**LOBBYING CHICAGO GOVERNMENT:**

**A PLAIN LANGUAGE GUIDE FOR NON-PROFITS**  
  


BOARD OF ETHICS

CITY OF CHICAGO

Lori Lightfoot, Mayor

William F. Conlon, Chair

**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.

With some exceptions, City law requires all individuals who “lobby” (as defined) to register with the Board of Ethics every year and 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 calendar quarter on their lobbying activity, including which matters they lobbied on, any compensation received from and expenditures made for each client, all 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. The Board may waive these, as explained below.

All lobbyists’ filings can be made and

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



**EXEMPTIONS FOR CERTAIN NON-PROFITS AND THEIR OFFICERS, DIRECTORS OR STAFF.** The law exempts some individuals from needing to register as lobbyists, or paying the fees.

**Registration Exemptions for Certain Non-profits.** Among those who needn’t register as lobbyists are employees, officers or directors of a “one-tiered” 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 certain 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 Planning & Development).

**What is a one-tiered non-profit?** It’s any non-profit that doesn’t have or represent for-profit members. Churches, synagogues, mosques, homeowners’ associations, charitable or educational institutions, non-profit hospitals, social service organizations, etc. typically are one-tiered lobbyists.

**However,** the exemption **doesn’t** apply to individuals paid to influence City legislative or administrative action on behalf of non-profit entities that themselves represent or include among their membership for-profit entities, or individuals engaged in for-profit enterprises. We call such entities “two-tiered” non-profits. So, paid officers of membership-based organizations like the Illinois Restaurant Association or the Chicago Building Owners and Managers Association must register once they try to influence City legislative or administration action. And so must the paid Executive Directors, officers or staff members of local Chambers of Commerce or other organizations 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 Non-profits.** 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 (“SSA”) service provider for the City.



***FOR MORE INFORMATION:***

[**www.cityofchicago.org/ethics**](http://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**

**Twitter: @ChicagoEthicsBd**

**Steven I. Berlin, Executive Director**

[**steve.berlin@cityofchicago.org**](mailto:steve.berlin@cityofchicago.org)

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