

Course Welcome Page

[Understanding Conflicts & Conflicts of Interest in Developmental Disabilities Councils](#)

Course Status:

[Print Your Certificate](#)



Alt-Text: NACDD and iTACC Logos

Alt Text: iTACC Logo: Information and Technical Assistance Center for Councils on Developmental Disabilities

Welcome to Understanding Conflicts & Conflicts of Interest in Developmental Disabilities Councils!

What is your role?

Before we begin, what is your role with the DD Council? *(Required)*

- ☐ Council Member
- ☐ Council Staff
- ☐ Other

Other

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Next, Click Start Here-Introduction and Contact

Start Here- Introduction and Contact



Course Overview: Welcome to Understanding Conflicts and Conflicts of Interest in DD Councils. This course will explore conflicts among Council members and how they might be prevented or resolved. We'll also examine how the active participation of Council members in other organizations and advocacy efforts can be controversial.

This course will focus on the following:

- Types of Conflict
- Conflict Resolution
- Conflicts of Interest
- Real & Perceived Conflicts of Interest
- Assurance & Public Perception
- Dual Roles
- Avoiding Conflicts of Interest

Course Objectives:

In this course, you will:

- Describe common types of conflict
- Explain possible solutions for conflict
- Define *conflict of interest*
- Describe different types of conflict of interest
- Distinguish between real and perceived conflict of interest
- Discuss dual roles and how to handle them
- Explain “assurance”
- State ways to avoid conflicts of interest

Contact Us Info (is a reusable block – ITAAC Contact Us)

Meet Character: (Reusable Block - “ITACC Meet Character”)



Meet _____: “Hi, I’m _____. I am a Council member and enjoy my role serving the DD community for a better quality of life. The day-to-day work with my colleagues is great. However, even within great work climates, conflicts sometimes arise. One of the best ways to reduce their impact is to anticipate them, understand them, and prevent or resolve them. Let’s learn about conflicts and conflicts of interest together. Click Lesson 1 to begin.”

Lesson 1: Conflict

Conflicts are inevitable (sure to happen) in organizations and groups, but they don’t have to be too damaging if we understand the various kinds and how to resolve them.

First, what do we mean by conflict?

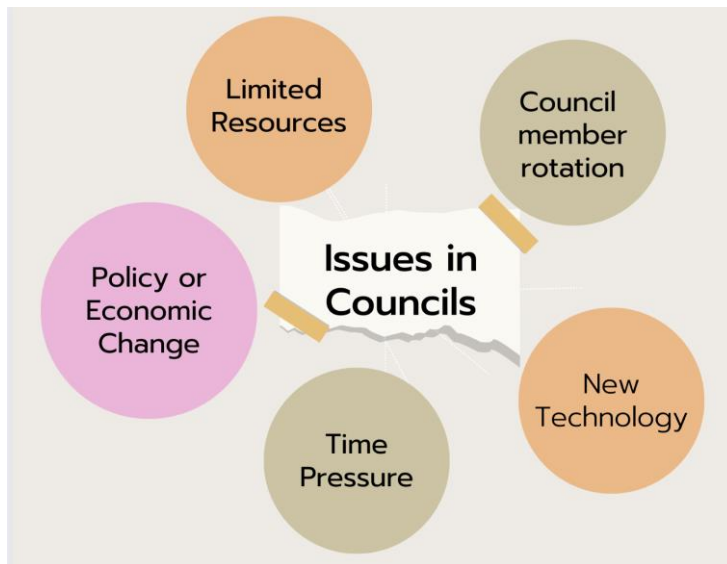
Definition

Conflict occurs when there is a clash or sharp disagreement. This can be a mental struggle resulting from needs, drives, wishes, or demands that are in opposition or are not compatible. It is often the result of hurt feelings, anger, bruised egos, or poor communication.



Conflict among Council members

Ironically, people's creativity, passion, and conviction for Council work can contribute to conflict. Also at play is the diversity of thoughts, worldviews, and lived experiences. Though enriching, the variety of perspectives can lead to misunderstandings.



Additionally, Councils work with limited resources and are often under pressure. They deal with policy change (economic or governmental), council member rotation, and new technology. These factors can cause stress and volatility (quickness to anger).

Character: “We’ve covered a general definition and the backdrop of conflict among Council members. Click on the ThinkSpot to reflect on likely instances of conflict in Councils.”

ThinkSpot: What are some specific examples of conflict you think would happen in Councils?

Lesson 2: Types of Conflict



(Jane made graphic in Canva)

Character: "In this lesson, we will cover common types of conflict: interests, values, personality, relationship, task, structural, and cultural. Some of them interrelate. We will also explore how to either prevent or resolve them. Click on Topic 1 to begin with interest and values conflicts."

Topic 1: Interest & Values Conflicts

Interest Conflict

Potential Scenario: Esther is a Council member working on an initiative offering technology-based training to people with IDD, especially those living in rural areas. Once they are equipped with in-demand tech skills, they enjoy increased employment opportunities.

Carrie is working on the same initiative but believes it should expand to cities. Even though data shows that Esther's focus makes the most sense, Carrie has several IDD family members in urban areas, which makes her adamant that they will not leave out city dwellers.



(Jane got image from Google Images)

As with Esther and Carrie, Council members often have different points of view about Council business (state plan activities, funding decisions, position statements). These are commonly called “interest conflicts” because of a perception that different interests compete with one another or that one has to “trade-off” what they believe is vital to get along and maintain a friendly relationship with other Council members.

Values Conflict

Values Conflict is similar to Interest Conflict.

Values Conflict occurs when members and staff have fundamental differences in identities and values, including differences in politics, religion, ethics, norms, and other deeply held beliefs. Even if people do not discuss these topics directly, the clash of values sometimes surfaces when making decisions about work—who to work with, what projects to take on, which groups should be prioritized, etc.



Here is an example:

Two Council members, Carolina and Jorge, are working on an employment initiative that provides customized employment for job seekers. They've collaborated to create webinars targeted at project participants, job coaches, families, and affiliated agencies. The webinar content outlines the customized employment process.

