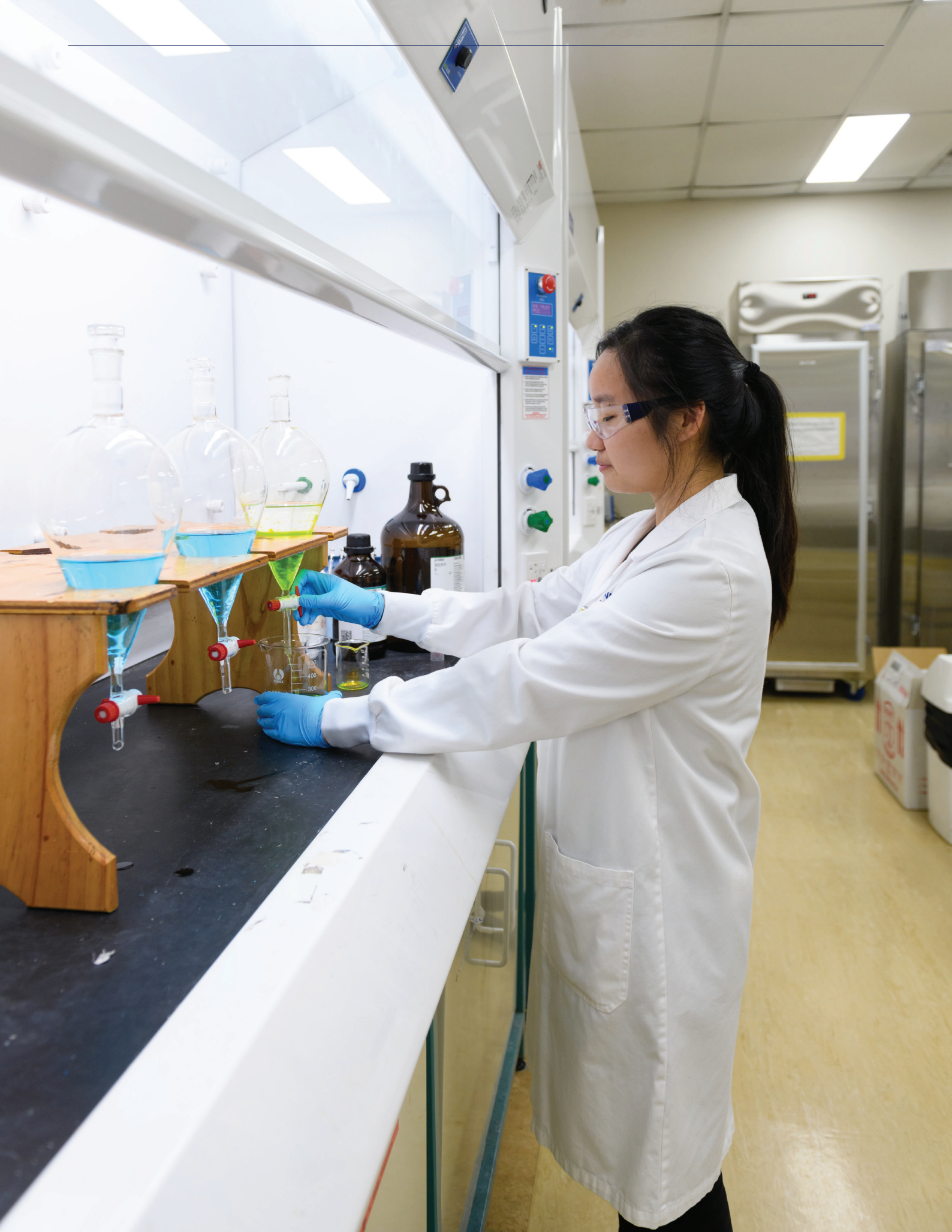

Code of Ethics and Conduct for NSW Government Sector Employees



Contents

Introduction	2
Application	3
Commencement date	3
The Ethical Framework for the government sector	4
Roles and responsibilities	6
Minimum expected standards of behaviour	7
Acting in the public interest	8
Act lawfully	8
Bullying, unlawful discrimination and harassment in the workplace	8
Confidentiality, privacy and records management	9
Conflicts of interest	10
Gifts, benefits and hospitality	11
Lobbying	11
Making public comment	11
Recruitment	12
Risk management	13
Secondary employment	13
Use of public resources	13
Workplace health and safety	13
Behaviour contrary to the Code	14
How to report serious wrongdoing	15
Actions when allegations are made	15
Declaring private interests as a senior executive	16

Introduction

When you work in the NSW government sector, you have an important role to play in maintaining confidence in our systems of government.

