



**LOCAL TECHNICAL
ASSISTANCE PROGRAM**

**ANSWER ISN'T
OBVIOUS:
ETHICAL
DECISION-
MAKING**

October 2026



1

SESSION BEING RECORDED

This session is being recorded.

By participating in this session, you are consenting to the recording, retention, and use of this session.

Additionally, as a reminder by asking a question verbally you are also consenting to the recording, retention, and use of your statements.



2

PRESENTER

Presenter: Kristy Shinn

Email: Kristy.Shinn@rettew.com

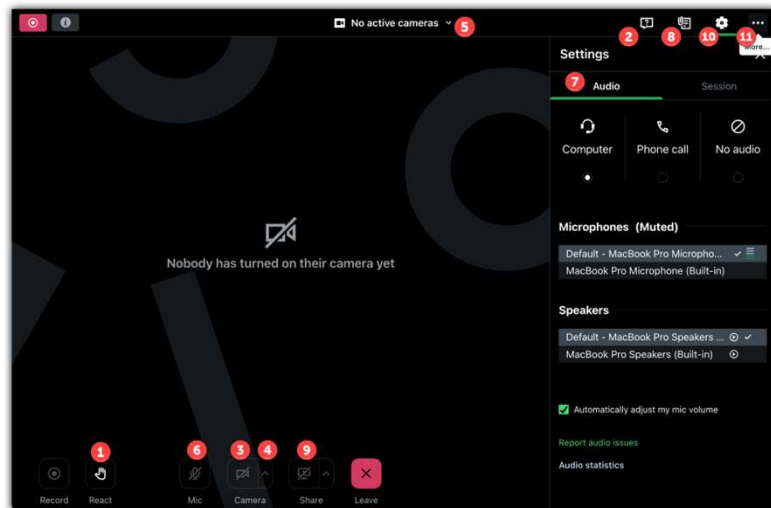
Phone: 717-516-7514

3

VIRTUAL IN-SESSION ATTENDEE GUIDE

Interact with the presenter/organizer:

- (1) Reaction Emojis
- (2) Use the Question/Chat icon to type your question/comment and send it to the staff/presenter.
- (8) If materials have been shared such as handouts or PDF slides, you can access them through the Materials icon.



4

PA LTAP

Pennsylvania Local Technical Assistance Program

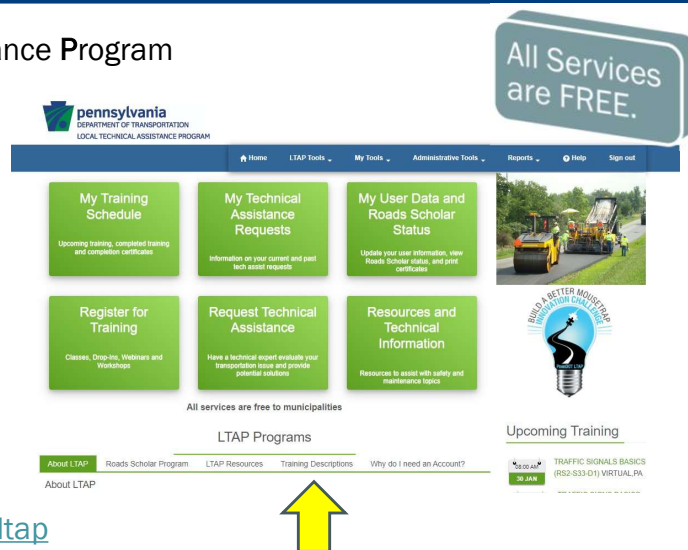
Providing Training

- In-Person & Virtual
- Road Shows

Technical Support Services

- Onsite
- Phone/email

- Website: www.gis.penndot.pa.gov/ltap



5

What are Ethics?



Ethical norms tend to be broader and more informal than laws.
Laws rarely "inspire". Ethics may.

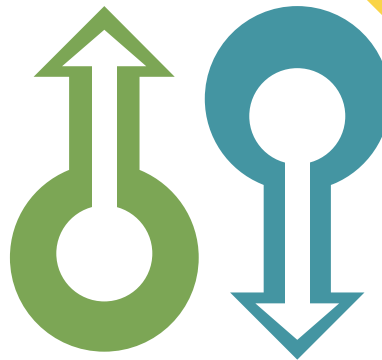
Ethics are self-regulated, largely voluntary, often adaptive.

