“Let’s Get Ethical” Video Project

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Abstract

The City of Philadelphia (City) Public Integrity Laws help to ensure that City government operates with the highest ethical standards and instills public trust. However, these laws are complex and how they apply to the common ethical situations City employees encounter can be difficult to understand. A goal of the Office of the Chief Integrity Officer (Office) is to provide proactive outreach to City employees to build awareness for the City's Public Integrity Laws and also help employees understand how these laws apply to their daily work. The Office engages in various outreach initiatives including workshops, the Integrity Works website, and employee toolkits to reach this goal. The most recent outreach initiative is the “Let’s Get Ethical” video project. The purpose of the video project is to educate City employees on the City’s political activity and gift regulations in an informational and entertaining way. The videos will be utilized by the Office in a variety of training settings to enhance City employees’ understanding of these complex laws.
Introduction

The use of information technology and social media has put government employees and officials in the spotlight in recent years. As a result, there has been an increased demand for transparency and accountability in government. In response to this movement, the City of Philadelphia (City) developed Public Integrity Laws to govern the work and ethical behavior of City employees. In his second day of office in 2008, Mayor Nutter further demonstrated Philadelphia’s commitment to clear and straightforward governance by establishing the Office of the Chief Integrity Officer (Office). The Office was created to “eliminate the influence of political or financial interests in how the City conducts its business, and to ensure that decisions are based solely on what is in the public’s interest and nothing else” (“Strategic Plan 2014”).

The City’s Public Integrity Laws are effective and comprehensive; however, they can be challenging for City employees to interpret. The Office has focused its efforts on increasing awareness of the Public Integrity Laws through various outreach and communication efforts. To gauge employee understanding of the City’s Public Integrity Laws and their perceptions on ethical behavior in the workplace, the Office conducted the City of Philadelphia Employee Ethics Survey in 2014. The most popular response to the question, “in your opinion, what is one thing the City could do to build a strong ethical culture among City employees,” was “more education and training” (“Employee Ethics Survey 2014”). Subsequently, the Office increased outreach efforts through department workshops, a bi-annual newsletter, email, Twitter, and annual Integrity Week activities. In order to further enhance proactive outreach efforts, the Office embraced a new medium and initiated the “Let’s Get Ethical” video project (Project).
Problem Statement and Proposed Solution

The laws and regulations about which the Office most frequently answers questions originate from the City’s Board of Ethics Regulation 8 (Regulation 8), Section 10-107 of the Home Rule Charter (Charter), and the Mayor’s Executive Order on Gifts, 03-11 (Executive Order). Regulation 8 and the Charter outline appropriate behavior surrounding employee political activity. It extensively covers various political activity scenarios, including political activity while on duty or using City resources; collecting, receiving, or soliciting contributions intended for a political purpose; and permissible expression and political activity (Section 10-107 of the Home Rule Charter). The Executive Order applies to all Executive and Administrative branch employees, which comprises about 85% of the City’s workforce. The Executive Order includes guidelines for City employees regarding the solicitation and acceptance of gifts from certain sources. There are exceptions in the Executive Order in which the acceptance of a gift is permissible, including a “Gift to the City,” or a token of appreciation of nominal value on the occasion of a City employee’s appearance at an event, amongst others. In addition, the Executive Order provides instructions on how a City employee should respond when presented with a prohibited gift ("Executive Order No. 02-08").

Despite the publication of the Regulation 8 and the Executive Order, the Office has received an influx of inquiries seeking clarification over the years. In 2014, inquiries regarding gifts and honoraria accounted for 29% of the total inquiries made to the Office ("Annual Report 2014"). Additionally, 6% of inquiries were made with regard to political activity ("Annual Report 2014"). In addition to these two issues, the Office also regularly receives questions related to conflicts of interest and contracting. The Office has oversight for the Executive Order and routinely provides formal
guidance on such matters. Most questions regarding political activity are referred to the City Board of Ethics, who has jurisdiction over the City's political activity restrictions; however, requestors are also informally advised by the Office on simple questions that are easily answered by referencing Regulation 8. Recognizing the abundance of questions regarding gift regulations and political activity, the Office proposed the Project to address the need for clarification and to educate City employees on the Public Integrity Laws in an informational and entertaining way. The Project intends to make these regulations and issues more understandable for City employees and to create educational tools for future use by the City in workshops, trainings, and on the Integrity Works website.

