

Course Learning Outcomes for Unit IV

Upon completion of this unit, students should be able to:

4. Apply public administration ethics theory to solve real-world problems.
 - 4.1 Identify a set of values and standards that coincide with professional behavior in the workplace, incorporating a community friendly perception to outside stakeholders.

Reading Assignment

Chapter 6:

Maintaining Responsible Conduct in Public Organizations: Two Approaches

Unit Lesson

The code of ethics is a listing of behavioral and procedural standards that guide members of an organization's daily activity. Most profit and non-profit institutions have articles of guidance in place that direct, constrain, and encourage certain behaviors types, set standards of reputation for supporting stakeholders to confirm professional practices, and help outside agencies confirm that ethical standards exist to hold practices accountable.

Codes can fail because:

- organizations do not emphasize or promote their practices;
- codes are not posted in public places, thus employees do not read or are reminded that accepted practices exist; and because of
- poorly written or vague direction listed in the code of ethics.

The organization that best defines public administrative practices and procedures and exists to advance the field of public administration is The American Society of Public Administration Code of Ethics (ASPA). The ASPA's (2012) code of ethics state:

1. Internal practices may encounter external ethical standards and practices, which could send mixed messages to all departments and make it difficult to interpret and hold accountable.
2. The concept of masking authentic codes may also be hidden to everyday workplace practices because daily standards of operation are now interpreted as acceptable.
3. Personnel who actually believe acceptable workplace behavior (that violates internal ethical codes) may be offended by such practices.
4. Whistle blowing accusers are treated rather harshly for exposing weak and unenforced ethical standards. Usually violators are not harshly punished.
5. Working conditions suffer – the fog of uncertainty increases because violations continue, while non-offenders remain confused on acceptable practices.
6. Some workers may feel threatened because exposure to current (illegal) workplace practices seems common.
7. Valid protections and immunity may have to be in place to protect whistle blowers.
8. Because violations extend long term, daily practices (unethical) seem perfectly authorized. When and if violators are approached, feelings of unfairness may occur along with resentment.

9. Without strong leadership, serious violations may continue to occur – unless pressure from external sources come into existence.
10. Known or exposed violators will have minimal punishment because leadership allowed existing occurrences. Past violations may be interpreted as minor infractions.

The unit assignment is to perform an ethics audit, evaluating an organization's code of ethics. Please review ASPA's Code of Ethics as an example. Components or measurements to review may include professional integrity, mission of organization, governance structure, compliance of all legal regulations, prudent stewardship, culture of openness and disclosure, diversity in hiring, retention and promotion, and fundraising philosophy.

It is important and powerful when a national organization such as ASPA takes a stand on an issue such as ethics. That sends a powerful message to members and the general public. States can help maintain that emphasis and build confidence in patrons by adopting such policies and statements. In Minnesota, members offer a model policy for local public officials by stating "Whereas, it is imperative that the officials in the public service not only maintain the highest possible standard of ethical conduct in their transactions of public business, but that such standards be clearly defined and known to the public as well as to the public official" (Association of Minnesota Counties). The state of Nevada has legislated an overview of ethical practices by public officials in Chapter 281A- Ethics in Government. They published a document known as the *Nevada Commission on Ethics: Citizen's Guide to Nevada's Ethics in Government Law*.

The state of Vermont took a vastly different route than most states in offering a standard for public officials. In 2013 and 2014, they launched a campaign entitled "CampaignForVermont." In a letter to the electorate, they made the statement, "You deserve the highest level of ethical conduct from government officials, and we should expect nothing less. Yet, Vermont is one of the only states without a comprehensive code of conduct that governs the conduct of public officials" (CampaignForVermont). The campaign organizers were not accusing other government officials' public administrators of wrongdoing. They were tracking the number of legislative acts passed in the previous decade that mentioned ethics and were simply calling for the establishment of "an independent ethics commission with the power to enforce a code of ethics," as a way to make government more transparent and set a standard of conduct for all public officials (CampaignForVermont). As part of this unit take a moment to search for your home state's code of ethics for public administrators.

References

- Association of Minnesota Counties. *Model ethics policy*. Retrieved at http://www.mncounties.org/Publications/FYIs/PDF/Model_Ethics08.pdf
- CampaignForVermont: Achieving Vermont ethics standards and accountability in government. Retrieved at <http://www.campaignforvermont.org/cms-assets/documents/145802-10122.cfv-ethics-position-paper.pdf>
- Nevada Regulatory Standards. *NRS 281A.500 – Ethics in government: General provisions*. Retrieved at <https://www.leg.state.nv.us/NRS/NRS-281A.html>
- The American Society of Public Administration. (2012). Code of ethics. Retrieved from http://www.aspanet.org/public/ASPA/Resources/Code_of_Ethics/ASPA/Resources/Code%20of%20Ethics1.aspx?hkey=acd40318-a945-4ffc-ba7b-18e037b1a858

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- Nevada Regulatory Standards. *NRS 281A.500 – Ethics in government: General provisions*. Retrieved at <https://www.leg.state.nv.us/NRS/NRS-281A.html>
- The American Society of Public Administration. (2012). Code of ethics. Retrieved from http://www.aspanet.org/public/ASPA/Resources/Code_of_Ethics/ASPA/Resources/Code%20of%20Ethics1.aspx?hkey=acd40318-a945-4ffc-ba7b-18e037b1a858