

## Policy on Conflict of Interest and Commitment

Policy Title	Policy on Conflict of Interest and Commitment
Policy #	01.017.1
Policy Owner	University of Rhode Island Board of Trustees
Contact Information	Questions about this policy should be directed to Human Resources at (401) 874-5270
Approved By	University of Rhode Island Board of Trustees
Effective Date	January 1, 2026
Next Review Date	No later than January 31, 2031
Who Needs to Know About this Policy	All Employees of the University and members of the University of Rhode Island Board of Trustees
Definitions	<p><b>Business.</b> A sole proprietorship, partnership, firm, corporation, holding company, joint stock company, receivership, trust, or any other entity recognized in law through which business for profit or not for profit is conducted.</p> <p><b>Business Relationship.</b> Relationship in which an Employee or Household Member serves as an officer, director, employee, partner, trustee or controlling stockholder of an organization, for-profit or not-for-profit that does business with the University.</p> <p><b>Employee.</b> Any person employed by the University, including faculty and staff, regardless of the source of funds from which they are paid.</p> <p><b>Family Member.</b> Defined by the RI Code of Ethics as any person in an Employee's family including, but not limited to, domestic partners, children, parents, siblings, grandparents, parents-in-law, brothers-in-law, sisters-in-law, or members of one's household. (Please refer to the Rhode Island Code of Ethics for the full defined list of family members.)</p> <p><b>Financial Relationship.</b> Defined by the RI Code of Ethics as a relationship in which an Employee or Household Member (1) is the actual or beneficial owner of more than 5% of an organization that does business with the University, or (2) has other direct or indirect dealings with an organization that does business with the University from which the Employee or Household Member may benefit directly or indirectly.</p> <p><b>Household Member.</b> Defined by the RI Code of Ethics as a person having legal residence or living in an Employee's place of residence.</p> <p><b>Interested Person.</b> A person, business, or other entity, whether for profit or not for profit, or a representative of such a person, business, or other entity that has a direct financial interest in a decision that the Employee is</p>

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	<p>authorized to make, or to participate in the making of, as part of their official duties; or a person, business, or other entity, whether for profit or not for profit, that engages lobbyists or is a registered lobbyist or lobbying firm as defined by the laws, regulations, or municipal ordinances of the state.</p> <p><b>University-Related Activity.</b> Any activity undertaken by Employees, students, recognized student organizations, or contractors or agents of the University on behalf of the University, which relate in whole or in part to any academic, research, public service, administrative, or other function or purpose performed under the auspices of the University, or in pursuance of University employment-related obligations, University academic or curricular programs, or recognized University extracurricular activities.</p>
<p><b>Statutes, Regulations, and Policies Governing or Necessitating This Policy</b></p>	<p>Rhode Island Constitution, Article III, Sections 7 and 8</p> <p>R.I.G.L. § 36-14 (The Rhode Island Code of Ethics), and the implementing regulations of the RI Ethics Commission, 520-RICR-00-00-1.1 through -4.12</p> <p>R.I.G.L. § 16-32-41 (University of Rhode Island [Board of Trustees], Conflicts of Interest)</p> <p>Title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965, Student Assistance General Provisions – Code of Conduct Related to Student Loan Activities 34 C.F.R. 668.14(b)(27)</p> <p>University Manual 4.63.11 Outside Activities of Department Members</p> <p>University of Rhode Island Policy on Public Private Partnership in Research and Development</p> <p>University of Rhode Island Policy on Financial Conflict of Interest in Research</p> <p>University of Rhode Island Policy on the Administration of Sponsored Agreements and Gifts</p> <p>University of Rhode Island Policy on Consensual Relationships</p> <p>University of Rhode Island Board of Trustees Procurement Regulations</p>
<p><b>Reason for Policy/Purpose</b></p>	<p>To ensure that Employees of the University are aware of their obligations relative to conflicts of interest and commitment in the performance of their duties.</p>
<p><b>Forms Related to this Policy</b></p>	<p>Self-Disclosure &amp; Conflict Management Form</p>

