

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

LEGAL COMPLIANCE MANUAL

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

Introduction

Rule: A public officer authorized to take part in the making of a sale, lease, or contract shall not voluntarily have a personal financial interest in the transaction or personally benefit financially from it. The following persons are specifically forbidden from having any interest in any contract made by their respective governing bodies:

1. elected officers;
2. town supervisors and town board members;
3. county officials, county deputies, county clerks, and employees of such officials; or
4. school board members.

Exceptions: For practical reasons, the legislature has created certain limited exceptions to the general prohibition. Part I of this questionnaire will assist you in making a determination as to whether an otherwise forbidden transaction fits within any of the statutory exceptions.

For the purposes of this checklist, "interested officer" shall mean any public officer or employee, as listed above, who directly or through his or her spouse (see "Discussion" below) has one of the following positions or interests in either the entity making or the subject matter of the sale, lease, or contract with the governing body:

1. officer;
2. director;
3. employee (see "Discussion" below);
4. partner;
5. owner (complete or partial);
6. shareholder; or
7. prior long-term contractual relationship.

Discussion

The determination as to whether a particular transaction involves an "interested officer" often calls for a judgment on the part of the auditor. A helpful concept to remember for analysis is that it is a conflict of interest to be on both sides of a contract or transaction.

Most problems in this regard arise in the examination of the "interest" the public officer has in the person or entity making the contract with the governing body. Two frequent problem areas are:

1. Contracts with Officer's or Employee's Spouse or Family Member. It is not a conflict of interest per se for a governing body to contract or otherwise economically transact with a member officer's spouse or family member. However, if the facts indicate an economic benefit to the member officer as a result of the contract or transaction, a conflict of interest exists. For example, if a husband and wife, one of whom is a public officer, share a common pool of funds and likewise share debts, conflicts may exist because there is benefit to the public officer or employee flowing from the economic benefit to his or her spouse. Likewise, if a governmental officer or employee and his or her spouse, in fact, do not economically benefit from each other, a conflict may not exist. This analysis would apply to all familial relationships. The auditor will need to factually determine whether an emancipated child living away from home has a financial interest with his or her parents.

2. Contracts with Companies in Which the Officer is an Employee. If the involved governmental officer or employee is simply a company employee without managerial powers and receives the same salary or raise regardless of the company's contract with the governing body, there probably is no conflict of interest. However, if said officer receives a bonus or commission or other benefit as a result of the contractual transaction between his or her company and the government entity, there is definitely a conflict of interest.

There are numerous aspects to be examined by the auditor in order to understand the totality of interests involved in a given contract or transaction between the governing body and an entity or person with a relationship to a member officer.

If, after review of the facts and applicable statutes, you are still unsure as to whether a particular set of circumstances constitutes a conflict of interest, you should contact an attorney for advice prior to preparing the "Audit Conclusion" at the end of this manual section.

Other Statutory References to Conflicts of Interest. In addition to the general statutory prohibition on conflicts of interest cited in the checklist, auditors should be aware that other statutory prohibitions and requirements exist with regard to certain types of municipal entities:

<u>Persons/Entities</u>	<u>Statute</u>
Public and local officials of metropolitan governmental units (as defined by Minn. Stat. § 10A.01, subds. 35, 22, & 24)	§ 10A.07
Housing and Redevelopment Authorities (commissioners and employees)	§ 469.009
Economic Development Authorities (commissioners, officers, and employees)	§ 469.098

Minn. Stat. Section	CONFLICTS OF INTEREST	Yes	No	Workpaper Reference
Part I. Contracts Generally				
§ 471.87	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Unless a statutory exception applies, a public officer who is authorized to take part in any manner in making any sale, lease, or contract in official capacity shall not voluntarily have a personal financial interest in that sale, lease, or contract or personally benefit therefrom. - The governing body may contract for goods or services with an interested officer only by unanimous vote. <u>See A, infra.</u> In addition to the unanimous vote, one of the statutory exceptions must apply. <u>See B, infra.</u> 			
§ 471.88, subd. 1	<p>A. Unanimous Approval</p> <p>If there were any transactions between the governing body and an interested officer, did the governing body approve the transaction by unanimous vote?</p> <p>NOTE: All <u>members</u> present, except the interested officer, must vote in order to produce a unanimous vote.</p>	_____	_____	_____
§ 471.88, subd. 2	<p>B. Statutory Exceptions</p> <p>1. Designation of Bank or Savings Association</p> <p>If the transaction involved the designation of a bank or savings association as an authorized depository for public funds and as a source of borrowing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Did the interested officer disclose to the governing body that he or she was a director or employee of the bank or savings association? b. Was such disclosure entered into the minutes of the governing body's meeting prior to the first designation of the bank or savings association as a depository or at the time of the interested officer's election, whichever was later? 	_____	_____	_____
§ 471.88, subd. 3	<p>2. Designation of Official Newspaper</p> <p>If a transaction involved the designation of an official newspaper or publication of official matters therein:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Was the newspaper in which the officer had an interest the only newspaper complying with statutory or charter requirements relating to designation or publication? 	_____	_____	_____

Minn. Stat. Section	CONFLICTS OF INTEREST	Yes	No	Workpaper Reference
Part I. Contracts Generally (Continued)				
§ 471.89, subd. 2	d. If the contract was entered into under emergency conditions, did the governing body adopt such a resolution prior to payment of the claims in which the facts of the emergency are also stated?	_____	_____	_____
§ 471.88, subd. 6	<p>5. Contract with Fire Department</p> <p>If the governing body entered into a contract with a fire department in which an interested officer was a member:</p> <p>a. Was the fire department a volunteer fire department?</p> <p>b. Was the contract for payment of compensation or payment of retirement benefits?</p>	_____	_____	_____
§ 123B.195	<p>6. Employment Contracts with School Board Members</p> <p>If the interested officer was a school board member and an employee of the school district:</p> <p>a. Was the employment contract not reasonably anticipated to exceed \$5,000 during the fiscal year?</p> <p>b. Was the contract entered into or renewed at a meeting where all board members were present and was the contract approved by a majority?</p>	_____	_____	_____
§ 471.88, subd. 12	<p>7. Contract for Construction Materials or Contracting Services</p> <p>If an interested officer contracted with the government unit to provide construction materials or services, or both:</p> <p>a. Was the contract done by a sealed bid process?</p> <p>b. Does the unit have a population of 1,000 or less according to the last federal census?</p> <p>c. When the question of the contract came before the unit for consideration, did the officer refrain from voting?</p>	_____	_____	_____
§ 471.88, subd. 13	<p>8. Contract for Renting Space</p> <p>If a public officer rented space in a public facility, was the rate commensurate with that paid by other members of the public?</p>	_____	_____	_____

Minn. Stat. Section	CONFLICTS OF INTEREST	Yes	No	Workpaper Reference
	<p>Part II. Purchase of Merchandise from Governmental Agency (Continued)</p> <p>2. Was the property or materials purchased by the public employee not needed for public purposes?</p> <p>3. Was the purchase made through sealed bids or public auction?</p> <p>4. Was the employee <u>not</u> directly involved with the sealed bid or auction process?</p> <p>5. Was the applicable "notice" law followed, and did the same require at least one week of published notice?</p> <p>This section does not apply to property or materials acquired or produced by political subdivisions for sale to the general public in the ordinary course of business.</p>	<p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>

Part III. Audit Conclusion
<p>The auditor must state a conclusion--based on this questionnaire and any other audit procedures performed--whether the client has complied with the legal provisions reviewed relating to conflicts of interest.</p>
<p>Conclusion: _____</p>
<p>_____</p>