



2019 Public Employee Ethics Survey
Results and Recommendations

Composite Report

**Bringing Ethics Awareness and
Training to our Communities**

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2019 Employee Survey – Composite Report

Executive Summary of the 2019 Employee Ethics Survey

The 2019 Employee Ethics Survey received 1,368 responses, for a 13% overall response rate, although the response rate varied by community (from 0% to 57%).

- Employees place higher value on ethics training. Employees now place a higher value on ethics training than at any time in the past.
- Witnessing unethical behavior has dropped. Reports of witnessing unethical behavior have dropped considerably since the first ethics survey in 2009 (66%, vs. 31% in 2019), perhaps indicating that either ethics training, or asking about ethics via surveys such as this one, or both, are increasing the visibility of positive ethics in the municipal workplace.
- Employees know how to report unethical behavior. In addition, employees reported a high level of confidence in their ability to know how to report unethical behavior, although this confidence dropped considerably for untrained employees (86% trained vs. 49% untrained).
- Employees would report observed unethical behavior. There is a similarly high level of confidence that employees would report unethical behavior if they observed it, which varied little by training (91% trained vs. 88% untrained).
- Employees believe unethical behavior reports would lead to positive change. There is also a high level of confidence that reports of unethical behavior in the workplace would lead to a positive change and would be appropriate, each of which was positively affected by training (believe in change: 73% trained vs. 56% untrained; believe change would be appropriate: 69% trained vs. 52% untrained).
- Employees site favoritism as the most prevalent ethics issue. Favoritism (46%) was the most-often cited ethical issue, followed by conflicts of interest (34%), and abuse of resources (29%). Each of these issues was reported considerably less than in previous surveys, and the newly-added issue of harassment/bullying (30%) was also of concern. However, the change in the survey options (with harassment/bullying, other, and none added this year) may have affected the responses, although the precipitous drop in reports of perceived conflicts appears to indicate a real drop in ethical concerns seen in the workplace.
- Ethics Code awareness has dropped. In the aggregate, awareness of the ethics code has dropped since the 2012 and 2015 surveys, especially among untrained employees.
- Overall, results are positive regarding ethics training. These results indicate that ethics training appears to be working to positively impact the municipal workplace, and that further training is likely to continue to have beneficial effects upon communities and their municipal employees.

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Composite Report on 2019 Employee Ethics Survey

The 2019 survey produced responses from 1,368 municipal employees. The Commission wishes to thank our member communities and those employees who took the time and had sufficient interest to complete the 16-question ethics survey (seen on pages 22-24). Table 1 displays the overall response rate¹ to the survey by member community, which varied quite widely, from 0% to 57%, as well as the actual number of responses, and the number of employees, for each member community. The total number of responses (1,359²) is down from the 2015 survey (with 1,476 responses), but well above the 2012 survey (with 565 responses). This response rate indicates a high interest in ethics issues, and is also an indication that the leadership in our member communities share their employees' interest in ethical practices and in ethical decision-making. However, an overall response rate of 13% indicates a need to further impress upon employees (and their supervisors) the value of responding to the ethics survey.³

The following general conclusions are drawn from the combined responses from the 1,368 respondents (the Composite Group). The Composite Group results often (but not always) mirror the responses from the individual communities. Where differences exist, they are at times significant. Where possible, community-specific reports have been created for each participating community (excepting only those communities with 10 or fewer respondents—Burns Harbor, Ogden Dunes, and St. John—which did not receive community reports). Below are the reflections gained from the aggregated (composite group) responses from all 20 member communities that responded to the ethics survey. These results provide a broad overview of how municipal employees feel about certain aspects of ethics in government. These aggregate results also provide a basis for comparing responses from each member community.

¹ Total sample for each community was provided by SEAC, and came from the 2018 Certified Report of Public Employment and Compensation reports for each of the SEAC member communities. The SEAC removed duplicate names, elected officials, board or commission members, and temporary/seasonal employees to arrive at the final public employee count by community. Although this number for each community may be imprecise, and may fluctuate from the time of measurement to the time of the survey, it is the best approximation available.

² This number differs from the total of 1,368 responses because 9 employees did not identify the member community at which they worked.

³ For comparison purposes, there were 307 responses to the 2009 ethics survey, out of 957 potential respondents, for a response rate of 32%. No comparable response rate data are available for the 2012 and 2015 ethics surveys.

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Table 1. Number and Percentage of Responses by Community

Community	2018 Employee Count	2019 Survey Responses	2019 Response Rate
Burns Harbor	49	10	20%
Cedar Lake	139	0	0%
Chesterton	131	43	33%
Crown Point	404	167	41%
Dyer	151	63	42%
East Chicago	643	0	0%
Gary	1,001	96	10%
Hebron	41	17	41%
Highland	292	46	16%
Hobart	355	73	21%
Lake County	3,307	74	2%
Lake Station	206	0	0%
LaPorte County	824	153	19%
Lowell	105	0	0%
Merrillville	198	20	10%
Munster	316	50	16%
Ogden Dunes	28	4	14%
Portage	371	63	17%
Porter County	907	111	12%
Schererville	262	115	4%
St John	143	2	1%
Valparaiso	390	159	41%
Westville	27	12	44%
Whiting	143	81	57%
TOTAL	10,433	1,359	13%

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2019 Composite Group Conclusions and Observations

Figure 1 contains two charts comparing responses from employees to each survey question from all member communities that participated in each of the four ethics surveys. Figure 2 contains a series of charts comparing responses to each survey question from all member communities that participated in the ethics survey. (Note: No responses were received from four member communities: Cedar Lake, East Chicago, Lake Station, and Lowell. In addition, too few [i.e., 10 or fewer] responses were received from three member communities: Burns Harbor, Ogden Dunes, and St. John. To protect the anonymity of respondents from those three member communities, no separate report was produced for them.)

Highlights of these comparisons include the following:

1. Awareness of the ethics code varies considerably by municipality. For most municipalities, over half of the respondents were aware of the ethics code; however, for the cities of Gary and Portage, and for LaPorte and Porter counties, awareness was below 50%. These low percentages present an opportunity to advocate for more training, as communities with more trained employees also reported greater awareness of the ethics code.
2. Most respondents had not received ethics training within the past 12 months. This result may explain the previous result, as the correlation between being trained in the past 12 months and awareness of the ethics code was significant, indicating that lack of recent training was associated with lower awareness.
3. Ethics training is seen as valuable, especially by those who had been trained. Overall, 81% of respondents, and at least 65% in each municipality, reported that they viewed ethics training as valuable. Further evidence of the value of ethics training is seen in the strong correlation between having been trained in the past 12 months and knowing how to report unethical behavior, indicating that those who were trained were more aware of the process for reporting unethical behavior. Fully 70% of those who had received ethics training were aware of the ethics code, versus only 28% of those who had not received training.
4. Reports of having witnessed unethical behavior vary by community. These rates varied from 0% to 52%, with a community-wide average of 33%, indicating a significant need for knowledge of how to respond when witnessing unethical behavior. Having witnessed unethical behavior was negatively correlated with having had ethics training in the past 12 months—indicating that one value of training may be to clarify what is (and is not) unethical behavior in the workplace.
5. Knowledge of how to report unethical behavior varies by community. These rates varied from 53% to 100%, with a community-wide average of 78%, indicating that there is room to improve in many communities in terms of how to report unethical behavior. Given the moderately high levels of such behavior occurred (as seen in the previous item), training may help to improve such knowledge. Knowing how to report unethical behavior was strongly correlated with having received training in the

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past 12 months, indicating that one of the biggest benefits of training is helping employees to navigate the process of reporting when unethical behavior occurs.

