Trends in Local Government Ethics

Presented at the 2015 Michigan Townships Association Annual Educational Conference January 29, 2015
Overview of MPPS survey program

Findings on township officials’ views on state and local government ethics issues (from Fall 2014 Wave of the MPPS), including:

- Financial Disclosure and “Revolving Door” policies
- Gifts and honoraria
- Conflicts of Interest
- FOIA and the Open Meetings Act
- Local ethical pressures
- Overall satisfaction with townships’ current ethics policies
The Michigan Public Policy Survey

- **Census survey** – all 1,856 counties, cities, villages, and townships
- **Respondents** – chief elected and appointed officials
- **Administered** – online and via hardcopy
- **Timing** – Spring and Fall each year
- **Topics** – wide range, such as fiscal health, budget priorities, economic development, intergovernmental cooperation, privatization, employee policies, labor unions, state relations, energy, environmental sustainability, Great Lakes, citizen engagement, bankruptcy, much more.
MPPS is not a typical opinion poll

- 70+% response rates

- **Transparency**
  -- Questionnaires online
  -- Pre-run data tables online
  -- Sharing of (anonymized) datasets with other researchers

- Borrow from other proven sources such as NLC and ICMA

- Quality control such as double blind coding of open-end responses, internal technical memos on data quality, etc.
What does the MPPS aim to do?

- **Improve understanding** of local government to help improve policymaking and quality of life
- **Inform local leaders** about peers across the state: challenges and responses
- **Inform state policymakers** and other stakeholders with data about local level challenges and responses not available from any other source
- **Build a longitudinal data archive** to allow tracking of fundamental changes (such as the economic transition, aging population, etc.)
- Foster **academic research and teaching** on local government issues
How many townships responded to the Fall 2014 MPPS?

905 townships total (73% of all statewide)

By Population Size
- 351 townships <1500
- 389 townships 1500-5000
- 82 townships 5001-10,000
- 61 townships 10,001-30,000
- 22 townships >30,000

By Region
- 113 in the Upper Peninsula
- 187 in the Northern LP
- 165 in the Central West
- 169 in the Central East
- 140 in the Southwest
- 131 in the Southeast
Rate the following groups of people overall in terms of ethical behavior in their official positions...

- State Legislators: 6% Very Ethical, 42% Mostly Ethical
- Executive Branch Officials: 14% Very Ethical, 43% Mostly Ethical
- Local Officials Across Michigan: 17% Very Ethical, 53% Mostly Ethical
- Local Officials in Your Township: 58% Very Ethical, 32% Mostly Ethical
Support for Financial Disclosure

The following types of Michigan government officials should be **required** to disclose their financial interests…
Michigan state officials should be **required** to wait a certain period of time after leaving office before becoming a lobbyist or consultant that works for state government...
Michigan currently **prohibits** state legislators from receiving honoraria, but **allows** certain levels of gifts, food, and travel or lodging expenses.

- **Appointed state officials should also be prohibited from receiving honoraria while in office.**
  - 4% Don’t Know
  - 14% Strongly Disagree
  - 21% Somewhat Disagree
  - 55% Neither Agree Nor Disagree
  - 14% Somewhat Agree
  - 5% Strongly Agree

- **A yearly cap should be enforced limiting the total amount of gifts any state government official may receive.**
  - 5% Don’t Know
  - 12% Strongly Disagree
  - 22% Somewhat Disagree
  - 55% Neither Agree Nor Disagree
  - 10% Somewhat Agree
  - 20% Strongly Agree

- **Gifts above a certain threshold should be reported by both the donor and state government official.**
  - 4% Don’t Know
  - 10% Strongly Disagree
  - 20% Somewhat Disagree
  - 63% Neither Agree Nor Disagree
  - 14% Somewhat Agree
  - 5% Strongly Agree

- **Policies prohibiting honoraria, limiting gifts, and requiring gift disclosure should apply to local government officials across the state.**
  - 5% Don’t Know
  - 14% Strongly Disagree
  - 20% Somewhat Disagree
  - 56% Neither Agree Nor Disagree
  - 20% Somewhat Agree
  - 20% Strongly Agree
Current Township Policies on Gifts and Honoraria

Does your township currently have any policies that prohibit, limit, or require disclosure for…

- Honoraria for local elected and/or appointed officials
- Gifts paid for by outside sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>&lt;1500</th>
<th>1500-5000</th>
<th>5001-10000</th>
<th>10001-30000</th>
<th>&gt;30000</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Honoraria</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honoraria</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>21%</td>
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</table>

Total 100%
How often, if at all, would you say officials in your township’s government face issues that present potential conflicts of interest?
Townships’ Experiences with FOIA requests

Has your township experienced Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests related to potential ethical concerns in the last five years?

- Yes, with findings of legitimate ethical concerns
- Yes, but no findings of legitimate ethical concerns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population Range</th>
<th>Yes, with findings</th>
<th>Yes, but no findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt; 1500</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1500-5000</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5001-10000</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10001-30000</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 30000</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>1%</td>
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Townships’ Experiences with Open Meeting Violations

Has your township experienced **accusations** of Open Meetings Act violations in the last five years?

- Yes, with findings of legitimate ethical concerns (8%)
- Yes, but no findings of legitimate ethical concerns (2%)
- 13% for each of the other categories: 1500-5000, 5001-10000, 10001-30000, >30000
Townships’ Experiences with Official Impropriety

Has your township experienced **accusations** of impropriety against one or more of your government officials in the last five years?

- 12% Yes, with findings of legitimate ethical concerns
- 25% Yes, but no findings of legitimate ethical concerns
- 12% No
- 4% Don't know
- 7% Don't want to answer
- 2% Less than 1500
- 4% 1500-5000
- 15% 5001-10000
- 36% 10001-30000
- 16% Over 30000

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GERALD R. FORD SCHOOL OF PUBLIC POLICY
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
Have you as a local official ever come under pressure to do something that you felt might be unethical in the last five years?
Sources from which you felt pressure to do something that, in your role as a local official, you felt might be unethical...
Does your township’s government currently have a code of ethics?

- < 1500: 46%
- 1500-5000: 63%
- 5001-10000: 79%
- 10001-30000: 68%
- > 30000: 81%
Satisfaction with Ethics Policies

Overall, how satisfied are you with your township’s policies and practices governing ethics?

- Very satisfied
- Somewhat satisfied

![Bar chart showing satisfaction levels for different population sizes.](chart.png)
Township Officials’ Views on Ethics Policies

Summary

- Most township officials rate their governments as “very ethical.” Fewer than half say the same about state legislators.

- Approximately 40% agree that local officials should have to disclose financial interests, and 76% say they should have restrictions on gifts and honoraria. However, only ~20% currently have policies on gifts and honoraria.

- Few townships statewide report instances of legitimate ethical concerns over conflict of interest, FOIA, violation of Open Meetings, official impropriety, or other ethical pressures.

- 85% of township officials are somewhat or very satisfied with their ethics policies and practices. (~58% have a formal code of ethics in place.)
The Michigan Public Policy Survey (MPPS)

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