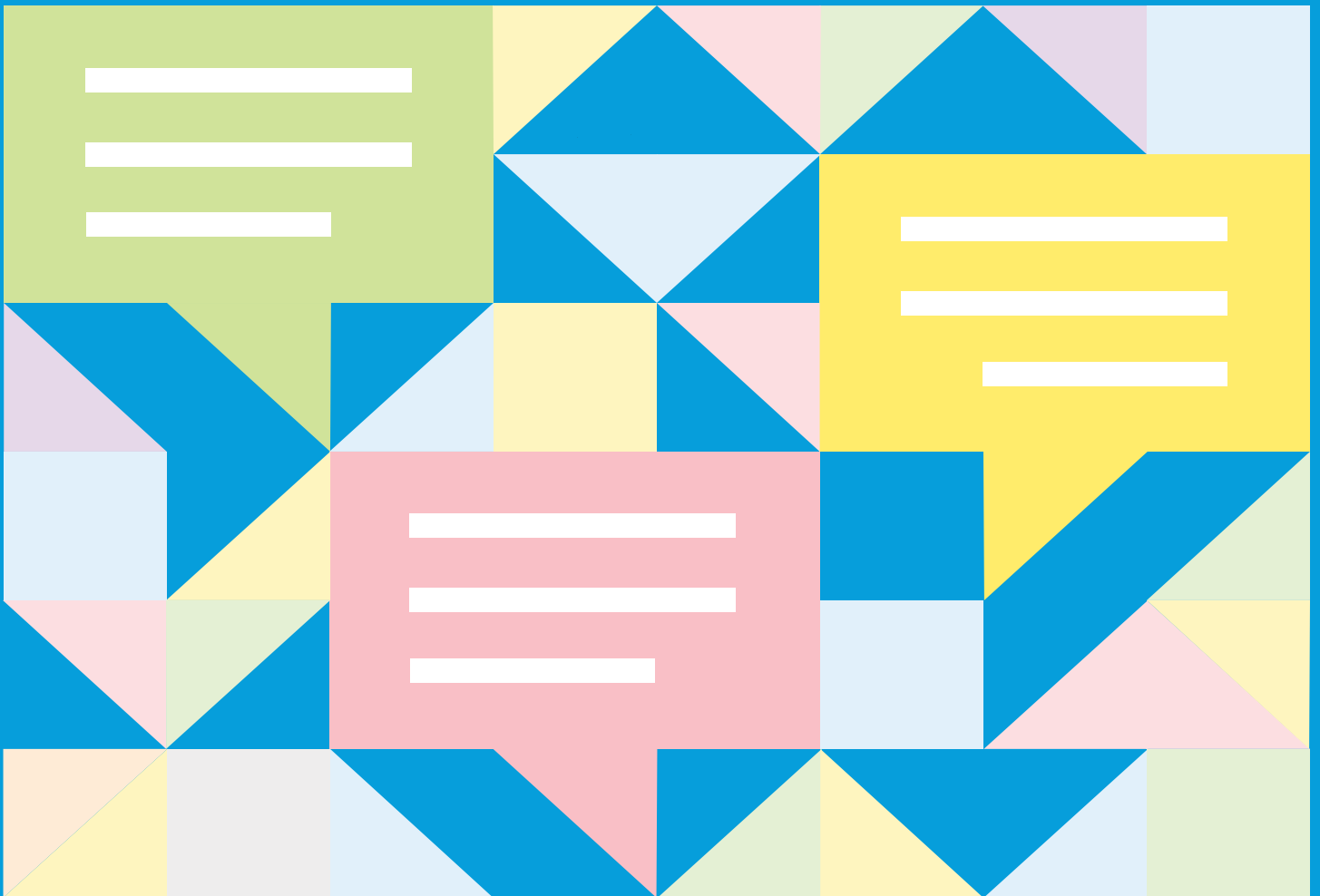


Leadership Dialogue 2024

**Navigating
outside
activities**

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE AND MATERIALS



Welcome to the United Nations Leadership Dialogue

Thank you for participating in the 2024 United Nations Leadership Dialogue. This annual event provides a valuable opportunity for you and your colleagues to discuss topics that impact our daily work.

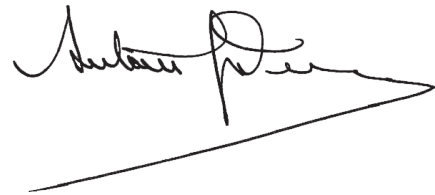
Every year, senior leaders conduct a guided Dialogue with their staff, who then lead similar discussions with their teams, ensuring every United Nations staff member participates.

