



Electoral Board Member Manual

Ethical Principles/Code of Conduct

AUGUST 2025

Promoting Free, Fair, Open, and Transparent Elections



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03 ETHICAL PRINCIPLES/CODE OF CONDUCT



Electoral Board Members

Dear Colleagues,

Electoral Boards play a critical role as guardians of our democratic process, responsible for ensuring the integrity and fairness of elections. We bear the weight of ensuring that voting is well-organized, that every vote is counted, and that election outcomes reflect the will of the electorate. The importance of your role demands that you uphold the highest standards of conduct in the execution of your duties.

- Election administration is complex and challenged with limited resources.
- Electoral Boards tirelessly strive to administer free, fair, and secure elections.
- You cannot anticipate every challenge and operate without error, and conduct must be judged with consideration of this reality.
- Finally, responsibility for carrying out our democratic process does not fall entirely on Electoral Boards. It is a shared duty. We must work together to safeguard our elections and provide support and resources that make our work possible.

Mr. John Nunnally, President

Virginia Electoral Board Association

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The Virginia Electoral Board Association [VEBA] wishes to acknowledge the insightful work and contributions of the individuals and organizations that shared invaluable resources leading to the crafting of these ethical principles and codes of conduct. This work draws upon the extensive research and analysis done by these subject matter experts.

VEBA is grateful to our contributors and to those who gave permission to use material which was vital to the success of this endeavor.

Thank you!

The American Law Institute

Ethical Standards for Election Administration

Dr. Charles Stewart III of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Research Director and Co-Chairs Bob Bauer of New York University School of Law and Ben Ginsberg of the Hoover Institution.

Election Center, The National Association of Election Officials

Standards of Conduct

Mitchell Brown, Ph.D., Director of the National Association for Election Officials.

The Virginia Department of Elections

Susan Beals, Commissioner of Elections

Virginia Electoral Board Association

Board of Directors

Special Thanks to the Ethics Committee

Rick Michael, Chair, Paul Kitchen, Roger Omwake, JoAnne Speiden, Clara Belle Wheeler

ETHICAL PRINCIPLES & CODE OF CONDUCT

For Members of the Virginia Electoral Board Association

These principles apply to all members of the Virginia Electoral Board Association, Electoral Boards in the Commonwealth of Virginia, and subordinates thereof in the profession of election administration.

Adhere to the law.

Election officials have a duty to uphold the Constitution of the United States and administer the law as written, amended, and interpreted by the applicable authorities within the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Protect and defend the integrity of the election process.

Election officials have a duty to ensure the integrity of elections and to safeguard against unfounded attacks on the integrity of the election process.

Promote transparency in the conduct of elections.

Election officials have a duty to make election administration transparent to the public.

Treat all participants in the election process impartially.

Election officials have an obligation to treat all participants in the electoral process uniformly and to ensure impartiality, including voters, candidates, citizens, and political committees.

Demonstrate personal integrity.

Election officials have a duty to conduct themselves honestly and forthrightly in all interactions with superiors, peers, candidates, campaign officials, and the general public.

Practice the highest level of ethics and stewardship.

Election officials have a duty to expend public funds carefully and foster respect among employees and volunteers.

Protect the public office.

Election officials have a duty to protect the probity of elections from manipulation for personal or partisan gain.

Advance professional excellence.

Election officials have a duty to stay informed about election laws and new developments in election management.

MY PERSONAL PLEDGE TO

FREEDOM, DEMOCRACY AND MY PROFESSION

ADHERE TO THE LAW.

Election officials have a duty to uphold the Constitution of the United States and administer the law as written, amended, and interpreted by the applicable authorities within the Commonwealth of Virginia.

APPLICATION

- **Understand and adhere to the law:** Election officials should have a working knowledge of all applicable federal, state, and local laws, and always comply with these laws in good faith while carrying out their duties to the best of their ability.
- **Stay current:** Election officials should regularly review legal requirements, stay apprised on changes to law, and seek guidance from legal counsel when uncertain on the correct protocols.
- **Adhere to proper procedures:** Election officials should adhere to all legal requirements and follow efficient and effective processes when setting policy, issuing regulations and guidance, and agreeing to contracts.
- **Document decisions:** Election officials should document their reasoning behind decisions to the extent feasible, to ensure that legal requirements are considered, and that the decision can be explained and justified.
- **Act as a nonpartisan resource for federal, state, and local lawmakers:** Election officials are experts on election administration. They should provide regular feedback to lawmakers at all levels of government and offer nonpartisan, factual information when new laws are proposed.

PROTECT AND DEFEND THE INTEGRITY OF THE ELECTION PROCESS.

Election officials have a duty to ensure the integrity of elections and to safeguard against unfounded attacks on the integrity of the election process.

APPLICATION

- **Act with honesty and accuracy:** Election officials should always make a conscious effort to convey accurate information to the public and use sound evidence to guide decision-making.
- **Protect the independence of election administration:** Election officials should resist undue interference from other public officials or outside actors in the administration of elections.
- **Bolster the election administration profession:** Election officials should seek to build trust in the field of election administration as a whole, recognizing that the actions and reputation of any one election official can impact whether all voters

have confidence in elections. Election officials should always be mindful that their public conduct, including criticism of other officials, impacts trust in the profession as a whole.

PROMOTE TRANSPARENCY IN THE CONDUCT OF ELECTIONS.

Election officials have a duty to make election administration transparent to the public.

