COLLECTION I — THE 12 POINTS OF GOOD GOVERNANCE

Ethical Leadership — Citizen's Guide

Standards of integrity in public life and how to identify and respond to ethical failures.

By Daniel P. Devine · Civest Sphere · November 2026



WATCH THE VIDEO

Ethical Leadership in 60 Seconds · 0:58

Watch it on American Civic Power or YouTube.

https://www.americancivicpower.com/goodgovernance#ethical-leadership

What it means

Ethical leadership means officials put the public interest ahead of their own. They avoid conflicts of interest, disclose their finances, don't use their office for personal or political gain, and step aside when they have a stake in a decision.

Why it matters

Trust is government's most valuable asset. A single ethics scandal can undermine years of good work and make residents assume the worst about everyone in office.

Signs it's working

- An active local ethics board with a published code of ethics.
- Officials file financial disclosures, and they're available to the public.
- Officials recuse themselves from votes where they have a personal interest.

- Political activity kept separate from public work.

Warning signs

- Contracts or jobs going to officials' relatives, donors or business partners.
- Missing or incomplete financial disclosures.
- Officials voting on matters that benefit them.
- Public staff or resources used for campaigns.

What you can do

1. Find your town or county's code of ethics and ethics board.
2. Request officials' financial disclosure statements where they're public.
3. Compare campaign donors with contract recipients. Civest Sphere's Board of Elections and Money Map tools can help.
4. Report concerns to the local ethics board or the state Commission on Ethics and Lobbying in Government.

Related points

Rule of Law, Accountability, Transparency.

Last reviewed November 2026. This guide is general information, not legal advice. Laws, deadlines and procedures change, so confirm details with the official source before you act.

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