Carolina believes Jorge is crafting some of the language in a way that stereotypes and pigeonholes people from certain backgrounds, suggesting they are most fit for manual labor. Jorge disagrees, saying he is presenting known preferences supported by statistics and data, even from direct conversations with close acquaintances. Carolina believes that some research and stated preferences may reflect negative and limiting indoctrination that people aren't aware of. She says it is their job as public servants to try to overturn people's subconscious beliefs about themselves, others, and who should do what in society.

In the above example, Carolina and Jorge both have great conviction about the customized employment initiative. They care deeply for individuals with IDD. Still, they have a values and perspectives clash on how to conduct the work.

Disputes involving values tend to heighten defensiveness, distrust, and alienation. It is important to prevent or quickly resolve them.

Interest and Values Conflict Resolution

Some approaches to reduce friction when people's interests, values, and beliefs are at odds:

[Interests and Values Conflict Resolution.mp4](#)



Link to [audio transcript of video](#)

This is an [excellent resource on Values Conflict](#) from Harvard Law School:

Character: “Interest and Values Conflict is common in organizations. This is because we all have different values and priorities. Click on the ThinkSpot to reflect on your and another person’s interests and values.”

ThinkSpot: What are a few of your top values in life? Put them in order starting from the most important to you. Then, think of a friend, co-worker, family member, or other acquaintance whose values you know well. Create a list of their top values in order of importance. How might the two of you disagree or clash in a situation?

Topic 2: Personality & Relationship Conflicts

Scenario: Kayla and Phillip are creating promotional materials for a device-sharing initiative for the DD community. This includes infographics, webpages, posters, and flyers. Kayla uses a lot of exclamation points, bright colors, and quirky patterns. Phillip believes her style is too playful and will make the Council appear babyish. They both believe in the program but have been arguing about design choices.

Personality (or Relationship) Conflicts arise from differences in personality, social style, personal taste, communication style, etc. In organizations, people who would not ordinarily meet in real life are thrown together and must try to get along. It's no surprise that personality and relationship conflicts are common.

Poor communication practices are often the cause of personality and relationship conflict. People do not communicate well when strong emotions are involved. They become defensive and allow assumptions and stereotypes to take over.

Personality and Relationship Conflict Resolution

These are possible Council approaches to reduce friction when people's personalities, tastes, communication styles, etc., are at odds:

- Research good communication practices for a variety of situations.
- Make time, at orientations and other meetings, to reflect on and discuss good communication practices with Council members and staff.
- Include education on how to balance "inquiry" and "advocacy" and how to check assumptions
- Raise awareness of personal filters, cultural lenses, how we see and experience the world, and how to adapt to different personalities.
- Help Council members distinguish between impact and intent, and to react accordingly
- Foster greater acceptance of differences in personalities and dispositions

Members should also feel empowered to reduce tensions on their own. Here is an example.

Mike and Farah have been working on Tech Launch, a project to help IDD individuals build website portfolios and skills for tech jobs. They have very different social styles. Mike only speaks when communication needs to happen. Farah, on the other hand, is verbose and expressive. Mike has not enjoyed being on the project lately because he finds Farah overbearing and blunt. One afternoon, Mike asks her to grab a coffee with him at the downstairs coffee shop. Farah is surprised but agrees. After a brief awkward period, they relax into friendly laughter about their pets; they can relate to each other's exasperation with cute but mischievous multi-poops. Eventually, Mike mentions that he's occasionally felt pushed around and judged by Farah when making project decisions. Farah says, "Really? I'm sorry. I don't mean to come off that way. People always think I'm bossing them around when I'm just excited about things and naturally blunt (direct)." She adds that she greatly respects Mike's career coaching expertise.

These are important individual approaches to reduce friction when personalities, tastes, communication styles, etc. are at odds:

[Personality or Relationship Conflicts - Resolution.mp4](#)



[Audio transcript of Personality & Relationships Conflict Resolution video.](#)

Character: "Personalities vary as widely as interests and values. One person may be talkative while another is quiet. Another person may be realistic while another is idealistic. There is no 'right' or 'wrong' personality or disposition (way of being), but differences can cause heated disagreements. They may also interpret each other negatively. In the next ThinkSpot, you'll reflect on your personality differences with others."

ThinkSpot: Describe a situation where you've had a conflict with a person in a work or volunteer setting based not on a difference of values or interests but personality, taste, or style. How did you behave and how did the other person behave? How was the conflict resolved?

Topic 3: Cultural Conflict

Cultural Differences

Cultural Conflict can feel similar to personality and relationship conflict, but it is different in that it is not rooted in clashes over individual characteristics or style. Rather, it is about differences in cultural values, beliefs, and norms.

Problems

Within social services, dealings across cultures may lead to worse outcomes than those conducted within the same culture. This is because different perspectives, values, and communication styles sometimes result in misunderstandings. In turn, misunderstandings can lead to people not seeking integrative or value-creating solutions. Why Do Cultural Differences Cause Problems?

1. Stereotyping

[Stereotyping.mp4](#)



[Text Transcript of Stereotyping Video](#)

1) Culturally Biased Interpretations

[Culturally Biased Interpretations.mp4](#)



[Text Transcript of Culturally Biased Interpretations video](#)

Cultural Conflict Resolution

Participation in today's global society requires respecting members of all cultures, even when their norms differ. Council members and staff must be sure to:

- ✓ Practice self-awareness
- ✓ Check unconscious biases
- ✓ Be mindful of cultural filters
- ✓ Check cultural biases
- ✓ Acknowledge no single culture is "the best" or "right"
- ✓ Continually learn about other cultures so that you aren't easily surprised by differences and don't handle them in a sloppy or disrespectful way
- ✓ Continually interact with people from other cultures (Proximity [closeness] and connection foster compassion and respect).

Character: "Cultural conflict can exist in many ways (approaches to parenting, frequency of drinking, emphasis on sports, behavior at weddings, deference to superiors, treatment of employees, etc.) In the next ThinkSpot, you'll reflect on cultural conflicts you've experienced."