6

Ethics and Legality

Laws function as social constraints, protecting us from someone or something.

When something is illegal it is often unethical.

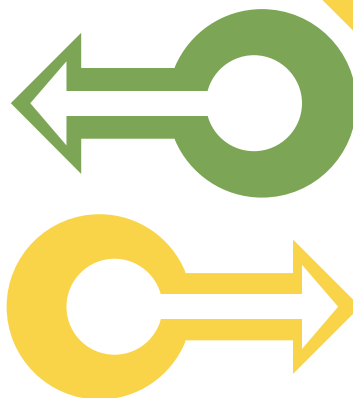


Conforming to laws does not necessarily mean it is ethical.

7

Ethics and Legality

The law is based on rules, compliance, things that are enforceable: You **MUST** do something.



Ethics are based on values, are self-regulating, not enforceable: You **SHOULD** do something.

8

Ethics and Legality

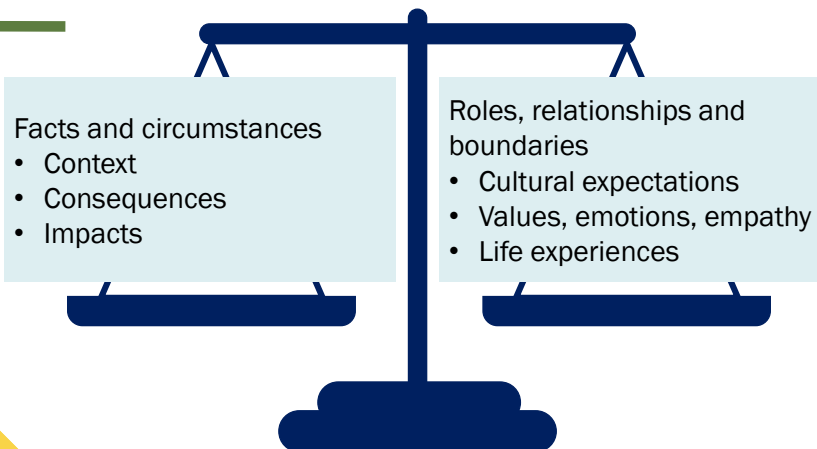


What about actions that live in the gray area?

What happens when our personal or community values evolve over time or in response to experiences or events?

9

Ethical Dilemmas



10

Right vs. Wrong

Only one option –
Right or Wrong



Violates law, policy, or someone's rights



Avoids responsibility



Requires dishonesty



Violates a professional code

11

Right vs. Right

Truth
vs.
Loyalty

Individual
vs.
Community

Short-Term
vs.
Long-Term

Justice
vs.
Mercy

Being honest and transparent conflicts with protecting a person, team, organization, or relationship.

12

Right vs. Right

Truth
vs.
Loyalty

Individual
vs.
Community

Short-Term
vs.
Long-Term

Justice
vs.
Mercy

What is best or fair for one person conflicts with what is best for the larger group or public.

13

Right vs. Right

Truth
vs.
Loyalty

Individual
vs.
Community

Short-Term
vs.
Long-Term

Justice
vs.
Mercy

An action that provides an immediate benefit conflicts with what may produce a better outcome in the future.

14

Right vs. Right

Truth
vs.
Loyalty

Individual
vs.
Community

Short-Term
vs.
Long-Term

Justice
vs.
Mercy

Applying rules, standards, or consequences consistently conflicts with showing compassion because of someone's circumstances.

15

Decision Making: Ends-Based

What produces the greatest good or least harm?

Think:

- Who is affected?
- What are the consequences?
- What happens if we choose A versus B?



16

Decision Making: Rules-Based

What would happen if everyone did this?

Think:

- What rules apply?
- What rights are involved?
- Would I want this to become the standard?



17

Decision Making: Care-Based

How would I want to be treated?

Think:

- Put yourself on the receiving end.
- What would fairness feel like from their position?
- What would you want someone to consider?



18

Ethical Decisions

Your township was bequeathed \$150,000 in funding that must be used for community improvements this year. There are two competing requests:

- Option A: Replace an aging playground in the township's largest park. It is still usable, but the equipment is outdated and not fully accessible. The park serves hundreds of families each week.
- Option B: Repair a deteriorating pedestrian bridge in a small neighborhood. Only about 30 households regularly use it, but without the repair, residents will soon lose their safest walking route to a bus stop and nearby services.

