

Getting the Word Out About Your Ethics Committee



An ethics committee reflects an organization's mission and goals, and beginning with the leadership, carries that work forward by its inclusive and deliberative actions. One of the health department's goals should focus on creating an environment in which every person thinks critically about ethical dilemmas, makes ethical decisions, and communicates with both internal and external audiences in a transparent and respectful manner. A communications strategy for an ethics committee can raise awareness of the health department's values, what ethical practices look like in action, and why they are important. Building credibility and trust is key for local health departments to serve as vital players in keeping communities safe and healthy.

As they consider and ultimately make decisions that affect the community, public health departments, should have both an internal and a public communications strategy to ensure that various stakeholders know the committee is an available resource for addressing ethical issues. Examples of stakeholders include the general public, including individuals and populations facing disparities in health status and health services, city/county government officials, local hospitals, law enforcement, and healthcare organizations. Examples of communications include quarterly newsletters, blogs, social media, and other vehicles for internal and external communication. Some guidelines for creating a communications component for both internal and external communications follow.

Internal

- ✓ Creating an ethical culture requires a multi-faceted approach to communications. When adopting a structure to communicate information, consider designating a person on the ethics committee to work with your communications staff in crafting messages for various audiences.
- ✓ Internally, a communications strategy ensures that employees are aware of the ethics committee as a resource to support their programmatic work and decision making.
- ✓ Develop a strategy for how ethics committee recommendations will be shared with staff.

External

- ✔ Community engagement is key to ensuring that the public understands and is made aware of the health department's commitment to ethics. This includes informing the public through various outlets (community and local newspapers, cable television, flyers, newsletters, and social media) of the local health department's activities, including those concerning ethics.
- ✔ It is also important to keep others in public office abreast of ethics committee activities. Letters to other public officials (e.g., state health director, state legislators, county commissioners) about ethics committee deliberations and outcomes are a good way to validate the committee's work.
- ✔ Look for opportunities to network with other professionals or groups that advocate for public health ethics, such as the Ethics Section of the American Public Health Association (APHA) and other LHDs with ethics committees (such as the ones listed on this website).

This resource accompanies the "So You Want to Start an Ethics Committee" webpage produced by the National Association of County & City Health Officials (NACCHO), with support from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

**Learn more and access additional resources at
www.naccho.org/programs/public-health-infrastructure/ethics**