

9.0 BOARD OF DIRECTORS STANDARDS OF CONDUCT AND ETHICAL OBLIGATIONS

These Standards of Conduct govern, affirm, and clarify the policies and expectations of TRWD concerning the conduct of members of the Board of Directors. It is in the best interests of TRWD for its governing body to maintain the highest standards of integrity, candor, impartiality, and conduct so that the best interests of TRWD may be served and the business of TRWD is carried out in a manner that upholds TRWD's business responsibilities and derives confidence of TRWD's staff, customers, and constituents. In conducting themselves in a manner consistent with the highest standards of integrity and personal conduct, TRWD Directors shall avoid even the appearance of any conflict of interest or impropriety.

These Standards of Conduct and Ethical Obligations should be reflected in Board policies and TRWD administrative procedures to ensure the General Manager, TRWD's executive and leadership teams, and all TRWD staff adhere to appropriate standards of conduct and the utmost ethical practices in the performance of their duties for TRWD.

9.1 General Standards of Conduct. Each Director is expected to demonstrate the highest degree of ethics in their official responsibilities and duties in order to maintain the integrity of TRWD. Each Director must commit to ensuring that they conduct themselves with honesty, integrity, and fairness in the discharge of their duties and ensure that TRWD business is conducted ethically and transparently.

Each Director is expected to become familiar with these policies and state law and procedures regarding ethical practices for public officials.

Additionally, members of the Board of Directors shall adhere to the following standards:

1. Attend all duly-scheduled Board meetings and committee meetings insofar as possible and become informed concerning issues to be considered at those meetings.
2. Communicate to other Board members and the General Manager expressions of public reaction to Board policies and programs.
3. Inform oneself about current issues by individual study and through participation in programs providing needed information.
4. Avoid being placed in a position of conflict of interest, and refrain from using the Board position for personal or partisan gain.
5. Take no private action that will compromise the Board or TRWD staff and respect the confidentiality of information that is privileged or confidential.

6. Bring about desired changes through legal and ethical procedures, upholding and enforcing all applicable statutes, regulations, and court decisions pertaining to water control and improvement districts.
7. Work with other Board members to establish effective Board policies and to delegate authority for the administration of the District to the General Manager.
8. Endeavor to make policy decisions only after full discussion at publicly-held Board meetings.
9. Render all decisions based on the available facts and independent judgment and refuse to surrender that judgment to other individuals or special interest groups.
10. Encourage the free expression of opinion by all Board members, and seek systematic communications between and among the Board, TRWD staff, and the community.
11. Work with other Board members and the General Manager to establish effective policies and practices prohibiting unlawful discrimination, including conduct that constitutes sexual harassment.
12. Support TRWD's employment of those persons best qualified to serve as staff and insist on avoiding preferential treatment of any person.

9.2 Attendance at Board Meetings. If a Director fails to attend six (6) consecutive regular meetings of the Board, or one-half or more of the regular meetings scheduled during the prior twelve (12) months, the Board by unanimous vote may remove the Director from serving as a member of the Board of Directors. The Board of Directors, however, may determine if fairness requires that the absences be excused on the basis of illness or other good cause.

9.3 Conflict of Interest Disclosure. If a Director has a substantial interest in a business entity or in real property, as defined by Local Government Code Chapter 171, the Board member shall file with the official recordkeeper of the Board, before a vote or decision on any matter involving the business entity or the real property, an affidavit stating the nature and extent of the interest and shall abstain from further participation on the matter if the Board action will have a special economic effect on the business entity or the value of the property that is distinguishable from its effect on the public.

If a Director is required to file and does file an affidavit under this section, the Board member is not required to abstain from further participation in the matter at issue if a majority of the Board is likewise required to file and does file affidavits of similar interest on the same official action.

An individual has a “substantial interest” if the individual or his or her parent, child, stepchild, spouse, or spouse’s parent:

1. Has a controlling interest in the business entity;
2. Has ownership in excess of ten percent of the voting interest in the business entity or in excess of \$15,000 of the fair market value of the business entity;
3. Has any participating interest, either direct or indirect, by shares, stock, or otherwise, whether or not voting rights are included, in the profits, proceeds, or capital gains of the business entity in excess of ten percent;
4. Holds the position of a member of the Board of Directors or other governing board of the business entity;
5. Serves as an elected officer of the business entity; or
6. Is an employee of the business entity.

9.4 Contractors, Vendors, and Consultants. All activities of TRWD shall be carried out in accordance with local, state, and federal law. Directors are expected to avoid any improper interactions with contractors, vendors, and consultants who provide services to or seek to provide services including, but not limited to, bribes, kickbacks, or other illegal payments.