As government sector employees, the work we do makes a difference in the lives of millions of people across NSW. The communities we serve both expect and need us to act ethically, fairly and comply with the law. We must spend public money wisely and maintain trust in our systems and institutions now and into the future.

The *Code of Ethics and Conduct for NSW Government Sector Employees* (**the Code**) sets out the minimum expected standards of behaviour that we must meet.

The Code provides a framework to guide our decisions and behaviour, no matter our level or our job.



Application

This Code is adopted under section 8A of the *Government Sector Employment Act 2013* (NSW) (**GSE Act**) and applies to all NSW government sector employees.¹ The Code identifies mandatory requirements for all government sector employees that are consistent with Part 2 of the GSE Act (the Ethical Framework for the government sector).

This Code applies at all times when government sector employees are acting in the course of, or in connection with, NSW government sector employment. The Code also extends to conduct outside of work hours where that conduct may affect your employment. This includes conduct that is undertaken in a private capacity, but is inconsistent with your ability (or could reasonably be perceived to inconsistent with your ability) to fulfil your duties in your government sector role.

This Code does not apply to individuals who are not NSW government sector employees.²

Departments and agencies may supplement this Code – but not alter or subtract from it – with requirements specific to their organisation’s operating environment and business risks. This material may be incorporated into this Code to form a single consolidated document, or published separately.

Commencement date

The Code applies from 1 November 2024. Conduct that occurred prior to that date while the code set out in section 2.2 of the document entitled *Behaving Ethically: A Guide for NSW government sector employees* was taken to have been adopted for the purposes of section 8A, remains in effect as if it had not been revoked and replaced.

¹ *Government sector employee* means a person employed in ongoing, term, temporary, casual or other employment, or on secondment, in a NSW government sector agency.

² Heads of government sector agencies are not personally covered by the Code if they are not a government sector employee. Statutory officeholders, including heads of Separate Public Service Agencies who are statutory officeholders and do not hold office in the Public Service (see GSE Act, Schedule 1, Part 3), are not personally covered by the Code since they are not government sector employees. Nevertheless, those heads of government sector agencies who are not personally covered by the Code are encouraged to conduct themselves in accordance with the requirements of this Code voluntarily, with any necessary modifications having regard to their statutory role and status.

The Ethical Framework for the government sector

All NSW government sector employees are required and expected to act ethically, lawfully and in the public interest. This can be achieved by adhering to the government sector core values of Integrity, Trust, Accountability and Service. These core values are underpinned by 18 principles, which will help you put the values into action. Our core values and principles are collectively prescribed by the GSE Act as the Ethical Framework for the government sector (**the Ethical Framework**), and are all of equal importance.





Integrity

- Consider people equally without prejudice or favour
- Act professionally with honesty, consistency and impartiality
- Take responsibility for situations, showing leadership and courage
- Place the public interest over personal interest.



Trust

- Appreciate difference and welcome learning from others
- Build relationships based on mutual respect
- Uphold the law, institutions of government and democratic principles
- Communicate intentions clearly and invite teamwork and collaboration
- Provide apolitical and non-partisan advice.



Service

- Provide services fairly with a focus on customer needs
- Be flexible, innovative and reliable in service delivery
- Engage with the not-for-profit and business sectors to develop and implement service solutions
- Focus on quality while maximising service delivery.



Accountability

- Recruit and promote employees on merit
- Take responsibility for decisions and actions
- Provide transparency to enable public scrutiny
- Observe standards for safety
- Be fiscally responsible and focus on efficient, effective and prudent use of resources.

Roles and responsibilities

All government sector employees must act in a way that is consistent with the Ethical Framework and must comply with this Code. Each of us has a responsibility to conduct ourselves in a manner that reflects our core values in action. This includes the responsibility to speak up when we see any behaviour that we believe does not live up to the Ethical Framework and the general principles and requirements in this Code. You should follow your agency's policies for reporting wrongdoing where you believe this has occurred.