ThinkSpot: What cultural conflict have you experienced relating to different social groups? What cultural conflict have you experienced relating to region, nation, or ethnicity?

Topic 4: Structural (or Task) Conflicts

Potential Scenario: Amber has been clashing with Hart about formatting documents for meetings. She wants him to adhere to the style guide in use for some time, but Hart thinks it needs to be updated. He insists that his supervisor, Candace, approves of his changes.

Structural or Task Conflict

Structural or Task Conflicts can occur between Council members or Council members and staff. It is when there needs to be more understanding about the boundaries of roles and responsibilities and where power is shared. This may involve concrete issues related to members' work assignments: who is supposed to do what--how, when, and where. It can also include disputes about how to divide resources; differences of opinion on procedures and policies; managing work expectations; and judgments & interpretation of data.



(Jane got this image from Google images)

Structural or Task Conflict Resolution

Cont'd Scenario: To resolve the formatting issue, Amber asks Candace and another supervisor, Ellis, to join her and Hart in a meeting. During the meeting, Ellis asks thoughtful questions, listening carefully to Amber and Hart and trying to understand them. Hart and Amber also hear

each other's perspectives. It comes out that Hart's formatting style is rooted in his accessibility training.

Ellis and Candace ask Amber and Hart what they propose to do about the conflict. Amber and Hart agree that they should collaborate on a re-work of the style guides. They think 2 or 3 hours of 'head-down' work could be enough to complete the new style guide and have it ready for distribution.

In the above situation, leaders and managers intervened with the following approach:

- Listen actively and ask questions
- Verbalize each party's position and confirm understanding
- Facilitate collaborative problem-solving
- Encourage the parties to brainstorm solutions (when parties develop solutions together rather than have them imposed by others, they are more likely to behave in line with the solutions.)

Watch this video which addresses other ways that structural or task conflict can be prevented or resolved:

[Task or Structural Conflict Resolution.mp4](#)



[Text transcript of Structural or Task Conflict Resolution Video](#)

Character: "Conflict in organizations is common. Sometimes it is even healthy because it can help people better understand and connect. It can also foster social and emotional learning. Next, let's check our knowledge about the different types of conflict."

Knowledge Check

80% to pass

1. Caroline and Marcy are planning background music for a fundraising event. They both want upbeat music, but Caroline prefers pop while Marcy likes hip-hop. Which type of conflict is this?

-- **Personality or Relationship Conflict**

-- Interest or Values Conflict

-- Task or Structural Conflict

-- Cultural Conflict

Feedback: This is personality or relationship conflict since Caroline and Marcy's disagreement is a matter of personal taste.

2. Yen is Vietnamese and is often very blunt in the way she gives feedback. Her comments can feel harsh to Rick, who works with her. He's used to negative critique being softened by positive comments and worded in a way that is more delicate. Which statement below applies?

--This is a task or structural conflict because Yen and Rick don't agree on who should be doing what tasks.

--This could be personality conflict (Yen is more blunt, Rick is more tactful), but it may also be cultural conflict because Yen's culture may favor bluntness and not softening criticisms while Rick's culture may be more indirect and delicate about them.

-- This is a conflict of values and interests because Yen's background makes her concerned for a specific group while Rick's background makes him concerned for

a different group. They both want to help people, but they differ on who to prioritize.

Feedback: This is possibly a personality conflict and possibly a cultural conflict. It may be Yen's personality that is blunt and direct, but it may also be her culture. Rick may also have a different personality, or a different cultural influence.

3. What are two things people tend to do that cause cultural conflicts?

- a) Seek out information and ask questions
- b) Stereotype others and have culturally biased interpretations
- c) Speak in others' native language and learn their norms
- d) Behave with compassion and react with sensitivity

Feedback: The tendency to stereotype others and have culturally biased interpretations are two common reasons for cultural conflicts.

4. _____ is when there is a lack of understanding about the boundaries of roles and responsibilities, and where power is shared. This may involve concrete issues related to members' work assignments: who is supposed to do what, how, when, and where.

-- Structural or Task Conflict

- Cultural Conflict
- Interests or Values Conflict
- Personality or Relationship Conflict

Feedback: Structural or Task Conflict is when there is a lack of understanding about the boundaries of roles and responsibilities, and where power is shared. This may involve concrete issues related to members' work assignments: who is supposed to do what, how, when, and where.

5. Which approaches are recommended when personality or relationship conflicts occur? (Select all that apply.)

- try to understand the other person before trying to be understood.
- focus on what happened rather than your interpretation of what happened.
- emphasize commonalities and unity between you and your colleague.
- do not try to resolve the conflict; it will go away on its own.

Feedback: These are some recommended approaches for resolution when personality or relationship conflicts occur:

- Try to understand the other person before trying to be understood yourself.
- Focus on what happened rather than your interpretation of what happened
- Emphasize commonalities and unity between you and your colleague.
- Gently bring up the source of tension and listen to what they have to say. Be interested and empathetic. Don't argue or defend your position.
- If the conflict persists, bring a manager or supervisor into the situation. Do so, however, with a sincere desire to resolve the conflict with maturity and respect, not to create or increase hostility or tension.

Lesson 3: Conflicts of Interest

Another concern for Councils is conflicts of interest. (This is not the same as values or interest conflict.)

While Councils value the active participation of stakeholders, state agencies, DD Act agencies, allied professionals, and leaders in disability rights, this involvement can sometimes create problems.

Real or perceived conflicts of interest, which the DD Council strongly discourages, can arise.

What is a conflict of interest?



(Image is from Jane's Canva Pro account)

Generally, a **conflict of interest** occurs when...

