



A WORD ABOUT ETHICS

GIFTS TO THE GOVERNMENT

What is considered to be a gift to the Government?

- Anything provided to support agency operations, including airplane tickets and meals, as well as funds.

Can I accept a gift to my agency?

- Yes, if:
 - the gift will benefit an agency program or operation,
 - acceptance will not create an appearance of impropriety by giving the impression that the agency will be biased in favor of the giver, and
 - it is approved by an authorized agency official.

When does acceptance of a gift create an appearance of impropriety?

- This is determined on a case-by-case basis, taking into consideration such factors as:
 - whether the donor has interests in controversial matters before the agency,
 - the value of the gift,
 - the usefulness of the gift to the agency, and
 - the circumstances surrounding the offer.

From which sources can I not accept a gift for my agency?

- Generally, you cannot accept a gift from:
 - an agency grantee (or applicant),
 - an agency contractor (or a bidder),
 - an agency licensee (or applicant), or
 - a company in an industry sector regulated by your agency.

(Although on some occasions gifts from these sources are permitted as not creating an appearance of impropriety.)

Are gifts for official travel (such as airline tickets, hotel, and meals) treated differently than other gifts to the Department?

- Yes, unlike other gifts, you cannot ask someone to pay for Government travel; it must be offered voluntarily. If you request a travel payment, your agency cannot accept it. Furthermore:
 - a travel gift must be approved by agency management before the travel takes place,
 - first class transportation cannot be accepted, and
 - honoraria and speaking fees cannot be accepted.

How do I report gifts?

- All gifts to an agency must be reported on a form CD 210; travel gifts must also be reported on a form SF 326. Both are available from the Ethics web page: www.commerce.gov/ethics.

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June 23, 2014