Managerial behaviour sets the tone for the conduct of all employees. Managers (including senior executives, senior managers, supervisors and others holding senior positions) play a critical role in promoting a culture that values high ethical standards and ethical behaviour. In addition to their responsibilities as government sector employees, all managers are required to model and promote this Code, and ensure that workplace culture, practices and systems operate consistently with the Ethical Framework.

In addition to having the responsibilities of managers, Departmental Secretaries, heads of agencies and senior executives are required to oversee implementation of this Code and the Ethical Framework.



Minimum expected standards of behaviour

All government sector employees are expected to know and act in accordance with the Ethical Framework for the government sector and the general principles and requirements set out in this Code.

The minimum expected standards of behaviour outlined below are not an exhaustive list of what to do in every aspect of your work. Rather, they are general principles and requirements to apply when carrying out your work and should be applied to decide on an appropriate course of action when faced with an ethical issue or professional decision.

If in doubt, you should talk to your manager, internal ethics advisor (where available), human resources team, the relevant member of your agency's executive, or your agency's team responsible for advising on Code compliance.

Acting in the public interest

Act lawfully

Bullying, unlawful discrimination and harassment in the workplace

Confidentiality, privacy and records management

Conflicts of interest

Gifts, benefits and hospitality

Lobbying

Making public comment

Recruitment

Risk management

Secondary employment

Use of public resources

Workplace health and safety

Acting in the public interest

You should treat all people you interact with in the course of your work:

- equally without prejudice or favour
- with honesty, consistency, impartiality and respect.

You should always:

- place the public interest over personal interest
- uphold the law, institutions of government and democratic principles
- provide apolitical and non-partisan advice
- provide transparency to enable public scrutiny
- be fiscally responsible and use resources efficiently, effectively and prudently.

Acting in the public interest requires leadership, courage and innovation to develop practical recommendations and actions that are consistent with the core values.

For those departments and other agencies that are subject to Ministerial direction and control, acting in the public interest requires you to help your agency to deliver the policies, programs and stated outcomes of the Government of the day. However, acting in ways which are expedient or convenient, but which are inconsistent with the government sector core values, is not in the public interest.

Act lawfully

You must always act lawfully and uphold the law.

You must comply with this Code as well as any department or agency code of conduct which applies to you, any relevant legislative, industrial and administrative requirements and any lawful direction made by a person with the authority to give such a direction.

Bullying, unlawful discrimination and harassment in the workplace

Everyone is entitled to be treated fairly and with courtesy and to feel safe and respected.

Bullying, unlawful discrimination, and all forms of harassment (including sexual harassment) are not acceptable under any circumstances and not tolerated in our workplaces.

You must not bully, unlawfully discriminate against or harass anyone in your dealings with them.

Public Service Commissioner Direction 1 of 2023 requires departments and agencies to have in place a policy in relation to workplace sexual harassment.

You should ensure you understand and adhere to your legal obligations and your agency's policies in relation to workplace sexual harassment, as well as additional policies (if any) relating to bullying, unlawful discrimination and other forms of harassment.

Managers play a critical role in actively preventing and responding to bullying, unlawful discrimination and other forms of harassment (including sexual harassment), and should familiarise themselves with these obligations. You should refer to your agency's policies (if any) for more information.

Confidentiality, privacy and records management

Confidentiality

Government sector agencies hold and manage large amounts of information. This information needs to be managed in accordance with relevant legislative obligations and agency policies (if any).

Unless otherwise authorised, you must maintain the confidentiality of all official information (including confidential, personal and other sensitive information or documents) held by your agency that is not publicly available, that has not been published or that you are not authorised to disclose.

You may only disclose official confidential information when you are authorised to do so, including when permitted or required by law or legal process to do so.

You must not disclose, access or use official information in an unauthorised way, including for your or anyone else's personal benefit or advantage.

Misuse of information acquired in the course of your employment may amount to misconduct, an offence under applicable criminal, privacy, information access, or State Records legislation and/or serious wrongdoing.

Privacy

You must protect personal information and health information, and comply with applicable privacy obligations and your agency's privacy and data breach policies.

The *Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998* (NSW) (**PPIP Act**) outlines how NSW public sector agencies are required to manage personal information. The *Health Records and Information Privacy Act 2002* (NSW) (**HRIP Act**) outlines how NSW public sector agencies are required to manage health information.

Records management

You must comply with record-keeping obligations that apply to your role and your agency's records management policy (if any). You must not destroy records without proper authority.



