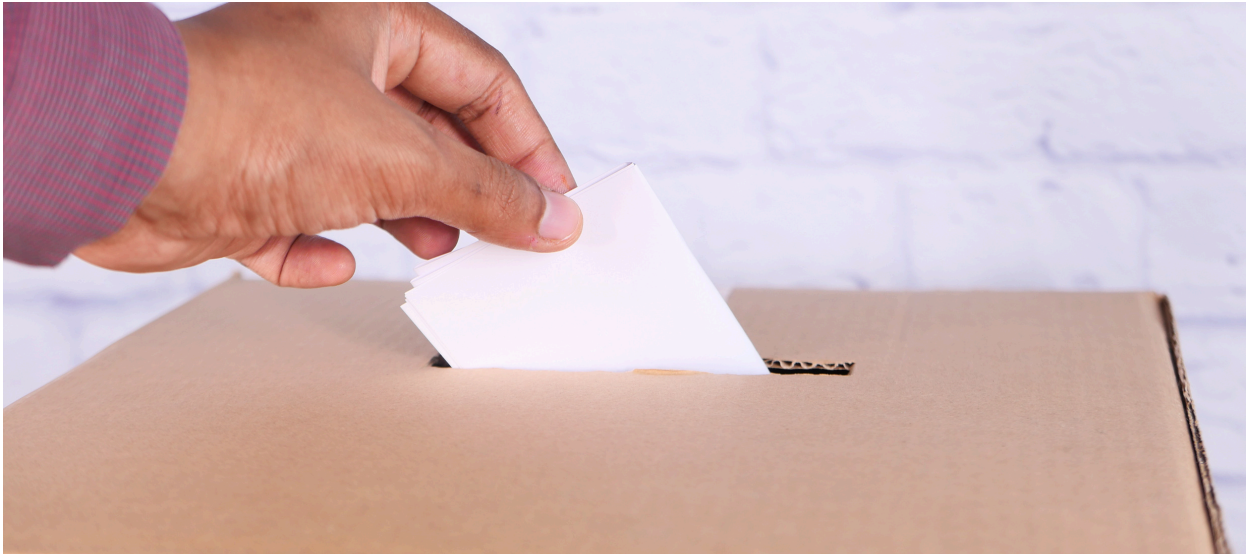


QUICK GUIDE OF COOK COUNTY CAMPAIGN REGULATIONS FOR POLITICAL CANDIDATES

Compiled by the Cook County Board of Ethics; Re-issued on May 30, 2024



INTRODUCTION

The Cook County Board of Ethics is responsible for enforcing the Cook County Ethics Ordinance. The Ethics Ordinance requires all Cook County officials and employees to abide by a Code of Conduct which sets forth general directives with the goal of creating a culture of fair and honest government in Cook County. The Code of Conduct applies to officials, employees, persons doing or seeking to do business with the County, persons regulated by the County, persons seeking official action by the County, and lobbyists.

This overview of Cook County definitions and select campaign regulations for political candidates is provided by the Cook County Board of Ethics. This guide provides relevant County ordinance information for County candidates and elected officials.

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DEFINITIONS

Cook County Code of Ordinances defines the following applicable terms in Section 2-562:

Candidate	Any person who has filed nominating papers or petitions for nomination or election to an elected office, or who has been appointed to fill a vacancy in nomination, and who remains eligible for placement on the ballot at either a general primary election or general election or who has raised or expended money in pursuit of elected office.
County	The County and all government agencies of the County.
Political Organization	A party, committee, association, fund, or other organization (whether or not incorporated) that is required to file a statement of organization with the State Board of Elections or a county clerk under Section 9.3 of the Election Code (10 ILCS 5/9-3), but only with regard to those activities that require filing with the State Board of Elections or a county clerk.
Single Candidacy	The time period during which a candidate is seeking office with primary election and general election being separate candidacies.



Don't forget: As a candidate for Cook County office, you are responsible to comply with the Cook County Ethics Ordinance.

CAMPAIGN CONTRIBUTION LIMITS

Cook County Code of Ordinances [Section 2-585\(b\)\(1\) through \(3\)](#)

The Cook County Ethics Ordinance limits campaign contributions, or the total amount of funds a prohibited source can donate to support the campaign for candidates running for County office.

