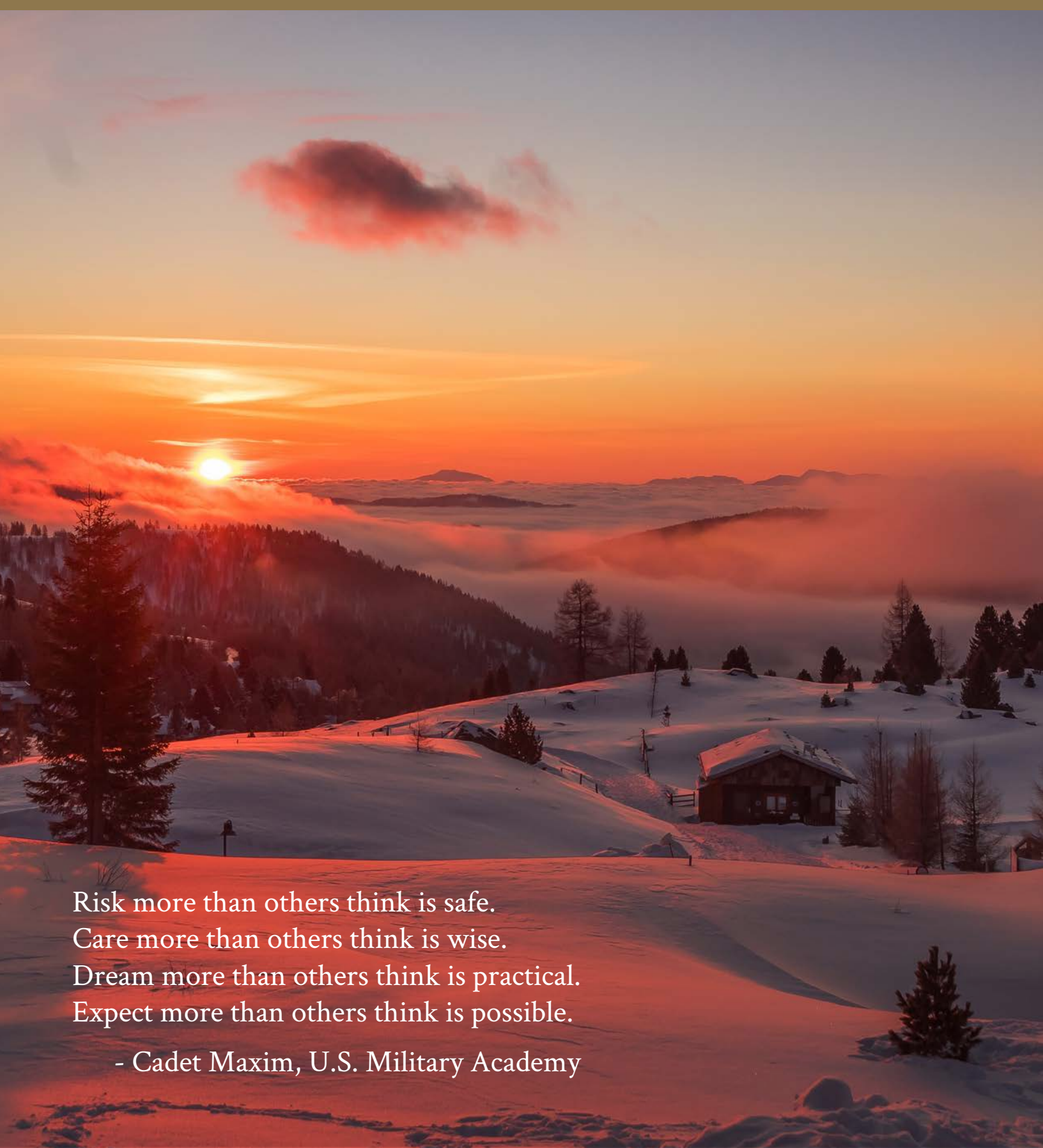


THE VOICE OF ETHICS

A Publication of the Ohio Ethics Commission

2021 Quarter 1



Risk more than others think is safe.
Care more than others think is wise.
Dream more than others think is practical.
Expect more than others think is possible.

