



Service Standard 1.1.7

Code of Conduct and Ethics

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SOPs	RFS Code of Conduct and Ethics
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Policy Contact	Director People and Culture
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1. Purpose

- 1.1. This Service Standard and accompanying Code of Conduct and Ethics (Code of Conduct) specify the mandatory requirements and standards of behaviour expected of all RFS members.
- 1.2. For the purposes of this Service Standard, RFS members are:
 - a. Staff members directly employed by the RFS
 - b. Volunteer members of RFS brigades, and
 - c. Persons undertaking work for the RFS, including contractors, consultants, contingent labour, secondees from other government sector agencies and other relevant bodies, and work experience students.

2. Policy

- 2.1. The RFS Code of Conduct forms part of this Service Standard.
- 2.2. All members must comply with the RFS Code of Conduct.
- 2.3. For staff members, the RFS Code of Conduct supplements but does not replace the [Code of Ethics and Conduct for NSW Government Sector Employees](#). Staff must comply with both the NSW Government Code and the RFS Code of Conduct.
- 2.4. As part of the acceptance of offer of employment, new staff are required to sign an acceptance letter that states they have been provided with a copy, read and agreed to abide by the conditions of the RFS Code of Conduct and the Code of Ethics and Conduct for NSW Government Sector Employees.
- 2.5. All staff must acknowledge and electronically sign the Code of Conduct and Ethics declaration within one month of commencing employment, and on an annual basis by 1 July each year, via the approved corporate system (currently SAP learning portal).
- 2.6. On joining the RFS, all volunteer members are to be provided with a copy of the RFS Code of Conduct as part of the induction process.

- 2.7. The Code of Conduct provides a broad framework to:
- guide daily professional and personal conduct of all RFS employee and volunteer members and engaged contractors and consultants, as they undertake their RFS duties and activities and provide a service for, and communicate with the NSW community
 - support sound and ethical decision making and efficient, effective and prudent use of resources
 - assist RFS members, contractors and consultants decide on an appropriate course of action when they are faced with an ethical issue or situation
 - assist RFS members, contractors and consultants to recognise and avoid behaviours that are inappropriate or have the potential to involve, or be perceived to involve, corruption, maladministration or waste, and provide guidance with respect to the reporting of such matters, and
 - provide transparency to enable public scrutiny and ensure a merit based, apolitical and professional RFS.
- 2.8. The Code of Conduct obliges all members, contractors and consultants to be accountable for their own professional and personal conduct and behaviour and to act in accordance with the NSW RFS values and in the community's interest at all times.
- 2.9. The Code of Conduct recognises the role of the NSW RFS as a government sector agency in preserving the community's / public's interest and defending public value.
- 2.10. The NSW RFS Values and standards outlined in the Code of Conduct must be demonstrated and maintained by all NSW RFS members, contractors and consultants at all times, whenever and wherever it is relevant to the work, responsibilities, functions and activities of the NSW RFS.
- 2.11. The RFS Code of Conduct applies whenever members are acting in the course of, or in connection with, their RFS duties. RFS members should ensure that their off duty conduct is consistent with these standards to avoid any adverse impact on the RFS, or on a member's employment or volunteer status or contractual arrangements.
- 2.12. The Code of Conduct cannot address every possible ethical issue or scenario which may be faced by members in the course of performing work, duties or functions and when off duty. For this reason, the Code of Conduct should be used as a source of practical guidance based on a common sense approach to making ethical decisions about duty and issues. If in doubt, members should always consult their supervisor.
- 2.13. All RFS members have an obligation to ensure that any visitors they are hosting act in accordance with the Code of Conduct at all times.
- 2.14. Failure to comply with the RFS Code of Conduct, or the Code of Ethics and Conduct for NSW Government Sector Employees for staff, may constitute misconduct, a breach of discipline, or a breach of contract. Consequences will depend on the nature and seriousness of the breach as outlined in Section 2.4 of the Code.

3. Document control

Release history

Version	Date	Summary of changes
1.0	1 September 1999	Initial release
2.0	17 June 2006	Repealed and remade v1.3 - complete review
2.1	3 April 2008	Repealed and remade v2.0 – minor amendments

Version	Date	Summary of changes
2.2	29 May 2008	Repealed and remade v2.1 – minor amendments
3.0	9 December 2008	Repealed and remade v2.2 Complete review to align with organisational values
3.1	18 September 2009	Repealed and remade v3.0 – minor amendments
4.0	10 September 2015	Repealed and remade v3.1 – complete review to align with <i>Government Sector Employment Act 2013</i> and Public Service Commissioner's Direction 1 of 2015
4.1	2 December 2016	Repealed and remade v4.0 – minor amendments
4.2	22 February 2022	Repealed and remade v4.1 – minor amendments
5.0	22 December 2025	Repealed and remade v4.2 – updated to implement the Code of Ethics and Conduct for NSW Government Sector Employees.

Approved by

Name	Position	Date
Trent Curtin	Commissioner	22 December 2025

Related documents

Document name
Government Sector Employment Act 2013
Rural Fires Act 1997
PSCC 2024-02 Code of Ethics and Conduct for NSW Government Sector Employees
Service Standard 1.1.34 Workplace Complaints Resolution



RFS

Code of Conduct and Ethics

Putting the RFS Values and Ethical Principles into Practice

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Message from the Commissioner

The NSW Rural Fire Service (RFS) is built on service to the community. For generations, our members have stood alongside the people of NSW in times of need, protecting lives, homes, livelihoods and the environment. This service is more than a role. It is a great privilege.

