

Board of Ethics City of Chicago

Rahm Emanuel, Mayor

LOBBYING CHICAGO GOVERNMENT: A PLAIN LANGUAGE GUIDE FOR NON-PROFITS



INTRODUCTION. Chicago's lobbying law is one of the broadest in the United States. Most private sector representatives who meet with or contact City employees or officials to "talk business" are likely lobbying. It's perfectly acceptable to be a lobbyist. As far as the Board of Ethics is concerned, there is no stigma attached to lobbying. It's a right guaranteed by the Constitution. But it's a regulated activity.

City law requires all persons who lobby to register with the Board of Ethics every year, disclose to the public who they are, who their clients are, and which City departments they intend to lobby. It also requires them to report every three months on their lobbying activity, including which matters they lobbied on, their compensation from and expenditures for each client, their political contributions, which City personnel they gave gifts to, and what those gifts were.

The City imposes a \$350 per year fee on all lobbyists at the time they register (and annually thereafter), and a \$75 per client after the first listed client.

All lobbyists' filings can be made and viewed online at:

<https://webapps.cityofchicago.org/elf/index.html>



EXEMPTIONS FOR SOME NON-PROFITS AND AFFILIATED REPRESENTATIVES. The law exempts some persons from having to register as lobbyists, or from having to pay the annual registration fee.

Registration Exemptions. Among persons who needn't register as lobbyists are employees, officers or directors of a not-for-profit entity (if acting on behalf of the entity to influence any City legislative or administrative action). This means that directors, staff members or officers of "one-tiered" non-profits need not register as lobbyists, even if they engage in activity that would otherwise require them to register (such as meeting with aldermen or senior staff from the Department of Housing & Economic Development). What is a one-tiered non-profit? It's

any non-profit that doesn't have or represent for-profit members. Hence, churches, synagogues, mosques, homeowners' associations, charitable or educational institutions, social service organizations, etc. typically are one-tiered lobbyists.

However, the exemption doesn't apply to persons paid to influence City legislative or administrative action on behalf of not-for-profit entities that themselves represent or include among their membership for-profit entities, or individuals engaged in for-profit enterprises. So, paid officers of membership-based organizations like the Illinois Restaurant Association or the Building Owners and Managers Association must register once they try to influence legislative or administration action. And so must the paid Executive Director or staff member of a local Chamber of Commerce or other organization with for-profit business members. ***But note: volunteer*** directors of chambers of commerce typically do not need to register, because they are not compensated for their services (or for the activities that would otherwise constitute lobbying).



FEE EXEMPTIONS FOR CERTAIN LOBBYISTS. The Board can waive the \$350 lobbyist registration fee (and any additional client fees) if a lobbyist provides written evidence that he or she is paid to lobby by a non-profit entity with for-profit members and either (i) the lobbyist's primary lobbying responsibilities are to foster small business initiatives primarily within a single official community area or neighborhood, or (ii) the non-profit entity has been approved or is pending approval by the City Council to be a special service area provider for the City.



[FOR MORE INFORMATION:](#)

www.cityofchicago.org/ethics

**City of Chicago Board of Ethics
740 North Sedgwick, Suite 500
Chicago, Illinois 60654
Tel: (312) 744-9660
TTY: (312) 744-5996
FAX: (312) 744-2793**

**[Steven I. Berlin, Executive Director](mailto:sberlin@cityofchicago.org)
sberlin@cityofchicago.org**