## Policy Statement

All Employees of the University of Rhode Island (“University”) are expected to conduct the affairs of the University in a manner consistent with their primary ethical, employment, and contractual commitments to the University. Employees often interact with industry, government, community groups, professional organizations, and other non-University entities during the time of their service to or employment with the University but outside of their public duties to the University. While these interactions typically reflect favorably on the individual and University, they must be in alignment with the mission and foundational values of the University and in compliance with University policies and applicable State and Federal laws and regulations. Standards of conduct and reporting requirements are set forth in the Rhode Island Code of Ethics (“Code”) and in Federal conflict of interest statutes. Performance of professional responsibilities for the University must be free from real or apparent bias motivated by self-interest. Employees have an obligation to avoid circumstances where their financial or other personal ties to outside organizations or persons could present a potential, apparent, or actual conflict of interest or could discredit the University’s name and reputation.

This policy is intended to increase the awareness of Employees and other University community members to the potential for conflicts of interest and commitment, and to establish a process whereby such conflicts may be managed or avoided.

The following additional policies related to conflict of interest apply to individuals engaged in specific activities, and may prescribe corresponding pathways for self-disclosure and conflict management:

- The Policy on *Financial Conflict of Interest in Research* and the Policy on *Conflict of Commitment in Research* additionally apply to Employees engaged in sponsored research activities;
- The Policy on *Public-Private Partnership in Research and Development* applies to Employees engaged in basic or applied Research and Development at the University;
- *University of Rhode Island Board of Trustees Bylaws* section 2.9. governs members of the Board of Trustees; and
- The Policy on *Consensual Relationships* applies to Employees whose activity meets the definition of a consensual relationship as defined in that policy.

### I. Background

A potential **conflict of interest** can arise when an Employee’s financial, professional, or other personal interests may directly or indirectly affect, or appear to affect, that individual’s judgement in exercising their institutional responsibilities. More specifically, situations where an Employee is in a position to influence the University’s business, administrative, academic or other decisions, in ways that can lead to personal, family or financial advantage of any kind for themselves, may be considered a conflict of interest. If an Employee or their Family Member has a Business Relationship or Financial Relationship with a third party, a potential, apparent, or actual conflict of interest with the University may arise.

A potential **conflict of commitment** exists when the time or effort that an Employee spends on an outside activity directly or significantly interferes with or compromises, or appears to compromise, the employee’s ability to fulfill their obligations to the University. More specifically, situations where an activity conflicts with the employee’s work hours for the University or interferes with their ability to perform or effectiveness in performing, the full range of responsibilities associated with their position at the University, may be considered a conflict of commitment.

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## **II. Authority on Potential Conflicts**

The Rhode Island Ethics Commission (also, “Ethics Commission”) has the legal authority to officially interpret and render opinions about the meaning of any provisions of the Code and its applicability to a particular situation. Employees may therefore need or be advised to request advisory opinions from the Ethics Commission in certain instances if they wish to obtain clarity on possible violations. The University may assist Employees through its designated University Conflicts Advisor to broadly understand the Code and to provide advice on how to obtain binding opinions from the Ethics Commission. The University has designated its Director of Enterprise Compliance as the University Conflicts Advisor. While the University may offer assistance to employees, it is not authorized to make or communicate any binding opinions or decisions relating to the applicability or meaning of specific requirements of the Code. Individuals are personally subject to enforcement actions against them for violations of the Code by the Ethics Commission.

## **III. Evaluating Potential Conflicts**

Employees are expected to become familiar with the Code and comply with its provisions. Listed below are some examples of prohibited activities, but this is not an exhaustive list. Further information, including additional examples and guidance on where to locate the complete Code, can be found in the procedures accompanying this policy.

**A. Gifts:** Business courtesies and gifts are a regular part of ongoing business practices but have the potential to create the appearance of a conflict. Employees and their spouse or dependent child may not accept gifts, discounts or gratuity, or anything of value, including forbearance or forgiveness of indebtedness (also collectively, “gifts”) from an Interested Person based on an expectation or understanding that the gift will influence the Employees judgement or the performance of their official University duties. Business courtesies and gifts can include, but are not limited to, a favor, discount, entertainment, hospitality, forbearance, loans, promises of future employment, or services.