The trust we hold is earned through helping the community in their time of need, and also through the way we conduct ourselves and care for one another, every day.

The strength of the RFS lies in its people. Our members come from all walks of life, bringing with them a rich diversity of backgrounds, experiences, skills and perspectives. This diversity is one of our greatest strengths. This strengthens our decision-making, enriches our culture, and ensures we reflect the communities we proudly serve.

Creating a Service where everyone feels safe, respected and included is deeply important to me and is one of my highest priorities as Commissioner. I am committed to fostering an environment where every member can be themselves, feel supported, and perform at their best. Every member deserves to be treated with dignity. There is no place in the RFS for bullying, harassment, discrimination, racism, victimisation, or any other form of misconduct.

This Code of Conduct and Ethics sets clear expectations for how we behave and how we treat one another. It applies to everyone who represents the RFS, including volunteers, staff, contractors and any other person undertaking work on our behalf. It applies equally, regardless of role, rank or tenure.

There will be times when doing the right thing requires courage. It may mean speaking up, respectfully challenging inappropriate behaviour, or supporting someone who raises a concern. I recognise that this is not always easy. But it is essential. A respectful, inclusive and safe organisation depends on our collective willingness to uphold these standards and to look out for one another.

The community places enormous trust in the RFS, often when they are at their most vulnerable. To honour that trust, we must hold ourselves to the highest standards of conduct, whether on the fireground, in the workplace, or in the community. Our behaviour matters. What we say, what we do, and how we treat others will always count.

By upholding this Code, we reinforce the values that define the RFS and reaffirm who we are. In doing so, we strengthen our culture and ensure the Service remains safe, respectful and inclusive, one where our members are proud to belong, and one that continues to serve the people of NSW with professionalism, integrity and pride.

Trent Curtin

Commissioner

1. Our Values

The community of NSW expects the RFS to conduct its business with professionalism, accountability, integrity and respect.

The actions, decisions and interactions of RFS members must:

- be consistent with relevant legislation and policy
- provide transparency to enable public scrutiny, and
- be soundly based on the RFS values and the principles that guide their implementation.

There is no hierarchy among our core values, and each is of equal importance.

Mutual Respect

- We actively seek and value everyone's contribution
- We acknowledge differences in people
- Constructive comment is accepted as a positive contribution to the richness of our organisation
- We encourage accepting responsibility and accountability while avoiding a "blaming" culture
- We respect the dignity of each and every person in all our communications

Adaptability and Resourcefulness

- We encourage creativity and flexibility, while approaching our work sensibly and with safety
- Initiative and continuous development are necessary and to be encouraged within our approved standards, procedures and guidelines
- We encourage open mindedness
- We are analytical in our approach to tasks and the Service encourages progression in new methods, alternatives, equipment and processes

One Team, Many Players, One Purpose

- We encourage diversity: our organisation is reflective of our communities
- We encourage contribution from all areas
- Consultation and engagement of stakeholders are essential to the success of the RFS
- We target a diverse range of groups in our communications and the promotion of our organisation

Integrity and Trust

- We communicate clearly what we expect from each other
- We take personal responsibility for actions and commitments that we make
- We are both respectful and open with each other
- We foster a climate of trust and reliability
- Open and informed decision making is promoted and encouraged

Support, Friendship and Camaraderie

- We provide a welcome atmosphere for all
- We support each other in all activities
- We foster a sense of belonging, purpose, enjoyment and involvement
- We mentor our people to help develop their full potential

Community and Our Environment

- We go above and beyond to make a difference in the community and our environment
- We undertake our roles and behave in a way that is inspiring to others
- We see building community capacity as central to our mission
- We engage with the youth of our communities to ensure the sustainability of the Service
- We are mindful of the ecological and environmental impact of our activities

Knowledge and Learning

- We foster a climate of continuous learning and sharing of information
- We encourage self-reflection and personal growth
- We enhance our knowledge through participation in a range of forums
- We actively participate in research and embed the learning into our organisation
- Debriefing is important, necessary and to be encouraged to improve our standards, procedures and guidelines

2. Introduction

2.1. What is the RFS Code of Ethics and Conduct, and who does it apply to?

The RFS Code of Conduct and Ethics (the Code of Conduct) forms part of Service Standard 1.1.7 Code of Conduct and Ethics.

The Code of Conduct implements the *Ethical Framework for the government sector* found in Part 2 of the *Government Sector Employment Act 2013*.

The Code of Conduct applies to:

- all members of the RFS, including the Commissioner
- any employee of another government sector agency on secondment to the RFS
- all consultants, contractors and agency employees engaged to perform work for, or on behalf of the RFS, and
- work experience students.

In the Code of Conduct:

- members of the staff of the RFS are referred to as ‘staff members’
- volunteer rural fire fighters are referred to as ‘volunteers’
- staff members and volunteers are referred to collectively as ‘members’, and
- the supervisor or manager directly in charge of a member is referred to as the ‘next in charge’. An example, for volunteers is:
 - for an officer or member of a brigade – the captain, or
 - for a captain or group officer – the district manager.

Staff members, as government sector employees, have additional obligations to those of volunteers. All RFS staff members must comply with the [Code of Ethics and Conduct for NSW Government Sector Employees](#) when acting in the course of, or in connection with, their NSW government employment. In the RFS Code of Conduct obligations that apply to staff members but not to volunteers have been specifically identified.

