

code of conduct

for victorian public sector employees



code of conduct

**for victorian public sector
employees**

The Victorian Government has vested the State Services Authority with functions designed to foster the development of an efficient, integrated and responsive public sector that is highly ethical, accountable and professional in the way it delivers services to the Victorian community.

The key functions of the Authority are to:

- identify opportunities to improve the delivery and integration of government services and report on service delivery outcomes and standards;
- promote high standards of integrity and conduct in the public sector;
- strengthen the professionalism and adaptability of the public sector; and
- promote high standards of governance, accountability and performance for public entities.

The Authority seeks to achieve its charter by working closely and collaboratively with public sector departments and agencies.

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Code of Conduct for Victorian Public Sector Employees (No 1) 2007

**Code of Conduct issued by the Public Sector
Standards Commissioner**

made under the

Public Administration Act 2004, s. 63

The *Public Administration Act 2004* provides for the Public Sector Standards Commissioner to prepare and issue Codes of Conduct based on the public sector values. The purpose of a code is to promote adherence to the public sector values and the Public Sector Standards Commissioner may determine to whom a code applies. A code is binding on any person to whom it applies, and contravention of a code is capable of constituting misconduct.

1 Name of Code

This Code is the *Code of Conduct for Victorian Public Sector Employees (No.1) 2007*.

2 Purpose

This Code is issued to promote adherence to the public sector values by employees of Victorian public sector bodies.

3 Commencement

This Code commences on 1 July 2007.

4 Application

This Code applies to and is binding on all public sector employees, as defined in s. 4 of the *Public Administration Act 2004*; other than employees of a special body, or unless excluded by a specific declaration issued by the Public Sector Standards Commissioner.

5 Revocation

This Code revokes the *Code of Conduct for the Victorian Public Sector*, issued by the Commissioner for Public Employment under the *Public Sector Management and Employment Act 1998*.

6 Declaration

I approve and issue the attached Code.



GREG VINES

Public Sector Standards Commissioner

1 July 2007

foreword

The publication of any code of conduct is important for a number of reasons. Apart from providing guidance to those who are bound by it, a code of conduct is a public statement about how a group or organisation expects to be perceived and, ultimately, judged. This is nowhere more the case than in the public sector, which in some way or other touches everyone in the community.

The actions of each and every public sector employee, no matter what their role, will shape the way they, their organisation and the sector as a whole are perceived.

This new *Code of Conduct for Victorian Public Sector Employees* amplifies the values contained in the *Public Administration Act 2004* (PAA). Both the values and this Code build on our public sector's long tradition of striving to meet the high standards the community rightly expects of it and reinforces the line of accountability from public sector employees to Secretary, Chief Executive Officer or Board, to Minister to Parliament.

The public sector continues to adapt and evolve to meet new and ever-changing demands and challenges. At the same time, it is essential that it retains the key attributes that have allowed it to play its critical role with the full confidence of Government and the wider community for over a century. Those key attributes are its apolitical nature, responsiveness, effectiveness and accountability; and it is precisely these things that the public sector values and this Code seek to reinforce and protect.

Many of the issues faced by public sector employees are changing in line with the greater complexity and rate of change within society at large. It is therefore important that the values are expressed in a way that is relevant to and reflects this dynamic environment. For example, the value of 'responsiveness' includes the concept of contributing to improvements in the way work is done. Perhaps more importantly, employees are increasingly faced with new situations where they are expected to exercise judgement and initiative. In the absence of a detailed rule for every conceivable situation, organisations are placing more emphasis on guiding values and principles of behaviour. This Code reflects that approach.

The values contained in the PAA and expanded on in this Code are relevant to the many and diverse operational settings in which Victorian public sector employees work.

At the same time, it is recognised that they will need to be supported by additional information and guidance at the local level.

The Victorian public sector strives for excellence in its delivery of services, through creativity, innovation and community engagement. The public sector values, supported by this Code, help define how we can achieve these goals.