If a gift is received and is not exempt from the Code, it may be immediately returned to the Interested Person, given to a charitable organization, deposited in a University account or turned over to a University department to be used for future University-Related Activities, or directed to University of Rhode Island Foundation & Alumni Engagement.

### **1. Allowable Exceptions:**

Examples of allowable exceptions include:

- a. Gifts having a value up to and including fifty dollars (\$50);
- b. Gifts from a single source having a value that does not exceed one hundred fifty dollars (\$150) in any one calendar year;
- c. Gifts offered to the public at large (e.g., trinkets provided at a booth or open house);
- d. Gifts given because of the Employee’s membership in a group whose majority members are not subject to the Code, and an equivalent gift is given or offered to other members;
- e. Plaque or other similar item given in recognition of individual or professional services; or
- f. There is a valid and lawful exchange of equal or greater value in return.

**2. Gifts from Vendors, Subcontractors, Consultants:** Employees and their Family Members may not accept gifts from vendors, subcontractors, consultants or other parties now furnishing or desiring in the

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future to furnish supplies or services to the University. Employees should consult the University of Rhode Island Board of Trustees Procurement Regulations, including specifically the “Supplemental Code of Procurement Ethics” contained therein, for more details.

- B. Transactions with Subordinates:** Employees may not engage in a financial transaction, including private employment, loans, or monetary contributions with an employee, contractor, or consultant over whom they exercise supervisory responsibilities. Financial transactions may create a situation where subordinates feel pressured to comply with their supervisor's request, lead to perceptions of favoritism or bias, or may create or appear to create unfair advantages or disadvantages for the subordinate.
- C. Financial Transactions with Students:** Faculty may not engage in direct financial transactions, including private employment, loans, monetary contributions, or the sale of materials or services directly to students enrolled in their course.
- D. Personal Financial or Other Interests:** Employees may not participate in matters where they have a financial or other interest that conflicts with their official University duties as these matters can compromise their ability to remain impartial and erode trust among colleagues and the University community. In addition, Employees may not use their official position or confidential information obtained via their official position for personal financial benefit, for the benefit of their Family Member, or to benefit a Business Relationship.
- E. Nepotism – Activities Related to Family Members:** Employees may not participate in the hiring process or any employment-related decisions pertaining to their Family Members. Also, Employees may not supervise a Family Member or otherwise review or participate in reviewing a Family Member's work executed in their official University capacity, and these supervisory responsibilities may not be transferred to a subordinate. Refer to the Policy on Consensual Relationships for further information and reporting requirements for covered relationships.
- F. Use and Appropriation of University Assets:** Employees may not use or access University property or resources such as funds, personnel, intellectual property (e.g., logos and marks), IT resources, letterhead or confidential or proprietary information for personal use or gain or in the performance of any non-University related activity unless authorized by a contract or other binding document executed by the University. Further, Employees may not use the University's name, trademarks, logos, or the fact that they are affiliated with the University in a manner that suggests that the University approves, disapproves, endorses, or promotes the non-University related activity without prior written authorization.
- G. Outside Activities & Employment:** Employees may not engage in outside activities or accept employment that could: (1) impair their independence of judgement with regard to their official University duties; (2) encourage the use or disclosure of confidential information gained while employed at the University; (3) conflict with or impact the performance of their official University duties; or (4) benefit the outside entity or employer when carrying out their official University duties. Employees involved in basic or applied Research and Development at the University may obtain an exemption as allowed under the Policy on Public-Private Partnership in Research and Development. Bargaining unit members are referred to contract articles, if such exist, relating to outside employment in their respective collective bargaining agreements.
- H. Misuse of Position:** Employees may not use their position or title at the University for the endorsement of any product, service or enterprise; to advertise or solicit personal business; or for the private gain/loss for themselves, their Family Members, or individuals with whom they have a Business or Financial Relationship. When teaching, speaking, or writing in a personal capacity, Employees may refer to their official title or position for biographical details or in connection with an article published, provided the title or

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position is accompanied by a reasonably prominent disclaimer stating that the views expressed by the Employee in the article do not necessarily represent the views of the University.