2.2. When does the Code of Conduct apply?

The Code of Conduct applies whenever a member is:

- in the workplace¹
- acting in the capacity of a member
- attending or participating in any RFS or RFS sponsored² activity, including but not limited to attending incidents, training, or other community relations events
- wearing RFS uniform, whether on duty or otherwise
- attending any RFS sponsored event including social events, or
- holding him or herself out as a member³.

¹ “Workplace” includes places occupied by RFS members whilst undertaking authorised activities and may include, but are not limited to: vehicles and tankers, boats, aircraft, fire grounds, trailers, caravans, plant and machinery, fire control centres, brigade stations, offices, training centres or locations, base camps, staging areas, canteens, workshops, storage facilities and warehouses, garages, toilets and amenities and any other location where RFS activities/duties occur.

² RFS sponsored activity” includes functions or events organised by a brigade or brigade social committee, field days, training courses (whether or not they are conducted on RFS premises) and meals provided at, or social gatherings held in conjunction with meetings or training courses involving staff and/or volunteers

³ This includes occasions when a member describes him or herself as a member or implies that they are a member by, for example, posting an image of themselves in RFS uniform or biographical details/description that includes a reference to membership of the RFS.

Members should ensure their off duty conduct is consistent with these standards to avoid any adverse impact on the RFS, or on their employment or volunteer status.

Contractors, consultants and agency employees engaged by the RFS and work experience students working in the RFS must abide by the Code of Conduct, whenever and wherever they are performing work for the RFS.

2.3. How does it relate to RFS service standards and policies and the law?

The Code of Conduct does not replace the general law or the NSW Public Service Commissioner's Directions. All members of the RFS must also comply with all relevant State and Commonwealth laws and staff members must comply with the NSW Public Service Commissioner's directions.

If a conflict arises between the Code of Conduct and the provisions of any Act, Regulation or Public Service Commissioner's Directions, the latter provisions prevail.

The Code of Conduct provides the overarching principles and standards for how members are to approach the most common ethical issues that may arise as they perform their duties. A number of other service standards, policies and guidelines are also issued by the RFS to set out the specific steps and actions to be taken when managing the ethical issues referred to in the Code of Conduct. Members must therefore ensure they are aware of and comply with the Code of Conduct and the relevant service standards, policies and procedures.

2.4. What happens if a member breaches the Code of Conduct?

Behaviour contrary to the RFS values and/or the Code of Conduct can bring individual members into disrepute, undermine productive working relationships, hinder service delivery and damage the community/public trust in the RFS, or the government sector more broadly.

There are a range of consequences for breaching the RFS values and the Code of Conduct depending on the nature and seriousness of the breach and the status of members involved.

A failure to comply with the Code of Conduct may constitute:

- A breach of discipline in the case of a volunteer
- Misconduct in the case of a staff member

The processes for managing breaches of the Code are outlined in Service Standard 1.1.34 Workplace Complaints Resolution.

The RFS Commissioner may also be required by law to report some breaches of the Code of Conduct to one or more of the following external agencies and such conduct may constitute a criminal offence:

- NSW Police
- NSW Independent Commission against Corruption (ICAC)
- Office of the Children's Guardian.

If it is alleged that a member has acted in a way that is contrary to the Code of Conduct, he or she will have an opportunity to provide their version of events. How this will happen will be proportionate to the seriousness of the matter. Where the allegation is minor or low level the member's next in charge may discuss the matter directly with the member. If the allegation is more serious, and/or there is evidence of a pattern of similar behaviour over a period of time, a formal process may be required.

Potential outcomes where a finding of breach of discipline/misconduct has occurred may include:

- Volunteers – reprimand, suspension, demotion, disqualifying the respondent from holding rank, imposition of conditions on membership or removal from membership
- Staff members – any of the actions detailed in Part 5, Section 69 (4) of the *Government Sector Employment Act 2013*
- Contractors, consultants, agency employee and work experience students – termination of contract/work arrangements.

2.5. What should a member do if they become aware of conduct or behaviour contrary to the Code of Conduct?

A member who believes that another member, consultant, contractor, agency employee, secondee or work experience student has done the wrong thing can discuss their concerns confidentially with their next in charge.

If the next in charge is the person who the member believes may have breached the Code of Conduct, or the member is not comfortable discussing their concerns with this person, they can raise their concerns confidentially with the next level of management/command.

The RFS Workplace Complaints Resolution Framework provides members with two avenues for lodging a formal complaint or making a confidential disclosure:

- a. Access and submit an online Formal Complaint Form via One RFS, or
- b. Call the Third-Party Hotline on 1800 950 159.

Members must report suspected corrupt conduct, as well as maladministration and serious and substantial waste of public resources, or a breach of government information and privacy rights in accordance with Service Standard 1.1.34 Workplace Complaints Resolution, or make a public interest disclosure in accordance with Service Standard 1.1.30 Public Interest Disclosures.

The *Public Interest Disclosures Act 2022* provides certain protections against reprisals for members who voluntarily report such matters, but not where the allegation is made vexatiously or with malicious intent.

To be protected under the *Public Interest Disclosures Act 2022* an individual must make the disclosure:

- internally to the person or persons nominated in Service Standard 1.1.30 Public Interest Disclosures
- externally to any of the following agencies, depending on the nature of the disclosure:
 - Disclosures concerning corrupt conduct should be made to the ICAC
 - Disclosures concerning maladministration should be made to the Ombudsman, and
 - Disclosures concerning serious and substantial waste of public money should be made to the Auditor-General.

