Mayor Frey and the City Council in response to the requirements of the Ethics Code.

Appointment and Membership

The 2024 members of the EPB were Anthony Thompson, Michael Friedman, and Mark Wagner. Anthony Thompson was the EPB’s 2024 chair.

Anthony Thompson was appointed to the EPB in January of 2023 to serve a term expiring January 2, 2026. Anthony Thompson is an enforcement supervisor with the Minnesota Department of Labor, Construction Codes and Licensing Division. He also serves as a Hennepin County Conciliation Court Referee and previously served as a volunteer investigator for the Fourth Judicial District Ethics Committee.

Michael Friedman was originally appointed to the EPB in March of 2022 and his current term expires January 2, 2027. Michael Friedman is the former Executive Director of the Legal Rights Center (LRC). His work with LRC has spanned the adversarial, restorative, and collaborative processes of the legal system. He also serves as a public member of the Lawyers Professional Responsibility Board and previously served as a member of the Fourth Judicial District Ethics Committee and the Minneapolis Civilian Police Review Authority. Michael Friedman resigned from his seat at the end of 2024.

Mark Wagner was appointed to the EPB in January of 2024 to serve a term expiring January 2, 2027. Mark Wagner is in-house counsel at Thrivent practicing in diverse areas including intellectual property and non-profit law. He has a wide range of pro bono and volunteer experience that includes the ACLU of Minnesota, Children’s Law Center and Immigrant Law Center.

Ethics Code § 15.220 provides that the City Attorney shall designate an assistant city attorney as the City's Ethics Officer. Susan Trammell was designated Ethics Officer in February 2006 and retired from the City of Minneapolis in June 2024. Daniel Abelson was hired as Managing Attorney in August 2024 and was designated Ethics Officer.

Mission

The Mission of the Board is to promote integrity in City government by providing the services set forth in Ethics Code §15.210(e). These services include providing interpretations of the Ethics Code, responding to allegations of Ethics Code violations, and providing policy advice to the Ethics Officer.

2024 Accomplishments

I. Ethics Education

Requirements of the Ethics Code

The Ethics Code requires new local official and employees to attend an ethics education seminar within six months of beginning their term or employment, respectively. A local official must attend the seminar every four years thereafter while employees must attend every three years. The Ethics Code states that the education seminars are to be designed and implemented by the Human Resources Department to educate local officials and employees about their ethical duties and responsibilities. Department heads are responsible for ensuring that all their employees attend the required ethics education seminars.

Board and Commission Ethics Code Education

The City currently has 40 boards, commissions and advisory committees (collectively "boards") to which residents are appointed. The Ethics Code requires the resident volunteers serving on these boards to attend ethics education upon beginning their service and every four years thereafter. Board members training is a web-based training module that permits the board members to participate in the training at their own convenience.

The City Clerk's office communicates the ethics education requirement to newly appointed members. The City Clerk's office also regularly communicates with board liaisons to remind the appointed members when their refresher training is due. At the time this report was created, 371 of the 460 appointments were filled. Of the filled memberships, ethics education compliance is at 69% which is slightly down from 71% in 2023 & 2022. The compliance rate in both 2022 and 2023 was significantly higher than prior years. The gains made in board member ethics education compliance is entirely due to the City Clerk's continuous compliance requirement communications with board members and board liaisons. Additional efforts will need to be taken to improve the rate of board member compliance. A task for 2025 will be to update the Board ethics training module which has not been updated since 2009.

Employee Ethics Code Education:

New employees must complete ethics training in the City’s COMET Leadership and Development Portal except for new Police and Fire employees who receive in-person training. Employees then must complete refresher training in COMET every three years.

A ten-minute political activity electronic training module outlining the do’s and don’ts employees must follow during election season was completed in summer of 2016. Nearly 100% of employees and all elected officials completed this training in 2016. The training module remains active in COMET and employees who want to engage in political activity are encouraged to watch the video. COMET records indicate that 20 people completed the political activity training in 2024.

