



## CIVILITY IN THE CITY: WHEN, WHERE AND HOW IT APPLIES

Civility is essential to ethical conduct in the City of Dallas. Truth be told, acting with civility exemplifies respect for the value and dignity of all individuals (12A-1(b)(4)). The Code of Ethics includes civility as a standard of behavior requiring that city officials and employees treat others with respect, doing for and to others what the city official or employee would have done for and to himself or herself in similar circumstances (12A-4(a)(3)).

That said, what the Code of Ethics considers civility to mean extends beyond mere politeness and manners. What follows is a breakdown of six sub-sections that address the when, where, and how of civility in particular cases according to the Code of Ethics. It is important to note that the standards of civility are not limited to these cases but illustrated by them. Let's look at these sub-sections to see how broadly it is applied in the Code of Ethics.

### When do the standards of civility apply:

Civility is a standard that applies to city officials and employees acting in the performance of their official duties.

### Where do the standards of civility apply :

Broadly speaking, the standard of civility applies to interactions with other city officials, city employees, residents, and persons doing business with the city.

### How do the standards of civility apply in particular situations:

The Code of Ethics provides specific guidance about civility in the context of four categories. The first category is broad, covering the interactions of city officials and city employees with one another, with residents, and with people doing business with the city. Here, the Code of Ethics demands that city employees and city officials accord respect and courtesy to one another and the public and it prohibits making comments or taking actions that are abusive; belligerent; crude; derogatory; impertinent; profane; slanderous; threatening; or that involve personal attacks upon the character, integrity, or motives of others.



If you are motivated by reading these exciting developments, stay tuned as more is to come each month. Things to look forward to include an essay contest, an ethics and equity week, and opportunities to dig deeper into certain topics through training events. **Baron Eliason**, and the CMO ethics officer **Hai Tran**, would love to hear from you about ethics in the city. Also, feel free to request a special training event in your department on any part of the Code of Ethics by contacting [baron.eliason@dallas.gov](mailto:baron.eliason@dallas.gov).

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The second category is the interaction of city officials and employees in meetings of boards, commissions, and city council. Here, the Code of Ethics demands that order and decorum are preserved. This is based on following both Robert's Rules of Order and the applicable rules of procedure for the city council, board, or commission.

The third category is city officials interacting with city employees, including seeking information or requesting assistance with projects. In a nutshell, city officials must avoid interference with the work of city employees and treat them as professionals. The Code of Ethics provides prohibitions related to this that includes not interfering with the work of city employees; not impairing the ability of city employees to implement city policies; not influencing city employees in the making of recommendations or decisions; and not berating city employees. To obtain information or request assistance with projects, city officials should work through the city manager, city secretary, city attorney, city auditor, or inspector general, or the applicable department director, rather than contacting city employees directly.

However, there is an exception that applies to the professional and administrative assistants to the mayor and city council.

The final category is city council members interacting with boards and commissions. The Code of Ethics prohibits city council members from three types of interactions with boards and commissions. First, councilmembers shall not use their position to influence the deliberations or decisions of boards and commissions. Second, councilmembers shall not appoint city council office staff members to boards and commissions. Lastly, councilmembers shall not demand that board or commission members vote as requested by the city council member or threaten board or commission members with removal. The exception to these prohibitions is that city council members may receive information from or provide information to a board or commission member, work together with board and commission member on projects, or express their opinions to board and commission members.

**Take a break and play Catch the Canary each week** - its a mystery game that comes straight to your email, takes less than two minutes to play, and teaches ethics!

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## What can be done when the standards of civility are not met:

As with any violation of the Code of Ethics, when the standards of civility are not met, the matter must be reported. There is a confidential hotline for making these reports but where civility is concerned, it is helpful to know a few things. Unlike a financial conflict of interest that can be demonstrated on paper, issues with civility are more likely to occur in one-on-one interactions, off the record, and out of the limelight. Therefore, it is important that when a Code of Ethics violation is reported, the reporter is able to bring witnesses, recordings, and other evidence to corroborate the complaint.

As you can see, civility is an important part of ethics here in the City of Dallas and it is broader than manners – it includes key aspects of our most important interactions as city officials and employees.



**Blow the Whistle!** Our confidential hotline for reporting violations of the Code of Ethics is called the Whistle. The Code requires us to report violations when we see them. Call 877.860.1061 or use the QR code.



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**Safe harbor Anyone?** Jimmy Buffet wrote his classic tune Cheeseburger in Paradise after sailing some stormy seas and making port. You may not be a sailor but if you are confused about whether the Code of Ethics prohibits an action you want to take, it can feel like a storm! Ask for an advisory opinion - its your safe harbor for getting free, confidential, authoritative advice. Email: [ATTethicsadvisoryinquiries@dallas.gov](mailto:ATTethicsadvisoryinquiries@dallas.gov)