The first Leadership Dialogue, in 2013, explored what it means to be an international civil servant. The most recent Dialogue, in 2023, on “Personal use of social media: How is my online behaviour?”, encouraged discussions around the responsible use of social media and of balancing freedom of expression with United Nations obligations.

This year’s topic, ***Navigating outside activities***, will examine common outside activities, such as personal academic pursuits, serving on external boards or committees and engaging in outside business ventures. The 2024 Dialogue will discuss how staff can ensure that their outside activities and affiliations do not lead to conflicts of interest or reputational risks to the Organization, nor question their integrity, independence and impartiality as international civil servants. Colleagues must obtain proper authorization before pursuing any external occupation, employment or activity related to the purpose, activities or interests of the United Nations, or before joining external boards, panels, committees, expert groups or similar bodies.

The Dialogue will remind us that, as United Nations staff, we represent the Organization. Our conduct outside of the workplace must therefore reflect the principles and values of the United Nations Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Standards of Conduct for the International Civil Service.

I invite all United Nations personnel to actively participate in this Leadership Dialogue.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'António Guterres', written over a long horizontal line that tapers to a point on the right side.

António Guterres
Secretary-General

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Background and Introduction

Many of us may have engaged in an outside activity at one time or another during our UN careers, whether that was a public speaking engagement in our personal capacity, serving as an advisor to a local community organization, or publishing material related to the purpose, activities, or interests of the United Nations. Outside activities are, by definition, not part of our official duties or functions. Consequently, a staff member engaged in an outside activity is not acting as a representative of the UN. Outside activities are undertaken in our personal capacity, on our own time, and at our own expense. Some outside activities have the potential to call into question our independence and impartiality, and/or create a conflict-of-interest situation and/or reflect adversely on the Organization. Outside occupation or employment, outside activities that relate to the purpose, activities or interest of the United Nations and participating in boards, panels, committees, expert groups or similar bodies that are external to the Organization require prior approval of the Secretary-General, pursuant to Staff Regulation 1.2 (o) and (p), Staff Rule 1.2(r), as well as ST/IC/2006/30, Section 11. Some activities can be engaged in at our discretion, as provided for in ST/AI/2000/13, "Outside activities".

In considering whether an outside activity may give rise to a conflict of interest, it would be important to keep in mind Staff Regulation 1.2(m) which states:

"A conflict of interest occurs when, by act or omission, a staff member's personal interests interfere with the performance of his or her official duties and responsibilities or with the integrity, independence and impartiality required by the staff member's status as an international civil servant. When an actual or possible conflict of interest does arise, the conflict shall be disclosed by staff members to their head of office, mitigated by the Organization and resolved in favour of the interests of the Organization."

In this Leadership Dialogue, we ask:

1. Why is it important to obtain prior authorization to engage in an outside occupation or employment, an outside activity that relates to the purpose, activities, or interest of the United Nations, and to participate in external boards, panels, or committees?
2. Why is it necessary to obtain clearance of a personal manuscript relating to the purpose, activities, or interest of the UN prior to publication?
3. Is it a conflict of interest to serve on an external panel or committee in your personal capacity on issues that are directly related to your area of work?
4. Can staff use their UN title, or identify their UN affiliation, when serving in a personal capacity on an external board, panel or committee?
5. Is it appropriate for a staff member to promote their personal business interests at their UN workplace, or to any entity or individual that they have engaged with in the performance of their UN duties?

KEY LESSONS FROM THIS YEAR'S DIALOGUE

This Leadership Dialogue will help us better understand the following topics:

1. Staff must ensure the complete separation between their personal activity and their UN status and official responsibilities.
2. An actual or possible conflict of interest shall be mitigated by the Organization and resolved in favour of the interests of the Organization.
3. Staff should not use their office or knowledge gained from their official functions for private gain, financial or otherwise, or for the private gain of any third party, including family, friends, and those they favour.
4. Participation in a personal capacity in boards, panels, committees, expert groups or similar bodies that are external to the Organization requires prior approval of the Secretary-General. Similarly, exercise of a profession, whether as an employee or an independent contractor for any non-United Nations entity is covered by the notion of "occupation" and "employment" and requires the approval of the Secretary-General.
5. Staff may not communicate, to any source, UN information that has not been made public, except in the normal course of their duties or by authorization of the Secretary-General nor may staff use their office for personal benefit.