I urge all public sector employees to read this Code of Conduct and to actively engage with their colleagues and managers in understanding how they can best adhere to its requirements.



GREG VINES

Public Sector Standards Commissioner

public sector values

(Public Administration Act 2004, s. 7)

Responsiveness – public officials should demonstrate responsiveness by:

- (i) providing frank, impartial and timely advice to the Government; and
- (ii) providing high quality services to the Victorian community; and
- (iii) identifying and promoting best practice.

Integrity – public officials should demonstrate integrity by:

- (i) being honest, open and transparent in their dealings; and
- (ii) using powers responsibly; and
- (iii) reporting improper conduct; and
- (iv) avoiding any real or apparent conflicts of interest; and
- (v) striving to earn and sustain public trust of a high level.

Impartiality – public officials should demonstrate impartiality by:

- (i) making decisions and providing advice on merit and without bias, caprice, favouritism or self-interest; and

- (ii) acting fairly by objectively considering all relevant facts and fair criteria; and
- (iii) implementing Government policies and programs equitably.

Accountability – public officials should demonstrate accountability by:

- (i) working to clear objectives in a transparent manner; and
- (ii) accepting responsibility for their decisions and actions; and
- (iii) seeking to achieve best use of resources; and
- (iv) submitting themselves to appropriate scrutiny.

Respect – public officials should demonstrate respect for colleagues, other public officials and members of the Victorian community by:

- (i) treating them fairly and objectively; and
- (ii) ensuring freedom from discrimination, harassment and bullying; and
- (iii) using their views to improve outcomes on an ongoing basis.

Leadership – public officials should demonstrate leadership by actively implementing, promoting and supporting these values.

Human Rights – public officials should respect and promote the human rights set out in the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities* by:

- (i) making decisions and providing advice consistent with human rights; and
- (ii) actively implementing, promoting and supporting human rights.

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1. introduction

1.1 a binding code of conduct

This Code of Conduct prescribes the behaviour expected of public sector employees.

Public sector employees are required to familiarise themselves and act in accord with the Code of Conduct. The Code of Conduct is binding on those employees to whom it applies and a contravention of it may constitute misconduct.

1.2 purpose of the code

The purpose of the Code of Conduct is to promote adherence to the public sector values prescribed in the *Public Administration Act 2004*. Given the broad and diverse nature of public sector organisations this Code prescribes standards of required behaviour rather than detailed policies and procedures.

The heads of individual public sector bodies are to develop and implement policies and procedures tailored to their own operating environment, to support the application of the Code. Public sector employees are required to comply with these policies and procedures.

The Code is designed to help public sector employees understand the responsibilities and obligations of working in the public sector. The behaviours described in the Code are essential in our relationships with the Government, community and other public sector employees.

1.3 pre-employment

The Code of Conduct can only bind public sector employees from the commencement of their employment. Public sector bodies need to establish policies and procedures that include provisions for dealing with false, incorrect or misleading information provided in relation to applications for employment.

1.4 contractors and consultants

Public sector employers are to require contractors or consultants engaged in or by their public body (including contractors or consultants engaged through an employment agency) to comply with this Code of Conduct and relevant policies and procedures, where the contractors or consultants:

- supervise public sector employees;
- undertake work that is of a similar nature to the work undertaken by public sector employees at a premise or location generally regarded as a public sector workplace; and
- use or have access to public sector resources or information that are not normally accessible or available to the public.

1.5 other available guidance

In addition to conduct prescribed in this Code, there may be specific issues which are covered by other legislation, an industrial agreement or award, or a policy or procedure set down by the public sector employer, or by some other relevant authority. Public sector employees who are unsure of the appropriate action to take in a particular situation should seek advice from their employer.

1.6 professional codes of conduct

Certain professions have professional codes of conduct that establish specific behaviours relevant to that profession. This Code of Conduct specifies the behaviour expected of individuals as public sector employees and should be read in conjunction with any professional code of conduct. Relevant employees need to be aware of their professional code of conduct as well as the provisions of this Code.