TRWD does not authorize or condone illegal or unethical activities by any of its contractors, vendors, and consultants. Directors who have knowledge of illegal or unethical activities by such third parties shall immediately report to the Board or the General Manager any activities which may be an indicator of illegal or unethical business practices.

No Director, or member of a Director’s family, shall solicit or accept any gift, favor, or service from a current or potential contractor, vendor, or consultant that might reasonably tend to influence the Director in the discharge of official duties or that the officer knows or should know is being offered with the intent to influence the Director’s official conduct. Directors are specifically prohibited from accepting from current or potential contractors, vendors, and consultants:

1. Vacations, pleasure trips, or hunting trips;
2. Discounts not available to the general public;
3. Products or services not available to the general public under similar circumstances;
4. Loans or advances;

5. Entertainment at a discount unavailable to the general public; or
6. Other unusual favors not available to the general public at the same cost.

Any Director receiving such offers shall immediately report such offers to the General Manager or to the Board of Directors.

A "gift" does not include a reasonable meal accepted as a guest, or a promotional item of nominal value, typical of items given at vendor booths at conferences.

9.5 Confidentiality. When there are competing confidentiality or security concerns, the Board may establish reasonable procedures or limitations to preserve confidentiality. If a member of the Board requests access to records which may be confidential, TRWD shall direct such requests to the General Counsel for review. Individual records responsive to the request shall first be reviewed by the General Counsel and marked as "Confidential." Records so marked may be reviewed by the requesting Board member, but copies may not be released, or their contents disclosed, without the approval of the Board. The reviewing Board member is required to maintain the records in the same manner they were maintained by TRWD.

At the time a Director is provided access to confidential records or to reports compiled from such records, the General Manager, other District employee, or General Counsel shall advise them of their responsibility to comply with confidentiality requirements.

9.6 Privilege. Communications between the Board of Directors and legal counsel is considered confidential if the information is not intended for disclosure to third persons other than those persons to whom the disclosure of information is made in furtherance of rendering professional legal services to TRWD and/or the Board of Directors or those reasonably necessary for the transmission of the communication. The attorney-client privilege belongs to the Board as a whole, and the privilege may not be waived except by the Board as a whole. Any unauthorized disclosure of an attorney-client communication is strictly prohibited.

9.7 Prohibition on Nepotism. A Director may not appoint a person to a position that is to be directly or indirectly compensated from public funds or fees of office if the person is related to the Director by blood (consanguinity) within the third degree or by marriage (affinity) within the second degree; or the person is related to another member of the Board of Directors by blood or marriage within a prohibited degree defined under state law. In addition, a Director may not appoint a person to a position that is to be directly or indirectly compensated from public funds or fees of office if the person is a domestic partner of or in a romantic relationship with the Director.

This prohibition on nepotism expressly includes directing the General Manager or TRWD staff to employ such a person at TRWD.

9.8 Prohibition on Bribery. A Director shall not intentionally or knowingly offer, confer, agree to confer on another, solicit, accept, or agree to accept a benefit:

- In exchange for the Director's decision, opinion, recommendation, vote, or other exercise of discretion as a Director of TRWD;
- In exchange for a violation of a duty imposed on the public servant by law; or
- That is a political contribution as defined by Title 15 of the Election Code or an expenditure made and reported as a lobbying expense in accordance with Government Code, Chapter 305, if the benefit was offered, conferred, solicited, accepted, or agreed to pursuant to an express agreement to take or withhold a specific exercise of official discretion, if such exercise of official discretion would not have been taken or withheld but for the benefit. "Benefit" means anything reasonably regarded as pecuniary gain or pecuniary advantage, including benefit to any other person in whose welfare the beneficiary has a direct and substantial interest.

9.9 Prohibition on Illegal Gifts: A Director shall not solicit, accept, or agree to accept any benefit from a person the Director is interested in or likely to become interested in contracts, purchases, payments, claims, or other pecuniary transactions with TRWD.

A Director who receives an unsolicited benefit that the Director is prohibited from accepting under this section may donate the benefit to a governmental entity that has the authority to accept the gift or may donate the benefit to a recognized tax exempt charitable organization formed for educational, religious, or scientific purposes.