APPLICATION

- **Establish clear protocols in advance:** Election officials should establish and adhere to guidelines and procedures to guide decision making during the election process. Election officials should make these protocols publicly available so that all interested parties are aware of the rules in advance, as long as doing so does not compromise physical security or cybersecurity. When new circumstances demand departures from established protocols, changes should be vetted with relevant stakeholders and communicated clearly to the public.
- **Be impartial:** In carrying out their official duties, election officials should always provide the same level of excellent services to candidates, parties, voters, and other participants in the democratic process.
- **Promote accurate information:** Election officials should endeavor to educate the public on the election administration process, including the existence of safeguards to ensure fair, accurate, and secure elections.
- **Ensure transparency with voters and the public:** Election officials should encourage members of the public to participate in election administration by serving as election workers or observing election processes, as law permits.

TREAT ALL PARTICIPANTS IN THE ELECTION PROCESS IMPARTIALLY.

Election officials have an obligation to treat all participants in the electoral process uniformly and to ensure impartiality, including voters, candidates, citizens, and political committees.

APPLICATION

- **Promote dignity, equality, and respect:** Election officials should treat all voters, candidates and other participants in the political process with respect, identify and correct discriminatory policies or practices, and refrain from activities or associations that promote discrimination.
- **Provide clear instructions:** Election officials should inform voters how to cast a ballot and have their vote counted, using varied communication methods and in a manner that is reasonably likely to reach all voters.
- **Provide inclusive voter support:** Election officials should provide accessible and inclusive services to all voters, regardless of their abilities or backgrounds.

- **Lead by example:** Election officials should model the professional and respectful behavior they expect from their staff in both internal and external interactions.

DEMONSTRATE PERSONAL INTEGRITY.

Election officials have a duty to conduct themselves honestly and forthrightly in all interactions with superiors, peers, candidates, campaign officials, and the general public.

APPLICATION

- **Act with honesty and accuracy:** Election officials should always make a conscious effort to convey accurate information to the public and use sound evidence to guide decision-making.
- **Protect the independence of election administration:** Election officials should resist undue interference from other public officials or outside actors in the administration of elections.
- **Bolster the election administration profession:** Election officials should seek to build trust in the field of election administration, recognizing that the actions and reputation of any one election official can impact whether all voters have confidence in elections. Election officials should always be mindful that their public conduct, including criticism of other officials, impacts trust in the profession as a whole.

PRACTICE THE HIGHEST LEVEL OF ETHICS AND STEWARDSHIP.

Election officials have a duty to expend public funds carefully and foster respect among employees and volunteers.

APPLICATION

- **Use resources efficiently:** Election officials should carefully adhere to budgets made available for election administration, and endeavor to use available resources in a way that maximizes their ability to administer secure, fair, and accurate elections.
- **Follow established procurement processes:** Election officials should follow procurement processes with the goal of obtaining equipment, systems, and services at the best price and quality.
- **Regularly review spending:** Election officials should regularly review and evaluate spending to identify inefficiencies and areas for improvement in future elections.
- **Communicate needs:** Election officials should proactively communicate early and often with relevant decision-makers about funding and other resources and assistance necessary to carry out responsibilities.

PROTECT THE PUBLIC OFFICE.

Election officials have a duty to protect the probity of elections from manipulation for personal or partisan gain.

APPLICATION

- **Follow relevant ethics and campaign finance laws:** As public officeholders, election officials should adhere to relevant ethics and campaign finance laws, including limits on campaign contributions, personal gift restrictions for public officials, conflict of interest rules, and transparency requirements.
- **Set special guardrails when running for office:** Election officials should establish and implement guardrails when running for office in their own jurisdiction, including to the extent feasible, recusing themselves from decisions that have a direct impact on their races.
- **Seek to maintain impartiality and avoid perceived conflicts of interest:** In carrying out their official duties, election officials should refrain from accepting any benefit or taking other actions that would create an appearance of a conflict of interest.

ADVANCE PROFESSIONAL EXCELLENCE.

Election officials have a duty to stay informed about election laws and new developments in election management.

APPLICATION

- **Seek training opportunities:** Election officials should seek and take advantage of opportunities for continued training, professional development, and sharing of best practices with others in their profession.
- **The Virginia Electoral Board Association:** shall endeavor to advance and provide professional development and serve as clearinghouse for innovative ideas and best practices.
- **Set staff up for success:** Election officials should hire staff based on skills and experience, provide staff with the training and guidance needed to succeed in their roles, and regularly review performance. Administrators should invest in staff knowledge, training, and resources to ensure continuity of operations.
- **Be open to improvement:** Election officials should be transparent about their operations, be open to constructive criticism, and welcome suggestions for improvement from colleagues, public officials, community groups, and voters.



RESOURCES AND RESEARCH SOURCES FOR ETHICS

Ethical Standards for Election Administration

The American Law Institute

[Standards Issued by Bipartisan Working Group](#)

Standards of Conduct

[Election Center, The National Association for Election Officials](#)

Florida Supervisors of Election

[Florida Supervisors of Election](#)

The Noland Principles

[Keeping the Public Front of Mind of-mind/](#)

Driving the Future of Elections as Public Service: The Role of Ethics

Susan Gill, Election Center Board of Directors

Standards of Conduct for Election Workers

[The Elections Group](#)

ASPA Code of Ethics

[The American Society for Public Administration](#)

Employee Code of Ethics

[Virginia Department of Elections](#)

Code of Ethics

[Voter Registrars Association of Virginia](#)