Professional codes set out a range of matters relating to the profession including dealing with breaches of the professional code. A breach of a professional code may affect the capacity of a relevant employee to continue to act in that profession and may also affect the ability of that employee to undertake their duties as a public sector employee. However a breach of the public sector Code and any sanctions arising can only be determined in accordance with procedures established for this Code.

1.7 breach of this code

This Code is based on the Victorian public sector values and therefore relates to both performance and conduct behaviours.

Failure to behave in the ways described in the Code of Conduct may lead to action under relevant performance management or misconduct processes. These processes need to be consistent with the public sector employment principles (*Public Administration Act 2004*, s. 8) and standards issued by the Public Sector Standards Commissioner; and communicated to all employees.

2. demonstrating responsiveness



Responsiveness – public officials should demonstrate responsiveness by:

- (i) providing frank, impartial and timely advice to the Government; and
- (ii) providing high quality services to the Victorian community; and
- (iii) identifying and promoting best practice.

(Public Administration Act 2004, s. 7)

2.1 advising government

Public sector employees serve the Government of the day and provide the same high standard of advice regardless of the party in power. Advice is provided in a frank, impartial and timely manner, and with an understanding of its implications on the broader policy direction of the Government. Public sector employees do not withhold relevant information from the Government.

2.2 remaining apolitical

Public sector employees conduct themselves in an apolitical manner. They implement and administer the policies and programs of the elected government. They avoid in the

course of their work, any participation in activities which support a political party or independent candidates including attendance at fund raising or similar events.

During caretaker periods (which is governed by caretaker conventions relating to the period of the election campaign and sometimes the period immediately after the election) public sector employees maintain the neutrality of the public sector and comply with relevant policies and protocols issued by their employer. They do not use their position to support particular issues, parties or candidates in an election campaign.

Public sector employees provide briefings or information to members of parliament only when authorised by the relevant minister. When providing briefings or information to members of parliament public sector employees respect the confidentiality of ministerial and government considerations leading to a decision, and decline to provide personal views or judgements on government policy or policy options of the Victorian or other governments.

Public sector employees provide support to ministers when information is required by parliamentary committees and may appear before such committees as a representative of the minister. Information sought by parliamentary committees should be provided unless the relevant minister certifies that disclosure would be prejudicial to the public

interest. Official witnesses should be co-operative and frank when giving factual information. On matters of government business, public sector employees may appear before parliamentary committees as a representative of a minister. They are not therefore expected to answer questions:

- seeking their personal views on government policy;
- seeking details of matters considered in relation to a ministerial or government decision or possible decision, unless those details have already been made public or the giving of evidence on them has been approved; and
- that would require a personal judgement on the policies or policy options of the Victorian or other governments.

Public sector employees, who are directed to answer a question falling within the coverage of the categories listed above, seek a deferral until they can discuss the matter with the minister or chief executive as appropriate. Alternatively, they can request that the answer to the particular question be reserved for submission in writing.

2.3 services to the community

Public sector employees provide services to the community in an equitable, prompt and professional manner. They act within the level of their authority and in accordance with the relevant policies.

2.4 contributing to improvements

Public sector employees are committed to continuous improvement and adopt a best practice approach to the performance of their work. They identify and actively promote appropriate strategies, methods and processes that lead to improved performance.

3. demonstrating integrity



Integrity – public officials should demonstrate integrity by:

- (i) being honest, open and transparent in their dealings; and
- (ii) using powers responsibly; and
- (iii) reporting improper conduct; and
- (iv) avoiding any real or apparent conflicts of interest; and
- (v) striving to earn and sustain public trust of a high level.

(Public Administration Act 2004, s. 7)

3.1 honesty at work

Public sector employees act honestly in the performance of their duties. They are open and transparent when making decisions. They give honest advice based on available facts and data. They ensure their advice is up to date.

3.2 using powers at work

Public sector employees use their power in a responsible way. They do not use their power to provide a private benefit to themselves, their family, friends or associates. They exercise power in a way that is fair and reasonable, and family or other personal relationships do not improperly influence their decisions. They respect the rights and dignity of those affected by their decisions and actions.