Disclosure can likewise be made to a Member of Parliament or to a journalist, subject to the conditions provided under Section 28 of the *Public Interest Disclosures Act 2022*.

If a member is unsure as to whether a matter involves corrupt conduct, maladministration or serious and substantial waste they should still report it to the nominated person or agency cited above.

In the case of conduct or behaviour that may involve serious misconduct, any misconduct involving a child or potentially criminal or corrupt conduct, or to seek clarification on these matters, they may also contact the RFS Performance and Conduct Unit or Area Commander.

3. Our Core Conduct Obligations

The RFS is a community based fire and emergency service. It is both part of the community and serves the community.

Serving the community means more than fighting fires and protecting people, property and the environment from emergencies. It also means we have other obligations as detailed in this section.

3.1. Compliance

All members must comply with:

- State and Federal Laws
- the RFS values

- the Code of Conduct, and
- any other RFS service standards, policies, procedures and guidelines relevant to their role.

All members must also comply with any lawful and reasonable direction or instruction given to them by another RFS member empowered to make such a direction or instruction under legislation, regulation, delegation or authorisation.

All RFS managers, executives and senior volunteers must also:

- lead and promote implementation of the Ethical Framework in their workplace
- ensure their workplace culture, practices and systems (including recruitment and promotion) operate consistently with the Ethical Framework
- recognise and promote individual member and team conduct that exemplifies the Ethical Framework, and
- act promptly and with due process to prevent and address any breaches of the Ethical Framework.

3.2. Public Interest

Since the functions and powers of the RFS can have a broad effect on members of the community, you are expected as a member to perform your duties and activities, make decisions and exercise any delegation or authorisation in ways that promote or preserve the community/public's interest.

It is acknowledged that members also have their own private interests. An 'interest' in this context means anything that can have an impact on an individual or group. The term 'private interest' includes not only the personal, professional or business interests of a member, but also the personal, professional or business interests of individuals or groups with whom a member is closely associated. This can include relatives, friends, business associates, or even rivals and enemies.

In order to ensure their actions and decisions actively place the interests of the community/public and the RFS before that of their own, members must:

- act professionally with honesty, consistency and impartiality as they carry out their RFS duties
- treat people with whom they have contact during the course of their duties equally without prejudice or favour
- uphold the law, institutions of government and democratic principles
- provide transparency to enable public scrutiny
- not use RFS information or resources for private gain
- not take improper advantage of their RFS membership
- provide apolitical and non-partisan advice
- promptly disclose and effectively manage any actual, perceived or potential conflict of interest so that they can perform their duties in a fair and unbiased way
- make adequate records of any decision made or actions taken during the course of their duties
- make sure they receive value for money when incurring expenses on behalf of the RFS, and
- be fiscally responsible and focus on the efficient, effective and prudent use of resources.

3.3. Ethical Decision Making

A member must act ethically in all their dealings with members of the community, our stakeholders and their fellow members.

It is therefore essential that members identify ethical dilemmas and apply ethical judgement in resolving them because this is appropriate behaviour that reflects RFS values.

The decisions and actions members take must be consistent with legislation, the RFS values, the Code of Conduct and RFS service standards, policies, procedures and guidelines.

When faced with an ethical dilemma, members should clarify the scope of the problem and consider carefully how the problem affects (or may affect in the future) other members, members of the community, stakeholders and the government of the day.

Members should use the following framework to guide their decision making:

1	Is what I am proposing to do within the law?
2	Is what I am proposing to do consistent with the principles of the NSW Government Sector?
3	Is what I am proposing to do in line with the RFS purpose and strategic plan?
4	Is what I am proposing to do in the best interests of the RFS and the community? (i.e. Will it yield the greatest benefit or least harm to the most people and minimize the number of people who might be disadvantaged in the short or long term)
5	Is what I am proposing to do consistent with the Code of Conduct and/or RFS service standards, policies, procedures and guidelines?
6	Is this a decision I have the authorisation to make, or should it be referred to a more senior member?
7	What will the outcomes of the decision be – for me, my role, the Section/Brigade, the RFS?
8	What will the consequences be for other individuals?
9	Which options support due process, transparency, fair compensation for any loss and fair treatment of those affected by any decision?
10	Which options support the legal rights of members of the public?
11	Could the decision lead to myself, or a family member, friend or associate benefiting at the expense of the Brigade, the RFS or the community?
12	Will the decision bear up to scrutiny by the community, the media or a watchdog organisation like ICAC?
13	What is the likely impact on RFS membership, finances, infrastructure and other assets?
14	What is the likely impact on government finances?
15	Can the issue be addressed through the redesign of services, work practices or new methods of service delivery?

Evaluate and decide which option best addresses the above issues and:

- is lawful
- is in the community/public interest
- supports integrity
- builds trust
- delivers better services, and
- ensures accountability.

To establish if the option selected is consistent with the RFS values and the Code of Conduct, test it against the following questions:

- **Integrity** – would your fellow members say you had considered the views of all interested parties/individuals and acted in the right way, even if it was at your personal cost?
- **Trust** – would your action, if it became public, build confidence in the RFS and the public sector?
- **Service** – would the community say your actions improved the quality of the services they receive?

- **Accountability** – would the Commissioner and fellow members say that your actions are consistent with the RFS values, the Code of Conduct and the law?

Ensure that in implementing your decision, the methods and approach you take are also consistent with the RFS values and the Code of Conduct.