Conflicts of interest

A conflict of interest exists when a reasonable person might perceive that your personal interest(s) could be favoured over your public duties.

A conflict may arise from a range of factors, including:

- personal relationships
- secondary employment
- membership of special interest groups
- your ownership of, or financial interest, in property, shares or companies.

Conflicts of interest may also arise due to your personal beliefs or attitudes that could influence, or be perceived to influence, your impartiality or decision-making. It is your responsibility to identify and declare conflicts of interest.

To determine if a conflict of interest exists, ask yourself:

- Do I have a personal interest?
- Do I have a public duty?
- Is there a connection between my personal interest and my public duty?
- Could a reasonable person perceive that my personal interest might be favoured?

It is not necessarily unethical to have a conflict of interest. However, you should avoid placing yourself in conflicting situations wherever possible. Failing to disclose and manage a conflict appropriately may amount to misconduct and/or serious wrongdoing.

Where you have a conflict of interest, you must:

- always disclose the conflict of interest in accordance with this Code and your agency's conflicts of interest policy (if any) as soon as you become aware of the conflict
- work with the appropriate person with responsibility for managing the conflict to resolve any conflicts in the public interest, rather than your own or another person's personal interest.

Managers or those responsible for managing a conflict of interest should:

- ensure the conflict is appropriately documented
- consider whether the circumstances warrant removing the employee from the duties that are in conflict with their private interests
- approve a management plan to eliminate or manage the conflict in the public interest
- monitor the situation to ensure compliance with the agreed management plan.



Gifts, benefits and hospitality

In the course of your work, you – or, occasionally, your family, relations, friends or associates – might be offered gifts, benefits and/or hospitality by customers, clients, applicants, suppliers, or other persons or organisations.

Where a gift, benefit or hospitality of token value is offered simply as a memento or a small token of appreciation, accepting it is unlikely to be inconsistent with your obligations under the Ethical Framework for the government sector (unless your agency policy prohibits you from accepting any form of gift or benefit).

However, you should always be aware that gifts, benefits and/or hospitality might be offered to influence you when making a decision, or to provide a favour which will advance the interests of the giver, either now or in the future.

You should never:

- solicit gifts, benefits and/or hospitality from anyone
- accept any gifts, benefits and/or hospitality offered to you that is intended, or likely, to cause you to act in a certain way
- accept any gift, benefit and/or hospitality where there could be a perception that it has been offered as an inducement or incentive to act in a certain way
- accept any gift, benefit and/or hospitality for a family member, relation, friend or associate that is intended as, or could reasonably be perceived to be, an inducement or incentive to act in a certain way
- accept any gift, benefit and/or hospitality where you currently, or may in the future, exercise discretion in the making of a decision affecting the giver.

You should ensure you understand and adhere to your agency's policies relating to the declaration and management of gifts, benefits and/or hospitality.

You must refuse bribes or inducements and report them in line with your agency's policy.

Lobbying

NSW public sector officials are required to act impartially in the public interest when carrying out their public duties, including when being lobbied, or making decisions after being lobbied, by lobbyists.

You must comply with the values, principles and requirements in this Code and Premier's Memorandum M2019-02 *NSW Lobbyists Code of Conduct*. The *Lobbying for Government Officials Act 2011* (NSW) restricts lobbying of Government officials by lobbyists, and requires lobbyists to comply with ethical standards of conduct and other requirements set out in the *Lobbyists Code of Conduct*. It is important for public confidence in the integrity of government that lobbying is carried out with appropriate probity and transparency.

Making public comment

Public comment is any comment made where it is expected that it will be seen or heard by members of the public. It includes:

- profiles or activities on social media
- comments on internet sites or broadcast by electronic means
- public speaking engagements
- comments to radio, television or print reporters (including letters to the editor)
- comments in books, journals or notices
- appearances before Parliamentary Committees.

You must not make any public comment on behalf of your agency or in the course of your work unless authorised to do so. When making an authorised public comment for official duties, you should:

- only state the facts
- avoid expressing opinions on government policies or government decisions, unless you are authorised to do so or this is part of your agency's role
- only disclose information that is publicly available or has been published or is information that you are authorised to disclose.