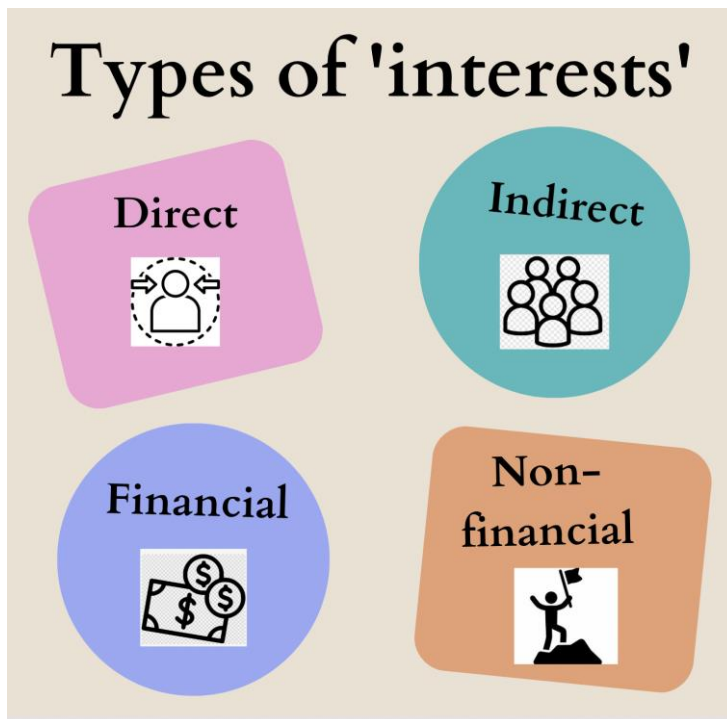
- A Council member's personal interests or outside activities compete with the Council's objectives, goals, or principles.
- A Council member or family member appears to gain or benefit personally from their position on the Council.

Character: Most organizations strongly discourage conflicts of interest. The idea is that a council member's first responsibility is to the Council. A member should set aside their interests and do what's best for the Council, colleagues, and constituents. It's important to be careful, vigilant, and informed to avoid conflicts of interest. Click on Topic 1 to learn about different types."

Topic 1: Types of Conflicts of Interest

There are four types of *interests*:

Types of 'interests'



(Jane made graphic above with CANVA)

1. **Direct Interests** – You, a close family member, or your personal business involvement stands to gain.
2. **Indirect Interests** – People or groups with whom you associate (or their close connections) stand to gain.
3. **Financial Interests** – You stand to gain or lose financially.
4. **Non-financial Interests** – You stand to gain or lose in some way other than financially (status, power, upward mobility, recognition, reputation, fame, etc.)

Although conflicts of interest can present in many different ways, here are some common ones:

Three common types of Conflicts of Interest:

[Common Conflicts of Interest.mp4](#)



[Text transcript of video \(common types of conflict of interest\)](#)

Here's how a conflict of interest might look within the DD Council:

Potential Scenario: Amy is a Council member on a committee making food, entertainment, and venue decisions for a public event. The committee was about to make some final choices when they discovered that Amy's 20 yr.-old niece is the lead singer of one of the local bands being considered. Amy has an additional conflict of interest in that her husband is the property manager of the dance hall being considered. Amy and her husband stand to gain financially if his venue is chosen. Several people on the Council are upset that Amy did not disclose her connections before the vote.

It turns out that Amy did know her husband's position was a conflict of interest. However, she did not think the connection with her niece mattered since money was not involved (most music acts were volunteering to perform in exchange for exposure.)

Character: Conflicts of interest are a concern for all types of organizations, from businesses to social services to schools and universities. Click on the ThinkSpot to reflect on the conflicts of interest described above.

ThinkSpot: Why is Amy's connection with her niece still a conflict of interest even though the niece's band won't be paid for performing? Do you think money-based conflicts of interest are a more significant violation than others? Explain.

Topic 2: Real or Perceived Conflicts of Interest

A conflict of interest matters even if it is not real but simply *perceived*.

The DD Act, Section 124 (c) (5) (D) says that Council members will never vote on matters in which they would benefit financially or gain in other ways, or even *appear* to benefit financially or gain in other ways.



(photo is from Canva – Jane's Canva Pro account)

What is meant by 'perceived conflict of interest'?

A perceived conflict of interest means that, regardless of circumstances, you aren't favoring anybody or doing anything for gain in any way—either for yourself or people close to you—but it still might look to outsiders like you are.

Consider the previous example with Council member Amy on a committee making decisions for a public event—her 20 yr.-old niece is in a band trying to be part of the entertainment. It may be the case that Amy has no intention of favoring her niece's band; she may even prefer a different band and intend to encourage the committee to choose that band.

The situation is still a perceived conflict of interest because a member of one of the bands trying out is Amy's relative. It will likely look to many people like a conflict of interest. Amy must either recuse herself (step down) from having a say in who performs, or her niece's band must withdraw their bid to perform at the event.



(this pic is from Google images)

Avoiding the Appearance of Conflict of Interest

- Council members have a responsibility to prevent the appearance of a conflict of interest.
- Members should never use the organization as a platform for personal benefit or gain
- A perceived conflict is often more damaging than a real one since it is harder to resolve.

Character: “Conflicts of interest can be controversial, whether real or perceived. Since they must be dealt with even when only perceived, the Council must always be vigilant (watchful) about involvements and circumstances. Click on the next topic for more examples of conflict of interest.”

Topic 3: Examples of Conflicts of Interest



(image is from Jane's Canva Pro account)

The following are conflicts of interest:

- ❖ Council members who also serve in leadership positions for organizations that apply for Council funding (This is considered a Dual Role, which will be discussed more in Lesson 4).
- ❖ Council members with immediate family members who receive Council funding
- ❖ Council members or their family members who work for agency or organizations that apply for Council funding
- ❖ Council members who want to be actively involved in a Council funded project as a participant
- ❖ Council members who supervise, hire, or encourage the hiring of close family members
- ❖ Council members accept gifts, discounts, or favors from an affiliate, constituent, or supplier of the Council (unless the gifts, discounts, or favors are available to everyone).

Commented [NJ1]: Not in the PowerPoint. Jane added from resources about conflicts of interest. Check with SME if they are okay.

