



Group Insurance Board

*Adopted: November 13, 2012
Revised: May 16, 2018*

Communications Policy

Purpose

This Communications Policy is intended to ensure that communications by the Group Insurance Board (Board) members are handled appropriately and in a manner that best serves the participants in the insurance programs under the Board's authority. Board members are expected to be professional and courteous in all communications. Communications by Board members shall be consistent with their fiduciary duty to represent the interests of the beneficiaries of the public employee trust fund and the proper administration of benefits.

Communication Between Board Members at Board Meetings

Board members should communicate in an open and constructive manner during meetings of the Board and Committees. Board members should refrain from private communication when discussing Board or Department of Employee Trust Funds (ETF) business during open meetings, for example via email, text or instant message, to prevent a violation of Wisconsin's Open Meetings Law.¹ When a quorum of the Board or a Committee of the Board meets, the meeting must be open to the public, held only after proper notice is given² and be recorded with proper minutes. However, the Board may conduct certain business in closed session in accordance with Wisconsin's Open Meetings Law.³

Communication Between Board Members Outside of Board Meetings

Any Board member may contact the Chair, or in his or her absence, the Vice-Chair, regarding issues of interest or concern about the insurance programs under the Board's authority. Board members are to contact the Board Chair or the appropriate ETF official if they wish to have specific issues discussed by the Board so that these items can be added to the Board meeting agenda.

Board members must not engage in mass or sequential email exchanges with other Board members relating to Board or ETF business. The Wisconsin Attorney General strongly discourages governmental bodies from using electronic mail to communicate about issues within the body's realm of authority, because of the risk of conducting a "meeting" or "convening of members" in violation of Open Meetings Law.⁴

Informal gatherings of Board members for social purposes are not considered public meetings under the Wisconsin Open Meetings law or this policy.⁵ If Board issues were to

¹ [Wis. Stats., Ch 19, Subchapter V.](#)

² [§ 19.84, Stats.](#)

³ [§ 19.85, Stats.](#)

⁴ [§ 19.82\(2\), Stats.](#)

⁵ [§ 19.82\(2\), Stats.](#)

be discussed at an informal gathering, however, the character of the gathering may change to a public meeting. As a result, please take caution in discussing board business outside of a formal board meeting.

Communication Between the Department Secretary (Or Designee) and the Board

Notice and information for special and regularly scheduled quarterly Board meetings will be sent to all Board members before the meetings. The Department Secretary shall communicate with the Board between meetings when issues arise that require their immediate attention and consideration and may communicate other issues of interest to the Board.

Communication Between a Board Member and ETF Staff

If a Board member needs information related to benefits administration, the primary contacts are ETF's Secretary or Deputy Secretary. Board members may contact Board Liaisons directly regarding meeting schedules, travel arrangements, reimbursements and other administrative matters.

Communication Between Third Parties and the Board (Directly or Through ETF)

To ensure adequate time for distribution, communication should be received by ETF through the ETF Board Liaison at least 24 hours prior to a meeting, in accordance with Board correspondence procedures posted on ETF's website. Board members shall forward to the Board Liaison any materials received directly from third parties.

Any correspondence to the Board received by ETF will be directed to the applicable Board without edit or redaction. All correspondence will be reviewed by ETF staff, and Board members will be informed that the correspondence includes individual personal information, and if applicable, protected health information that may be protected from disclosure by state or federal law. ETF will review and, as necessary, redact personal information from the correspondence prior to any posting of the material on the ETF website.

Board members shall safeguard and keep confidential any personal information received from third parties, as per the Board's Privacy of Personal Information Policy.

Materials Provided by an Attendee to the Board at an Open Meeting

While ETF procedures provide that materials be submitted to ETF at least 24 hours prior to a Board meeting, Board members may receive materials from third party attendees at an open Board meeting. Board members and attendees shall transfer any such materials directly to the Board Liaison. If there are sufficient copies, the Board Liaison may disseminate the information to the Board. If there are not sufficient copies to be disseminated at the meeting, the Board Liaison will distribute the information as correspondence prior to the next Board meeting.

Communication Between a Board Member and a Service Provider or Vendor

If a Board member is contacted by anyone with a future interest in doing business with the Board, the Board member should refer the individual to ETF's Secretary. The Secretary may refer the matter to the appropriate ETF staff or other advisors to evaluate the business inquiry or solicitation.

When a Board member discusses ETF or Board business with a vendor outside of a Board meeting, that Board member's independence may be perceived as compromised and could result in the Board member's disqualification from formal consideration of any related matters by the Board.

Presentations to External Groups

If a Board member is asked to make a presentation to external groups, the Board member must indicate that he or she is not speaking on behalf of the Board, unless the Board member has specifically been authorized to do so by the Board. Board members shall be respectful of the Board, its policies and its decisions in all external communications, even if the Board member disagrees with the Board's decision. The Board should speak with a single voice for the benefit of all participants.

Board members are encouraged to provide presentation materials related to ETF-administered benefit programs to ETF for review prior to distribution or publication. This will help to ensure accuracy of materials related to ETF programs and to ensure the programs are not inadvertently placed at risk.

Discussion of Individual Benefits

Board members are discouraged from counseling others about individual benefits. When a Board member discusses insurance benefits outside of a Board meeting, that Board member's independence may be compromised and could result in the member's disqualification from subsequent formal consideration of any related matters by the Board. Providing specific benefit information to others is outside the scope of Board member duties and responsibilities. Board members should either relay the benefits inquiries to the appropriate staff at ETF or encourage the person to contact ETF directly.

Communication Between a Board Member and the Media

The ETF Secretary and Board Chair are the only two individuals authorized to speak on behalf of the Board. The primary media contact for the insurance programs is ETF's Secretary or the Secretary's designee. ETF's Secretary may designate another staff person as a spokesperson, depending on the topic of inquiry by the press. When a statement from the Board is required, the Board Chair will serve as the spokesperson. If the Board Chair is unavailable, the Vice-Chair will serve as the spokesperson.

For ETF internal use:

| Adopted* | Deferred Compensation Board Reviewed or Revised | Group Insurance Board Reviewed or Revised | Retirement Boards (ETF, TR, WR) Reviewed or Revised |
|------------|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| 11/13/2012 | | 5/16/2018 | 12/03/2009 |

*Individual board policies may vary.