6. Whether one would, or has, reported unethical behavior varies by community. Rates of having reported unethical behavior varied from 9% to 36%, with a community-wide average of 25%, whereas reports of intention to report unethical behavior (were it to occur) varied from 84% to 100%, with a community-wide average of 90%. These variables were both negatively correlated with whether one was trained in the past 12 months, indicating again that training may help one to discern whether or not a behavior is unethical, and thus merits (or does not merit) reporting.

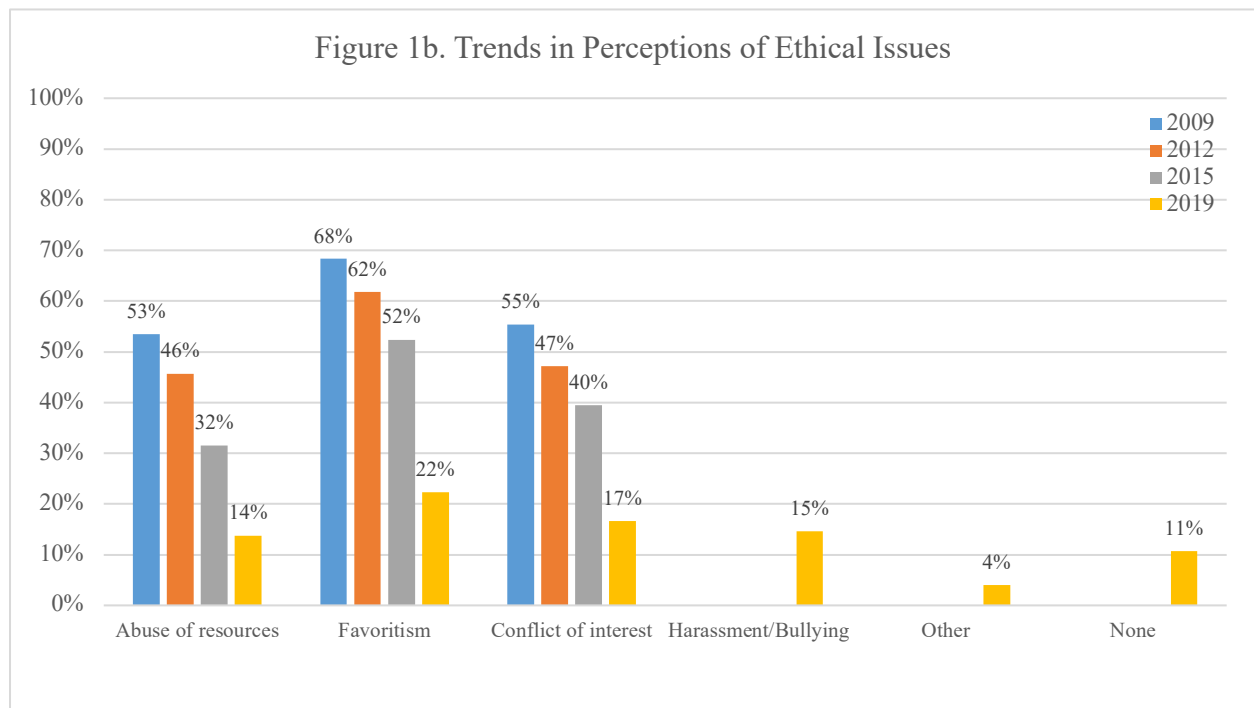
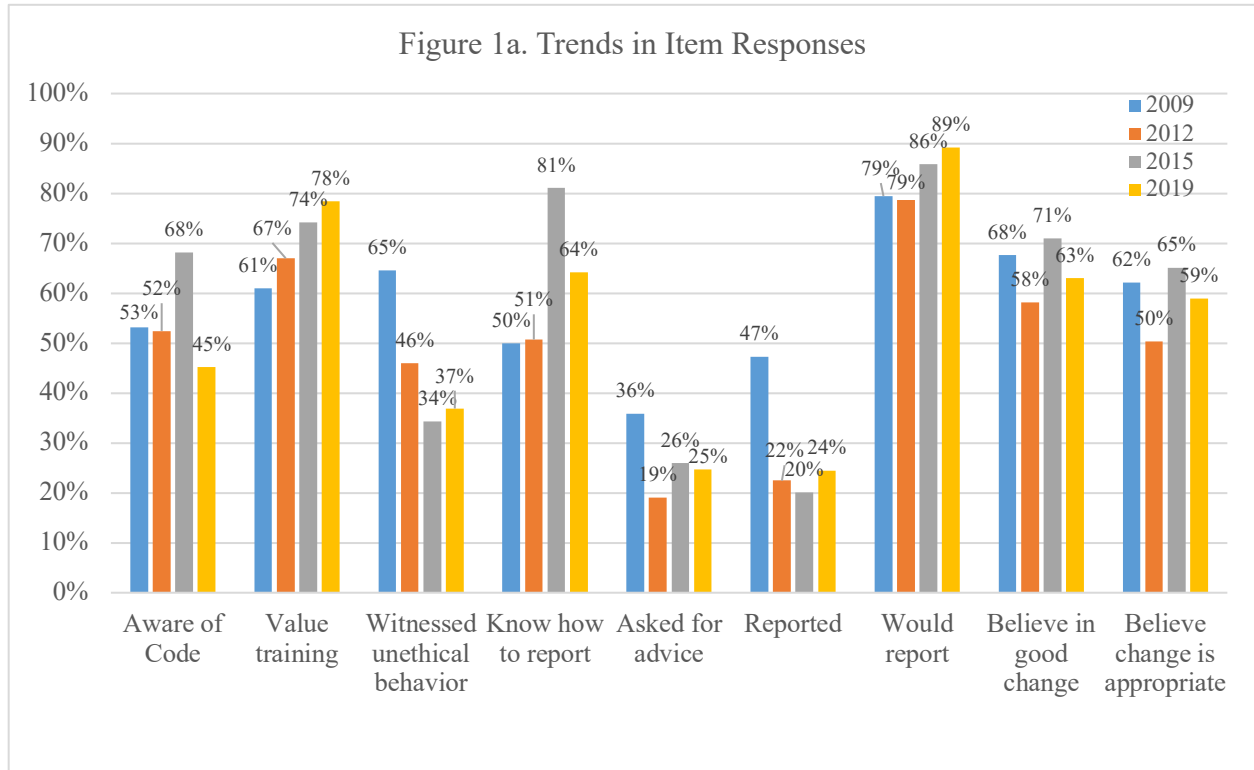
7. Belief that corrective action following a report of unethical behavior would occur, and would be appropriate, varied by community. Rates of belief that corrective action would occur varied from 55% to 100%, whereas rates of belief that corrective action would be appropriate varied from 50% to 100%. These variables were positively correlated with whether one was trained in the past 12 months, indicating that another benefit of training is greater belief in both the efficacy of and the justification for corrective action to address the unethical behavior.