3.4. Accountability

Being accountable in everything we do:

- enhances the public's confidence in the RFS
- helps to ensure that we are responsive to the interests of the community, and
- protects individuals, members and the RFS.

A member is accountable for their own conduct and the decisions they make and actions they take. Members must demonstrate their accountability by:

- acting according to the spirit and the letter of any relevant legislation
- complying with RFS service standards, policies, procedures and guidelines at all times
- making certain that all decisions, actions and advice are based on evidence and within delegation/authorisation
- being answerable for their decisions and actions, and the outcomes resulting from their decisions and actions
- making sure that any decisions made, actions taken or advice provided on behalf of the RFS is properly documented
- ensuring they take ownership of situations that they are involved in. They see them through, and take responsibility for what happens – good or bad
- not blaming others if things go wrong. Instead, they do their best to make things right
- taking an active role in implementing the objectives of the RFS, and
- ensuring that RFS resources and assets are used responsibly in accordance with relevant service standards.

3.5. Fairness and Equity

The NSW community, our stakeholders and other members have a right to expect that members demonstrate fairness and equity whenever they perform their duties, take actions, have interactions and make decisions.

Accordingly, all members must:

- act honestly, in good faith, reasonably and with integrity at all times when dealing with members of the community, stakeholders and fellow members
- perform their duties impartially, particularly when exercising discretionary powers or delegated authority
- inform other members and members of the community of their rights, the procedures to be followed and the criteria on which any decisions will be made, providing them with adequate opportunity to respond and/or put their case and then taking this information into consideration when making decisions
- ensure other members and members of the community are advised of the reasons for any decision, and
- act in a manner that is inclusive and respectful of people and their linguistic, cultural, religious, ethnic, national or racial backgrounds, physical, mental or intellectual attributes or disabilities, age, gender or sexual orientation.

3.6. Environmental Protection

All members have statutory responsibilities to protect the environment under the *Rural Fires Act 1997* and other legislation.

Accordingly, all members must:

- be mindful of the environmental impacts of their actions
- have regard to the principles of ecologically sustainable development, and
- work to minimise environmental impacts in the workplace by reducing consumption of paper and energy and reusing and recycling resources.

4. Conduct Obligations in Specific Circumstances

A member's conduct, behaviour and the choices they make provide the opportunity to put the RFS values and the Code of Conduct into practice and to support other RFS members to do the same.

By observing the following principles as members undertake their duties will ensure that their professional and personal conduct and behaviour promotes the RFS values and maintains the community's trust and confidence in its integrity and professionalism.

4.1. Workplace Health and Safety

All members must take reasonable care of their own health and safety, and the health and safety of others.

Volunteers must comply with all relevant RFS Work, Health and Safety service standards.

Staff members must comply with all relevant RFS Work, Health and Safety policies and service standards.

4.2. Alcohol and other Drugs

A member must not:

- sell or allow the sale of alcohol on RFS premises and at RFS sponsored events, other than on licensed premises
- supply or allow the supply of alcohol to minors on RFS premises and at RFS sponsored events by any person, including the minor's parent or guardian
- allow the consumption of alcohol by minors on RFS premises or at RFS sponsored events, or
- consume alcohol on RFS premises or at RFS sponsored events unless a responsible officer is present who is willing to assume responsibility for:
 - ensuring compliance with the Code of Conduct and other relevant service standards and policies, and
 - supervising the conduct of the members in attendance.

In the case of volunteers, the responsible officer must be:

- a group or brigade officer over the age of 18 years, and
- present at all times while alcohol is being consumed

In the case of staff members, the responsible officer must be:

- an inspector or of higher rank or if non-ranked, a Manager or above, and
- present at all times while alcohol is being consumed.

Soft drinks or other non-alcoholic drinks must be made available whenever alcohol is consumed or available for consumption on RFS premises or at RFS sponsored events.

A member must not use, supply or possess any prohibited substance. A prohibited substance includes:

- any prohibited drug or prohibited plant as that term is used in the *Drug Misuse and Trafficking Act 1985 (NSW)*
- any prescription drug or pharmaceutical other than in circumstances where the member:
 - has a prescription for the prescription drug or pharmaceutical provided by a registered health care provider, and
 - is using it in accordance with the advice of that health care provider.

4.3. Conflicts of Interest

A 'conflict of interest' refers to situations where a member's private or personal interests may conflict with the performance of a member's responsibilities/duties (i.e. their public duty).

A conflict of interest can involve gaining a personal advantage as well as avoiding or minimising personal disadvantage. That is, a conflict of interest may allow you to avoid a loss, expense, or something else that has a negative impact on your personal or private interests.

Conflicts of interest may be actual, or be perceived to exist, or potentially exist at some time in the future.

Members must avoid situations where in the performance of their duties they could be influenced, or be seen to be influenced by their private interests.

The perception of a conflict of interest is just as important as an actual conflict as it can equally have an impact on the NSW community's confidence in the integrity of the RFS.

It isn't wrong or unethical to have a conflict of interest, what is important is that it is identified promptly and appropriately managed.

The best way to handle conflicts of interests is to avoid them entirely, wherever possible. If a member thinks they have a conflict of interest they must disclose it to their next in charge as soon as possible, and work cooperatively with them on a strategy to manage the situation.

Staff Members Only – staff members must also comply with all relevant policies relating to Conflicts of Interest.

Public Sector Senior Executive (including an acting senior executive) Only - must make a written declaration of private financial, business, personal or other interests or relationships that have the potential to influence, or could be perceived to influence, decisions made or advice given by the senior executive.

