

# Expectations for Attorney-Client Relationships

## Guidance Applicable to Local Government Lawyers

When representing local governments, the Client is the entity as an organization (e.g., city, county or district). Elected officers, appointed officials and staff members may be representatives of the Client. While the Attorney usually works closely with those individuals they typically are often not the Clients. Nonetheless, for purposes of this document representatives of the local government and the entity they serve are referred to jointly as “Clients.”

Although each arrangement will vary, there are certain essential elements of successful Attorney-Client relationships that tend to provide a solid foundation. This document outlines recommended mutual expectations between Attorneys and the local government Clients they serve. Its purpose is to promote professionalism, accountability and effective collaboration in the delivery of municipal legal services.



### Client's Standards

In furtherance of sound, reliable legal representation, Clients may reasonably expect the following:

- **Integrity:** Attorneys shall adhere to the highest ethical standards (including state and local codes), recognizing the Attorney's conduct reflects upon the Client and their community.
- **Empathy:** While Attorneys serve the institution, Attorneys shall remain aware the organizations are comprised of people who are coping with the human challenges shared by all.
- **Respect:** Attorneys shall treat people in a professional manner, including members of the public and Client representatives (regardless of their specific roles as staff, managers, appointed or elected officials).
- **Competence:** Attorneys shall maintain the knowledge, education and expertise necessary to appropriately perform as the Client's legal advisor, representative and advocate within the scope of the engagement.
- **Candor:** Attorneys shall be honest and direct when counseling the Client and keeping the Client informed of the status of legal matters.
- **Communication:** Attorneys shall proactively, frequently and plainly communicate with the Client to foster a better shared understanding and build mutual trust.
- **Confidentiality:** Clients expect their legal team to be diligent and discreet when safeguarding their sensitive data and protecting their confidences (while understanding the privilege may belong to the entity, not necessarily individuals).

- **Responsiveness:** Attorneys shall respond in a timely manner by providing counseling and legal products in accordance with the Client's reasonable directions.
- **Diligence:** Attorneys shall be persistent in devoting the time and attention necessary to provide thorough, professional services in a cautious manner.
- **Efficiency:** Attorneys shall conduct their representation and provide their services in a manner that respects the Client's resources and is not wasteful.
- **Alternatives:** Clients deserve to be presented with options accompanied by risk assessments particularly if the Client's initial preferred course of action faces legal impediments.
- **Advisors:** Clients turn to Attorneys for legal counseling (and sometimes policy guidance) recognizing the ultimate decision belongs to the Client.
- **Politics:** The Attorney's responsibility is generally to the local government organization acting collectively as a body. Attorneys will not choose sides in internal political disputes or participate in personality conflicts among or between members of the governing body and/or staff.
- **Relationships:** While over time business relationships may develop into friendships, Attorneys will maintain the proper professional distance and objectivity necessary to serve the organization.

### **Attorney's Standards**

To provide the best service and maintain a healthy relationship, Attorneys may reasonably expect the following:

- **Integrity:** Client representatives shall adhere to the highest ethical standards (including state and local codes), recognizing their conduct reflects upon the organization and their community.
- **Empathy:** While Attorneys are expected to be strong individuals, possessing both emotional intelligence and mental resilience, Clients shall remain aware that Attorneys are people who may be coping with the human challenges shared by all.
- **Respect:** Clients will treat Attorneys in a professional manner.
- **Consideration:** Clients make their own decisions and are not required to heed the Attorney's advice, but legal guidance (including any options or alternatives identified) will be carefully considered and not casually ignored or discarded.
- **Time:** Attorneys will be afforded a reasonable amount of time to conduct due diligence and perform their tasks consistent with their professional standards given the Attorney's many duties and obligations.

- **Communication:** Clients shall frequently, timely and plainly communicate with the Attorneys to foster a better shared understanding and build mutual trust.
- **Information:** Attorneys will be promptly notified of new legal matters and significant developments on pending projects for which their services have been retained and provided the data necessary to do their jobs (including the names and contact information for project staff).
- **Context:** Clients will provide their Attorneys with a full explanation of the situation including the rationale, parties and objectives rather than ask narrow questions or convey only partial data.
- **Cooperation:** Client's cooperation with their Attorneys is vital to the successful provision of legal services and can be an express condition to coverage by risk pools and/or insurance coverages.
- **Feedback:** Critiques of the Attorney's performance are welcome when presented in a discrete, timely, respectful, professional place and manner designed to improve legal services and enhance the relationship.
- **Politics:** The Attorney's responsibility is generally to the local government organization acting collectively as a body. Attorneys will not be required to choose sides in internal political disputes or participate in personality conflicts among or between members of the governing body and/or staff.
- **Relationships:** While over time business relationships may develop into friendships, Clients will remain professional and avoid personal entanglements.

### Course Correction

Should conflict arise stemming from unrealized expectations, Clients and their Attorneys are encouraged to timely engage in civil, direct and respectful discussions seeking realignment. Conversations among Attorneys and their Clients focused on fostering mutual understanding and cooperation may occur one-on-one and as a group.

*October 1, 2025. This document was prepared for educational purposes, only. It was compiled by Alan Bojorquez utilizing the learned suggestions received from many experienced colleagues (attorneys, managers and mayors).*