There are more specific examples, along with how they can be handled:

	Situation	Result	Recommendation
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	A member serves on the Council and on the Board of Directors Advisory Committee of a disability organization that applies for a grant through the Council. (This is called a Dual Role.)	Even though the Council may not receive direct financial benefit from the grant, there may appear to be a conflict of interest.	The Council member can publicly disclose the conflict (this should be noted in the meeting minutes) and recuse themselves from discussions and voting on the topic.
	A Council member has a spouse, significant other, or immediate family member (or other relationship identified in State or Territory guidelines) receiving funds from a Council-funded project.	This would constitute a conflict of interest for the Council member.	The Council member could resign appointment to the Council, or the family member could step away from the grant-funded position.
	A Council member participates in the development of a request for proposal outlining the activities of a project. The Council will fund the project, and the Council member's employer will compete for the funding.	The Council member's involvement may constitute a perception of a conflict of interest. There appears to be an unfair advantage to other entities competing for Council funds.	The DD Council can publicly disclose the conflict (this should be noted in the meeting minutes) and recuse themselves from discussions and voting on the topic. If the project is funded AND the Council member is a self-advocate or family member AND is a managing employee (in any capacity) for the entity, the Council member must resign their membership, or

Commented [NJ2]: For the SME: Perhaps need more explanation for why this appears to be a conflict of interest...?

			the entity can decline the funds. (Section 125 (b)(3)(B)).
	A DD Council member wants to be actively involved in a Council funded project as a participant (examples of projects: leadership training program, peer mentor training project)	The Council member's involvement could be perceived as a conflict of interest. This is because Council members' duties include approving, funding, and monitoring activities within the state plan. In addition, the Council member is a public official serving on a public body using public money. As such, it is important to avoid the perception that the Council member is approving and funding projects to help themselves.	The DD Council member should not assume a role as a participant in Council-funded projects. The Council member can be a participant after their term ends.

(All images in the chart are from Jane's Canva Pro account)

Character: It can be challenging for people who like involvement in related causes and organizations to avoid conflicts of interest. In many cases, the conflicts are entirely unintended. In the next ThinkSpot, consider a time when you've had a conflict of interest.

ThinkSpot: Describe a time when you were in an actual or perceived conflict of interest. Was the interest direct or indirect? Financial or non-financial? How was the situation resolved?

Scenarios – Check for Understanding

Could use these scenarios as “checks for understanding” (instead of the ThinkSpot)

****Scenario 1**:** Angel is a Council member. She is also serving on the board of another organization that helps those with developmental disabilities. This organization, however, does not apply for grants. Is there a conflict of interest here?

Answer: Since Angel's other organization does not apply for grants, this is likely not a conflict of interest. She should disclose her position anyway, however, to make sure everyone is aware of the situation and that potential issues can be monitored.

=====

****Scenario 2**** Hector is a Council member. His 7-yr old daughter attends Wilson Elementary School. Her teacher, Caroline Murtry, is married to a man whose organization receives funds for a Council funded project. Is this a conflict of interest for Hector?

Answer: This probably needs a closer connection to constitute a conflict of interest for Hector. Conflicts of interest usually occur with immediate family members or significant others.

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****Scenario 3**** Perla has been a Council member for three years. In the past, she never wanted to participate in any projects, but now there is a senior citizens initiative that she wants to be involved in because it affects people in her neighborhood. A fellow Council member, Elly, says there is no problem with this. Is Elly right?

Answer: Elly is wrong about this. There *is* a conflict of interest when a Council member wants to participate in Council-funded projects. Perla can participate only after her term as a Council member ends.

Lesson 4: Dual Roles

What is a Dual Role?

A dual role exists if a Council member also serves in a leadership or decision-making role of another entity seeking Council funding.

Commented [NJ3]: I think it would be good if the SME can provide reasons why this is problematic. Perhaps...three or four specific bad outcomes and how they caused harm. It sounds a little abrupt to just define it. We're giving the "what" here but not the "why" (I would come up with the 'why' myself, but I think the SME(s) could do a much better job of that...)



(Jane got this image from Adobe stock)

How to Handle Dual Roles

- ❖ If you are a member of the Council *and* a Board of Directors of an agency or organization applying for Council funds, you should prioritize the Council's goals and objectives.

Possible reasons that can be given (Jane is suggesting these)

-- Council is more likely to get things done when everyone agrees. If there is a premise of "Council first," members are more in the mindset of cooperation with each other in the name of loyalty to the Council.

-- The Council's goals and objectives pertain primarily to bettering the quality of those with disabilities. This requires subordinating financial gains to social well-being.

- ❖ Council members in dual roles should take great care not to influence any other Council member to gain their support or sway them to vote for or against proposals or decisions that may benefit their organization.



Character: "Holding dual roles doesn't have to be a problem if you are responsible about disclosing your involvements and positions outside of the Council. Conflicts of interest can always be dealt with responsibly and respectfully, but only when everyone knows what's going on and takes corrective action. Click on the next lesson, which covers assurance and public perception."

Lesson 5: Assurance & Public Perception

The DD Act on Assurance

Commented [NJ4]: Again, I think this content would be enriched with some 'why' explanation. Doesn't have to be long or too in-depth, but perhaps 2 to 3 reasons why this is expected and why it is beneficial to put the Council first (assuming the other organization is a noble cause as well).

The plan shall provide an assurance that no member of such Council will cast a vote on any matter that would provide direct financial benefit to the member or otherwise give the appearance of a conflict of interest. Section 124 (c) (5) (D) .

THE DD ACT ON ASSURANCE

The plan shall provide an assurance that no member of such Council will cast a vote on any matter that would provide direct financial benefit to the member or otherwise give the appearance of a conflict of interest. Section 124 (c) (5) (D)



(Jane made the above graphic in Canva)

Character: "Voting on matters where one stands to benefit financially is obviously a cause for concern. This goes in the other direction too. A Council member voting on an issue where they stand to lose financially is just as much a conflict of interest. Anyone who votes on a matter should have no financial stake in it one way or another. Let's learn more about the assurance the Council provides in topic 1."