Prohibited Sources include:

1. Anyone who does or has done a significant amount of business with the County (\$10,000 or more) during the preceding four years
2. Lobbyists registered to lobby Cook County
3. Individuals seeking official action from the county, a candidate or elected official. Seeking official action means a non-ministerial act, including entities that seek property tax relief for their clients through reassessments from the Cook County Assessor's Office.

The intention is to permit total contribution up to, but not exceeding, \$1,500.00 in a calendar year.

- This includes contributions to any associated local, state or federal political committees that are established in support of a specific candidate for County office.
- A calendar year is January 1 to December 31.

No "Pay to Play"

Contribution limitations are intended to safeguard against quid pro quo corruption or "pay to play" arrangements where a contributor makes a donation in exchange for the opportunity to do business with the County or obtain other favorable official action.

Remember that even lawful political contributions to County officials and candidates for County office are never a prerequisite to doing or continuing to do business with the County.

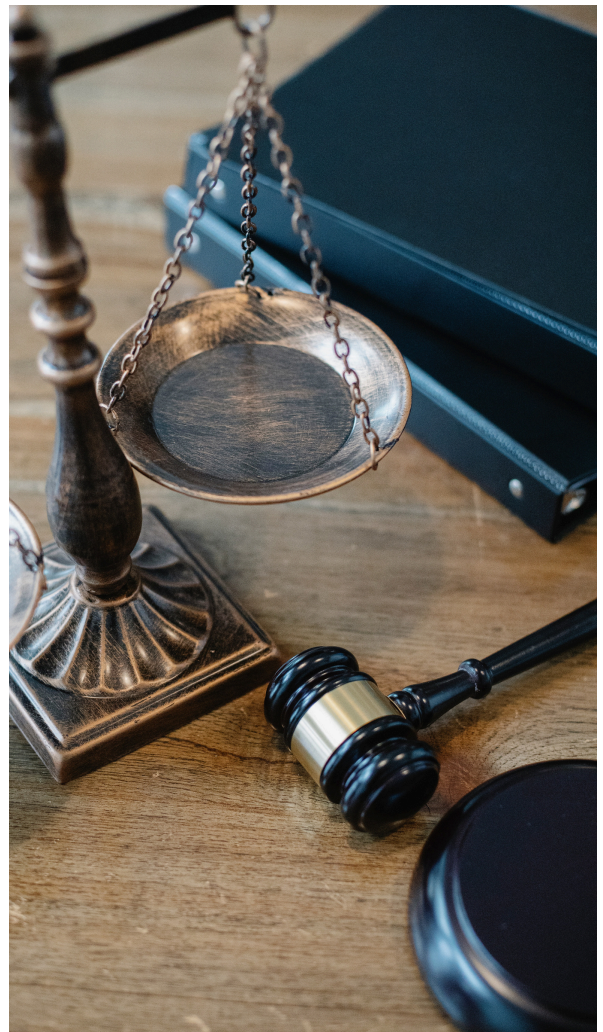


CAMPAIGN CONTRIBUTION LIMITS (CONT.)

Done business or Doing business means any one or any combination of sales, purchases, leases or contracts to, from or with the County or any County agency in excess of \$10,000 during the previous four years.

Seeking to do business means taking action within the past six months to obtain a contract or business with the County when, if such action were successful, it would result in the person doing business with the County. This includes responding to a request for qualifications (RFQ), joining a pool of pre-qualified vendors or any similar procurement vehicle. The presumption that such a person is seeking to do business will last for the same duration as any RFQ, pre-qualified pool or similar procurement vehicle remains valid for all qualified respondents.

The Board of Ethics uses several sources when we conduct our Campaign Contribution Reviews, including the *Report - Seeking Official Action* data and *Campaign Contributions - Restricted Contractors* database. Candidates can use these sources to self-audit contributions received. **The sources are available on the Board of Ethics [webpage](#).**



Cook County Board of Ethics is not a regulating body for elections. Please contact Cook County Clerk's Office or the Illinois State Board of Elections, with questions about elections.