- Cadet Maxim, U.S. Military Academy

2020 at the Ohio Ethics Commission: Productivity in a Chaotic Year

Have you ever followed a television series that doesn't seem to know when to end? Random plot twists, new unbelievable storylines, and never-ending cliffhangers just to keep the show on the air? Doesn't that sound like a pithy summary of the year 2020?

Like many of you, the Ohio Ethics Commission members and staff are eagerly anticipating a better year ahead allowing us to gather again with our loved ones and resuming activities that had to be "shelved" last year. Despite the many complications and obstacles last year presented, the Commission powered on with a vigorous workload to fulfill our mission to ensure impartiality and integrity in government. Read on for a synopsis of the efforts and accomplishments of the Ethics Commission in 2020:

Advisory Opinions

One of the Ethics Commission's statutory duties is to provide guidance to those who have questions or need guidance under the Ohio Ethics Law. Seeking advice before acting protects those who are subject to the law and, perhaps even more importantly, protects Ohio citizens from potential government wrongdoing. As outlined below, the pandemic didn't deter our Advisory Attorneys from forging ahead to provide solid legal guidance in the following mediums:

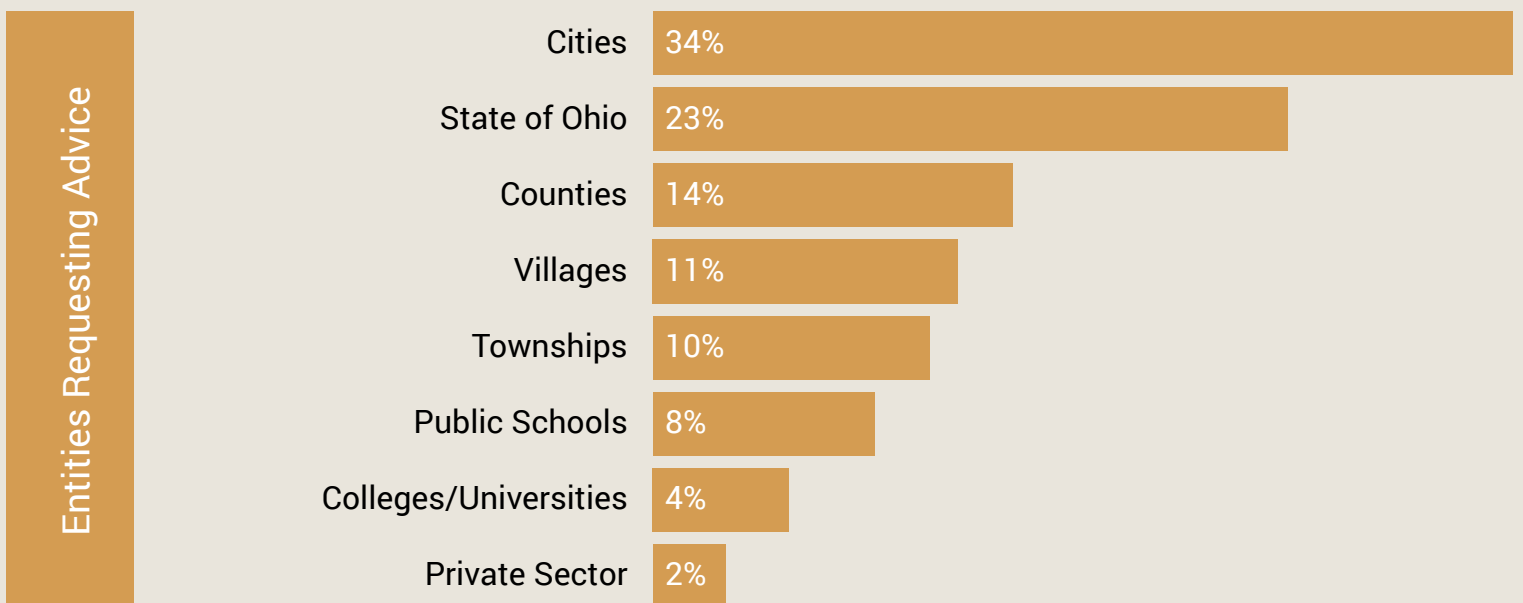
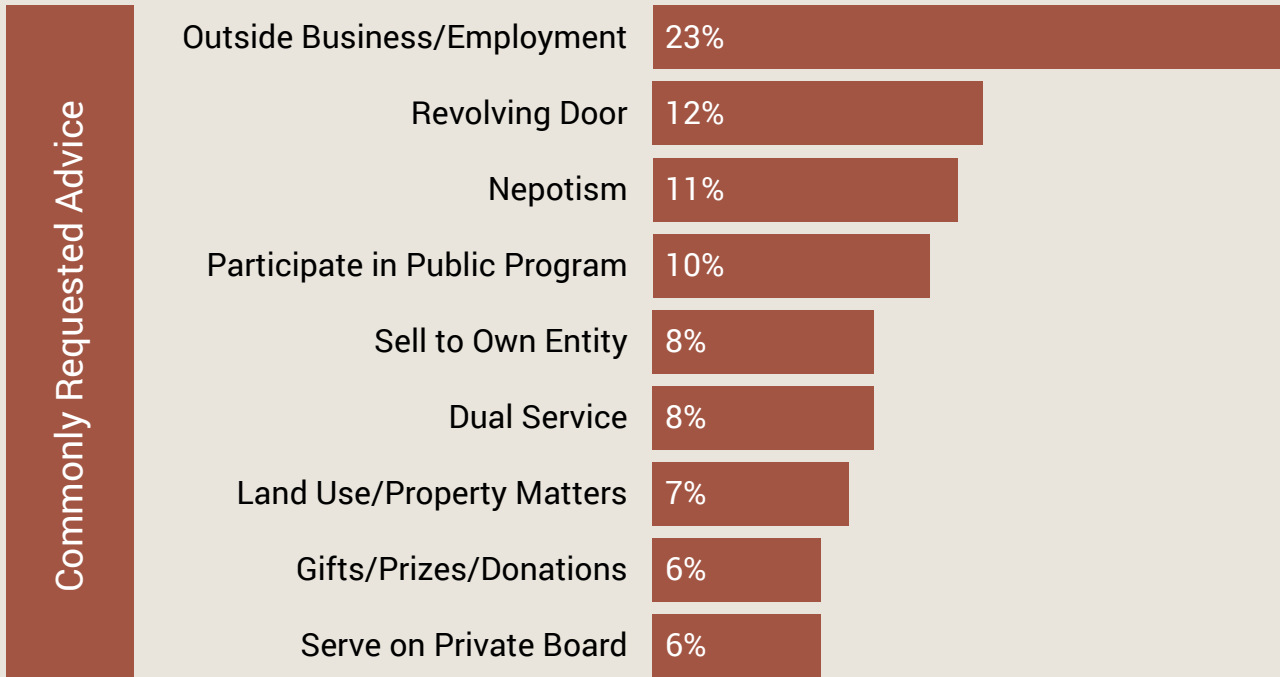
- 177 written requests
- More than 2,200 emails
- More than 1,500 telephone inquiries