This prohibition on illegal gifts does not apply to:

1. A fee prescribed by law to be received by the Director or any other benefit to which the Director is lawfully entitled or for which he or she gives legitimate consideration in a capacity other than as a public servant;
2. A gift or other benefit conferred on account of kinship or a personal, professional, or business relationship independent of the status of the recipient as a Director;
3. A benefit to a Director required to file a statement under Texas Government Code Chapter 572 or a report under Texas Election Code Title 15 that is derived from a function in honor or appreciation of the recipient if:
 - The benefit and the source of any benefit in excess of \$50 is reported in the statement; and

- The benefit is used solely to defray the expenses that accrue in the performance of duties or activities as a Director which are non-reimbursable by TRWD;
4. A political contribution as defined by Title 15 of the Texas Election Code;
 5. An item with a value of less than \$50, excluding cash or a negotiable instrument as described by Texas Business and Commerce Code § 3.104;
 6. An item issued by a governmental entity that allows the use of property or facilities owned, leased, or operated by the governmental entity;
 7. Transportation and lodging expenses or meals in connection with a conference or similar event at which the Director renders services, such as addressing an audience or engaging in a seminar, to the extent those services are more than merely perfunctory; or
 8. Food, lodging, transportation, or entertainment accepted as a guest and, if the donee is required by law to report those items, reported by the donee in accordance with that law.

9.10 Prohibition on Improper Honoraria and Expenses. A Director shall not solicit, accept, or agree to accept an honorarium in consideration for services that the Director would not have been requested to provide but for his or her official position or duties as a member of TRWD's Board of Directors. A Director, however, is not prohibited from accepting transportation and lodging expenses or meals in connection with a conference or similar event in which he or she renders services, such as addressing an audience or engaging in a seminar, to the extent those services are more than merely perfunctory.

9.11 Prohibition on Abuse of Office. A Director shall not, with intent to obtain a benefit or with intent to harm or defraud another, intentionally or knowingly violate a law that specifically applies to Directors of water districts and that directly or indirectly imposes a duty on the Director or governs the conduct of the Director. A Director, likewise, shall not misuse TRWD property, services, personnel, or any other thing of value belonging to the District, that has come into his or her custody by virtue of his or her status as a Director of TRWD's Board. Such misuse includes dealing with TRWD property contract to:

- An agreement under which the Director holds the property;
- A contract of employment or oath of office of the Director;
- A law, including provisions of the General Appropriations Act specifically relating to government property, that prescribes the manner of custody or disposition of the property; or
- A limited purpose for which the property is delivered or received.

9.12 Prohibition on Misuse of Official Information: A Director shall not use or rely on information the Director has access to by virtue of his or her service as a Director and that has not been made public to:

- Acquire or aid another to acquire a pecuniary interest in any property, transaction, or enterprise that may be affected by the information;
- Speculate or aid another to speculate on the basis of the information; or
- As a Director, coerce another into suppressing or failing to report that information to a law enforcement agency.

A Director likewise shall not, with intent to obtain a benefit or with intent to harm or defraud another, disclose or use information for a nongovernmental purpose that the Director has access to because he or she serves as a member of the Board of Directors that has not been made public.

For purposes of Section 9.12, “information that has not been made public” means any information to which the public does not generally have access, and that is prohibited from disclosure under the Texas Public Information Act.

9.13 Protections for Acting on a Legislative Measure. A Director may not be subject to disciplinary action or a sanction, penalty, disability, or liability for:

- An action permitted by law that the Director takes in the Director’s official capacity regarding a legislative measure;
- Proposing, endorsing, or expressing support for or opposition to a legislative measure or taking any action permitted by law to support or oppose a legislative measure;
- The effect of a legislative measure or of a change in law proposed by a legislative measure on any person; or
- A breach of duty in connection with the Director’s practice of or employment in a licensed or regulated profession or occupation, to disclose to any person information, or to obtain a waiver or consent from any person, regarding the Director’s actions relating to a legislative measure; or the substance, effects, or potential effects of a legislative measure.

AUTHORITY

Tex. Gov’t Code §§ 551.001, et seq.

Tex. Gov't Code §§ 552.001, et seq.
Tex. Gov't Code § 572.059
Tex. Gov't Code § 573.002
Tex. Gov't Code § 573.041
Tex. Loc. Gov't Code § 171.002
Tex. Loc. Gov't Code § 171.004
Tex. Penal Code §§ 1.07(41)(A), (E)
Tex. Penal Code. § 36.01
Tex. Penal Code § 36.02
Tex. Penal Code § 36.07
Tex. Penal Code §§ 36.08(d), (i)
Tex. Penal Code §§ 36.10(a)-(b)
Tex. Penal Code §§ 39.01(1)-(2)
Tex. Penal Code § 39.02(a).
Tex. Atty Gen. Op. OR 2006-03805 (2006).
Tex. Atty. Gen. Op JC-184 (2000)