Conflicts of Interest and a member's right to participate in political and community activities and pursue personal interests

Outside of a member's RFS duties he or she has the right to participate in political and community activities and to pursue personal interests, provided that:

- any participation does not conflict with their duty as an member to serve the community's interest and the government of the day in a politically neutral manner, and
- any conflict that arises is recognised and adequately managed.

What is considered appropriate by the RFS in any particular case will depend on the nature of the issue, the position the member holds, the extent of their participation, and their public prominence.

Where a member becomes aware that a conflict of interest has arisen regarding their political or community activities they must inform their next in charge immediately who will then work with them to develop the most appropriate strategy for addressing the conflict.

RFS staff employees seeking to contest elections must also comply with the provisions outlined in PSCC 2013 – 03 and DPC Circular 2013 – 04 Contesting Elections.

4.4. Gifts and Benefits (Staff Members Only)

All staff members must exercise judgment and caution in regard to any gifts or benefits they may be offered in connection with their official duties, or because of their position or role in the RFS.

The acceptance of gifts/benefits regardless of their monetary value may compromise, or appear to compromise the impartial performance of a member's duties and responsibilities, or cause, or appear to cause a conflict of interest. Accordingly, members must always consider the reasons and the context in which the gift/benefit has been offered and the consequences of receiving it, before making any decisions to accept it.

Staff members must comply with all relevant policies relating to gifts and benefits.

4.5. Secondary or Private Employment (Staff Members Only)

Secondary or private employment means work other than a staff member's job with the RFS, and includes undertaking voluntary or unpaid work or operating a private business (whether as an employee, principal or business owner).

A staff member must seek approval in writing from their next in charge to undertake secondary or private employment prior to commencing the secondary or private employment.

The written submission must show that:

- the secondary or private employment will not interfere with, or adversely affect their RFS duties
- the secondary or private employment will not create a conflict of interest with their RFS duties
- the secondary or private employment will not involve the use of any RFS intellectual property or confidential information or resources, and
- the secondary or private employment will be undertaken outside of their current working hours.

Staff members who are directly involved in the procurement of goods and services for the RFS are prohibited from undertaking secondary or private employment with a supplier or potential supplier of goods or services to the RFS.

If the staff member's approved secondary employment arrangements change (e.g. change in hours, location etc.) they must seek approval in writing from their next in charge before the new arrangements take effect. If the staff member's position in the RFS changes they must reapply for secondary employment approval.

Staff members who are volunteer members of a brigade do not need to seek approval to be a volunteer member from their supervisor, however they must comply with the provisions of Service Standard 2.1.9 Participation by Permanent Staff in Brigade Activities.

4.6. Respectful and Inclusive Workplace

The RFS is strongly committed to providing and maintaining a respectful and inclusive workplace, where all members are treated with dignity, courtesy and respect at all times, and in all work locations. Bullying, discrimination, vilification and/or sexual harassment have no place in a respectful and inclusive workplace.

Volunteers must comply with all relevant service standards.

Staff members must comply with all relevant policies and service standards.

4.7. Safety, welfare and well-being of children

The RFS has both a legislative and moral obligation to protect children.

A child is defined as a person under the age of 18 years.

Protecting children engaged in RFS activities and providing a child-safe, child-friendly environment is a responsibility that all members share. In order to create a child-safe environment all members must

take an active role in keeping children safe from all forms of harm and creating a trusting environment where they are valued, respected and welcomed.

Members must:

- comply with any relevant pre-screening employment/membership checks if they will be involved in child related activities. Child related activities are defined in Service Standard 2.1.5 Child and Youth Participation in RFS Activities
- ensure that they act professionally and maintain a respectful and professional distance around any child with whom they come into contact during the course of their duties
- avoid any behaviour which might be considered by a reasonable person as inappropriate including but not limited to:
 - having a sexual or intimate relationship
 - using sexual innuendo or inappropriate language
 - holding conversations where they disclose private information about themselves
 - giving gifts of a personal nature
 - taking inappropriate photographs, or
 - having contact via social media, text, phone, email or letters in inappropriate circumstances.
- recognise circumstances that may involve inappropriate behaviours towards a child and discussing their concerns with their next in charge, or with the Performance and Conduct Unit
- ensure that any child that approaches them with a concern or complaint about another member's behaviour towards a child is appropriately supported and the matter immediately reported to their next in charge, or to the Performance and Conduct Unit, and
- ensure any immediate risk to a child is reported to the NSW Police.

4.8. RFS resources

Members must ensure that RFS resources are used efficiently and effectively for the purposes of the RFS and that they:

- make decisions relating to the use of resources, facilities and equipment that are reasonable, appropriately authorised and able to withstand community scrutiny
- take due care and diligence and act within delegation when purchasing goods and services on behalf of the RFS
- treat RFS property and equipment with due care and ensure the property and equipment is secured against theft, misuse or breakage
- take appropriate care of any protective clothing and equipment issued to them and only wear it when authorised to do so
- wear their RFS uniform in a presentable manner
- hold a valid licence for the class of RFS vehicle, boat or aircraft they are operating. If their licence is cancelled, suspended or disqualified they must inform their next in charge immediately
- hold a valid licence or accreditation for the equipment they are required to use
- only use the RFS internet, intranet, email and computers (computer systems) for appropriate purposes
- do not use RFS computer systems to create, access, store or distribute pornographic, harassing, obscene, threatening, sexist, sexually explicit, racist, discriminatory or other offensive material
- do not use the RFS computer systems for accessing, downloading, copying, storing or playing videos, audio or music files, unless that material is related to their RFS duties
- are economical in the use of office facilities and equipment, including the use of motor vehicles, travel and credit cards

- know, understand and comply with the requirements of the *Government Sector Finance Act 2018*, the *Public Works and Procurement Act 1912* and the *Government Advertising Act 2011* if they are responsible for receiving, spending or accounting for money, and
- return any equipment provided to them during the course of their employment/membership to their next in charge on their last day of duty.

