Washington State Department of Social & Health Services

Transforming lives

Administrative Policy No. 18.60

Subject:	Employee Relationships with Clients, Contracted Service Providers, and Outside Organizations
Information Contact:	Human Resources Division
Authorizing Source:	Chapter 42.52 RCW Ethics in Public Service
Effective Date:	July 1, 2005
Revised:	July 26, 2023 [1] Housekeeping 2/26/24 [2] Housekeeping 7/30/2025 [3] Housekeeping 6/23/2026
Approved By:	**Original approved by Wendy Long** Senior Director, DSHS Human Resources Division

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Purpose

This policy sets standards related to potential conflict of interest in Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) employee relationships with clients, contracted service providers, and outside organizations conducting business or seeking to conduct business with DSHS. The policy identifies prohibited activities and actions related to potential or actual economic or personal interests.

Scope

This policy applies to all DSHS employees.

Additional Resources

Administrative policy 18.17 relationships and the reporting structure
Administrative policy 18.18 outside employment
Administrative policy 18.64 standards of ethical conduct for employees
RCW 42.52.140 Gifts
RCW 42.52.150 Limitations on gifts
Contracting with State Agencies | Executive Ethics Board

Definitions

Client: Includes applicants and current recipients of DSHS services and benefits.

Contracted service providers: Include persons or businesses seeking to provide goods or services or enter into a financial relationship with DSHS, including service providers, sole source contractors, vendors, and community-based organizations.

Outside organizations: Public, private, non-profit, or governmental organizations that may be seeking to enter into or have a financial or regulatory relationship with DSHS.

Household member: Persons who reside in the same home who have reciprocal duties to and do provide financial support for one another. The term does not include persons sharing the same house when the living style is primarily that of a dormitory or commune. (WAC 357-01-182)

Relative: For purposes of this policy, a relative of a DSHS employee is: Anyone who is connected by blood, marriage, adoption, or other legal connection. This includes but is not limited to parents, siblings, spouse, children, in-laws, cousins, niblings (children of siblings), grandchildren, legal wards, foster children, or registered domestic partners. Anyone who was formerly considered to be a relative as defined above.

Romantic or sexual relationship: A current or former consensual relationship that includes but is not limited to: dating, a relationship that was sexual in nature, engagement, and other intimate relationships.

Policy

A. Employee responsibilities

Consistent with AP 18.17 relationships and the reporting structures, AP 18.18 outside employment, and AP 18.64 standards of ethical conduct for employees, DSHS employees must not:

1. Seek, solicit, receive, accept, or take, either directly or indirectly, anything of economic value such as a gift (*see RCW 42.52.140 and RCW 42.52.150*), gratuity, or favor from any person, including a client, contracted service provider, or outside organization, if the employee has reason to believe any of the following regarding client, contracted service provider or outside organization they:
    a. Have or are seeking a contractual, business, or other financial relationship with DSHS.
    b. Are involved with an operation or activity regulated by DSHS.

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c. Have interests that may be substantially affected by the employee's performance or non-performance of official duties.
d. Reasonably expect that the action of offering the gift, gratuity, or favor would influence the judgment of the employee, or be considered as part of a reward for action or inaction.

2. Use the power or authority of their position in a manner intended to induce or coerce another person to provide themselves or someone else with anything of economic or personal value, directly or indirectly.

3. Engage in a transaction with a person that may result in a conflict of interest.

4. Accept, maintain, or disburse client funds except as authorized.

5. Work on a DSHS client's case when the client is or has been:
   a. A member of the employee's household;
   b. A relative of the employee;
   c. In a romantic or sexual relationship with the employee.

6. DSHS employees must immediately notify their supervisors or managers if they become aware of a real or potential conflict of interest resulting from:
   a. The employee's own relationship with a client, contracted service provider, or outside organization.
   b. Another employee's relationship with a client, contracted service provider, or outside organization.

7. Under WAC 292-110-060, employees must seek approval from the Executive Ethics Board before entering into, or obtaining a beneficial interest in, a contract or grant with a state agency only if the process for awarding the contract or grant was not open and competitive, or, whenever only one bid or application was received.

B. Management responsibilities

When a supervisor or manager becomes aware of an employee's real or potential conflict of interest, they must contact the human resources division and collaboratively develop a plan to remove the possibility of a conflict of interest between the employee and the client, contracted service provider, or outside organization. The employee may be an active participant in the collaborative process.

[1] Link updates 2024 SharePoint move.
[2] Update to match changes to the executive ethics law, effective July 27, 2025.
[3] Add clarifying language under A.7.

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