8. Favoritism is of particular concern. Overall, nearly half (46%) of respondents indicated that they were concerned about favoritism, with only 3 municipalities reporting it to be of concern to less than a third of respondents.

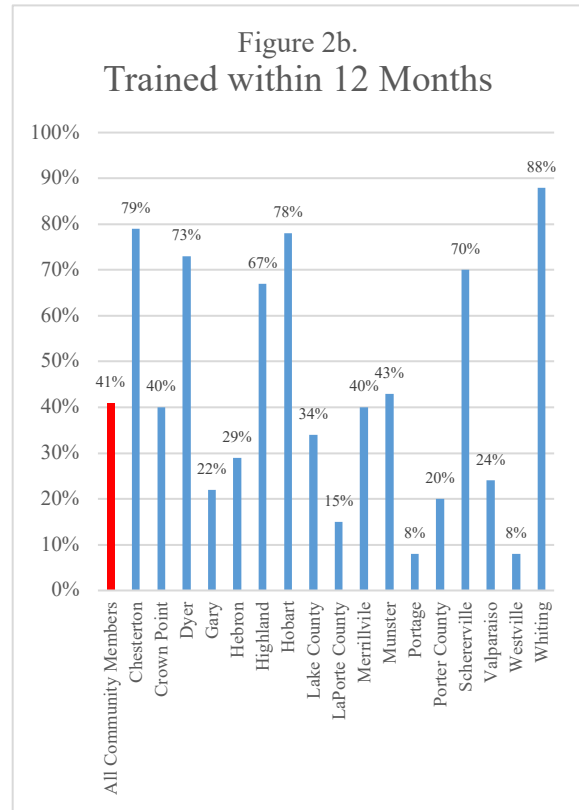
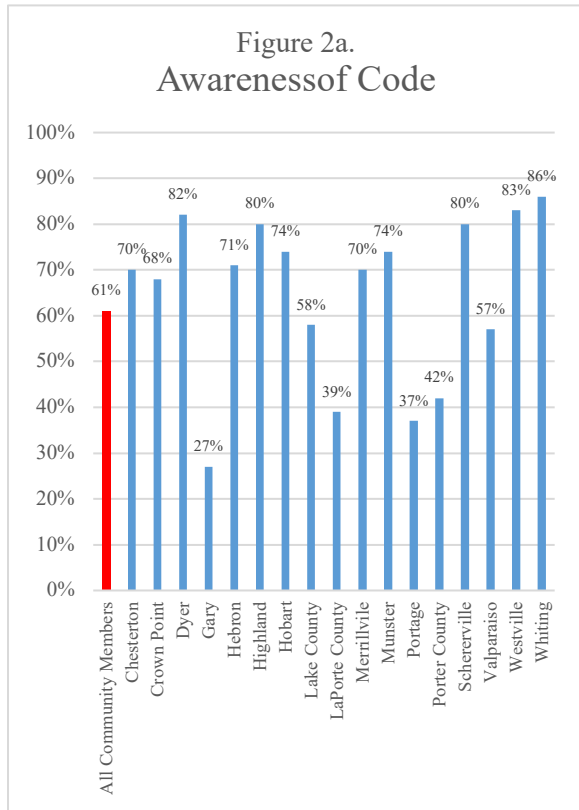
9. Other ethical issues are of concern. Conflicts of interest and unauthorized use of resources remain of concern, and the newly-added issue of harassment/bullying were of concern to nearly a third of respondents. Given that only about one-fifth (22% of trained, and 19% of untrained) of respondents reported no concerns, the need for ethics training and awareness remains.

6. Ethics training has a positive impact. Employees who were trained showed significant advantages on most items, compared to untrained employees. In particular, trained employees (a) placed a higher value on ethics training, (b) reported witnessing more unethical behavior, (c) were more aware of the process for reporting unethical behavior, (d) were more likely to ask for advice on ethical issues, and (e) believed that reported unethical behavior would be acted upon and would receive a fair and appropriate response. However, training did not have a noticeable impact on whether ethics issues were perceived to be occurring, but rather only in how to react if they were occurring.

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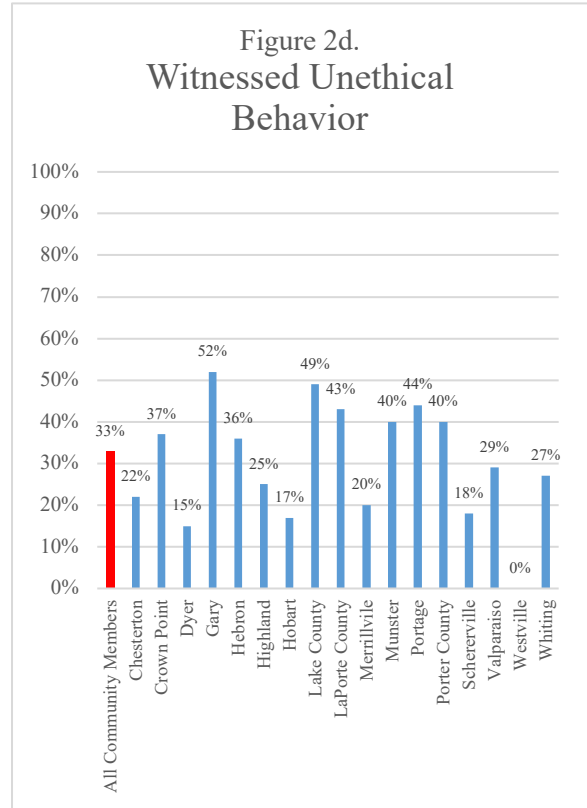
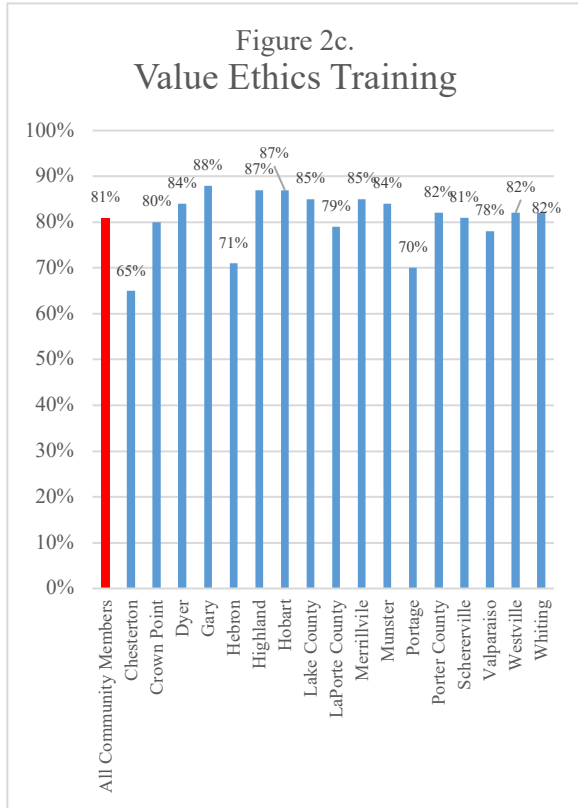