The requests for advice and guidance came from all sectors of the state, including cities, counties, villages and townships. Some of the common issues the Advisory Attorneys addressed included:

- Nepotism and Public Contract Restrictions
- Gifts, Prizes and Donations
- Private Outside Employment
- Financial Disclosure
- Post-Employment Issues

The following charts represent the types of questions the Commission received in writing and the types of entities requesting written advice. Despite the challenges posed by working remotely, the Advisory Attorneys responded to these requests promptly and thoroughly, thereby benefitting the requestor, the entities they represent, and the larger public.



Should you ever have questions under the Ohio Ethics Law, please don't hesitate to contact us. Visit our [Advice Page](#) for more information.

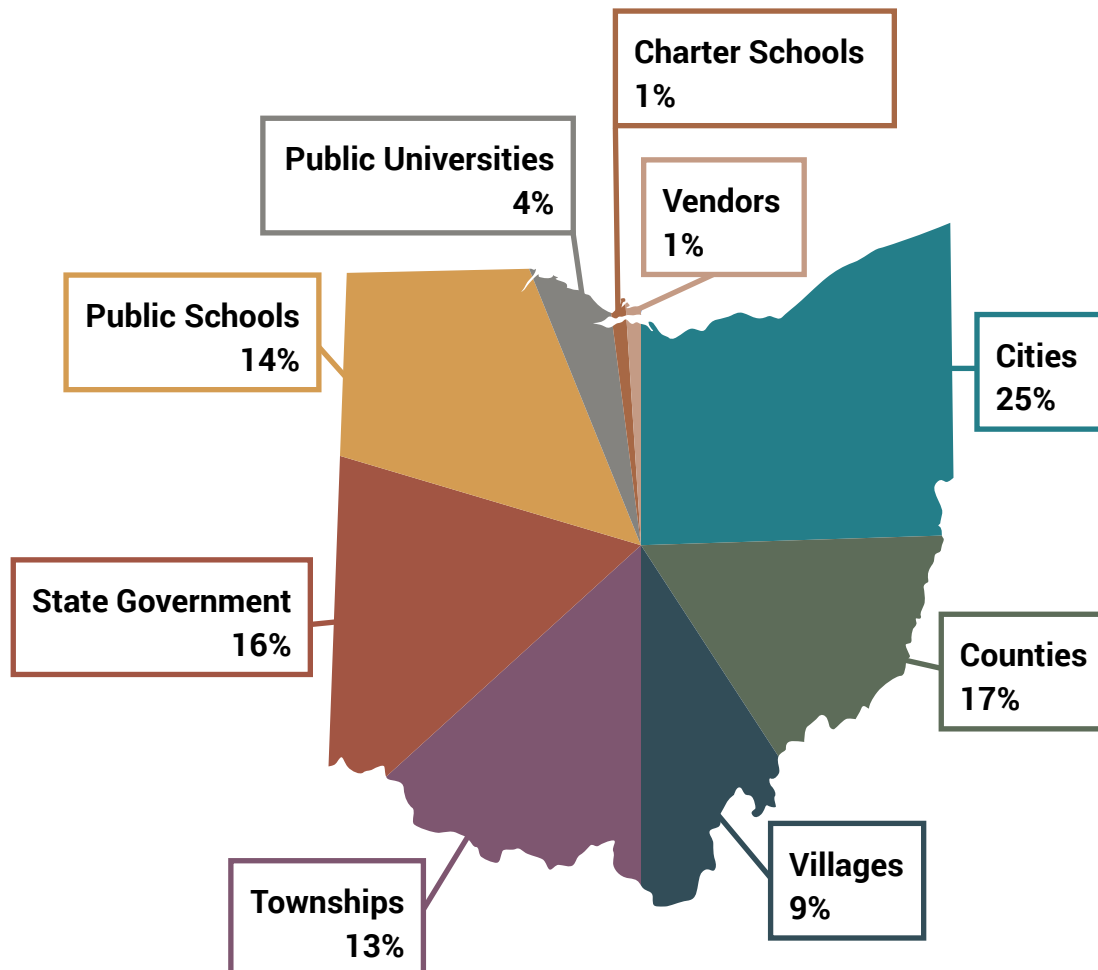
Investigations

The Commission's investigation section faced challenges as a result of the pandemic, including closed courtrooms that delayed grand juries and court hearings, a state government hiring freeze that prevented backfilling two open positions, and social distancing restrictions on conducting "in-person" interviews. Nonetheless, our attorneys and special investigators forged ahead in 2020 with a total of 135 cases investigated with Investigative Staff responding to 868 telephone investigative inquiries and processing 411 information requests or allegations of wrongdoing. The Commission opened 67 new investigations and resolved 23 cases under its settlement authority.

Common investigations included:

- Outside Business/Employment Violations (43%)
- Public Contracts (Including Nepotism) Violations (26%)
- Conflict of Interest Violations (10%)

As a percentage of total cases investigated in 2020, about 2/3 of the public officials or employees investigated were affiliated with local government (cities, counties, villages, or townships). Here is a breakdown by entity:



Ethics Education

The Commission's Education and Training program routinely provides highly-rated training sessions regarding the Ethics Law around the state. We were thrown a significant "curve ball" when the pandemic struck requiring training to be obtained in new and innovative formats. Fortunately, the Ethics Commission already has an effective arsenal of electronic documents and training opportunities to allow public officials and employees to learn about and comprehend the Ethics Law in readily-available and easy-to-understand formats. In addition to our online fact sheets and newsletters, the Commission deftly provided live webinars, recorded on-demand classes, and even virtual Continuing Legal Education (CLE) opportunities.