Before and After the Dialogue

The host of your Leadership Dialogue (in general, your manager) will facilitate a discussion lasting around 90 minutes on at least two of the scenarios. To help you and others get the most out of this year's Leadership Dialogue, we would encourage you to take the following four steps before and after the Dialogue:

STEP 1: PRE-READING

Please take a look at the following resources prior to the Dialogue:

- [Charter of the United Nations: Articles 100 and 105](#)
- [Staff Regulations 1.1 \(a\), \(b\) and 1.2 \(e\), \(f\), \(g\), \(i\), \(m\), \(o\), \(p\), \(q\) \(ST/SGB/2023/1/Rev.1\)](#)
- [Staff Rules 1.2 \(r\), \(k\), \(o\), \(p\) and 1.9 \(ST/SGB/2023/1/Rev.1\)](#)
- [Standards of Conduct for the International Civil Service \(2013\): Paragraphs 23, 24, 45-49.](#)

STEP 2: PREPARE TO PARTICIPATE

1. Please come to the discussion ready to actively participate, ask questions, contribute relevant examples and discuss relevant situations you may know of or have heard about.
2. **Multilingualism:** The United Nations is a multilingual environment. While different duty stations will have specific languages that are mandated for official communication, not all colleagues will be able to express themselves freely in them. As the Leadership Dialogue is meant to encourage the exchange of ideas, we encourage you to embrace the use of multiple languages in the Dialogue and to maximize participation, by offering to assist colleagues with translation, if you speak the needed language(s). The Ethics Office, on its part, will endeavour to increase the languages in which the Dialogue is available.
3. Let your Leadership Dialogue host know if you have any needs related to disability or working hours, or any other requirements that need to be addressed, in order to enable you to fully participate.

STEP 3: SCENARIOS

- Please read through the three scenarios below, reflecting on the discussion questions if you have time.

STEP 4: AFTER THE SESSION

- Submit Appendix F online (see page 13) to evaluate your discussion leader/session facilitator's conduct of the leadership dialogue session. You can opt to submit anonymously.

Scenarios

SCENARIO 1: PERSONAL ACADEMIC WRITINGS ON UN-RELATED TOPICS

Many staff members pursue academic studies in their personal time. Students pursuing higher degree programmes may be required to write a master's or doctoral dissertation. UN Staff members undertaking such personal studies occasionally seek to write about a topic related to the work of the United Nations, including their own area of responsibility with the Organization.

Sergey is a Project Coordinator at a UN field mission in Talusia. He is pursuing his master's degree in international development. He has decided to write his master's thesis on "**Women and economic development in Talusia**", an issue that he also deals with as part of his UN duties. He has written an email to his Human Resources Office to get approval to conduct questionnaires and interviews with his UN colleagues and counterparts on this topic.

Sergey plans to carry out questionnaires and interviews with UN staff, including UN personnel within the Talusia country team, his interlocutors in the Ministry of Finance and staff of a local NGO that he interacts with in his UN capacity.

Sergey mentioned in his email to the Human Resource Office that his proposed thesis is based on his current work for the mission. He gave assurances that the identities of those responding to the questionnaires will remain confidential and that the information gathered through the interviews will only be used as raw data to conduct analysis and will not be copied or quoted. His thesis will be submitted to an academic review panel and once approved, it will then be published in an academic journal.

Sergey's Human Resources Office, however, has advised him to choose a thesis topic that is not directly related to his UN functions or the mission. Sergey is accordingly considering writing his thesis on another topic using only publicly available UN information, if required.

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. What does Sergey need to know before undertaking personal academic study on a UN-related topic that will be published?
 - Does Sergey need approval to undertake external studies?
 - Can Sergey carry out surveys, questionnaires or interviews of UN staff and his counterparts in connection with his personal academic studies?
 - Does Sergey need approval to publish an academic thesis?
2. Is it permissible for Sergey to write his master's thesis based on his current work for the mission?
3. Does Sergey need to seek approval of the manuscript of his thesis prior to publication if he changes his topic so that it is no longer connected to his UN duties, but still relates to the purpose, activities or interest of the UN?

4. What does the Head of Entity need to consider when reviewing a publication request?
5. Should a disclaimer be included in an approved publication relating to the purpose, activities, or interests of the UN?

RELATED RESOURCES AND REFERENCES

- Staff Regulations 1.2 (f), (g), (i), (o) and (p) (ST/SGB/2023/1/Rev.1)
- Staff Rules 1.2 (r) and 1.9 (ST/SGB/2023/1/Rev.1)
- ST/AI/2000/13, Outside Activities, Sections 4.1 (d), 4.3, and 5.2

SCENARIO 2: PARTICIPATION IN BOARDS, PANELS, COMMITTEES, EXPERT GROUPS, AND SIMILAR BODIES

- Also available in [video format](#)

Format: Animated video

Setting: Training room with participants and facilitator

Workshop: Ethics in Action

Jaime: Our next topic is participating on boards, panels, committees, expert groups or similar bodies that are external to the Organization.