Staff Members only - limited use of computer systems, fixed and mobile telephones, facsimile and photocopier equipment (but excluding motor vehicles) for personal use will generally be permitted, provided the use is infrequent and brief and the following criteria has been satisfied:

- The use of the equipment does not conflict with the staff member's work or that of their colleagues
- The use of the equipment does not involve a significant cost to the RFS
- The use of the equipment is undertaken in the staff members own time
- The staff member will not benefit financially from the use of equipment, and
- The use of equipment is not for commercial purposes for the staff member or others.

4.9. Intellectual property

When creating materials, applications or equipment, members must ensure the intellectual property rights of the RFS and others are not infringed. Any third party copyright or other rights information must be recorded in the materials.

The copyright of material created by members in the course of their duties belongs to the Crown, even if the material was developed in the member's own time, or at home.

A member must seek consent from the relevant Deputy Commissioner before entering into any arrangements regarding the publication or disclosure of any research or articles or materials, applications or equipment produced as part of their duties.

A member must not use the intellectual property, including copyright of the RFS for private purposes without first obtaining written consent from the relevant Deputy Commissioner.

During subsequent employment and activities, a member must respect the confidentiality of any information obtained in the course of their RFS duties and the intellectual property rights over material produced, including material that they produced in the course of their RFS duties.

For more information in relation to responsibilities regarding intellectual property see Service Standard 1.1.19 Intellectual Property.

4.10. Confidential, private and personal information

All members must ensure that personal and private information that is collected from other members or the public is treated in a confidential manner.

All members must ensure that corporate information created, received, or collected in the course of their duties is treated in a confidential manner.

Volunteers must comply with all service standards relating to the collection, handling and protection of information.

Staff members must comply with all policies and service standards relating to the collection, handling and protection of information.

4.11. Public Comments

A member must comply with relevant service standards in particular Service Standard 1.4.8 Media when making any public comments or publishing official information regarding the RFS.

Public comment includes comments made in the context of public speaking engagements, comments on radio, television, the internet or other collaborative or social networking applications, letters to

newspapers, books, journals or other written publications where it is reasonably expected that the comments will be available to the community at large.

Only the Commissioner, Deputy Commissioners, or other delegated persons are authorised to speak on behalf of the RFS.

Members who are an elected or nominated spokesperson for a relevant representative association or union are entitled to make public comments in relation to RFS matters, as long as it is made clear to the audience that those comments represent the views of the association or union, and are not those of the RFS.

If a member wishes to make a statement on an official matter as a private citizen they must not do so in RFS uniform. They must also make clear that the comments made are their own or those of other entities and are not made on behalf of the RFS.

Members must be mindful to ensure they do not reveal any confidential, personal or private information when making public comments.

4.12. Personal relationships

The RFS acknowledges that members with a close personal relationship may be required to work/undertake duties together. It is also recognised that in the workplace or the operational environment this could, or could be seen to compromise fair and ethical work performance and decision-making.

If a member has a close personal relationship with another member or members that may create a conflict of interest (either perceived or actual) they must declare the relationship/s to the next in charge. The member must also work actively with their next in charge to ensure that appropriate steps are taken to minimise any negative effects, (either perceived or actual), of the close personal relationship/s. If a member is unsure or has concerns about whether a close personal relationship is a Conflict of Interest they should discuss the matter with their next in charge.

4.13. Personal presentation

When a member wears the RFS uniform, or operates identifiable RFS vehicles, boats or aircraft they are clearly identified to the community as a member of the RFS. A member's appearance must be clean, neat and tidy, other than when undertaking operational activities on an incident ground.

Any clothing worn by a member which bears the insignia of the RFS must only to be worn in accordance with Service Standard 8.1.1 Uniforms for RFS members.

A member must only wear RFS uniform:

- when on duty or travelling to or from duty, and/or
- when attending training, official functions, meetings, conferences or at RFS sponsored events.

A member must wear the appropriate personal protective equipment/clothing (PPE/C) for the task when undertaking operational activities in accordance with Service Standard 5.1.5 Protective Clothing and Accessories.

A member must not wear their uniform, identity card or RFS name badge when visiting a public bar or registered club, other than if they are attending the venue for an official function, meeting, conference or a RFS sponsored event.

Staff members who do not wear uniform must still ensure that their personal appearance and presentation are clean, tidy and appropriate for their role when on duty.

All uniform and PPE/C items remain the property of the RFS and must be immediately returned to the RFS if the member is directed to do so by their next in charge or when they cease to be a member of the RFS.

4.14. References

All members must comply with this section of the Code of Conduct to avoid incurring legal liability and to ensure they protect the public interest and the integrity and reputation of the RFS.

Employment References (Staff members only)

An employment reference is a document or verbal statement which provides information or makes assertions about a current or former staff member's skills, conduct and performance, during a specified period of time. An employment reference is provided to an employer to enable them to assess the current or former staff member's suitability or non-suitability for employment.

