

THE VOICE OF ETHICS

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Got You Covered

Building bridges between communities and Ohio's governments through integrity and accountability



Conferences and the Ohio Ethics Law

Conferences, trainings, and professional meetings can be a valuable part of public service. They offer opportunities to learn new skills, share ideas, and build relationships with colleagues across Ohio and beyond. But when meals, travel, lodging, or entertainment are included, it's important to keep the Ohio Ethics Law in mind.

Travel expenses?

Under the Ethics Law, public officials and employees cannot solicit or accept substantial things of value from improper sources. Travel expenses, lodging, and entertainment are considered substantial things of value. Improper sources include vendors, regulated parties, or anyone doing or seeking business with a public agency.

There are limited situations where conference travel expenses may be accepted, such as when they are paid by a governmental agency or certain professional associations connected to the agency's public mission. In many cases, these expenses must also be disclosed.

Registration?

Complimentary conference registration is generally prohibited if offered by an improper source. However, public officials and employees who are invited to speak or present as part of their official duties may often accept complimentary registration provided to all guest speakers.

Entertainment?

The Ethics Law also places limits on entertainment connected to conferences. Vendors and regulated parties cannot provide public officials or employees with substantial entertainment, such as golf outings or lavish meals. At the same time, ordinary receptions or open houses that are educational, modest in nature, and open to all attendees are generally permissible.

Door Prizes?

Another common question involves conference giveaways and door prizes. If a public official or employee attends a conference in an official capacity and wins a prize, the item belongs to the public agency—not the individual employee.

Need more?

Check out our [Gifts page](#) for more helpful information before you pack your bags for that professional conference this fall! Conferences can be a great opportunity for professional development, but a little advance consideration can help ensure attendance remains both productive and compliant with the Ohio Ethics Law.



Hears What's Happening on The Voice of Ethics Podcast



A heated dog bite dispute becomes a cautionary tale about abusing public positions in [Barking Up the Wrong Tree](#)



Steve Berlin of the Chicago Board of Ethics talks about Cubs fever sweeping the city *and city council* in [Take Me Out to the Ballgame](#)



A Susan and Nick head outdoors for two public park-themed stories in [Trail Mix-Ups: Ethics in the Parks](#)



A public golf course's back nine borders a city council member's back yard in [A Hole-in-One Too Close to Home](#)

Visit ethics.ohio.gov/ethicslaw/podcast.html, or find The Voice of Ethics on [Spotify](#), [YouTube Music](#), [Amazon Music](#), [Apple Podcasts](#), or wherever you listen.

Take care, be ethical!

The Ohio Ethics Law & Non-Profit Organizations

New Fact Sheet!



Whether you're part of a non-profit that supports a public agency or a public servant who regularly works with non-profit partners, understanding how the Ohio Ethics Law applies to these relationships is essential. Non-profits play a major role in strengthening schools, parks, libraries, safety services, and other public programs, and those collaborations can raise important ethics questions. A [new fact sheet](#) from the Ohio Ethics Commission breaks down the most common issues these partnerships create and offers clear guidance for both sides.

Gifts? Board Service? Fundraising?

The fact sheet answers practical questions such as:

- Can a non-profit give a public official a gift, meal, or event ticket?
- Can a public official serve on a non-profit board? Under what conditions?
- When is a complimentary fundraising dinner ticket okay to accept?
- What is permitted when public officials volunteer or help fundraise for non-profits?
- Can non-profits pay for travel expenses or offer honoraria to public speakers?
- What counts as serving in an "official capacity"?
- Are there restrictions on public officials working for non-profits after leaving government service?

Strengthening Partnerships (and Public Trust)

If your non-profit collaborates with a public agency, or if you're a public servant who works with non-profits, this resource provides clear guidance to help you stay compliant and protect public trust.

To get answers to these and other frequently asked questions, check out [The Ohio Ethics Law & Non-Profit Organizations fact sheet](#).





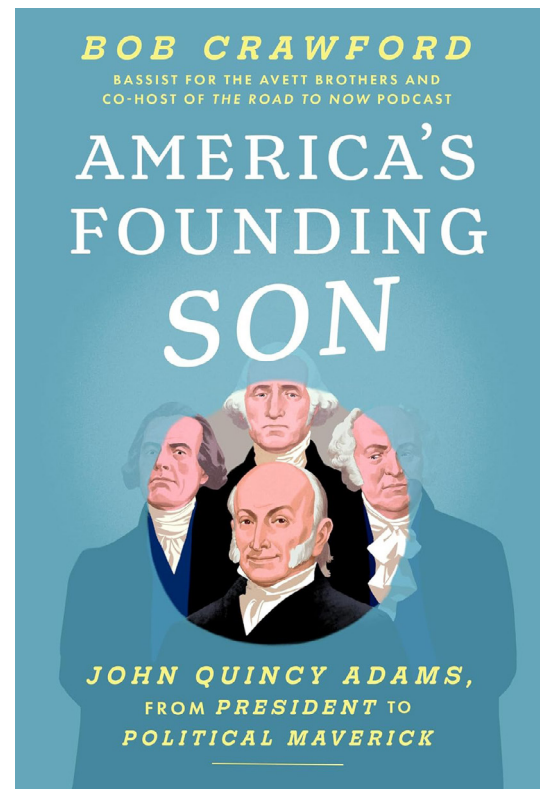
America's Founding Son: John Quincy Adams, From President to Political Maverick by Bob Crawford

A book review by the Ohio Ethics Commission's Susan Willeke

The Avett Brothers are known for their eclectic sound, blending bluegrass, country, punk, folk, rock, and pop influences into something uniquely their own. What listeners might not expect from the band is an accomplished bassist who has also emerged as an enthusiastic historian and talented author. Yet that is precisely the surprise delivered by Bob Crawford in his impressive debut book, *America's Founding Son: John Quincy Adams, From President to Political Maverick*.