Hala: I once sat on an advisory board for an NGO.

Jaime: Was that in your official or personal capacity, Hala?

Hala: Personal, I think. Does it matter?

Jaime: This is a good place to start, whether you participate in an official or personal capacity is very important for how the engagement is assessed.

For instance, if you are invited to serve on an advisory board in your official capacity to represent the views and interests of the Organization, then this is not an outside activity? Instead, your participation would form part of your official duties and responsibilities, subject to approval. When your management reviews the invitation, they will consider – like all other official engagements with external entities – whether the entity has an institutional relationship with the UN, such as an MOU, whether they are, for example, a service provider, a donor, a recipient of UN funding, or an implementing partner, whether your participation would serve the interests of the Organization and contribute to the achievement of its goals, whether the activity is in alignment with the work being carried out by relevant offices, whether your participation would not give rise to any reputational risks or conflicts of interests, and that you are the right person to make such representations.

Hala: So, if I'm invited, my management may decide that I'm not suitable to sit on the advisory board, but my colleague is?

Jaime: In principle, yes. If participation is in an official capacity to represent the views and interests of the Organization, the Organization decides who is best suited to make those representations.

Sergio: What if I've been invited to serve on a commission for development cooperation set up by my government to advise on its development aid. This would be a great opportunity for me, as an SDG Officer, to influence how development funding is channeled to support the SDGs.

Jaime: This one is sensitive because according to the Charter of the UN and the staff regulations, staff may not seek or accept instructions from any Government or external source and staff are required to discharge their functions and regulate their conduct with the interests of the Organization only in view.

Sergio: What does that mean, only in view?

Jaime: It means we must place the views and interests of the Organization ahead of any personal, national, or other view or interest.

Sergio: But my participation *would* serve the interests of the SDGs and that means, the UN.

Jaime: That may be, but as an independent international civil servant appointed by, accountable to and under the exclusive authority of the Secretary-General, it would be inconsistent with your status to serve in a personal capacity on a board or entity linked to your national government.

Abeba: What if I'm invited, in my personal capacity, to serve on the board of an NGO whose mission is to provide psycho-social support to victims of human trafficking.

Jaime: To serve on any external board in your personal capacity, you must submit a request in writing to your Head of Entity through your Executive Office or local Human Resources Office and provide all the relevant information with your request.

Abeba: What kind of information?

Jaime: Like, the name of the entity and what it does, whether you have any engagement with the entity in your UN capacity and whether the entity has an institutional relationship with the UN. For example, do they have an MOU with the UN, are they or have they been a UN service provider, a donor, a recipient of UN funding, or an implementing partner, etc. whether you would have a fiduciary duty to the entity or fundraising responsibilities? What are you expected to do for them, when and for how long are you expected to do it, and whether you'll be paid.

Abeba: Wait. What's a fiduciary duty?

Jaime: A fiduciary duty is a legal responsibility of loyalty and care pursuant to which you may be held accountable by third parties for the actions, activities or decisions taken by the entity and its personnel.

Abeba: What if I don't know whether membership of the Board involves fiduciary duties.

Jaime: Usually officers of a corporation including NGOs, or members of the Board Directors or Board of Trustees, have fiduciary duties, but if you're not sure, ask the entity first for the by-laws or terms of reference for membership of the Board and submit that with your request.

Reza: What then? Would Abeba be allowed to serve on this NGO Board?

Jaime: Well, if there are no legal, financial, or fiduciary duties or fundraising responsibilities, if Abeba has no engagement with the entity in her UN capacity, and the entity does not have an institutional relationship with the UN and there are no other conflicts of interest, her participation in an advisory capacity may be permissible.

Reza: What if Abeba is invited to serve on a committee of an NGO which is a UN service provider? Any issue?

Jaime: If the entity is, or seeks to become, a UN service provider, having a UN staff member serve on its Committee, even in a personal capacity, could give rise to conflict-of-interest situations. First, her engagement with the NGO could suggest a UN endorsement, and/or preferential treatment, which could give, or appear to give, the NGO an unfair market advantage. This could expose the Organization to challenges from other vendors and allegations of impropriety. Her engagement could also give rise to an appearance or perception that she is disclosing UN insider information, or that she is using her UN affiliation to help the NGO for her own private gain. This could also suggest a misuse of her position with the Organization.