Staff members who hold supervisory or management roles may be approached from time to time by current or former staff member for an employment reference. As there is no legal obligation for an employee in NSW to be provided with an employment reference, staff members who hold supervisory or management roles are not obliged to provide an employment reference.

Where a staff member who holds a supervisory or management role chooses to provide an employment reference, they can only do so if they were a line supervisor or manager of the person seeking the reference.

Employment references for current or former staff members may only be provided to another person/organisation with the staff member's consent.

Where a line supervisor or manager has been asked by a current or former staff member to act as a referee, it can be assumed that implied consent has been granted to disclose relevant information.

If a line supervisor or manager has not been asked by the staff member to be a referee and the line supervisor or manager is contacted for an employment reference, the consent of the staff member must be obtained before disclosing any information. If the staff member cannot be contacted or consent is not granted then no information is to be disclosed.

Employment references whether provided verbally, or in writing, must be accurate. You may be subject to a claim of defamation from the current or former staff member or a claim for compensation for misleading a new employer if you provide inaccurate information or withhold critical information in an employment reference. Line supervisors or managers must ensure they limit the information they provide in any reference to a subordinate's capabilities, performance and conduct during the period in which the person was under their supervision/management, or to an assessment of the person against specific selection criteria.

Where an employment reference is requested in writing it may be prepared on RFS letterhead and the line supervisor or manager may include their RFS title, rank, grade or position/role.

Written employment references must be signed and dated by the author and a copy retained for future reference. A hardcopy must be placed on an existing staff members personnel file where practicable.

Written employment references must only be provided in hardcopy or in PDF format.

Personal References

A personal reference is a document or verbal statement which provides information or makes assertions about a person's character or personal attributes. Personal references are generally used to support loan or rental applications, in dealings with the Police, or in criminal, civil or industrial court proceedings.

Personal references may be provided by any RFS member in their capacity as a private individual.

Members need to be careful however, when providing personal references as there are a number of legal or conflict of interest issues to be considered, including:

- The integrity of the RFS

- Members must sign and date any written personal reference they provide. However, they must not use their RFS title, rank, grade or position in a written personal reference, nor imply in any way that the RFS endorses the content of the personal reference
- Personal references (written or verbal) which make reference to the current or former member's service with the RFS must include a clear disclaimer that the views contained in the reference are the views of the person providing the reference and do not represent the views of the RFS
- Written personal references must not be provided on RFS letterhead, including Brigade letterhead
- Written personal references must not be sent through the RFS email system, or in an envelope which contains the RFS crest or identifies the RFS or a Brigade in any way.
- The Public Interest
 - As public officials, members have an obligation to protect the public interest and the integrity of the RFS before their own, or another member's interests. For that reason, it is important to consider if a conflict of interest exists, either for themselves, or for the RFS, if they provide a personal reference.
- The Person's Privacy
 - Members have an obligation to protect the privacy of the person for which they are providing the personal reference. Thus, written personal references should generally be provided directly to the current or former member who has requested the personal reference
 - A written personal reference may only be provided to another person/organisation if the current/former member has provided their consent to the information being disclosed to that person/organisation
 - Once the written personal reference has been provided to the current/former member (or with their consent to another person/organisation), all electronic versions and any hardcopy versions of the document must be destroyed to protect the privacy of the current/former member.
- Personal Liability
 - Members who have been requested to provide a personal reference (whether verbally or in writing) which is to be used by the current or former member in proceedings involving the NSW Police Force, or to support the member in civil or legal proceedings, or at a tribunal, must ensure that the information they provide in the personal reference is accurate to the best of their knowledge. It is an offence to state anything to a tribunal or court that is untrue, or that would be misleading
 - To ensure a written personal reference cannot be subsequently altered you should only provide it to the person requesting it in hardcopy or PDF format.

Notwithstanding anything else in this Code of Conduct, a statement may be provided by the RFS in relation to a staff member's employment or salary to a financial institution or other appropriate person or entity at the member's request for the purpose of an application for a mortgage, loan application, finance agreement or other purpose where information of that nature is normally provided by an employer.

4.15. Bankruptcy (Staff Members Only)

Under Clause 10 of the *Government Sector Employment Regulation 2014* a staff member must notify the RFS Commissioner if they become bankrupt, or make a composition, arrangement or assignment for the benefit of their creditors.

This notification must be made in writing immediately after the declaration, composition, arrangement or assignment has been made. The member must also provide information as to the cause of the bankruptcy or need for the composition, arrangement or assignment.

The Commissioner may, as a condition of the engagement of a person in a financial management role, require the person to declare, before the person is engaged in that role, whether or not the person has at any time been declared bankrupt or made a composition, arrangement or assignment for the benefit of the person's creditors.

4.16. NSW Government Lobbyist Code of Conduct

Lobbyists seek to influence Government not only by direct approaches to Ministers and their offices, but also through contacts with staff members. These contacts normally focus on introducing their clients' views and related information into policy or consultation processes. While this is a legitimate activity that can improve the quality of advice to Government, it must be subject to similar standards of transparency, integrity and honesty as lobbying contacts with Ministers.

For this reason, the NSW Government Lobbyist Code of Conduct also applies to RFS staff members in that:

- Staff members must only deal with registered lobbyists. The Register of Lobbyists is available on the NSW Electoral Commission Website: www.elections.nsw.gov.au
- The lobbyist is obliged to inform the staff member of the third party interests they represent and the issues that the third party wishes the lobbyist to raise.

Any breach of the Lobbyist Code of Conduct should be reported to the Secretary of the Department of Premier and Cabinet.