

# ANSWERS FROM THE CITY ETHICIST

## #4: Is a sou-sou a no-no?

**Question:** *In my City job, I participate in a sou-sou with my coworkers. Any problem with that?* -Sue, City Supervisor

**Answer:** *It could be. In a sou-sou, members basically make interest-free loans to one another on a rotating basis. Each person puts a certain amount of money into the pot every payday, and one member per period gets the entire pot. Because the City Charter **prohibits** a City employee from entering into financial relationships with superiors or subordinates, an employee who gets into a sou-sou with, for example, his boss is violating the law.*

*This rule protects public servants who might feel like they have to enter into a financial relationship with the boss out of fear of having their job adversely affected if they don't. Also, a supervisor, like you, who enters into a sou-sou with a subordinate may give the appearance that she favors that employee over others who are not in the sou-sou.*

*The City Charter does **not prohibit** City employees who are not in superior-subordinate relationships from entering into financial relationships, so if none of the members are your boss, and you aren't their boss, it ought to be OK.*

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