Topic 1: Assurance

An assurance is a pledge or guarantee that leaves no doubt about a matter.



(Jane got the picture above from Canva)

To maintain federal compliance, Councils must submit assurances (including conflict of interest) with their 5-year plan to the following offices:

- Administration for Community Living
- Administration on Disabilities
- Office of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

How do Councils provide assurance?

[Assurance.mp4](#)



Video Script for video above:

Councils use a variety of methods to provide assurance. The most common are:

- Conflict of Interest policies. These can be State or Territory level policies for Governor appointees or Council level policies for members.
- Information forms. The Council keeps and updates these forms annually. They contain specifics about Council member involvement on other boards and organizations.
- Code of Conduct policies adopted by the Council. **A code of conduct policy outlines the appropriate behavior employees are expected to follow in the workplace toward their colleagues, supervisors, and overall organization.**
- Recusing oneself from the room when discussions or voting occurs. This means disqualifying oneself as a judge or decision-maker.

Character: "Assurances are important because they build trust. They assure the public that the Council and its members will always act with integrity. Next, let's check our understanding of assurances."

Knowledge Check:

1. To which offices must the Council submit assurances? (Select all that apply.)

- a) **Administration for Community Living**
- b) **Administration on Disabilities**
- c) Administration for Community Engagement
- d) **Office of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities**
- e) None of the above

Feedback: The Council must submit assurances in their 5-year plan to the Administration for Community Living, the Administration on Disabilities, and the Office of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities.

2. Conflict of Interest policies can be _____ or _____ level policies for Governor appointees or Council level policies for members.

- a) State; Tertiary
- b) **State; Territory**
- c) Local; Managerial
- d) Local; Federal
- e) None of the above

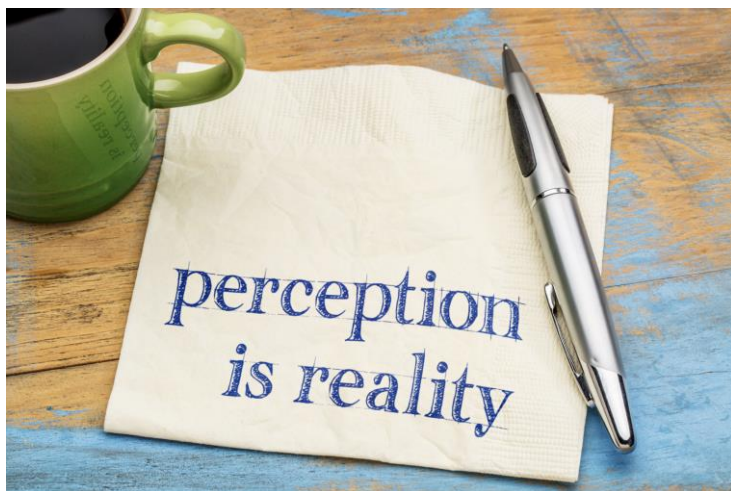
Feedback: Conflict of Interest policies can be **State** or **Territory** level policies for Governor appointees or Council level policies for members.

3. A Council member who recuses themselves from voting:

- a) Gets the final say in what will happen
- b) Chooses how and when a vote will take place.
- c) **Disqualifies themselves from being a judge or decision-maker**
- d) Decides how much funding will be given to a project.
- e) None of the above.

Feedback: A Council member who recuses themselves from voting disqualifies themselves from being a judge or decision-maker.

Topic 2: Public perception



(image is from Jane's Canva Pro account)

Scenario: Casey is a Council member working closely with Community Dispute Resolution Centers (CDRC). The Council provides disability awareness training for CDRC's mediators, conflict coaches, and staff. This helps them customize their public assistance to be accessible to anybody and more effective overall. The Council also helps CDRC with public outreach so that more of the DD community is aware of CDRC's free or low-cost services.

For two years, Casey had no official role in CDRC. However, in the past year, she's assumed a position on CDRC's Board of Directors. When the grant for CDRC comes up within the Council, there appears to be a conflict of interest. Casey now seems to have a reason to favor CDRC over other grants.

Casey is aware of how the situation might look, so she makes a point of having little input on the CDRC grant and lets her colleagues make decisions around it. Another Council member, Ken, tells her, however, that this is not enough, that Casey should not be in the room at all for discussions about CDRC, and she should not speak—in meetings or outside of them—to other Council members about her work with CDRC.

Ken is making sure the Council upholds integrity. He is being mindful of public perception.

Thomas Jefferson enunciated the basic principle of public service: "When a man assumes a public trust, he should consider himself as public property." This sentiment has been echoed by many others, becoming a familiar principle over time: "Public service is a public trust."

Council members must always act in ways that maintain and build public trust. This means not allowing the perception that any unethical behavior is occurring in Council business and affairs. This is important because even perceptions of misconduct or unethical behavior can have long-term, sometimes permanent negative impacts.

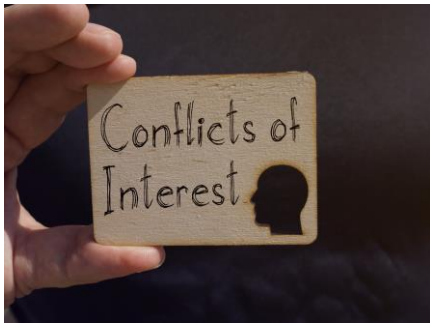
If a Council member is innocent of wrong-doing, but the public believed for a time that there was wrong-doing, it may never see that Council member or the Council in the same way again. This is because there is a tendency for people to latch onto and continue to believe the first things they learned about a person, as well as the worst things they heard about them. Corrected or positive information that may surface later often does not change impressions already made. Thus, a Council member being “cleared” of wrong-doing may not matter; public trust may already be irrevocably damaged.