- I. Selection, Award or Administration of Contracts:** Employees may not participate in the selection, award, or administration of a contract if there is a real or apparent conflict of interest. Such a conflict would arise when the Employee, Family Member, or organization with which they have a Business or Financial Relationship has a financial or other interest in the parties considered for award or under current contract. Employees should consult with the University of Rhode Island Board of Trustees Procurement Regulations, including specifically the "Supplemental Code of Procurement Ethics" contained therein, for details.
- J. Course Material Adoption:** Faculty have the academic freedom to select the best course materials for their teaching needs. There is no prohibition against the assignment of faculty-authored course materials for relevant classes. While faculty are encouraged and welcome to use their authored materials in credit-earning courses they teach or oversee, a conflict of interest may arise if they earn a profit on the sale. Faculty members are responsible for adhering to the requirements of the RI Code of Ethics and are expected to disclose situations where they require students to purchase their faculty-authored materials. These materials should be purchased through the University's bookstore, with royalties either waived or forfeited to the University unless another arrangement is specified in a written Conflict Management Plan. Such a plan may be put in place to mitigate or eliminate the conflict.

**IV. Self-Disclosure & Conflict Management**

Employees have an obligation to self-identify all situations in which they have a potential, actual, or perceived conflict of interest or commitment that does or may violate the Code of Ethics or other applicable federal or state laws or regulations. Employees are expected to promptly disclose in writing to the University administrator (i.e., supervisor, director, dean, department chairperson, vice president, senior vice president, vice provost, or provost) having the most immediate supervisory relationship to the Employee, before they engage in the activities that produce the conflict. In accordance with the University Manual 4.63.11, outside activities of department members should be brought to the attention of chairpersons. Self-disclosures by Human Resources leadership shall be reported to the University President and the University's Conflicts Advisor.

The Employee, the Employee's immediate supervisor, or a person above the employee in the University organizational hierarchy (also, "Supervisor"), and the Vice President for Human Resources or their designee (collectively "VPHR"), must agree upon and monitor a written conflict management plan to mitigate or eliminate the conflict. For management plans relating to Human Resources leadership, the University's Conflicts Advisor shall review and advise the University President. Supervisors shall use their best efforts to manage conflicts reported to them consistent with the mission of the University and this policy, but may prohibit an activity that produces a conflict in its entirety if they determine that such management is not possible or practical. Any management plan or decision to deny a specific activity must be in writing, and it is the responsibility of the Supervisor and VPHR to issue and maintain the written plan or decision. Individuals involved in developing or approving a conflict management plan are expected to be knowledgeable on this policy and the RI Code of Ethics and should seek guidance from the University Conflicts Advisor if necessary. The Self-Disclosure & Conflict Management form may be used to support compliance with this policy. There may be situations where an approval in the form of an advisory opinion from the RI Ethics Commissions will be required prior to and as part of plan approval.

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These same responsive action steps described in the previous paragraph will be followed in instances where the University learns of a potential conflict on its own rather than from self-disclosure by the Employee.

**V. Enforcement**

The University may investigate potential violations in accordance with the policy and procedures for Reporting Violations of Law, Regulations, or University Policy and Procedure. Violations of this policy by Employees may subject the Employee to appropriate discipline up to and including termination, in keeping with the provisions of any applicable collective bargaining agreements and other applicable employment policies. The University's enforcement of this policy is separate from any individual liability an Employee may face under the RI Ethics Code or other applicable State and Federal laws and regulations.

**Exceptions**

The University may not treat an action or activity of any Employee as a violation of this policy if and to the extent that:

- 1) The action or activity is ruled to be compliant with the Code of Ethics by the Ethics Commission or a court of competent jurisdiction;
- 2) The action or activity is allowed by an exception issued by the Ethics Commission; or
- 3) The action or activity is allowed through a Code of Ethics "exemption" granted pursuant to the above-referenced Rhode Island Public-Private Partnership Act and the University's policy on Public-Private Partnership in Research and Development.

**Policy Review and Revisions**

(Versions earlier than the first policy number may be paper only)

Policy #	Effective Date	Reason for Change	Changes to Policy
01.017.1	January 1, 2026	n/a	n/a

**Note:** This policy supersedes the *Policy on Ethics and Conflict of Interest* (01.009.01).