3.3 financial probity

Public sector employees observe the highest standards of integrity in financial matters and comply with the requirements of relevant financial management legislation, policies and procedures. They maintain a strict separation between work-related and personal financial matters and only use or authorise the use of public financial resources or facilities for work-related purposes.

3.4 official information

Public sector employees with access to official information ensure it is only used for official purposes and in an approved manner. Official and personal information is handled according to relevant legislation and public sector body policies and procedures.

Public sector employees only disclose official information or documents acquired in the course of their public employment when required to do so by law, in the legitimate course of duty, when called to give evidence in court, or when proper authority has been given. In such cases comments are confined to factual information only.

3.5 public comment

Public sector employees only make public comment when specifically authorised to do so in relation to their duties, a public sector body, or government policies and programs. Such comment is restricted to factual information and avoids the expression of personal opinion. Public comment includes providing information or comment to any media (electronic and print), the internet and speaking engagements.

When making a comment in a private capacity, public sector employees ensure their comments are not related to any government activity that they are involved in or connected with as a public sector employee and make it clear they are expressing their own view. They ensure personal comments do not compromise their capacity to perform their public sector role in an unbiased manner, and that their comments are not seen or perceived to be an official comment.

3.6 reporting unethical behaviour

Public sector employees comply with legislation, policies and lawful instructions in the performance of their work. Public sector employees report to an appropriate authority workplace behaviour that violates any law, rule or regulation or represents corrupt conduct, mismanagement of public resources, or is a danger to public health or safety or to the environment. Public sector employers inform their employees of their rights and responsibilities under ‘whistleblower’ and similar legislation.

3.7 conflict of interest

Public sector employees declare and avoid conflicts of interest to help maintain community trust and confidence.

A conflict of interest can be actual, potential or perceived. This relates to circumstances where the employee is or could be directly influenced or where it is perceived the employee might be influenced.

Public sector employees ensure their personal or financial interests do not influence or interfere with the performance of their role. They seek to ensure the interests of family members, friends, or associates do not influence or could be perceived to influence their performance in the job.

If an employee is unsure about a possible conflict of interest they seek advice from their manager.

3.8 other employment

Public sector employees only engage in other employment where the activity does not conflict with their role as a public sector employee. Employment includes a second job, conducting a business, trade or profession, or active involvement with other organisations (paid employment or voluntary work). Managers or supervisors can assist public sector employees to determine if such activities will cause an actual or perceived conflict of interest.

Victorian Public Service employees are required to seek approval to engage in any other paid employment.¹ Other public sector employees comply with any policies of their public sector employer in relation to engaging in other employment.

3.9 public trust

Public sector employees seek to build and maintain a high level of trust with the Government, community and other public sector employees. They behave in a manner that does not bring themselves or the public sector into disrepute.

Public sector employees avoid conduct in their private life that may adversely affect their standing as a public official or which may bring their public sector employer into disrepute.

3.10 criminal offences

Public sector employees advise their manager if they are charged with a criminal offence, which is punishable by imprisonment or, if found guilty, could reasonably be seen to affect their ability to meet the inherent requirements of the work they are engaged to perform.

¹ *Public Administration Act 2004*, s. 32

3.11 drugs and alcohol

Public sector employees carry out their work safely and avoid conduct that puts themselves or others at risk. This includes the misuse of alcohol, drugs or other substances when at work or when engaged in work related activities.

The misuse of alcohol, prescribed drugs, illegal drugs and other substances is an issue for both employers and employees as it impacts on both work and personal life and in some cases the reputation of their public sector body.

Public sector employees who are on medication that could affect their work performance or the safety of themselves or others inform their manager or supervisor to ensure any necessary precautions or adjustments to work can be put in place.

4. demonstrating impartiality



Impartiality – public officials should demonstrate impartiality by:

- (i) making decisions and providing advice on merit and without bias, caprice, favouritism or self-interest; and
- (ii) acting fairly by objectively considering all relevant facts and fair criteria; and
- (iii) implementing Government policies and programs equitably.