JANE START HERE – Monday 2/20/23

Character: Your perception of something is how you think about it or your impressions of it. Public perception of something - such as the Council - is how people feel about it or their impressions. The public having a positive perception of the Council is important because feeling good about the Council means supporting the Council. Support, in turn, lends itself to credibility (a good reputation) for the Council. This can have a ripple effect. If the public supports the Council, other entities, like the government and the private sector, are compelled to cooperate with and help fund its initiatives. Individuals are also more helpful and cooperative.

Google It (got this idea from an HDI document in the LearnDash for HDler’s course – it’s about different kinds of activities): Google “public perception” and skim or read one or two short articles about the concept. What ideas or insights did you get from these articles that are not mentioned here?

Lesson 6: Avoiding Conflicts of Interest



(Jane got the above image from Canva)

Clear and open discussion is the path to ensure the Council maintains not just the public perception of integrity but also the reality of it while members actively engage in other important disability-related work.

If you are unsure if something is a conflict of interest - since conflicts of interest can be so varied - it is best to clarify before anything happens and you are unknowingly in violation.

What are some ways the Council can avoid conflicts of interest?

[Avoiding Conflicts of Interest.mp4](#)



Text of the video:

- 1) Draft a formal conflict of interest policy. It should be in writing and updated regularly.
- 2) Make sure everyone to whom the conflict-of-interest policy applies is aware that it applies to them. Do not just say it applies to “everyone in the Council” because this is vague and will lead to confusion. Be specific about categories, departments, roles, and titles.
- 3) Consider what constitutes a conflict of interest and describe as many common situations and types of conflict of interest as you can think of. Include definitions when relevant. Make these situations known to everyone. Discuss preventing and eliminating situations.
- 4) Make available at least two separate chains of reporting to ensure anonymity and freedom from repercussion and to encourage Council members to come forward with information concerning conflicts.
- 5) Lay out a step-by-step procedure by which alleged conflicts are examined and designate who conducts this investigation.

- 6) Consider and then clearly state all potential resulting actions the Council may take in response to a disclosed conflict, or a situation found to constitute a conflict after formal investigation.
- 7) Actively maintain the policy by continuing to add to or alter it in response to the Council's needs. In this way, the policy becomes a "living document" that grows and changes with every new situation encountered.
- 8) Apply the policy consistently. Charge the policy committee with continued oversight of the application process so employees, applicants, and the public understand that the Council is vigilant in its efforts to identify conflicts of interest and committed to preventing them in the first place.

This document provides a more comprehensive view of conflicts of interest:

<https://www.ganintegrity.com/compliance-glossary/conflict-of-interest/>

Character: "It is better to err on the side of caution regarding conflicts of interest. Even if you don't think something is a conflict of interest but think it might be or might appear to be one, you should speak about it to a supervisor. If you fail to disclose something that might be a conflict of interest, and it later turns out that it is one, you would be questioned on why you didn't discuss it with anyone. Now let's pull together everything we've learned with a comprehensive final exam."

Final Exam

1. **True** or False: Limited resources, Council member rotation, and time pressure are common reasons for conflict and issues in Councils.

Feedback: True. Limited resources, Council member rotation, policy or economic change, time pressure, and new technology are common reasons for conflict and issues in Councils.

2. Values Conflict occurs when: (Choose the best answer.)

A) **members and staff have fundamental differences in identities and values, which can include differences in politics, religion, ethics, norms, and other deeply held beliefs.**

B) members and staff have differences in personality, preferences, tastes, communication styles, and lifestyle.

C) members and staff are unclear about who is supposed to do what within the organization, or how they are supposed to carry out their responsibilities.

D) members and staff do not inform each other about potential conflicts of interest or appearances of conflict of interest.

Feedback: Values Conflict occurs when members and staff have fundamental differences in identities and values, which can include differences in politics, religion, ethics, norms, and other deeply held beliefs.

3. Jenni and Neeraj are working on a PowerPoint presentation for the next staff & Council member meeting. Neeraj wants to use classic colors like navy blue and maroon. Jenni thinks bright colors like yellow and royal blue are more in order. Though this is just a color-choice, they really clash over it. What type of conflict is this?

- a) Personality
- b) Values/Interests
- c) Cultural
- d) Task
- e) None of the above

Feedback: This is most likely a simple personality conflict in that it's about different tastes in colors and aesthetics. Though such preferences can stem from deeper beliefs about colors, for the most part, we consider liking some colors over others as simple personal preference relating to our personal tastes – a difference of personality.

4. What are things people can do to prevent or resolve cultural conflict? (Select all that apply.)

- a) Practice self-awareness
- b) Check cultural biases
- c) Determine which cultures are superior to others
- d) Avoid too much interaction with others

e) Continually learn about other cultures

Feedback: The correct answers are A, B, and E. These are ways people can resolve or prevent cultural conflict:

- ✓ Practice self-awareness
- ✓ Check unconscious biases
- ✓ Be mindful of cultural filters
- ✓ Check cultural biases
- ✓ Acknowledge no single culture is "the best" or "right"
- ✓ Continually learn about other cultures so that you aren't easily surprised by differences and don't handle them in a sloppy or disrespectful way
- ✓ Continually interact with people from other cultures (Proximity [closeness] and connection foster compassion and respect).

5. **Structural or Task Conflict occurs** when there is a lack of understanding about the boundaries of _____, and where _____ is shared.

- a) executives and Council members; space
- b) discretion and disclosure; communication

C) roles and responsibilities; power

- d) expression and reserve; impact

Feedback: Structural or Task Conflict occurs when there is a lack of understanding about the boundaries of **roles and responsibilities**, and where **power** is shared.

6. Which of the following are good approaches for managers and leaders to deal with structural or task conflict among staff & Council members? (Select all that apply.)

- Listen actively and ask questions
- Verbalize each party's position and confirm understanding
- Facilitate collaborative problem-solving
- Encourage the parties to brainstorm solutions

Feedback: Managers and leaders are advised to take the following approaches to dealing with task/structural conflict:

- Listen actively and ask questions
- Verbalize each party's position and confirm understanding
- Facilitate collaborative problem-solving
- Encourage the parties to brainstorm solutions (when parties develop solutions together rather than have them imposed by others, they are more likely to behave in line with the solutions.)