Education Highlights of 2020 included:

- 82 presentations with 10,577 attendees
- Three Continuing Legal Education (CLE) classes in 2020 for public practice attorneys with more than 1,500 attendees
- Two webinars entitled "The Ohio Ethics Law & Working from Home" to assist public officials and employees to identify potential concerns that can arise under the Ethics Law while working remotely. The two sessions were electronically attended by more than 1,300 public officials and employees.

In spite of the learning challenges that 2020 presented, thousands of learners were able to obtain convenient and effective training to learn more about the Ethics Law and apply that knowledge to public service. While we look forward to eventually resuming "in-person" classes this year, based on the feedback we received in 2020, online learning isn't a bad choice! See below for some of the comments we heard last year regarding our virtual tools:

Webinars

- Ten minutes into the ethics training this morning and I already deemed it the most engaging ethics training I have been to (and I have been to a lot)!
- I wanted to say thank you so much for all of your hard work. It is appreciated. I liked how you tried to keep the information up to date and relevant even to the most recent events facing us working from home due to COVID-19. And your positive attitude always shines through. It made for a nice break in a very stressful time.
- Very good job with the web-based training today! Very funny, great pictures and stories. Keep up the great work.

Newsletters

- Just wanted you to know how much I appreciate your informative newsletters
- Congratulations on another outstanding newsletter!
- This newsletter was a home run, as always

E-Course

- The Ethics Training was focused and enjoyable, and reiterated Ohio law and principles to live by. Thank you for an excellent training!
- I just completed the annual Ohio Ethics Training module and wanted to say how impressed I was with it. No one looks forward to mandatory training compliance. Yet, from an instructional design perspective, this was easily the best one I have yet experienced. The results are informative, engaging, and well-organized.
- I think this year's training is even more positive than last year's (amazingly). My main issue with your training is that we only get one per year!

CLE Classes

- Thanks so much for an amazing CLE and for all your work to ensure we get credit for it. I have to tell you in all honesty that that was the best CLE I've ever taken!
- This ethics/professionalism seminar was AWESOME. Interesting and relatable.
- Entertaining - actually keeps people's attention with practical real-world examples. I have found yours to be the best of the ethics CLEs in Ohio for many years now.

Keep reading through the newsletter for a related article regarding training opportunities in 2021!

Financial Disclosure

Another statutory responsibility of the Ohio Ethics Commission is administering the financial disclosure program. Financial disclosure statements (FDS) were designed to assist certain public servants, including some elected officials and high-ranking state employees, in identifying potential conflicts of interest and provide transparency to Ohio citizens regarding the financial interests of those who serve them in the public sector

This year, filers were especially grateful for the online FDS resources since our financial disclosure specialists were not able to be in the office every day to meet with filers or receive "hard copy" files. In fact, in 2020, the Commission received nearly 10,300 statements with 93 percent of these filers using the Commission's online filing system.

If you are new to financial disclosure filing or want additional information regarding this program, please visit the [Financial Disclosure page](#) of our web site or check out our [FDS FAQ](#)!

A New Year: New Training Opportunities

One of the disheartening parts of 2020 for the Ethics Commission was the need to halt on-site “live” ethics education sessions. These in-person sessions allow for stimulating interaction, a chance to ask questions “on the spot,” and allows for free, convenient, and effective ethics training for public officials and employees in both state and local governments.

We are hopeful that 2021 will eventually allow a return to these “in-house” sessions, so if you are interested in discussing this as a possibility for your office, feel free to email susan.willeke@ethics.ohio.gov for more information.

In the meantime, however, the Ethics Commission continues to offer virtual training options that we believe are equally helpful and even enjoyable! Take a look to see which of the following choices might currently be the best fit for you or your public entity.

E-Course: “The Ohio Ethics Law: Building a Culture of Integrity”

Each year, the Ohio Ethics Commission provides a new e-course to allow public employees and officials to participate in the Ethics Law training from the convenience of their own computers! Our latest e-course is available on our website and can be accessed 24/7. The e-course provides an overview of the Ethics Law and provides proof of completion at the end of the course. Check it out!

Note for state officials and employees: The e-course fulfills the Ohio Ethics Law training requirement under Executive Order 2019-11D for state officials and employees (including financial disclosure filers).