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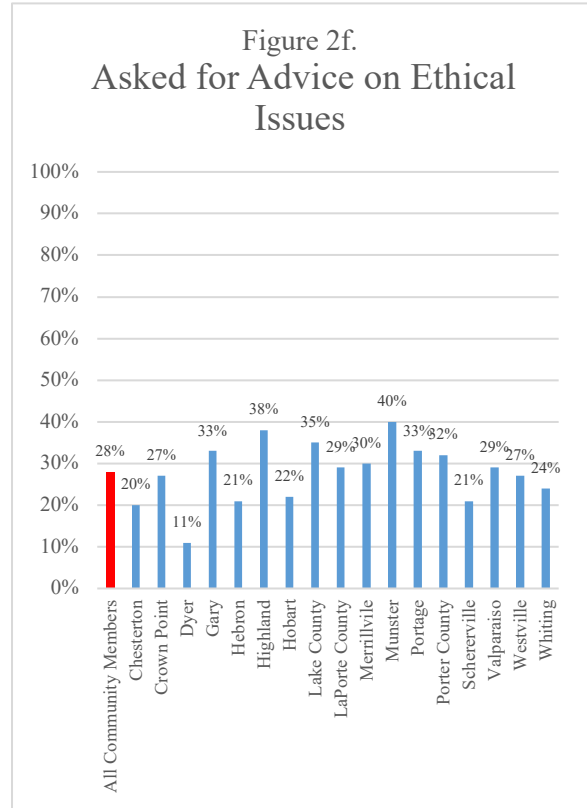
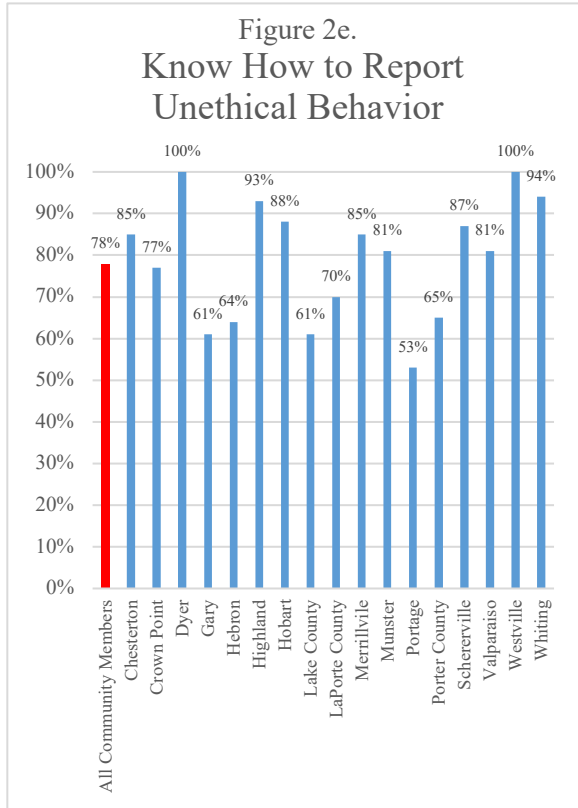


Note: All data in Figure 2 are from 2019 ethics survey.