7. Generally, a **conflict of interest** occurs when... (Select all that apply. Three answers are correct.)

-- A Council member's personal interests or outside activities compete with the Council's objectives, goals, or principles.

-- A Council member votes on a grant decision and is very opinionated about it in the lead-up to the vote.

--A Council member or a member of their family appears to gain or benefit personally from their position on the Council.

-- A Council member has served for four years straight and holds a part-time job that is unrelated to Council work.

Feedback: Generally, a conflict of interest occurs when a Council member's personal interests or outside activities compete with the Council's objectives, goals, or principles, OR when a Council member or a member of their family appears to gain or benefit personally from their position on the Council.

8. Of the four types of interests discussed, what does Direct Interests refer to? Choose the best answer.

- A) People or groups with whom you associate (or their close connections) stand to gain.
- B) Someone you grew up with but do not speak to anymore stands to gain.
- C) You, a close family member, or your personal business involvement stands to gain.
- D) A past acquaintance who you once worked with and still see occasionally stands to gain.

Feedback: Direct Interests refers to when you, a close family member, or your personal business involvement stands to gain.

9. **True** or False: Status, power, upward mobility, recognition, reputation, and fame could all be considered non-financial interests.

Feedback: This is true. Status, power, upward mobility, recognition, reputation, and fame are all considered non-financial interests.

10. A(n) _____ conflict of interest means that, regardless of circumstances, you aren't favoring anybody or doing anything for gain in any way—either for yourself or people close to you—but it still might *look* to outsiders like you are.

- a) actual
- b) glaring
- c) illegal
- d) unethical
- e) perceived

Feedback: A *perceived* conflict of interest means that, regardless of circumstances, you aren't favoring anybody or doing anything for gain in any way—either for yourself or people close to you—but it still might *look* to outsiders like you are.

11. **True** or False: It is a conflict of interest when Council members have immediate family members who receive Council funding.

Feedback: True. It is a conflict of interest when Council members have immediate family members who receive Council funding.

12. What is a dual role?

- a) A Council member works from home but also works on site, and a schedule is not made as to where work will take place on a given day.
- b) A Council member also serves in a leadership or decision-making role of another entity that is seeking Council funding.
- c) A Council member serves in a leadership or decision-making role of another entity that does not have any dealings with the Council, financial or otherwise.
- d) A Council member oversees some staff members working on one project and oversees a different set of staff members working on a different project.

Feedback: A dual role is when a Council member also serves in a leadership or decision-making role of another entity that is seeking Council funding.

13. A Council member who recuses themselves from voting:

- a. Gets the final say in what will happen
- b. Chooses how and when a vote will take place.
- c. Disqualifies themselves from being a judge or decision-maker

- d. Decides how much funding will be given to a project.
- e. None of the above

Feedback: A Council member who recuses themselves from voting disqualifies themselves from being a judge or decision-maker.

14. What does a Code of Conduct policy do?

- Asks Council members and staff to rate their colleagues as to who is most professional, gracious, and helpful on a day-to-day basis.
- Determines who will complete what tasks on various projects within the Council, especially tasks related to their area of expertise.
- Helps orient workers to the payroll system and human resources contacts they will have to navigate throughout their time in the Council.
- Outlines the appropriate behavior employees are expected to follow in the workplace toward their colleagues, supervisors, and overall organization.

Feedback: A code of conduct policy outlines the appropriate behavior employees are expected to follow in the workplace toward their colleagues, supervisors, and overall organization.

15. To which offices must the Council submit assurances? (Select all that apply.)

- Administration for Community Living
- Administration on Disabilities
- Administration for Community Engagement
- Office of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities
- None of the above

Feedback: The Council must submit assurances in their 5-year plan to the Administration for Community Living, the Administration on Disabilities, and the Office of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities.

16. **True** or False: If you are not sure if a situation is a conflict of interest, but think it might be, you should talk about it with a supervisor.

Feedback: True. It is better to err on the side of caution when it comes to possible conflicts of interest. This means disclosing the situation (talking about it with a supervisor) rather than staying silent.

17. **True** or False: If you are a member of the Council and a Board of Directors of an agency or organization applying for Council funds, you should prioritize the Council's goals and objectives.

Feedback: This is true. If you are a member of the Council and a Board of Directors of an agency or organization applying for Council funds, you should prioritize the Council's goals and objectives.

18. What are two things people tend to do that cause cultural conflicts?

- Seek out information and ask questions
- **Stereotype others and have culturally biased interpretations**
- Speak in others' native language and learn their norms
- Behave with compassion and react with sensitivity

Feedback: Two things people do that tend to cause cultural conflicts are stereotyping others and having culturally biased interpretations.

19. Which approaches are recommended when personality or relationship conflicts occur? (Select all that apply.)

- try to understand the other person before trying to be understood.
- focus on what happened rather than your interpretation of what happened.
- emphasize commonalities and unity between you and your colleague.
- do not try to resolve the conflict; it will go away on its own.

Feedback: These are some recommended approaches for resolution when personality or relationship conflicts occur:

- Try to understand the other person before trying to be understood yourself.
- Focus on what happened rather than your interpretation of what happened
- Emphasize commonalities and unity between you and your colleague.
- Gently bring up the source of tension and listen to what they have to say. Be interested and empathetic. Don't argue or defend your position.
- If the conflict persists, bring a manager or supervisor into the situation. Do so, however, with a sincere desire to resolve the conflict with maturity and respect, not to create or increase hostility or tension.

20. Which type of conflict does this best describe: "disputes about how to divide up resources, differences of opinion on procedures and policies, managing work expectation, and judgments & interpretation of data."?

- a) Personality conflict
- b) Cultural conflict
- c) Task or Structural conflict
- d) Values or Interest conflict

Feedback: Task or Structural Conflict occurs when people have disputes about how to divide up resources, differences of opinion on procedures or policies, managing work expectations, and judgements & interpretation of data.