(Public Administration Act 2004, s. 7)

4.1 decisions and advice

Public sector employees make decisions and provide advice that is free of prejudice or favouritism and is based on sound judgement. Before making a decision or providing advice, public sector employees consider relevant information and the impact on the Government, community and other public sector employees. Their decisions are not affected by personal influences.

4.2 gifts and benefits

Public sector employees do not - for themselves or others - seek or accept gifts or benefits that could be reasonably perceived as influencing them.

Public sector employees comply with any policies of their public sector employer in relation to accepting, declaring and/or recording the receipt of gifts or benefits.

Public sector employees who are unsure about accepting a gift or benefit seek advice from their manager.

4.3 acting fairly

Public sector employees deal with issues consistently, fairly and in a timely manner. Public sector employees use fair criteria, and consider all relevant information in dealing with issues.

Being fair means being just and working within commonly accepted rules.

4.4 implementing government policies and programs

Public sector employees implement government policies and programs fairly and without bias. Their decisions and actions are consistent with relevant policies and are based on merit and careful consideration of the relevant facts. Public sector employees seek to achieve equitable outcomes within the extent of their authority.

5. demonstrating accountability



Accountability – public officials should demonstrate accountability by:

- (i) working to clear objectives in a transparent manner; and
 - (ii) accepting responsibility for their decisions and actions; and
 - (iii) seeking to achieve best use of resources; and
 - (iv) submitting themselves to appropriate scrutiny.
- (Public Administration Act 2004, s. 7)*

5.1 working to clear objectives

Public sector employees understand the objectives of their role. Public sector managers and supervisors provide encouragement, support and a clear sense of direction and purpose. Employees who are unclear about their goals discuss this with their manager or supervisor.

5.2 being responsible for decisions and actions

Public sector employees make decisions and take actions within the scope of their authority that are lawful and consistent with relevant legislation and government policy.

They consider any impact of their decisions or actions on the Government, community and other public sector employees.

5.3 work resources

Public sector employees use work resources and equipment efficiently and only for appropriate purposes as authorised by the employer.

Public sector employees seek to achieve value for money and use resources in the most effective way possible. They identify opportunities for improvement to achieve best possible efficiency and responsiveness.

Work resources include physical, financial, technological and intellectual property. Intellectual property includes copyright, trade marks, registered designs, patents (including patented business systems), semiconductors, circuit layout rights, and trade, business or company names, and all other proprietary rights, and any rights to the registration of such rights, including proprietary rights developed or created by employees in the course of their employment.

The employer retains ownership of all these work resources.

5.4 open to scrutiny

Public sector employees implement government policy in an open and transparent manner. They maintain accurate and reliable records as required by relevant legislation, policies and procedures. Records are kept in such a way as to ensure their security and reliability and are made available to appropriate scrutiny when required.

5.5 ability to meet essential requirements

Public sector employees notify their employer of any loss, suspension of, or change to, a registration, accreditation, licence or other qualification that affects their ability to meet relevant essential requirements or to perform their duties.

5.6 compliance with legislation

Public sector employees ensure they are aware of and comply with all legislation relevant to the performance of their duties.

6. demonstrating respect



Respect – public officials should demonstrate respect for colleagues, other public officials and members of the Victorian community by:

- (i) treating them fairly and objectively; and
- (ii) ensuring freedom from discrimination, harassment and bullying; and
- (iii) using their views to improve outcomes on an ongoing basis.

(Public Administration Act 2004, s. 7)

6.1 fair and objective treatment

Public sector employees promote an environment that encourages respect.

Public sector employees are fair, objective and courteous in their dealings with the Government, community and other public sector employees.

6.2 privacy and confidentiality

Public sector employees understand the importance of privacy and confidentiality. Confidential information requires special treatment and protection. Those people who

provide confidential information to public sector employees have the right to expect this information will be treated as confidential. Public sector employees with access to confidential information ensure it remains confidential, and at all times act in accordance with legislation and policies relating to dealing with private information.