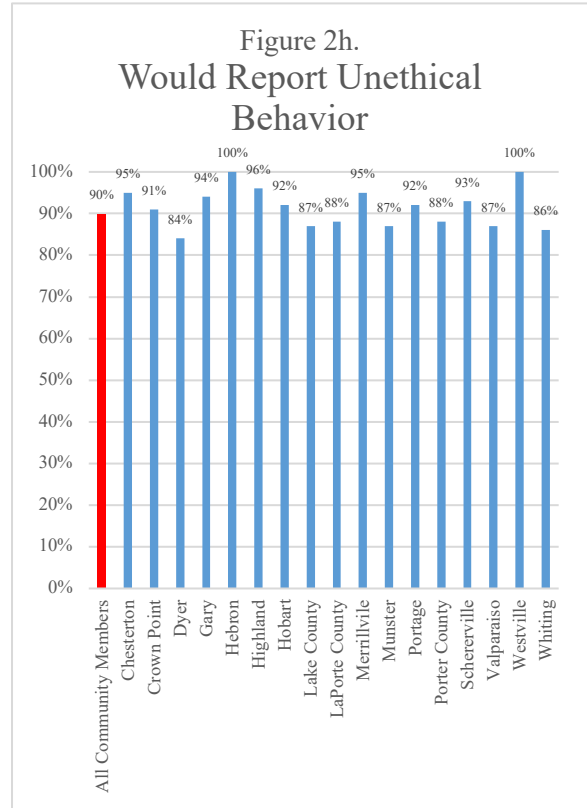
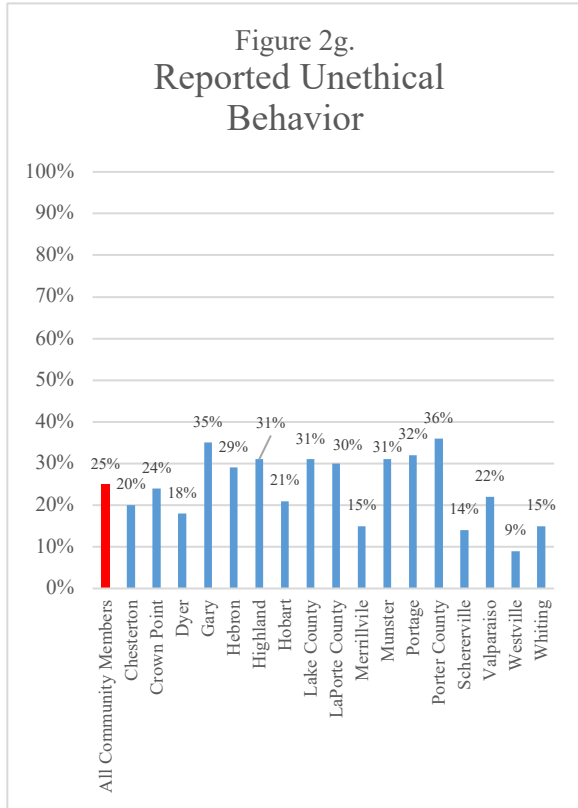
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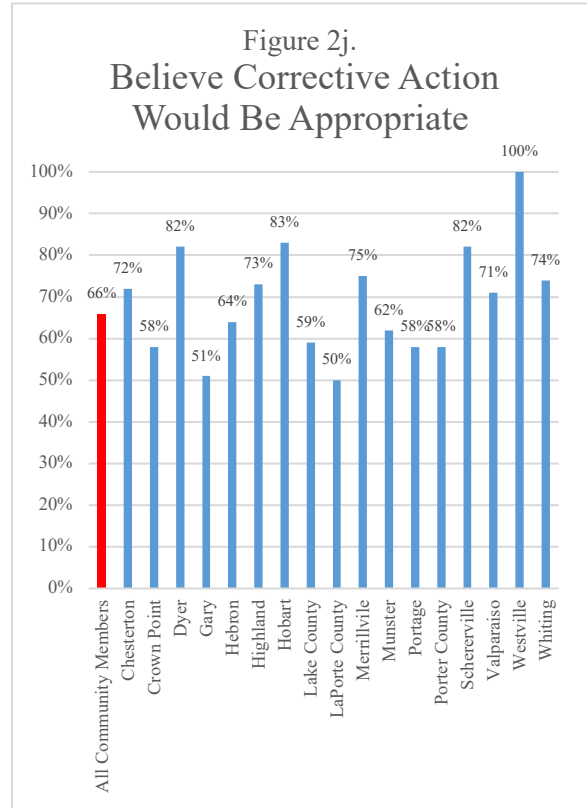
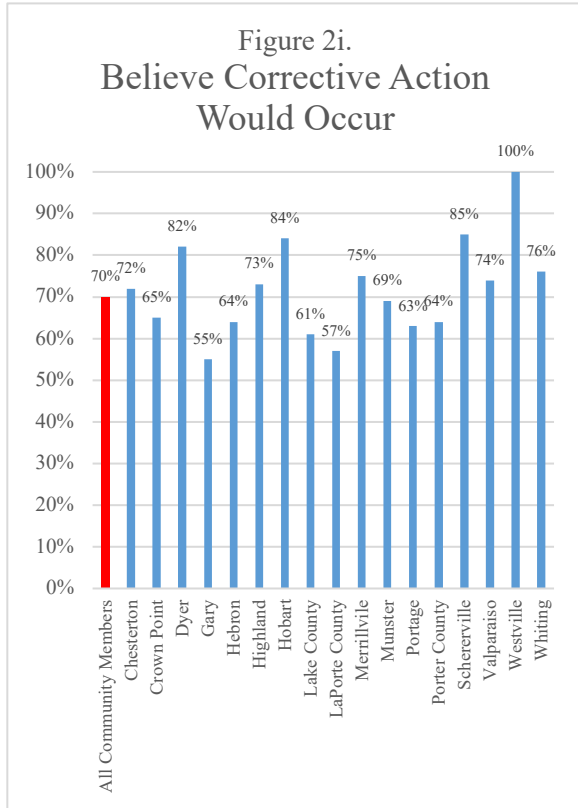
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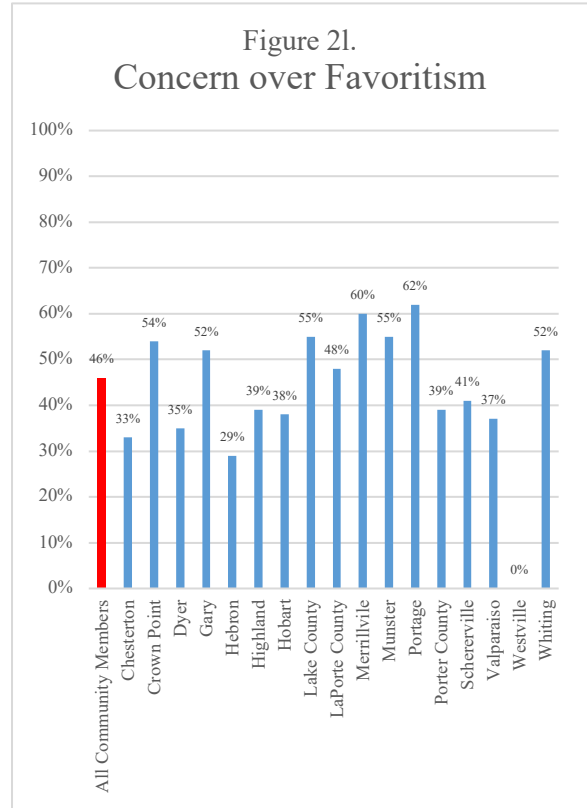
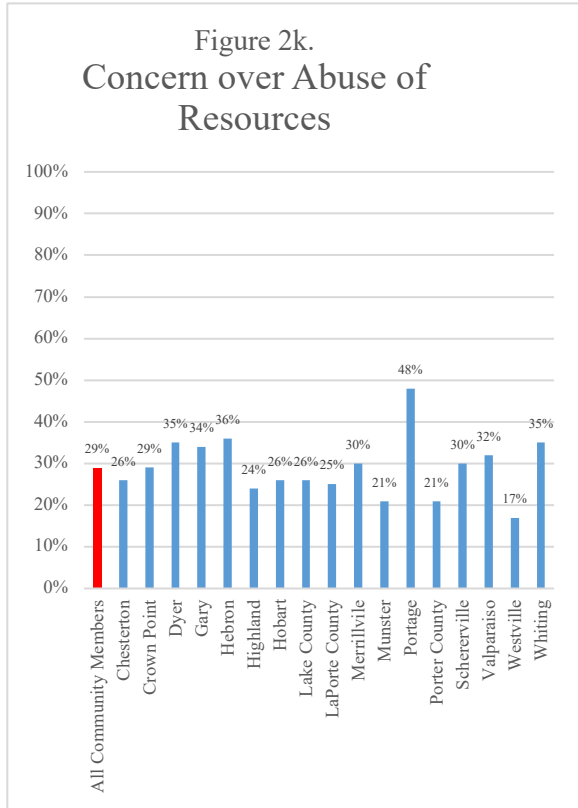
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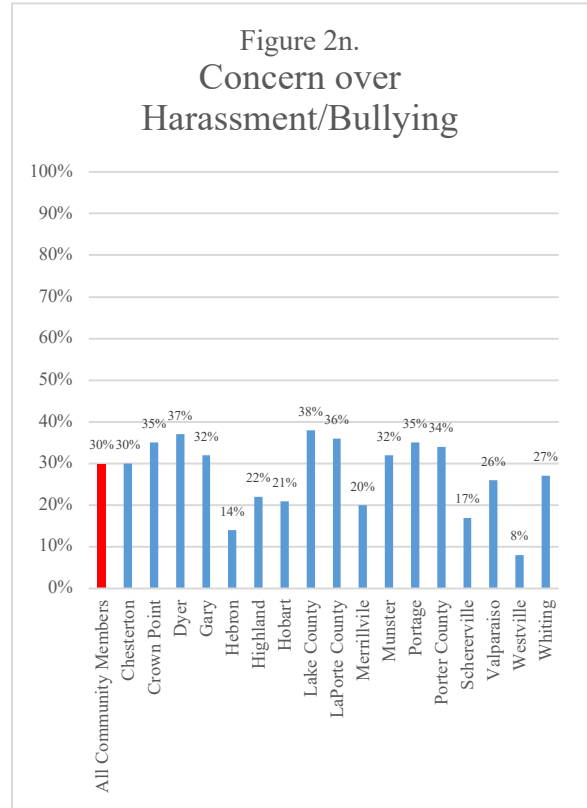
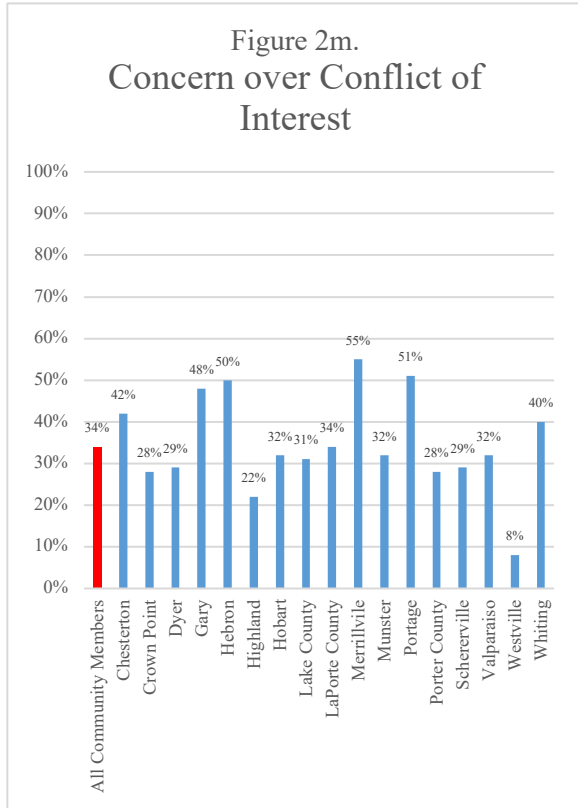
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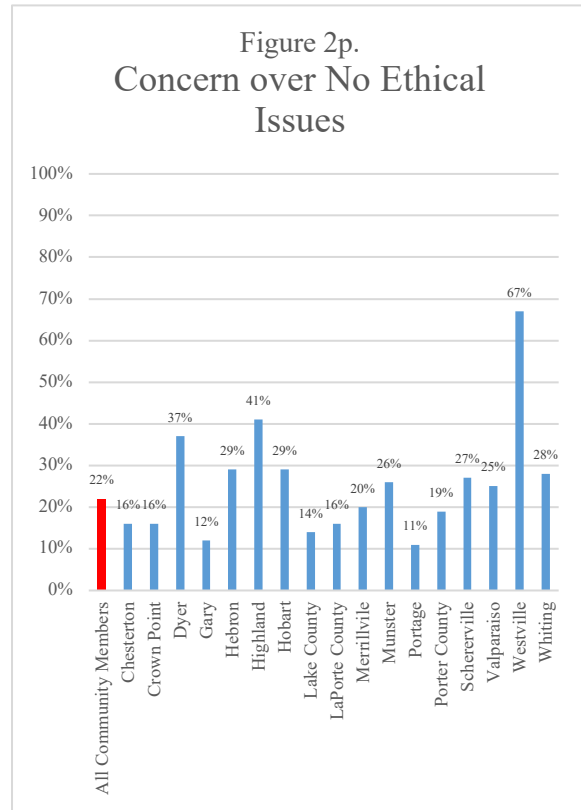
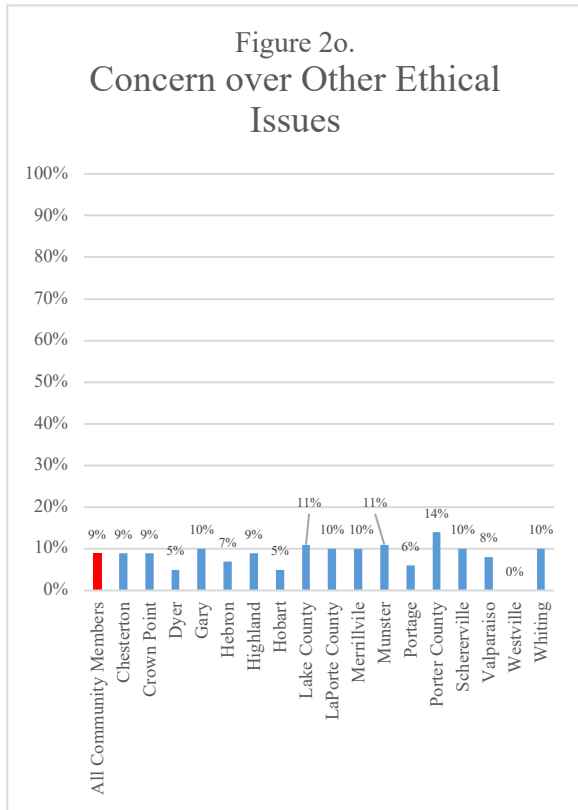
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2019 Composite Compared to 2009, 2012, and 2015