AUDITING PROCESS OF CAMPAIGN CONTRIBUTIONS

Cook County Code of Ordinances [Section 2-585](#)

The Board of Ethics audits campaign contributions to affirm that they are within the limits established in Section 2-585. The procedure is as follows:

1. Board staff audits public campaign contribution disclosure records from the Illinois State Board of Elections to determine whether contributions to candidates for County office and County Elected Officials are in compliance with Cook County's campaign contribution limits.
2. If, based on the audit, the Board staff determines the contributor has exceeded the limitations, the Board will send a formal notice to the campaign committee and contributor.
3. The Board staff may also reach out to obtain additional information from the contributor and/or campaign as they review contributions.
4. If the Board staff find that a contribution is over the limit, individual contributors and/or campaign committees have the opportunity to respond to demonstrate that (1) the Board's determination is incorrect; or (2) the contributor has complied with the Ethics Ordinance by obtaining reimbursement of the excessive contribution. The Board will determine if the response is sufficient in affirming compliance.

Failure to respond will result in a referral to the Board for further action. Any candidate for any County office or any current elected official in Cook County government shall return contributions found in excess of the limitations set forth in this section within 30 days of notification from the Board of Ethics. Failure to return contributions within 30 days shall be a violation of this section and subject to fines under [Section 2-602](#).



ELECTION PERIOD RESTRICTIONS

NEWSLETTERS, BROCHURES, ADVERTISEMENTS, AND PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENTS

Cook County Code of Ordinances [Section 2-586\(a\)](#)

Cook County departments and officials are prohibited from using County funds and resources to purchase and distribute newsletters, brochures, advertisements, and public service announcements.

- Only applies to elected County officials who are **candidates** for County elected office.
 - Does not apply to County officials running in non-County elections, such as mayor, state representative or senator, etc.
- Restriction applies 60 days prior to a general, primary, and special election until the day after the election.

County funds and resources may not be used in the following manners:

1. Printing, mailing and distribution of **newsletters** or **brochures** bearing **proper name and/or image** of an elected County official who is a candidate for County office.
2. **Broadcasting and airing** (radio or television) or **printing in a commercial newspaper or commercial magazine** or **public service announcements** and **advertisements for County-administered programs** that contain the **proper name, image or voice** of an elected County official who is a candidate for County office.
 - a. Potential exceptions: Elected official appearances on television or radio to discuss County-administered programs and initiatives. An example of this would be an invitation by a local radio station to discuss the completion of a significant County-funded construction project. This interview should not be political in nature and should avoid content related to any upcoming elections.

Social Media Exception:

The restrictions do not apply to social media. Materials containing an elected official's voice, image and/or name may be posted on an official County social media profile.

Examples, include but are not limited to:

- Flyers, newsletters or brochures containing an official's name and image may be posted on a Cook County-owned website and social media account year-round.
- Examples of social media include Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn and NextDoor.



PROHIBITED USE OF THE COOK COUNTY SEAL IN CAMPAIGN COMMUNICATIONS

Cook County Code of Ordinances [Section 2-1\(d\)](#)

No one should use Cook County's seal for private purposes, including campaigning. Additionally, no one should 'fraudulently forge, deface, corrupt, or counterfeit the seal of the County.'

This means, please do not use the Cook County seal in campaign materials without authorization. Even with authorization to use the seal, please do not edit or otherwise change the seal (e.g., edit the colors, crop parts of the seal, use the seal as a watermark).

PERMANENT PROHIBITIONS ON USE OF COUNTY FUNDS FOR PROMOTIONAL MATERIALS

Cook County Code of Ordinances [Section 2-586\(b\)](#)

County funds and resources may **never** be used to design, purchase, produce and/or distribute promotional materials that include the proper name and/or image of any elected official.

Promotional materials include, but are not limited to:

- Bumper stickers
- Commercial billboards
- Lapel pins or buttons
- Magnets
- Sports teams
- Clothing or apparel
- Stickers
- Calendars
- Vehicles
- Equipment.

The Cook County Ethics Ordinance does not prohibit the use of political campaign or other private funds from being used to purchase these items. Items should include a disclaimer "Not paid for with Cook County Funds". **However**, employees may not contribute to the creation, purchase, or distribution of these items during County time. Nor should they be distributed in a County office.

This guide is not legal advice. It is intended to help you understand the County's regulations for political candidates. For confidential, authoritative advice, please contact the Board of Ethics.