



# Code for Ethical Leadership in Local Government

## SUMMARY

### OUTCOMES: What do we want to achieve?

An ethical culture

Well-functioning municipality

Trust

### PRINCIPLES: How do we achieve what we want?

#### An ethical municipal leader:

1. Sets the tone for an ethical culture.
2. Follows a community-centred approach to governance.
3. Respects the boundary between the political and administrative spheres of the municipality.
4. Ensures the appointment of staff who have competence and integrity.
5. Ensures the appropriate level of competence, integrity, and diversity on committees and oversight structures.
6. Deals fairly and decisively with ethics transgressions and poor performance.
7. Engages respectfully and constructively with other leaders.

### SPIRIT OF ETHICAL MUNICIPAL LEADERSHIP: What is our core consideration?

Leading in the long-term sustainable interest of the municipality and all its communities.

The spirit of the Constitution and local government legislation underpins the Code.



An initiative of The Ethics Institute in partnership with:



cooperative  
governance  
Department:  
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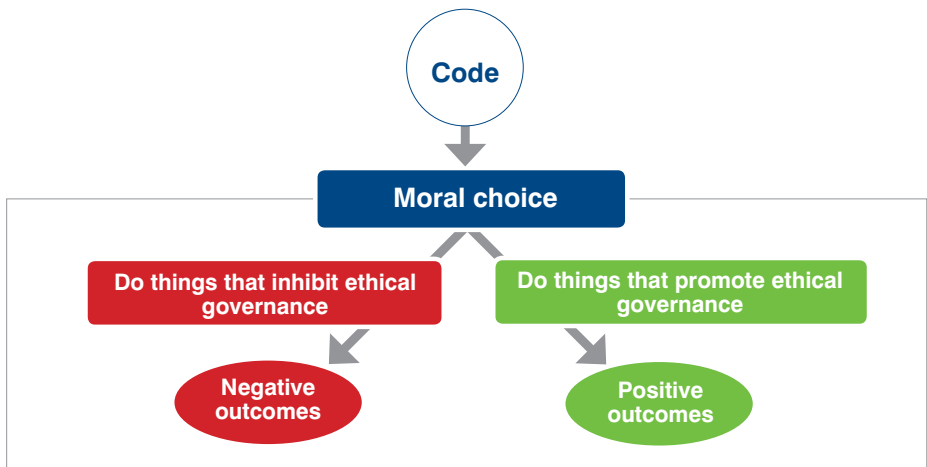
## Rationale – Key to the Code

Ethical leadership is an absolute prerequisite for successful developmental local government as envisaged by the Constitution. The truth, however, is that neither ethics, nor leadership can be legislated or externally enforced. It is an individual choice.

It is the premise of this Code that the majority of leaders in local government are ethical people, who want to do the right thing. At the same time, the research has clearly shown that leading ethically in local government can be very difficult, and that there are certain practices that undermine ethical leadership (making it more difficult) and others that empower ethical leadership (making it easier).

This Code therefore aims to be a tool to help municipal leaders navigate this challenging terrain. It clarifies what practices have been proven by the research to undermine ethical governance, and should therefore be avoided, and what practices are enabling, and should be pursued.

It is not a case of minimally complying with the Code that will lead to good outcomes, but also the spirit and intent with which it is done. At the end of the day, it is a moral choice by the individual leader, as well as the municipal leadership as a collective.



This Code aims to give effect to the spirit of the Constitution and create an environment where the existing legislative and regulatory framework can thrive, by setting out the following in relation to ethical leadership in local government:

- The outcomes: What is it that we want to achieve?
- The spirit: What is our core consideration?
- The principles: What must be done to achieve the outcomes?

This Code has been developed for municipal leaders who want to be part of the solution – who want to build a better local government and a better South Africa.

## Principle 1: An ethical municipal leader sets the tone for an ethical culture

### An ethical municipal leader:

- i. Leads by example, living the values of ethical municipal leadership.
  - Integrity
  - Community centredness
  - Accountability
  - Diligence
  - Courage
- ii. Ensures compliance with the spirit and letter of the legislative and regulatory framework.
- iii. Ensures that the ethics of the municipality is governed and managed in a way that results in an ethical culture.
- iv. Promotes civic ethics in the community.

## Principle 2: An ethical municipal leader follows a community-centred approach to governance

### An ethical municipal leader:

- i. Places the interest of the community first.
- ii. Consults meaningfully with communities.
- iii. Is open and truthful with communities.
- iv. Is responsive to communities.
- v. Ensures the prudent use of resources.
- vi. Considers the interests of everyone in the community, not just those who voted for them.
- vii. Aspires to a shared, inclusive vision for the community.
- viii. Where required, builds coalitions in the best interest of the community.

## Principle 3: An ethical municipal leader respects the boundary between the political and administrative spheres of the municipality

### An ethical municipal leader:

- i. Respects the principle of separation of powers.
- ii. Actively guards against politicising or factionalising the administration.
- iii. Works in a constructive spirit with the other sphere of the municipality (i.e., council or administration).

## Principle 4: An ethical municipal leader ensures the appointment of staff who have competence and integrity

### An ethical municipal leader:

- i. Ensures the appointment of the best possible staff (with competence and integrity) to fulfil the mandate of the municipality.
- ii. Avoids politicising the administration through staff appointments.
- iii. Strives to ensure stability in the management team of the municipality.

**Principle 5:** An ethical municipal leader ensures the appropriate level of competence, integrity, and diversity on committees and oversight structures

**An ethical municipal leader:**

- i. Selects the strongest possible candidates (considering their competence and integrity) onto committees and oversight structures.
- ii. Co-opts external expertise onto committees and oversight structures where the internal technical expertise is insufficient.
- iii. Ensures an appropriate mix of skills and diversity on committees.
- iv. Ensures stability on committees to allow for committee members to mature and gain experience.

**Principle 6:** An ethical municipal leader deals fairly and decisively with ethics transgressions and poor performance

**An ethical municipal leader:**

- i. Ensures that the spirit and process with which disciplinary cases are adjudicated is:
  - Fair
  - Independent
  - Timely
- ii. Ensures that sub-standard performance is addressed timeously and fairly.
- iii. Ensures that personal and political considerations do not trump the best interest of the municipality and all its communities in discipline and performance management.
- iv. Deals decisively with conflicts of interest.
- v. Ensures that audit findings are addressed.

**Principle 7:** An ethical municipal leader engages respectfully and constructively with other leaders

**An ethical municipal leader:**

- i. Aspires to reciprocal relationships of trust and integrity with each other.
- ii. Ensures that personal, political and factional differences do not get in the way of doing the work of the municipality in the interest of the community.



## Code for Ethical Leadership in Local Government 2023

Scan QR code or visit the website [www.tei.org.za/lgeli](http://www.tei.org.za/lgeli)

- to download the full version of the Code
- for the latest developments on the Code
- to find out about training opportunities for councillors and officials.