Just remember, you must have approval from your Head of Entity to serve in your personal capacity on any board, panel, committee, expert group, or similar body external to the UN, regardless of whether or not it is related to the Organization.

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. Which types of personal engagements with external boards or committees require approval?
2. Is it a conflict of interest to serve on an external panel or committee in your personal capacity on issues that are directly related to your area of work?
3. Why is it relevant to disclose whether the external entity has an institutional or contractual relationship with the UN?
4. Can staff, in their personal capacity, serve on a body established by and reporting to a national government?
5. Can staff use their title and UN affiliation when serving in a personal capacity on an external board, panel or committee?
6. Is it permissible to publicly carry out advocacy or engage in fundraising on behalf of an external entity?

RELATED RESOURCES AND REFERENCES

- Charter of the United Nations: Articles 100 and 105
- Staff Regulations 1.1 (a) and (b) and 1.2 (f), (g), (i), (o), and (p) (ST/SGB/2023/1/Rev.1)
- Staff Rule 1.2 (r) (ST/SGB/2023/1/Rev.1)
- ST/AI/2000/13, Outside Activities, Sections 2 and 4
- ST/IC/2006/30 Outside Activities, Paragraph 11
- Standards of Conduct for the International Civil Service (2013): Paragraphs 45 through 49

SCENARIO 3: OWNERSHIP OF A BUSINESS

Vivian has written to her Human Resources Unit seeking approval for her co-ownership of and involvement with an outside business. She is a Procurement Officer in a headquarter location. She disclosed that she and her two close friends have set up a business in her home country. They are considered equal co-owners of a company, **Hydrate247 LLC**. The company sells purified drinking water to households in different residential areas (including areas where UN staff reside), as well as to small offices, restaurants, and resellers of water. She clarified that:

- a. The company is managed by her two friends and co-owners. It has 12 employees, mostly drivers.
- b. Vivian is not involved in the day-to-day operations of the company but may go in from time-to-time to see how the business is operating and to do some light paperwork and certify documents;
- c. She does not draw a salary; however, the profits are split equally among the co-owners every quarter;
- d. Vivian confirmed that **Hydrate247** does not have any contractual relationship or dealings with the UN. However, the two co-owners of **Hydrate247** work for an IT company which has sought to do business with the UN in the past and may do so again in the future.

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. Does Vivian need prior approval for her business ownership and involvement with Hydrate247?
2. What are Vivian's obligations in the event the two co-owners of the IT company seek to do business with the UN or bid for a UN contract?
3. Is it appropriate for Vivian to promote the services of Hydrate247 at her UN workplace or to any entity or individuals that she has engaged with in the performance of her UN duties?
4. Would it be appropriate for Vivian to display an SDG poster marking the upcoming UN water conference in the reception area of the Hydrate247 office?

RELATED RESOURCES AND REFERENCES

- Staff Regulations 1.1 (b) and 1.2 (e), (m), (o), (p) and (q) (ST/SGB/2023/1/Rev.1)
- Staff Rules 1.2 (k), (o) and (p) (ST/SGB/2023/1/Rev.1)
- ST/AI/2000/13, Outside Activities, Sections 2 and 3.1.
- Standards of Conduct for International Civil Servants (2013): Paragraphs 23 and 24.

Appendix F: Participant Evaluation of Facilitator Form (Online)

INSTRUCTIONS: Each participant should submit the information below online using the link <https://forms.office.com/e/aTSmGLrp1Y> OR the QR Code below.



Prepare to fill in the information below online:

1. Date of session
2. Name of discussion leader
3. Your entity
4. Was the discussion leader knowledgeable and prepared?
5. Did the discussion leader engage your interest?
6. Did the discussion leader give sufficient time to complete discussions and exercises?
7. Did the discussion leader encourage you to participate?
8. Did the discussion leader listen to your comments, ideas, or questions?
9. Did the discussion leader limit his/her intervention to an appropriate level to focus the discussion on the views of the participants rather than his/her own?
10. Any other comments

Leadership Dialogue Contact Information

FOR MORE INFORMATION, OR TO COMMENT, CONTACT:

United Nations Ethics Office

www.un.org/en/ethics

(Available via iSeek or the public United Nations site)

Email: ethicsoffice@un.org

Phone +1-917-367-9858

Also, please consult these resources, available on our website:

[Putting Ethics to Work: A Guide for UN Staff](#)

[The Roadmap: A Staff Member's Guide to Finding the Right Place](#)