**Project Execution**

The Project was staffed by eight interns from the Mayor's Internship Program. The Project group was then divided into two groups of four, each group tasked with creating two videos. Due to the high percentage of inquiries made to the Office regarding gift and honoraria regulations and political activity, the Office selected these issues as the subject areas for the videos. Each subject area has numerous rules and regulations, so both groups examined Regulation 8, the Charter, and the Executive Order in order to select specific rules to highlight in the videos. The rules addressed in the political activity videos include actions such as the use of social media for political purposes, using City resources, and wearing campaign items at work or in uniform. The rules addressed in the gift regulation videos include receiving gifts from companies vying for a City contract, the application of the “Gift to the City” exception, and the acceptance of honoraria.

To prepare for the Project, the interns met with a member of the Office of Innovation and Technology (OIT), who presented a tutorial on video production.
With that information at hand, the groups met weekly to develop video ideas, create storyboards, and write scripts. The scripts were then peer-edited and approved by the Office prior to the filming process. Over the following weeks, the groups met independently to assign roles, create props, practice the scripts, and film the videos. The final weeks were used to edit the videos and incorporate “bumpers,” or slides containing the legal information governing the rules on gifts and political activity for City employees. The videos were then reviewed and approved by the Office.

**Group Challenges and Limitations**

The most significant challenge of the Project was understanding the language of Regulation 8, the Charter, and the Executive Order. In order to create easy-to-understand videos for City employees, the groups had to clarify their own questions with the Office. Due to the nuanced and complex legalese in Regulation 8, the Charter, and the Executive Order, the groups had to create several drafts of the scripts in order to clearly explain the regulations. Furthermore, some rules applied only to specific City employees, so any exceptions had to be clearly defined in the videos. To do so, the groups utilized “bumpers” to fully explain the exceptions and clarifications by including the exact wording from Regulation 8, the Charter, and the Executive Order. The “bumpers” also provide guidance to City employees who may seek additional information on either of the issues presented in the videos. In using the wording verbatim, the groups ensured that City employees were given complete information regarding gift regulations and political activity.

In addition to this challenge, the groups found it difficult to translate the dense legal information into an engaging, entertaining format. Each group used a different approach – one parodied existing television shows and the other used unique components such as incorporating a Ben Franklin impersonator. Although the creative
ideas were readily available, the primary challenge was developing creative ideas into educational tools. It proved to be difficult to act out light-hearted scenarios while integrating legalese into the dialogue. The revision process was extensive as the Office reviewed scripts and multiple video edits before the final approval was given.

Furthermore, the groups faced more common challenges of group projects – schedule coordination and time management. Each of the interns worked in various City departments during the week, so much of the Project was completed on Friday afternoon sessions. Although Friday afternoons were dedicated to the Project, group members had to coordinate schedules and work on other days in order to complete filming. Due to the varied sets used in the videos, such as Love Park, the groups had to film around times of congestion in public locations. This, in addition to completing regular work assignments during the week, required significant time management for both groups to complete the Project by the established deadlines.

Conclusion

At its inception in 2008, the Office of the Chief Integrity Officer was tasked with “promoting honesty, integrity, and transparency in City government” ("Executive Order No. 02-08"). Since then, the Office has created, organized, and disseminated educational tools to increase awareness and observance of the City's Public Integrity Laws. Despite efforts to publicize and distribute information, the Office recognized a need to translate nuanced information into a clear and engaging format for City employee consumption. As a result, the “Let’s Get Ethical” video project was initiated. Due to the high percentage of inquiries regarding gift regulations and political activity, the interns from the Mayor’s Internship Program created videos explaining the rules outlined in City's Board of Ethics Regulation 8, Section 10-107 of the Home Rule Charter, and the Mayor’s Executive Order on Gifts, 03-11. These videos will be used in
workshops, trainings, and on the Integrity Works website in order to educate City employees on complex ethical issues in an informative and entertaining way. Moving forward, the Office can use these videos as templates to continue explaining other complex ethical issues City employees encounter and addressing City employee questions.
References


“Regulation No. 8: Political Activity.” *Board of Ethics*. City of Philadelphia Board of Ethics. Web. 27 July 2015.