You are able to participate in public debate on political and social issues in a private capacity, including on social media. In making public comments in a private capacity you should ensure your comments:

- are clearly identified and understood to be your personal views
- do not discuss or disclose information concerning your work or workplace that is not publicly available
- are lawful – do not post material that is defamatory, bullying, harassing, breaches privacy, is in contempt of court, breaches intellectual property rights or is otherwise unlawful.

You must not act in a way that casts doubt on your ability, or the ability of your agency, to act impartially, apolitically and professionally.

Recruitment

If you are involved in any recruitment, you must comply with the Ethical Framework requirement to recruit and promote employees on merit, and comply with applicable legislative requirements concerning the recruitment process.

You must also promptly declare any conflict of interest as required by this Code and/or your agency's policies (if any). Where applicable, you must work with the appropriate person with responsibility for managing the conflict to resolve any conflicts in the public interest, rather than your own or another person's personal interest.



Risk management

When carrying out your work or contributing to the making of decisions, you have a duty to objectively identify any risks and report them to your manager or the relevant decision maker, so they can be assessed and appropriately managed in a lawful way. Risks must be managed in accordance with your agency's risk management policy (if any) and applicable mandatory NSW Treasury policies.

Secondary employment

You may for various reasons wish to undertake either paid or unpaid work in addition to your role within the government sector.

You are required to comply with applicable legislative requirements and follow your agency's policies (if any) concerning secondary employment. For Public Service employees, see clause 7 of the *Government Sector Employment Regulation 2014* (NSW).

Taking on additional work may give rise to a conflict of interest, or reasonably perceived conflict, between your primary and secondary employment.

If this occurs you should declare the conflict in accordance with this Code and your agency's conflict of interest policy (if any) and resolve any conflicts in the public interest, rather than your own or another person's personal interest.

Use of public resources

You must use public resources in an efficient, effective and prudent way.

You must not use public resources – including such things as money, property, equipment or consumables – for an unauthorised purpose. You must not use your position, or access to government resources and information, for personal gain or the gain of another person.

When procuring goods and services for your employer, you must ensure you:

- declare any conflicts of interest in accordance with your agency's conflicts of interest policy (if any)
- work with the appropriate person with responsibility for managing any conflict to resolve any conflicts in the public interest, rather than your own or another person's personal interest
- comply with applicable NSW Procurement Board policies and directions as well as your agency's procurement policies (if any)
- comply with the principles of probity and fairness
- take reasonable steps to ensure the goods and services are not the product of modern slavery
- obtain value for money.

You are required to comply with this Code, your legislative obligations, the NSW Government Procurement Policy Framework, and your agency's policies and procedures (if any).

Workplace health and safety

We all have a role to play in ensuring the safety of ourselves and others in the workplace.

You must take reasonable care for your own health and safety and not do anything that adversely affects the health and safety of others. You should report risks to health and safety in accordance with your duties under the *Work Health and Safety Act 2011* (NSW) and your agency's policies (if any), and familiarise yourself with the work, health and safety arrangements in your workplace.

Managers may have more substantial obligations involving the safety of those under their supervision or attending work locations, and should familiarise themselves with these obligations. You should refer to your agency's policies (if any) for more information.

Behaviour contrary to the Code

Behaviour contrary to this Code or to the Ethical Framework for the government sector can create an unsafe workspace, bring individuals into disrepute, undermine productive relationships with colleagues and the public, and damage public trust in your agency or the broader government sector.



A contravention of this Code may be misconduct for the purposes of section 69 of the GSE Act, or other legislation governing the conduct of government sector employees in the Teaching Service, Police Force, Health Service, Transport Service and other services of the Crown.

If you are unsure of what is appropriate conduct in a particular situation, you can discuss the matter with your manager, internal ethics advisor (where available), human resources team, the relevant member of your agency's executive, or your agency's team responsible for advising on Code compliance. Your agency may have additional options available to discuss any concerns you have. Heads of government sector agencies may also contact the Public Service Commissioner.

If you see someone act in ways that are contrary to this Code, you should raise your concerns in accordance with your agency's policy framework for reporting wrongdoing.

How to report serious wrongdoing

The *Public Interest Disclosures Act 2022* (NSW) (**PID Act**) establishes a framework to encourage people who work in the public sector to report serious wrongdoing. Serious wrongdoing means one or more of the following:

- corrupt conduct
- serious maladministration
- a government information contravention (other than a trivial failure)
- a local government pecuniary interest contravention
- a privacy contravention (other than a trivial failure)
- a serious and substantial waste of public money.