The 2019 version of the SEAC survey was identical in most respects to surveys conducted by the Commission in 2009, 2012, and 2015, with the addition of two case study questions. However, comparing the 2019 results to previous years' results has limitations. In 2009, there were only 5 member communities, and by 2012, there were still only 7 member communities; this number increased to 20 (of which responses were received by 19) at the time of the 2015 survey, although only 20 (of 24) member communities responded to the 2019 survey. Thus, aggregate comparisons may make some sense, but as many communities have not been represented across the entire time span of the SEAC survey, it is difficult to compare all communities' responses across time.

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Table 2 displays the percentage of survey respondents who had received training, by survey year. Highlights of these across-time comparisons include the following:

1. Fewer employees are receiving training. In 2009, 48% of respondents had received ethics training; in 2015, 74% had (no data were available on this question from 2012). In 2019, only 54% had received training. Given the value of training highlighted above, it appears that encouraging more employees to attend ethics training would be of service to the member communities, and greater efforts should be devoted to re-attaining (or exceeding) the high levels of training reported in the 2015 survey. However, as Table 2 indicates, the majority of those who had received training had received it in the past year.
2. Awareness of the ethics code has decreased. Awareness peaked in 2012, and has declined since then, especially among untrained employees. The value of training, noted above, may thus also have spillover effects on non-trained employees—and thus, declines in training may have multiple negative effects.
3. Training is seen as valuable by all employees, especially those who have been trained. In the two most recent surveys, those who received training placed a higher value on training than those who had not been trained.
4. Training is associated with a decline in reports of witnessing unethical behavior, yet does not seem to affect actual reporting of unethical behavior. This may indicate that training helps employees to better grasp what is—and what is not—unethical behavior. However, the rate at which employees actually report unethical behavior (except for in 2009) appears to be unrelated to whether or not employees are trained or not. These two results, in combination, may indicate that trained employees may, in fact, determine that less behavior they witness in the workplace is unethical, but that they may be more likely to report it when it does occur.
5. Training is associated with huge increases in employees' confidence that they would know how to report unethical behavior. This result is by far the biggest result of training, and demonstrates that training imparts to employees knowledge of the relevant process involved in reporting unethical behavior.
6. Training is associated with a stronger culture of ethics in the workplace. Generally speaking, training is associated with greater willingness to ask for advice on ethical matters, greater intention to report unethical behavior, and greater beliefs that, after reporting unethical behavior, that corrective action would take place and would be appropriate. Such changes indicate that training is helping to instill a more ethical culture in the workplace of trained employees.