In 2024, the Ethics Officer, or a designee, conducted 7 in-person trainings for new employees in the Minneapolis Police Department, 1 training for new employees in the Minneapolis Fire Department and 0 ethics trainings for newly elected officials.

As of December 31, 2024, COMET records show 94.4% of employees, regular and seasonal, are compliant with the required Ethics Code education. The percent compliant slightly improved over the 92.6% and the 81.2% compliant for the previous two calendar years. The following chart depicts the Ethics Code education status of the employees of each department according to COMET records.

Employee Ethics Education Status by Department As of December 31, 2024

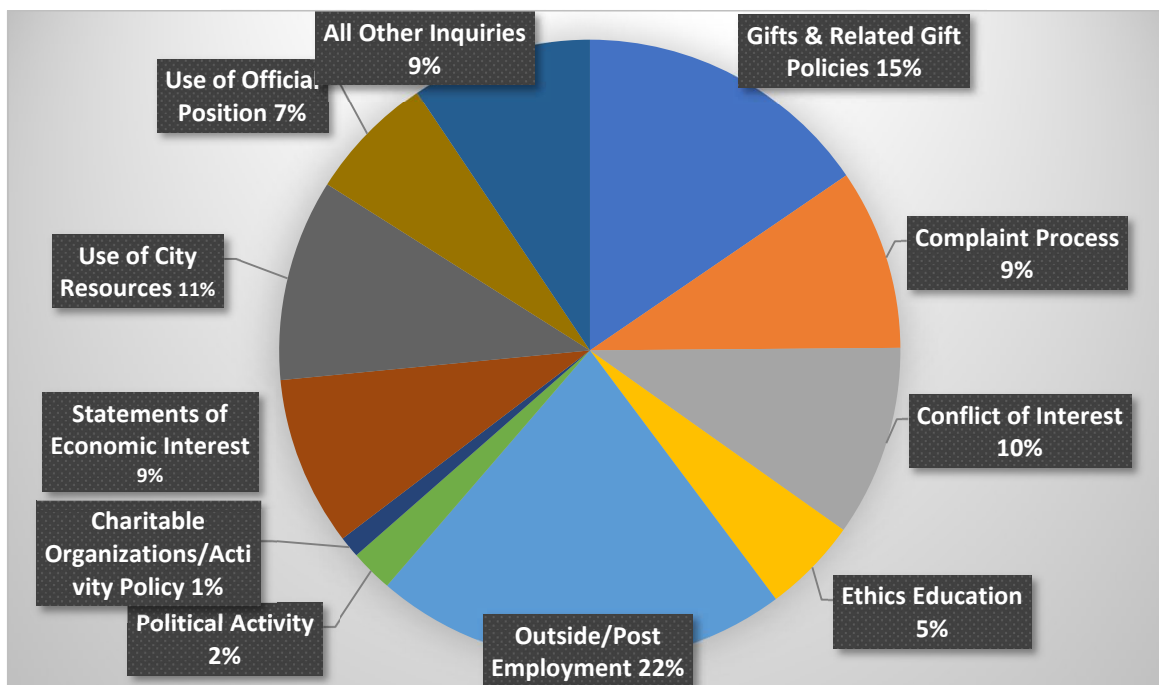
| Department | COMET Number of Employees | Employees in compliance | Employees out of Compliance | Training Due in 2025 |
|---|---------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------|
| Mayor | 15 | 14 | 1 | 1 |
| Office of the City Attorney | 112 | 112 | 0 | 44 |
| Office of the City Clerk | 99 | 98 | 1 | 41 |
| Office of Community Safety | 12 | 12 | 0 | 2 |
| Office of Public Service | 11 | 11 | 0 | 3 |
| 311 | 40 | 39 | 1 | 19 |
| 911 | 66 | 64 | 2 | 22 |
| Arts & Cultural Affairs | 7 | 7 | 0 | 2 |
| Capital Improvements | 66 | 60 | 6 | 14 |
| City Assessor | 36 | 34 | 2 | 15 |
| City Auditor | 14 | 14 | 0 | 4 |
| Civil Rights | 39 | 37 | 2 | 3 |
| Communications | 10 | 8 | 2 | 0 |
| Community Planning & Economic Development | 226 | 225 | 1 | 86 |
| Convention Center | 166 | 147 | 19 | 15 |
| Emergency Management | 8 | 8 | 0 | 2 |
| Estimate & Taxation | 2 | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| Finance and Property Services | 266 | 260 | 6 | 99 |

| | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|------------|------------|
| Fire Department | 404 | 339 | 65 | 22 |
| Human Resources | 59 | 55 | 4 | 11 |
| Information Technology | 89 | 86 | 3 | 28 |
| Intergovernmental Relations | 5 | 4 | 1 | 0 |
| Minneapolis Health Department | 157 | 149 | 8 | 41 |
| Neighborhood & Community Relations | 20 | 20 | 0 | 6 |
| Neighborhood Safety | 16 | 13 | 3 | 3 |
| Performance Management & Innovation | 7 | 7 | 0 | 2 |
| Police Department | 764 | 729 | 35 | 139 |
| Public Works | 987 | 941 | 46 | 155 |
| Racial Equity Inclusion & Belonging | 4 | 4 | 0 | 1 |
| Regulatory Services | 175 | 169 | 6 | 92 |
| Totals | 3882 | 3668 | 214 | 947 |

II. Ethics Inquiries

From January 1, 2024, through December 31, 2024, the Ethics Officer answered 179 telephone and email inquiries regarding ethics. The number of inquiries is down from the 244 inquiries in 2023 and the 277 inquiries in 2022. The Board finds it encouraging that so many employees are mindful of the ethical issues and seek guidance when these issues arise in the workplace. The substantive topics of 2024 inquiries were as follows:

ETHICS INQUIRIES



Outside/Post Employment was the leading inquiry category of the year, followed by Gifts & Gift Related Policies.

The Chart below depicts the changes over the years in inquiries:

ETHICS INQUIRIES – HISTORICAL

| Category, Ethics Code Section | Percentage Inquiries 2021 | Percentage Inquiries 2022 | Percentage Inquiries 2023 | Percentage Inquiries 2024 |
|--|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| Aspirations, 15.10,15.20,15.130 & 15.180 | 0.6% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% |
| Fiduciary Duty, 15.30 | 0.3% | 1.1% | 0.0% | 0.5% |
| Conflict of Interest, 15.40 | 12.0% | 11.6% | 6.2% | 9.9% |
| Lobbyists, 15.40(b)(4) | 0.3% | 0.0% | 0.4% | 0.0% |
| Gifts, 15.50 | 10.2% | 13.7% | 19.4% | 8.2% |
| Outside Employment, 15.60 | 10.8% | 11.2% | 10.7% | 20.4% |
| Post-employment, 15.90 | 2.7% | 2.5% | 0.8% | 1.1% |
| Use of Official Position, 15.70 | 1.5% | 4.0% | 3.3% | 6.6% |
| Statements of Economic Interest, 15.80 | 5.7% | 11.2% | 8.3% | 8.8% |
| Use of City Resources, 15.100 | 3.9% | 10.1% | 9.5% | 10.4% |
| Political Activity, 15.110 | 8.1% | 4.3% | 4.6% | 2.2% |
| Loans, 15.120 | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% |
| Required Reporting, 15.140 | 0.0% | 0.4% | 0.4% | 0.0% |
| Discrimination / Harassment, 15.150 | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.5% |
| Nepotism, 15.160 | 0.9% | 0.7% | 0.4% | 0.5% |
| Use/disclosure of Information, 15.170 | 0.6% | 0.7% | 0.4% | 0.0% |
| Bias/Favoritism, 15.190 | 0.9% | 0.4% | 2.5% | 0.5% |
| Inappropriate Influence, 15.200 | 0.3% | 0.0% | 0.8% | 0.5% |
| Ethical Practices Board, 15.210 | 1.2% | 1.1% | 1.7% | 0.5% |
| Complaint Process, 15.230 | 23.1% | 13.7% | 12.8% | 9.3% |
| Contracts, 15.250 | 0.3% | 0.4% | 0.0% | 0.5% |
| Ethics Education, 15.260 | 5.7% | 6.1% | 4.1% | 4.9% |
| Related Policies - Solicitation of Gifts to the City, Gifts between Employees & Charitable Organizations | 6.0% | 4.3% | 10.8% | 4.4% |
| Miscellaneous | 5.1% | 2.5% | 2.9% | 5.5% |