Trading his upright bass for a pen, Crawford has produced a thoroughly researched, engaging, and often surprising biography of the nation's sixth president. The book focuses particularly on the remarkable second act of John Quincy Adams's public career. After leaving the White House, Adams accomplished something no other former president has done before or since: he won election to and served in Congress for nearly two decades. The son of the nation's second president, Adams inherited both his father's fiery temperament and his unwavering commitment to integrity and public service. Crawford argues that Adams's devotion to principle over party "was not a strategy for political success," a trait that contributed to his becoming, like his father, a one-term president.

Crawford's book shines brightest in its account of John Quincy Adams's post-presidential years, when he reinvented himself as one of the nation's most formidable opponents of slavery. Though reluctant to embrace the label of abolitionist, Adams viewed slavery as fundamentally incompatible with the principles of liberty set forth in the Declaration of Independence. In Congress, he relentlessly challenged pro-slavery lawmakers, coined the term "slavocracy," and repeatedly outmaneuvered supporters of the House's infamous "gag rule," which sought to silence antislavery petitions. As Crawford argues, Adams was fighting for far more than legal victories – he was striving to ensure that the nation his parents' generation had founded would live up to its highest ideals.



The author's greatest accomplishment is the depth of his research and his ability to illuminate a pivotal period of American history that receives far less attention than it deserves. He paints a sweeping portrait of a young nation wrestling with questions of power, principle, and human liberty, never shying away from the less flattering realities of nineteenth-century politics. At times the book's exhaustive approach make some chapters feel overly dense, with lengthy detours into secondary figures or congressional maneuvering that sometimes left me wishing for a more concise narrative.

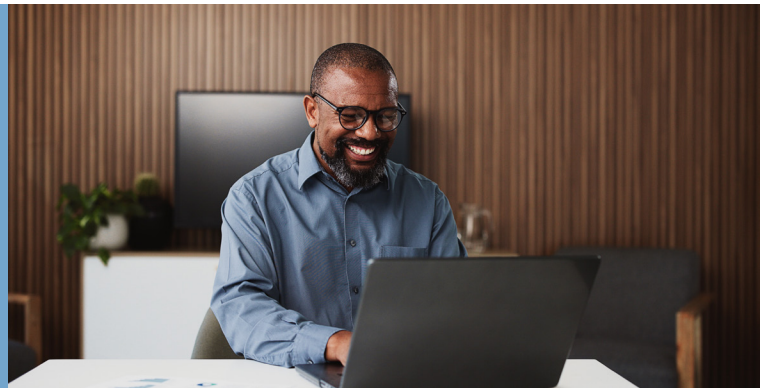
Crawford also adopts a distinctly conversational style, frequently drawing on modern slang, pop-culture references, and contemporary analogies to connect nineteenth-century events with present-day readers. Comparisons to reality television, references to debates "going viral," and mentions of "FOMO" lend the book an accessible and often humorous quality. Some readers will likely find these touches charming and engaging. For me, they were occasionally distracting in what is otherwise a scholarly and thoughtful work. Still, the stylistic choice reflects Crawford's desire to make history feel immediate and relevant rather than distant and academic.



For history buffs and casual readers alike, *America's Founding Son* offers a rich and engaging examination of one of the most consequential periods in American history. Yet the book's greatest value may be its reminder that the challenges of public service have changed far less than we might imagine. John Quincy Adams's willingness to stand on principle, even at great political cost, speaks across the centuries to anyone entrusted with the public's confidence. Crawford's portrait of Adams serves as a powerful reminder that integrity, transparency, and ethical leadership are not only historical ideals but enduring public duties.



Free CLE? *Yes, Really!*



Keeping up with Continuing Legal Education requirements can be challenging — especially when balancing busy schedules and tight budgets. That's why the Ohio Ethics Commission partners each year with the Ohio Board of Professional Conduct to offer free CLE seminars designed specifically for attorneys in public practice.

The [Commission's CLE programs](#) are approved for 2.5 attorney professional conduct hours and cover practical, real-world ethics issues facing Ohio's public officials and employees. Even better, the classes are offered in convenient format — we have one in-person option in downtown Columbus and one remaining live webcast session.

In addition, the Commission offers a free online [Ohio Ethics Law e-course](#) that provides an overview of the Ethics Law and qualifies for one hour of general CLE credit once per calendar year. The course can be completed from anywhere and is a great option for busy professionals looking for flexible training opportunities.

Finally, don't mind either of our one-hour [webinars](#) — intro and advanced — each approved for one hour of general CLE. Live, effective, free of charge, convenient, and fun!

Questions? Email susan.willeke@ethics.ohio.gov for more information. The Commission is proud to provide practical ethics education at no cost as part of its ongoing commitment to supporting Ohio's public sector professionals.



Ohio Ethics Commission
www.ethics.ohio.gov
(614) 466 -7090

William Green Building
30 West Spring Street, L3
Columbus, Ohio 43215-2256