

# Foundational Principles of Responsible Conduct

For BC's Local Governments

## Key Foundational Principles:

- Integrity
- Accountability
- Respect
- Leadership & Collaboration

## What are foundational principles?

The foundational principles provide a basis for how local government elected officials fulfill their roles and responsibilities, including in their relationships with each other, with local government staff and with the public.

These principles are intended to guide both the conduct of individual elected officials and the collective behaviour of the local government council or board. The principles are also meant to guide local governments in fulfilling their corporate functions and responsibilities to their communities.

Responsible conduct at all of these levels is key to furthering a local government's ability to provide good governance to its community.

## How do the principles "fit" with legal obligations?

It is the duty of elected officials to understand and abide by all legal requirements that apply to elected officials and local governments<sup>1</sup>, and nothing in this document should be interpreted as taking precedence over such legal obligations.

Local government elected officials should interpret the principles described below in accordance with the responsibilities and obligations set out in B.C.'s local government legislation, other applicable legislation, the common law and the policies and bylaws of the local government.

## How are the principles incorporated into the existing local government framework?

Elected officials are encouraged to incorporate the foundational principles whenever they are carrying out their official duties; but there are some circumstances where they are required to consider these principles.

Elected officials must recite an oath or affirmation where they make a commitment to uphold these principles before they can hold office.

Elected officials must also contemplate these principles when considering adopting a code of conduct at the beginning of a new term.

These principles will continue to be incorporated into B.C.'s local government framework to help bolster responsible conduct practices.

<sup>1</sup> Many legal obligations apply to elected officials and local governments, including but not limited to rules about: ethical standards such as conflict of interest; open meetings; protecting confidential information; workplace safety such as harassment; and expenditure of local government funds.

## **INTEGRITY:**

### **Conducting oneself honestly and ethically**

- Be open and truthful in all local government dealings, while protecting confidentiality where necessary
- Behave in a manner that promotes public confidence, including actively avoiding any perceptions of conflicts of interest, improper use of office, or unethical conduct
- Act in the best interest of the public and community
- Ensure actions are consistent with the shared principles, values, policies, and bylaws collectively agreed to by the council or board
- Demonstrate the same ethical principles during both meetings that are open and closed to the public
- Express sincerity when correcting or apologizing for any errors or mistakes made while carrying out official duties

<sup>2</sup> Discriminatory conduct includes any verbal or physical actions taken against someone because of their Indigenous identity, race, colour, ancestry, place of origin, religion, marital status, family status, physical or mental disability, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or age pursuant to the BC Human Rights Code.

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## **RESPECT:**

### **Valuing the perspectives, wishes, and rights of others**

- Treat elected officials, staff, and the public with dignity, understanding and respect
- Acknowledge how people's beliefs, values, ideas, and contributions add diverse perspectives
- Create an environment of trust, including displaying awareness and sensitivity around comments and language that may be perceived as offensive or derogatory
- Refrain from any form of discriminatory conduct<sup>2</sup> against another elected official, staff, or the public
- Honour the offices of local government and fulfill the obligations of Mayor/Chair and Councillor/Director dutifully
- Recognize and value the distinct roles and responsibilities of local government staff
- Call for and expect respect from the community towards elected officials and staff
- Ensure that public statements and social media posts that concern other elected officials, staff, and the public are respectful

## **ACCOUNTABILITY:**

### **An obligation and willingness to accept responsibility or to account for one's actions**

- Be transparent about how elected officials carry out their duties and how council conducts business
- Ensure information and decision-making processes are accessible to the public while protecting confidentiality where necessary
- Correct any mistakes or errors in a timely and transparent manner
- Accept and uphold that the council/board is collectively accountable for local government decisions, and that individual elected officials are responsible and accountable for their behaviour and individual decisions
- Listen to and consider the opinions and needs of the community in all decision-making, and allow for public discourse and feedback
- Act in accordance with the law, which includes, but is not limited to, the statutes, bylaws, and policies that govern the local government

## **LEADERSHIP AND COLLABORATION:**

### **An ability to lead, listen to, and positively influence others; coming together to create or meet a common goal through collective efforts honestly and ethically**

- Demonstrate behaviour that builds public confidence and trust in local government
- Provide considered direction on municipal policies and support colleagues and staff to do the same
- Educate colleagues and staff on the harmful impacts of discriminatory conduct, and take action to prevent this type of conduct from reoccurring if necessary
- Create space for open expression by others, take responsibility for one's own actions and reactions, and accept the decisions of the majority
- Advocate for shared decision-making and actively work with other elected officials, staff, the public, and other stakeholders to achieve common goals
- Foster positive working relationships between elected officials, staff, and the public
- Commit to building mutually beneficial working relationships with neighbouring First Nations to further advance reconciliation efforts
- Positively influence others to adhere to the foundational principles of responsible conduct in all local government dealings

The Working Group on Responsible Conduct is a joint initiative between the UBCM, LGMA and the Ministry of Municipal Affairs. The Group was formed to undertake collaborative research and policy work around issues of responsible conduct of local government elected officials.