If you become aware of serious wrongdoing, you can report your concerns in accordance with your agency's Public Interest Disclosure policy. You can also contact the relevant integrity agency body (such as the Ombudsman, Independent Commission Against Corruption, Auditor-General, or Law Enforcement Conduct Commission).

If you believe conduct may be illegal or constitute a criminal offence, you should follow your agency's policies for reporting wrongdoing or, if appropriate, report the matter to NSW Police Force.

Under the PID Act, it is both a criminal offence and misconduct to take detrimental action against a person who makes, or is suspected of making, a public interest disclosure. The PID Act provides a range of additional protections against detrimental action.

When a public official (as defined in the PID Act) reports suspected or possible wrongdoing in the public sector, their report will be a public interest disclosure (PID) if it has certain features which are set out in the PID Act. PIDs must be managed in accordance with the PID Act.

Further information about public interest disclosures is available on the NSW Ombudsman's website.

Actions when allegations of misconduct are made

For employees of Public Service agencies, the GSE Act and *Government Sector Employment (General) Rules 2014* (**GSE Rules**) set out how allegations of misconduct are to be dealt with, which include:

- requirements that the relevant employee be advised of the detail of the allegation
- the action that may be taken against the relevant employee if there is a finding of misconduct
- the process to be undertaken to investigate and resolve the matter
- that the relevant employee be provided a reasonable opportunity to respond to the allegations and the proposed action to be taken.

Government sector agencies that are not part of the Public Service (that is, the Teaching Service, Police Force, Health Service, Transport Service and other services of the Crown) are not bound by the misconduct provisions in the GSE Act and GSE Rules unless so prescribed. Non-Public Service agencies have their own legislative, policy and/or industrial instrument requirements for dealing with allegations of misconduct.

Declaring private interests as a senior executive

A senior executive (including an acting senior executive) must make a written declaration of private financial, business, personal or other interests or relationships that have the potential to influence, or could reasonably be perceived to influence, the senior executive's duties, including decisions made, or advice given by the senior executive.³

Where a senior executive has no such private interests to declare, they must declare a 'nil return'.

After a senior executive makes an initial declaration, a fresh declaration must be made:

- as soon as practicable, following any relevant change in the senior executive's private interests
- as soon as practicable, following the senior executive's assignment to a new role or responsibility
- at least annually.



A template form for making a private interests declaration is available on the PSC's website. The form may be used 'as is', or augmented by a department/agency to reflect the operating environment and/or business risks which are specific to the department/agency.

An acting senior executive is not required to make a fresh declaration on each 'acting' occasion and may rely on their most recent declaration, provided:

- that declaration is brought to the attention of their current manager
- there are no additional undeclared private financial, business, personal or other interests or relationships that have the potential to influence, or could be perceived to influence, decisions made, or advice given by the senior executive whilst they are acting.

A senior executive must provide their declaration to:

- in a department, the Secretary
- in an executive agency related to a department, the agency head
- in a separate Public Service agency, the agency head
- in the Teaching Service, NSW Police Force, NSW Health Service, Transport Service of NSW and any other service of the Crown, the head of the service.

A Department Secretary must provide their declaration to the Secretary of the Premier's Department.

The Secretary of the Premier's Department must provide their declaration to the Public Service Commissioner.

A head of an executive agency related to a department must provide their declaration to the Department Secretary.

A head of a transport-related service must provide their declaration to the Secretary of the Department of Transport.

A head of any other service of the Crown must provide their declaration to the Secretary of the Premier's Department.

Responsibilities of person receiving declaration

Government sector agency heads are responsible for ensuring that procedures are in place to require that:

- senior executives complete declarations
- handling and storage of declarations comply with the requirements of the PPIP Act
- declared conflicts of interest are managed and monitored.

³ Government sector agency heads who are statutory officeholders and not subject to this Code may wish to provide a voluntary declaration of interests. They can do so to the person exercising employer functions in relation to the statutory officeholder, to the extent that this is possible. For example, statutory officers whose employment is governed by a contract of employment with a Minister, or who are subject to Ministerial direction or control in respect of some or all of their functions, could make their voluntary declaration to that Minister. Where this is not possible or appropriate in the circumstances, voluntary declarations may be made to the Secretary of the Premier's Department.

Code of Ethics and Conduct for NSW Government Sector Employees

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