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Table 2. Number of Respondents Trained Within 12 Months, by Survey Year

Survey Year	Percentage of Respondents Trained within 12 Months
2009	48%
2012	-- ⁴
2015	26%
2019	59%

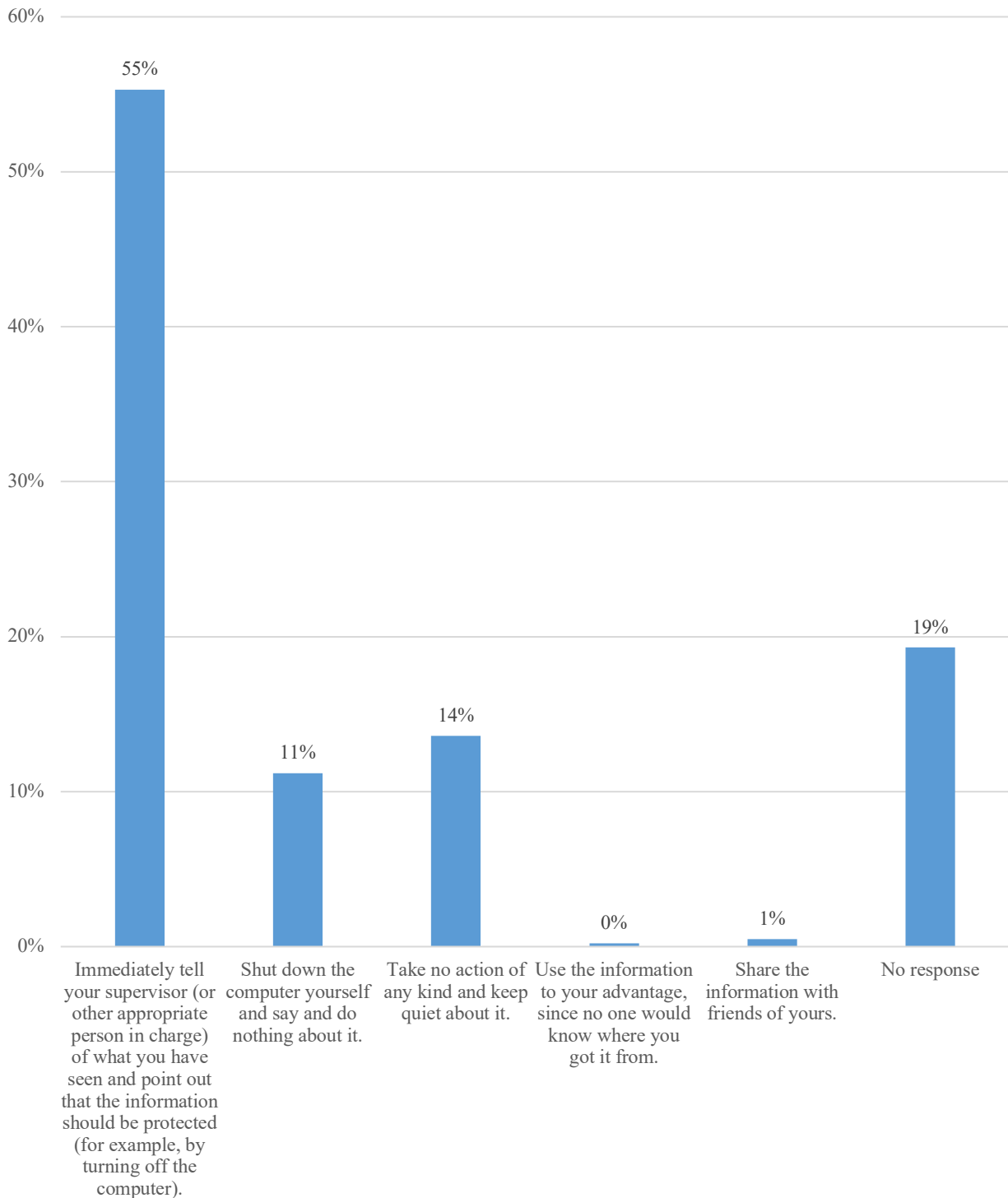
Figures 3 and 4 contain the percentage of respondents who responded to each of the (new to this survey) case study questions with each option. For case 1, most (55% of) respondents indicated they would immediately report the violation to their supervisor, whereas nearly a quarter of respondents indicated they would take no action. For case 2, a slight majority (51%) of respondents indicated they would immediately report the violation to their supervisor. Nearly a fifth reported they would either directly or anonymously take other action, whereas 10% indicated they would not take any action.

Given that barely half of responses in each case were the ethically correct response, training would likely assist in selecting the ethically appropriate course of action, as seen in the results of those who were trained recently. Those who were (vs. those who were not) trained in the past 12 months were significantly more likely to select the ethically appropriate response for both case 1 (70% vs. 54%) and case 2 (61% vs. 54%).

⁴ No data available on percentage of respondents trained within 12 months for survey year 2012.

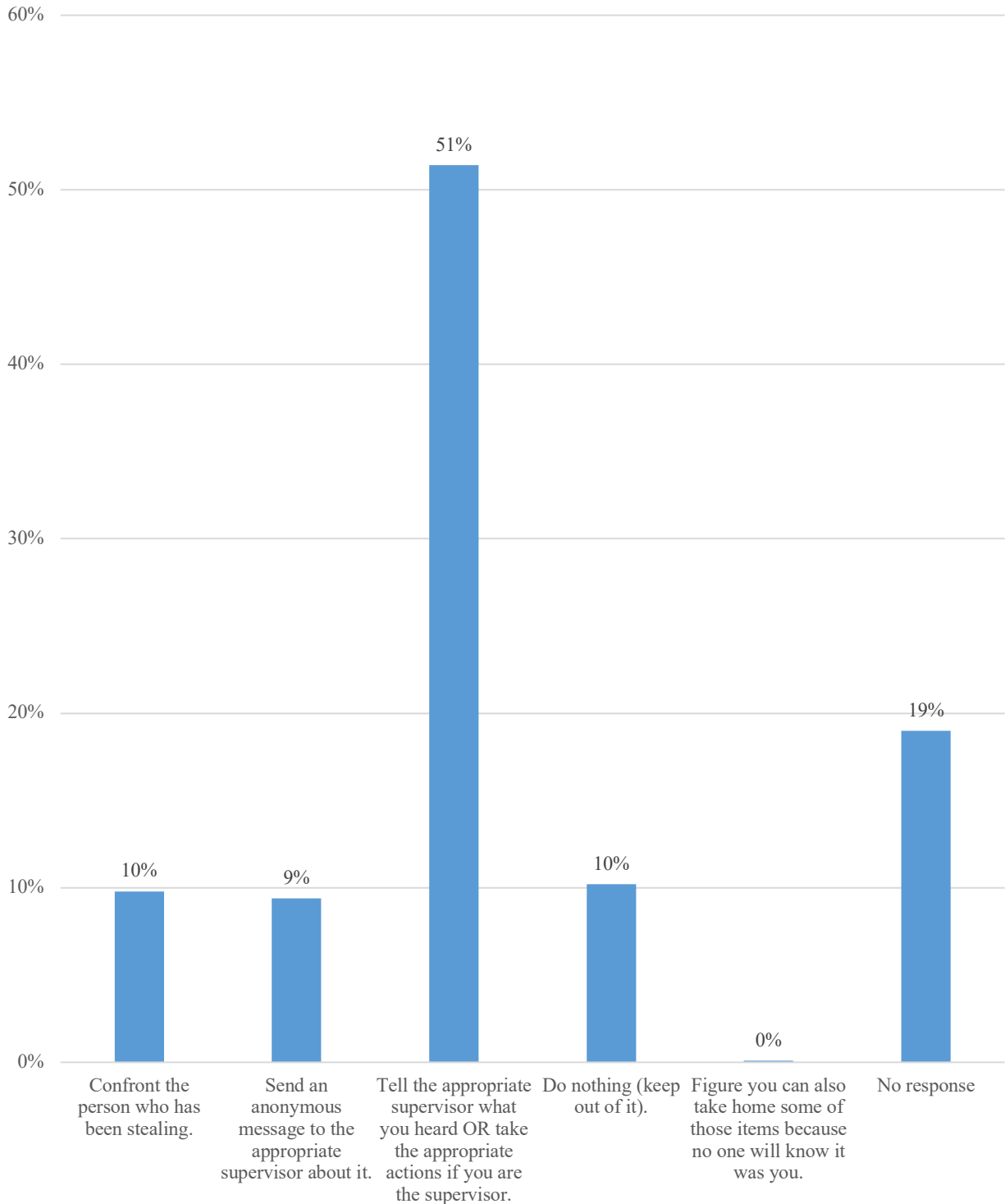
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Figure 3.
Case 1: Percentage of Respondents Selecting Each Response



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Figure 4.
Case 2: Percentage of Respondents Selecting Each Response





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Other Ethical Issues of Concern to Respondents

One survey question (“What ethical issues are you most concerned about in the workplace? Select all that apply”) asked respondents to select one of six options (Unauthorized use of city/town/county resources; Favoritism; Conflict of interest; Harassment/Bullying; Other [please specify]; and None), and to write in comments if they selected Other.