Note for attorneys: The 2021 e-course has been approved for one hour of general Continuing Legal Education credit.



[Click here for the e-course](#)
The Ohio Ethics Law: Building a Culture of Integrity

Webinars

The Ohio Ethics Commission routinely presents free one-hour webinars to assist public employees and officials in understanding and complying with the Ohio Ethics Law. These live and interactive are designed to be effective, convenient, and even enjoyable.

And this year, the Commission is offering two webinar choices! Both provide an overview of the Ethics Law, but it's up to you to decide which one is right for you!

Read below to decide which webinar is right for you and then register below! Once registered, you will receive an email confirming your registration with information you need to join the webinar.

Webinar Option #1: The Ohio Ethics Law: Building a Culture of Integrity

This one-hour webinar provides a solid overview of the Ohio Ethics Law with summations of conflicts of interest, gift restrictions, public contract prohibitions, nepotism, post-employment, and more. Relevant and timely examples will help solidify the concepts and restrictions outlined in this webinar. This webinar is an excellent choice for those who seek a solid foundation regarding the Ethics Law or need a "refresher" course. This webinar is also an excellent option for those who may be new (or returning) to public service. These webinars will occur on the following dates:

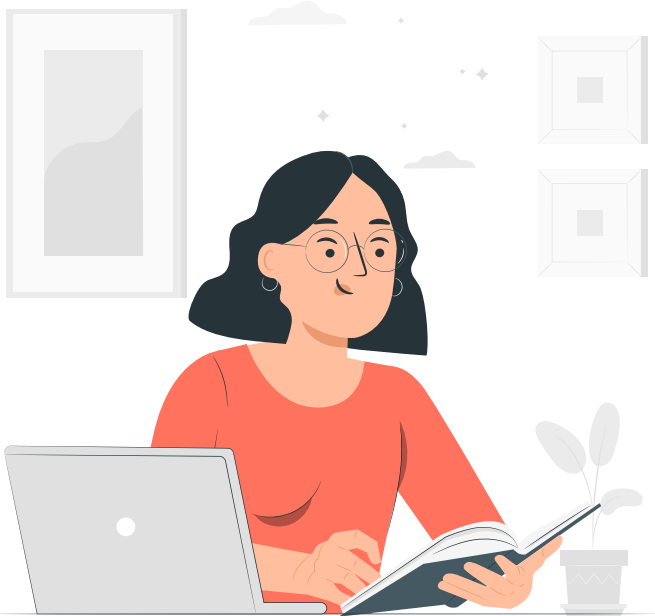
Thursday, February 11	10:00 - 11:00 AM
Wednesday, March 17	10:00 - 11:00 AM
Tuesday, April 13	2:00 - 3:00 PM
Friday, May 7	10:00 - 11:00 AM
Monday, June 14	10:00 - 11:00 AM
Thursday, July 15	1:00 - 2:00 PM
Monday, August 16	1:00 - 2:00 PM
Friday, September 24	10:00 - 11:00 AM
Wednesday, October 13	2:00 - 3:00 PM
Tuesday, November 16	10:00 - 11:00 AM
Thursday, December 16	10:00 - 11:00 AM



[Click here to register for the webinar](#)
The Ohio Ethics Law: Building a Culture of Integrity

Webinar Option #2: The Ohio Ethics Law: A Deeper Study

For those who have participated in our trainings for numerous years, this fresh approach to the Ethics Law might be for you! This webinar is also one-hour long and will also cover all primary areas of the Ethics Law but will focus on specific applications of the law. Each area of the law will be studied in correlation with germane legal advisory opinions previously issued by the Ethics Commission. Anyone is welcome to this webinar, but those who already have a solid understanding of the statute will likely find this one especially stimulating and thought-provoking. The schedule for this webinar is listed below:



Friday, April 9	10:00 - 11:00 AM
Tuesday, June 22	1:00 - 2:00 PM
Thursday, August 5	10:00 - 11:00 AM
Wednesday, October 6	1:00 - 2:00 PM
Monday, December 20	10:00 - 11:00 AM

[Click here to register for the webinar
The Ohio Ethics Law: A Deeper Study](#)

Note for state officials and employees: Both webinars fulfill the Ohio Ethics Law training requirement under Executive Order 2019-11D for state officials and employees (including financial disclosure filers).

