

Tips for Developing Ethics Policies for Agencies and Organizations

Organizations involved in prevention efforts should consider developing new or reviewing existing organizational policies related to ethical issues. Clear policies can help to prevent unethical behavior by establishing clear expectations for addressing ethical issues around topics such as the nature of services and confidentiality, and for how the organization plans to address actions that violate organizational values or principles. Below are some key elements to include in these policies.

- **Definitions and principles.** The policy should define what ethics is and which principles the organization values. The policy may choose to reference the [Prevention Code of Ethics](#) or other existing professional codes.
- **Expectations for specific behaviors.** The policy should clearly note expectations and rules for addressing ethical dilemmas that are most likely to arise. These expectations are often included in a more general employee handbook or set of workplace policies. A specific policy about ethics may include reference to the employee handbook and a reminder that many rules in that handbook are also ethical obligations.
 - *Supervision of and interaction with youth and other vulnerable populations, use of social media, and use of funds and resources are topics that may exist as separate policies and for which connection to ethical principles could also be underscored.*
 - *The policy should cover expectations for a variety of roles, including coalition members and volunteers. To what extent does the policy affect non-employee roles? How will the organization deal with unethical behavior of staff, a coalition member, or volunteer?*
- **Process for reporting unethical behavior.** The policy should outline a process for reporting unethical behavior. It is best practice to include several reporting options, including ways for reporters to remain anonymous, so that employees and volunteers can choose the option that works best for them.
- **Protections for persons reporting concerns.** The policy should affirm a “whistleblower” policy for people reporting concerns in good faith.
- **Consequences of non-compliance.** A strong policy will articulate how the agency or organization will address unethical conduct. It is important that people understand the consequences of unethical behavior.
- **Implementation and periodic review.** As with any policy, it is important that the organization take action to inform and remind staff about the ethics policy. Organizations should consult with employees, as well as human resources and legal representatives, before implementing any policy. Organizations should review each policy periodically after adoption to ensure that it is current and consistent with relevant laws. The policy should outline a process for how staff and volunteers will be informed of new or revised policy.

To learn more about the role of ethics in substance misuse prevention and practice strategies for addressing common ethical dilemmas, sign up for the [Prevention Solutions@EDC](#) online course [Ethics in Prevention](#).