6.3 maintaining confidentiality

Public sector employees receive and manage information in such a manner that its confidentiality will be maintained and that it will not be used to advantage a prospective employer or business, or disadvantage the Victorian Government.

6.4 equity and diversity

Public sector employees follow the spirit as well as the letter of the law relating to discrimination, harassment, bullying and victimisation. Public sector employees create an environment that is free of discrimination, harassment and bullying.

Valuing and promoting diversity is an important element of demonstrating respect.

6.5 improving outcomes

Public sector employees are conscientious and efficient in their work. They use their knowledge and expertise to deliver a high quality service, as well as identifying opportunities to improve service outcomes.

Public sector employees contribute both individually and as part of a team and engage constructively with their colleagues on work related matters. They share information with team members to support delivery of the best and most appropriate service outcomes.

7. demonstrating leadership



Leadership – public officials should demonstrate leadership by actively implementing, promoting and supporting these values.

(Public Administration Act 2004, s. 7)

7.1 leading by example

Public sector employees model the behaviours based on the public sector values and at all times act in an ethical manner. Leadership is about positive influence, inspiring and empowering others.

Providing sound advice, delivering high quality services and encouraging best practice **demonstrates responsiveness.**

Being honest, using powers correctly, identifying and dealing with inappropriate conduct, avoiding conflicts of interest and developing and maintaining public trust **demonstrates integrity.**

Making decisions that are free of bias, considering all relevant facts and ensuring policies and programs are implemented fairly **demonstrates impartiality.**

Being transparent, responsible, using resources efficiently and inviting scrutiny **demonstrates accountability.**

Treating others fairly, eliminating discrimination, harassment and bullying, and focusing on improving outcomes **demonstrates respect.**

7.2 managing staff

Public sector managers and supervisors apply the public sector employment principles. They provide a safe, encouraging and supportive work environment that recognises and values diversity, abilities and contributions. They give their employees a clear sense of direction and purpose.

They set realistic goals, timelines and workloads, and provide adequate resources and appropriate information to complete work. They trust their employees to manage their work autonomously but also provide them with support when needed. They address any performance issues promptly, directly and confidentially with the employee concerned.

They treat their employees fairly and consistently when making selection decisions and allocating work. They assess performance and provide constructive feedback and development opportunities. They consult genuinely with their employees, and adhere to industrial and legal obligations.

They understand and respond to legitimate concerns of their employees, and encourage work arrangements that enable their employees to achieve a work-life balance.

7.3 supporting others

Public sector employees work co-operatively with their colleagues and other public sector body employees. They support and learn from them and accept differences in personal style.

They respect, and seek when necessary, the professional opinions of colleagues in their area of competence, and acknowledge their contribution.

Public sector employees, managers and supervisors provide other public sector employees with support and guidance.

8. demonstrating commitment to human rights



Human Rights – public officials should respect and promote the human rights set out in the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities* by:

- (i) making decisions and providing advice consistent with human rights; and
- (ii) actively implementing, promoting and supporting human rights.

(*Public Administration Act 2004*, s. 7)

8.1 understanding human rights

Public sector employees understand human rights as these apply to their work.

8.2 making decisions and providing advice consistent with human rights

Public sector employees ensure their own decisions, advice and policy development properly considers the human rights set out in the Charter, and respects the human rights of others.

8.3 implementing human rights

Public sector employees deliver services and programs and act in a manner that is consistent with the Charter.

8.4 protecting human rights

Public sector employees seek to protect the human rights of colleagues, other public officials and members of the Victorian community by raising concerns regarding circumstances that could breach those rights, and reporting any suspected breaches in accordance with procedures established by their public sector employer.

supporting government
serving victorians



contact us

at the State Services Authority

Email: info@ssa.vic.gov.au

Phone: (03) 9651 1321

Fax: (03) 9651 1883

www.ssa.vic.gov.au

Postal Address:

3 Treasury Place

Melbourne 3002