Note for attorneys: Both types of webinars have been approved for one hour of general Continuing Legal Education credit.

Ethics Education - Regional Sessions

The Ethics Commission's "Regional Sessions" are designed for public entities that may not be able to host a training session but have staff or board members who prefer a "live" classroom setting. Due to the pandemic, these sessions were converted to virtual experiences in 2020, but the Commission has optimistically scheduled these sessions in late 2021 and hope that you can join us!

The regional sessions are open to all public officials and employees, including state, county, city, township, village officials, public libraries, public school districts, etc.!

If you want to know more about the Ohio Ethics Law, please join us for these free and interactive discussions. All classes will take place from 10:00 - 11:30 AM on the following dates:

October 2	Cincinnati
October 14	Perrysburg
October 29	Cleveland
November 4	Columbus
December 2	Columbus



**For session details and registration information
click here for our Regional Sessions webpage**

Note for state officials and employees: These classes fulfill your Ethics Law training requirement under the Governor's Executive Order (including financial disclosure filers).

Note for attorneys: These sessions have been approved for 1.5 hours of general Continuing Legal Education credit.

If you have questions or concerns regarding any of the training options outlined above or the Ohio Ethics Law, please contact Susan Willeke at (614) 466- 7090 or susan.willeke@ethics.ohio.gov

Online Resources - They Just Keep Coming!

In addition to providing sound legal guidance under the Ohio Ethics Law, the Commission also strives to explain and summarize provisions of the law in easy-to-understand language. As a result, the Commission regularly reviews its online resources to determine if new fact sheets or e-courses would further its goals to make the law approachable and applicable.

See below for a list of new online resources now available on the Ethics Commission's website!

[Conflicts of Interest: What Should I Know?](#)

A brief overview of conflict of interest issues under the Ohio Ethics Law.

[Representation Fact Sheet](#)

Guidance regarding rendering services on matters before public entities.

[Township Trustees Serving as Volunteer Firefighters](#)

Guidance for township trustees who wish to serve as township firefighters.

[When is a Gift a Donation?](#)

Guidance for the public and private sectors regarding donations to public entities.

[The Ohio Ethics Law 101: The Ethics Toolkit for Public School Districts](#)

An outline of the Ethics Law for officials and employees who work for or serve public school districts in Ohio.

[Financial Disclosure Statements FAQ Booklet](#)

The most commonly asked questions on how to complete the financial disclosure form and other helpful information.

[New E-Course: Financial Disclosure Statements 101](#)

This e-course provides a helpful overview on the who, what, why, when, and how of completing a financial disclosure statement. The course walks through the Ethics Commission's online filing system question-by-question and provides numerous additional resources to assist filers in fulfilling financial disclosure requirements.

