

6.2 Standards of Conduct

The featured instrument in cultivating and maintaining the integrity of program operations is the “Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct.” This document succinctly articulates SBDC policies and expectations with respect to appropriate behavior.

This Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct acknowledges the acceptance by SBDC staff of the obligation of self-discipline and disclosure above and beyond the requirements of law. It notifies the public that representatives of SBDC will maintain a high level of professionalism and ethics, and requires these individuals accept the obligation to conduct themselves in a way that is beneficial to society.

The NYS/SBDC enforces the Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct by receiving and investigating all complaints of perceived violations and by taking disciplinary action against any individual if personally found to be guilty of Code violation(s). It is the desire for the confidence and respect of the profession that should motivate the individual to maintain the highest possible professional and ethical conduct.

The reliance of owners and managers of New York's small businesses on the advice of the NYS/SBDC imposes an obligation to maintain high standards of integrity and competence. Therefore, NYS/SBDC employees have the basic responsibilities to:

- Hold the affairs of their clients in strict confidence.
- Strive continuously to improve their professional skills.
- Advance the professional standards of the NYS/SBDC.
- Uphold the honor and dignity of the NYS/SBDC.
- Maintain high standards of personal conduct.

In recognition of the public interest and to the profession, all SBDC staff must agree in writing to comply with the following articles of professional responsibility.

Articles of Professional Responsibility

1. Professional Behavior and Attitude

NYS/SBDC staff will maintain a wholly professional behavior and attitude toward those they serve, including other members of the NYS/SBDC, clients, and the general public at large.

2. Professional Contribution

All staff must recognize their responsibilities to the public interest and to their own professional development by contributing to the understanding of better ways to manage small businesses. This contribution may be through the development and dissemination of information to peers as well as the public.

3. Inside Information

No staff will take personal, financial, or other advantage of material or inside information resulting from their professional relationship with clients. Staff also will not provide others material or information which might take such advantage of clients.

4. Avoid Improprieties

All staff will strive to avoid improprieties, and the appearance of improprieties.

5. Conflict of Interest

Staff will not accept any reward (i.e., finders and/or origination fees) from individuals or organizations for recommending the equipment, supplies, services of such individuals or organizations.

6. Professional Standards

All staff will strive continuously to advance and protect the professional standards of the NYS Small Business Development Centers.

7. Supporting the Code of Professional Conduct

All staff will support this Code by reporting violations to their Center Director.

8. Understanding of Client Needs

Staff will first confer with a new client in sufficient detail and gather sufficient facts to gain an understanding of the perceived problem, the objectives to be achieved, the scope of assistance needed, and the possible benefits that may accrue to the client.

9. Proprietary Information

No staff will provide to a client proprietary information learned from previous client without first obtaining the consent of the previous client.

10. *Client Confidentiality*

Staff will hold as strictly confidential the identity of a client, as well as all information concerning the affairs of a client gathered during the course of a professional engagement. The only exception occurs when the client has released, in writing, such information for public use.

11. *Impartiality*

Service personnel will ensure advice to clients is based on impartial consideration of all pertinent facts and opinions.

12. *Outside Influences*

All staff will inform their clients immediately of any special relationships, circumstances or interests that might influence, or give the appearance of influencing, their judgment or impair their objectivity. The Business Advisor will offer to withdraw from the client relationship and refer the client to another Business Advisor.

13. *Recommendations*

All staff will ensure that sufficient relevant information is evaluated in developing conclusions and recommendations. Solutions should be realistic and practical, clearly understood by the clients, and capable of being implemented by the client.

14. *Quality Assurance*

Business Advisors will demonstrate a commitment to the quality of their advice, assistance and resulting products through sufficient planning, reviews and controls.

15. *Sharing Knowledge*

All staff must recognize their responsibility to the profession to share with their colleagues the general body of knowledge and approaches they use in serving clients.

16. *Proprietary Material and Techniques*

All staff will not knowingly, without permission, use copyright material and proprietary data, procedures, materials, or techniques that others have developed but have not released for public use.

17. *Dress Code*

All staff are expected to dress in appropriate business attire.

18. *Timeliness*

Staff do not keep clients waiting. It is extremely important to be on time and ready to work. In the event of an emergency, the client is to be contacted immediately. In addition, all reports are to be filed in a timely manner.

19. *Disclosure*

All staff and agents of the NYS/SBDC will disclose any conviction, judgment or activity which would cause the public to question the program's integrity.

20. *Other Considerations*

All staff and agents of the NYS/SBDC are to be advised of the SBDC Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct prior to engaging in the delivery of direct services. Certification and adherence to this policy does not replace or exempt that individual from specific policies, with respect to professional conduct and behavior, at host institutions, including the Research Foundation Conflict of Interest Policy where applicable.