A total of 115 responses to this question were provided by respondents. Several respondents reported concerns over misuse of finances, employee theft, nepotism, and bribery; others reported concerns with alcohol abuse, bias and discrimination, and inappropriate behavior or speech (which may be similar to harassment/bullying), with several specific mentions of sexual harassment. Several noted lack of professionalism and lack of following policy; others noted inappropriate political behavior and its effects on the workplace.

An additional question asked “Do you have any recommendations for the Shared Ethics Advisory Commission on how to improve ethics awareness in the workplace? If so, please explain.” A total of 231 responses to this question were provided by respondents, 171 of which contained a response other than “No” or “None at this time” or something similar. Several respondents suggested additional refresher training courses on ethics, or courses occurring at higher frequency, which may represent a need for additional (and perhaps on-line) ethics training resources. Other responses suggested similar training for supervisors and elected leaders, and similar discussions (outside of training) within one’s specific work group. Still others raised questions of how to respond if the unethical behavior is by one’s supervisor, or by elected leaders.



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Observations and Recommendations

1. Interest in ethics issues, as seen across all survey time periods, indicates continuing interest in ethics training.
2. Training should continue to emphasize how to report unethical behavior, especially in one's particular municipality. Results to date indicate that such knowledge is one benefit of ethics training.
3. Due to continuing concern expressed by respondents, training should continue to address the issues of favoritism, conflicts of interest, and misuse of public resources. The newly-added issue of harassment/bullying should be included in training as well.
4. Unethical behavior appears to be occurring (or at least is reported as occurring) less frequently. Whether this is due to greater awareness among employees of the ethics code, or due to other reasons, it is a reason to celebrate, but also an area that could still use improvement, as nearly a third of (31% of trained, and 41% of untrained) employees report witnessing unethical behavior.
5. The newly-introduced ethical case studies indicate that a majority of respondents would report unethical behavior to their supervisors. However, other responses to the case studies indicate a need for greater discussion, perhaps via more ethics training, of how to respond appropriately to the depicted behavior.

Shared Ethics

ADVISORY COMMISSION

BRINGING ETHICS AWARENESS AND TRAINING TO OUR COMMUNITIES

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SEAC 2019 Employee Ethics Survey

(Note: Survey was administered online.)

April 2019

Dear local official or employee,

The Shared Ethics Advisory Commission is very interested in your response to the following questions about ethics in your workplace. The purpose of the survey is to determine your awareness of ethical issues and your familiarity with procedures for reporting alleged unethical behavior in the workplace.

While this survey is voluntary, we sincerely hope that you will take a few minutes to complete it. **Please respond by April 19, 2019.** The results will be tabulated at Purdue University Northwest. The information you and others provide will give us valuable insight into how best to serve you and the residents of our participating communities. Based on the results, future ethics training may be revised, and recommendations developed about ethical processes. We are only interested in the answers of groups of people. Individuals' answers will not be shared with anyone's workplace.

PLEASE NOTE: This survey is voluntary and is intended to be anonymous. Please do not refer to specific people in your answers, and do not put your name anywhere on the survey.

Thank you for your participation in this important project.

Sincerely,

Daniel Klein
Commission President

Where are you currently employed?

- Burns Harbor
- Cedar Lake
- Chesterton
- Crown Point
- Dyer
- East Chicago
- Gary
- Hebron
- Highland
- Hobart
- Lake County
- Lake Station
- LaPorte County
- Lowell
- Merrillville
- Munster
- Ogden Dunes
- Portage
- Porter County
- Schererville
- St. John



BRINGING ETHICS AWARENESS AND TRAINING TO OUR COMMUNITIES

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Valparaiso
 Westville
 Whiting

Before you received this survey, did you know anything about the Shared Code of Ethics and Values created by the Shared Ethics Advisory Committee?

Yes
 No

Have you attended an ethics training program in the last...

6 months?
 7-12 months?
 13-24 months?
 greater than 24 months?
 Never

How important do you think ethics training is for you and your co-workers on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the most important?

1 (Not at all important)
 2
 3
 4
 5
 6
 7
 8
 9
 10 (Extremely important)

During the last 12 months, have you witnessed unethical behavior in the workplace?

Yes
 No

Do you know what the process is for reporting unethical behavior in the workplace?

Yes
 No

Have you ever asked anyone in authority (like your supervisor, an administrator, or someone in Human Resources) in your workplace for advice on any ethical issues?

Yes
 No

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Have you ever reported unethical conduct to someone in authority in your workplace?

Yes
 No

Would you report unethical behavior in your workplace?

Yes
 No

If you were to report unethical behavior, do you think someone would care enough to take action?

Yes
 No

If you were to report unethical behavior, do you believe it would receive a fair and appropriate response?

Yes
 No

What ethical issues are you most concerned about in your workplace? (Select all that apply.)

Unauthorized use of city/town/county resources

Favoritism

Conflict of interest

Harassment/Bullying

Other (please specify) _____

None

Skip To: Recommendations if answer = None

How concerned are you with the ethical issue(s) you selected?

Mildly concerned
 Moderately concerned
 Very concerned

Do you have any recommendations for the Shared Ethics Advisory Commission on how to improve ethics awareness in the workplace? If so, please explain.

Below, we have two hypothetical cases that we would like you to respond to. Keep in mind that we are interested in your honest opinions, and that your responses will be kept anonymous.

As you are walking out, your eyes randomly come to rest for a moment on a computer screen that somebody has forgotten to turn off. You happen to notice, in that quick glance, information you could use to your advantage. You realize the information is confidential and that you should not have seen it.

Do you...

- immediately tell your supervisor (or other appropriate person in charge) of what you have seen and point out that the information should be protected (for example, by turning off the computer).
- shut down the computer yourself and say and do nothing about it.
- take no action of any kind and keep quiet about it.
- use the information to your advantage, since no one would know where you got it from.
- share the information with friends of yours.

You overhear someone in your unit telling a workmate that he/she has been stealing small items from work (such as cleaning supplies or postage stamps).

Do you...

- confront the person who has been stealing.
- send an anonymous message to the appropriate supervisor about it.
- tell the appropriate supervisor what you heard OR take the appropriate actions if you are the supervisor.
- do nothing (keep out of it).
- figure you can also take home some of those items because no one will know it was you.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.