III. Ethics Report Line and Ethics Complaints

Employee Report Line

Maintaining a confidential reporting line for employees to make anonymous reports of their concerns is a well-established best practice. The City’s confidential reporting line, the Employee Report Line, has been operational since 2008. Reports can be made by phone or electronically.

Reports made through the Employee Report Line are available to the City’s Ethics Officer, the City’s Human Resources Investigative Unit (HRIU), the City Auditor, and the Labor and Employment attorneys in the City Attorney’s Office. Once received, the reports are triaged by and assigned for handling. For matters involving requiring an investigation, the HRIU or if appropriate an outside investigator will handle the investigation. For other concerns, the Human Resources Business Partner (HRBP) for the applicable department is usually assigned. These complaints are handled in the same manner as all other potential employee discipline matters.

Ethics Complaints can also be made to the Ethics Officer using a form on the City’s website. This year the Ethics Officer updated the form to a fillable web form instead of having complainants email a PDF to the Ethics Officer. The updated form makes it easier to make a complaint and will help enhance the complaint tracking process and information security.

Ethics Complaints

The City uses Ethico to track all employee-related complaints, including those received directly by the Ethics Officer.

The Board only tracks the complaints requiring the attention of the Board. The Board handles complaints involving department heads, elected officials and members of the City’s appointed boards and commissions.

The Board reviewed 9 ethics complaints in 2024. None of the complaints resulted in a recommendation for discipline or other action.

IV. Proposed Ordinance Amendments

The Board is not proposing any amendments to the Ethics Code at the time of this report but as detailed in the 2025 work plan, during 2025 there likely will be a proposal to amend section 15.260 of the Ethics Code to align the training interval for non-employee local officials with their board or commission terms.

Additionally, in 2025 staff will begin a comprehensive review of the Ethics Code for amendments with the goal of presenting recommended amendments to the Ethical Practices Board in late 2025 or early 2026 and presenting amendments to the City Council in 2026.

2025 Work Plan

The 2025 work plan is predicated on the availability of City staff to complete the tasks requiring staff involvement.

Ethics Education

- Create an updated online ethics training module for Board and Commission member ethics education.

Ethics Code Review & Revision

- Draft revisions to section 15.260 of the Ethics Code to align the training time period for non-employee local officials with their board or commission terms. The goal is to have these revisions codified in 2025.
- Conduct a comprehensive review of the Ethics Code for amendments with the goal of presenting recommended amendments to the Ethical Practices Board in late 2025 or early 2026 and presenting amendments to the City Council in 2026.

Code Interpretation through Policy Recommendations

- Assist departments with policy drafting upon request.

Ethics Inquiries

- Answer Ethics Code inquiries from employees, local officials, and the public.

Ethics Complaints

- Participate in the Human Resources triage team to review, assign, and manage complaints alleging employee misconduct.
- Appropriately address complaints regarding elected officials and department heads:
 - Present case analysis and recommendations to the Board.
 - Prosecute contested cases before the Board.

Promote an Ethical Culture in the City of Minneapolis

- Reach out to elected officials and department management to engage them in discussions about ethical cultures and ways to improve the City's culture.