There is not enough money to do both.

19

Decision Making

Approach	Notes
Ends-based	Hundreds of residents would benefit with a playground compared with a much smaller number of residents using the bridge.

20

Decision Making

Approach	Notes
Ends-based	Hundreds of residents would benefit with a playground compared with a much smaller number of residents using the bridge.
Rules-based	The bridge could become the priority if your principle is that essential public infrastructure and safety come before recreational improvements, regardless of how many people benefit.

21

Decision Making

Approach	Notes
Ends-based	Hundreds of residents would benefit with a playground compared with a much smaller number of residents using the bridge.
Rules-based	The bridge could become the priority if your principle is that essential public infrastructure and safety come before recreational improvements, regardless of how many people benefit.
Care-based	How would you feel if you had small children and there was a new playground? How would you feel if you lost your safest walking route?

22

Ethical Decisions

A long-term public employee is beloved by residents and coworkers. They are helpful, friendly, and have served the community for 22 years.

You discover they have repeatedly skipped a required documentation step.

Nothing bad has happened, and they tell you: "I've been doing this job longer than that policy has existed. I know what I'm doing."

Other employees have been held accountable for the same requirement.

23

Ethical Decisions

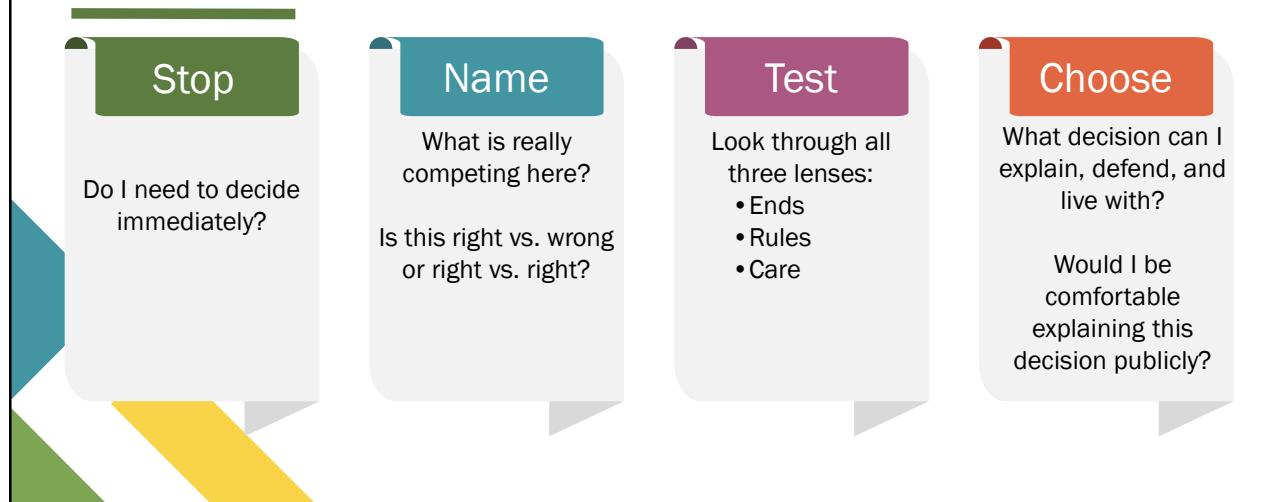
An employee receives a request for information that is legally releasable. The information is technically a public record, but it contains details that could embarrass a local resident who has been very vocal at public meetings.

A coworker jokes: "They wanted transparency. Let's give them transparency."

The release itself would comply with the law.

24

Ethical Decision Tool



25

Summary

Ethics isn't knowing the answer to every situation.
It's having a process for asking better questions when the answer isn't obvious.

The standard isn't simply, "Can I do this?"
Sometimes the more important question is, "Should I?"

26

Questions?

Comments?



27

CONTACT LTAP

Address :
 Pennsylvania Department of Transportation
 Bureau of Planning and Research
 400 North Street, 6th Floor
 Harrisburg, PA 17120



Pennsylvania
Department of Transportation
 Local Technical Assistance Program
www.pa.gov/penndot

Website: <https://gis.penndot.pa.gov/ltap/>

Phone: 1-800-FOR-LTAP

Fax: 717-783-9152

Email: ltap@pa.gov

Copyright © 2026 by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. All rights reserved.

28