Ohio Ethics Law Six-Part E-Course Series

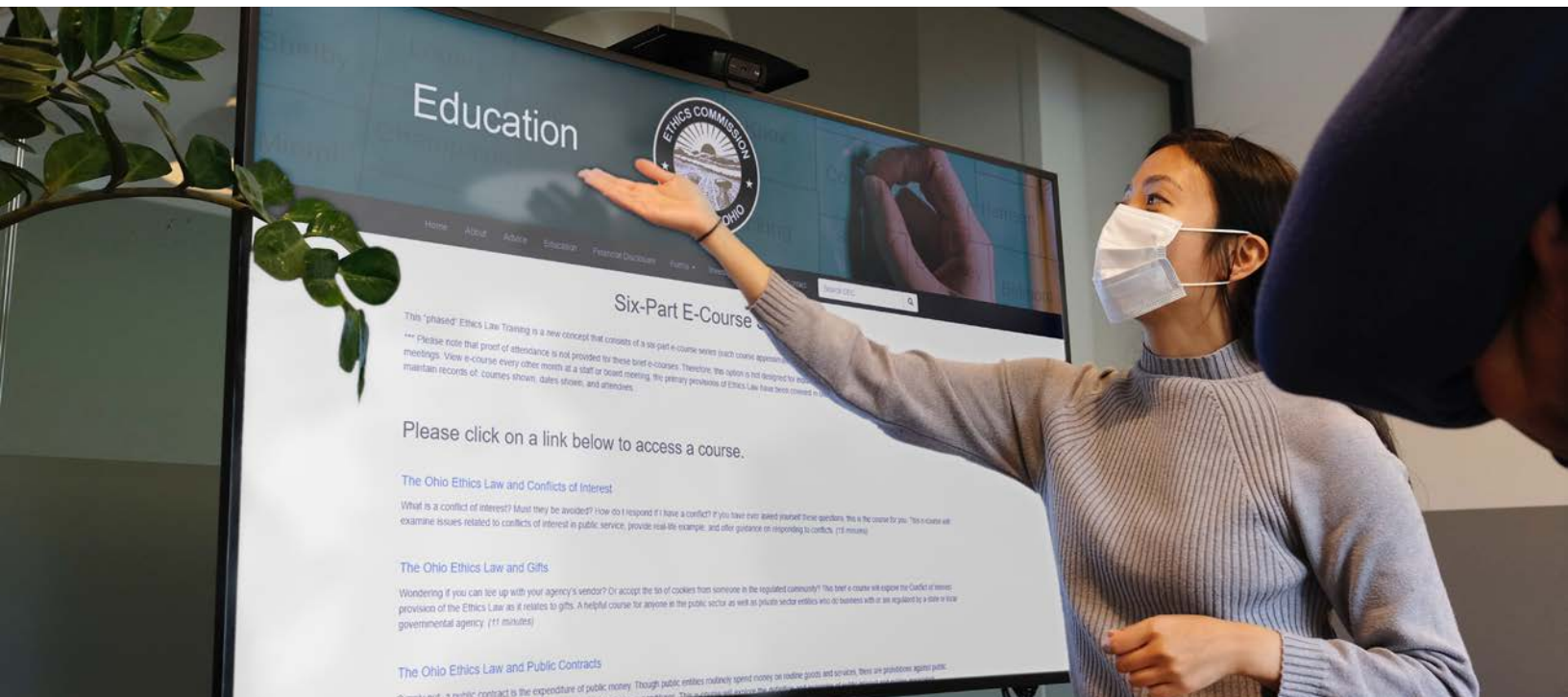
And we're not done yet! Be sure to check out our new and improved [Six-Part E-Course Series](#) which consists of a six 10 - 15 minute long e-courses which outline the major provisions of the Ohio Ethics Law. The e-courses have recently been updated and we think you'll find them aesthetically pleasing and easy to follow. The six brief classes consist of the following e-courses:

1. The Ohio Ethics Law and Conflicts of Interest
2. The Ohio Ethics Law and Gifts
3. The Ohio Ethics Law and Public Contracts
4. The Ohio Ethics Law and Nepotism
5. The Ohio Ethics Law and Sales to Public Agencies
6. The Ohio Ethics Law and Post-Employment



While proof of attendance is not provided for these brief e-courses, this is a great option for staff or board/commission meetings. Simply view one of the six e-courses every other month at a staff or board meeting, and the primary provisions of Ethics Law have been covered in one year! Internal attendance tracking could include meeting minutes or sign-in sheets.

Check out any of these new resources on the Ethics Commission's website and feel free to email susan.willeke@ethics.ohio.gov with your ideas for new fact sheets or e-courses!



Continuing Legal Education Classes Announced

Each year, the Ohio Ethics Commission and the Ohio Board of Professional Conduct provide free Continuing Legal Education (CLE) courses each year for public practice attorneys. These free classes have been approved by the Supreme Court of Ohio Commission on Continuing Legal Education for 2.50 total CLE hours of attorney professional conduct instruction.

- The first class, **May 5, 2021** will be a live webinar presentation;
- The second class, **October 21, 2021** will be a webinar “re-run” of the May 5 recorded CLE webinar; and
- We have optimistically scheduled an “in-person” CLE at the BWC Auditorium on **December 3, 2021**. (We will notify registrants of this class should we be required to convert it into an online class).

For dates and registration information
click here for our CLE Seminars webpage

You will receive electronic handouts prior to the CLE classes. If you register for either of the virtual classes, you will also receive instructions prior to the session on how to log-in for the CLE webinar.

If you do not already receive our electronic notifications regarding CLE classes and would like your email to be included in that list, please visit [this page](#) of our website and enter your email address there.

Questions? Email susan.willeke@ethics.ohio.gov or call (614) 466-7090.



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