

Ethics Tip of the Month



Take me out to the ballgame...

As spring winds down and summer ramps up, many agencies promote employee events to get folks out of the office and enhance team building, and that are just plain fun. We like fun, but the question that always seems to come up is whether it would be an ethical violation for an agency to advertise an event, like a baseball game, that is being held at the baseball field and for which agency employees can purchase discounted tickets.

An agency can tell folks about these types of events, like Mariners Day or Tacoma Rainiers Day, but the agency should not provide a link to the website of the outside organization, like the Mariners, on the agency's intranet site. If the agency receives discount coupons for this event, they may place them in the public section of their building for all to take or they can put them on a public bulletin board. If the coupons are electronic and only available on the organization's website, the agency may tell employees to go to the organization's website to obtain the coupon, but they cannot provide a link to that website.

Under RCW 42.52.160, Use of persons, money, or property for private gain, no state officer or state employee may employ or use any person, money, or property under the officer's or employee's official control or direction, or in his or her official custody, for the private benefit or gain of the officer, employee, or another. The Ethics Board may adopt rules providing exceptions to this section of the law for occasional use of the state officer or state employee, of de minimis cost and value, if the activity does not result in interference with the proper performance of public duties.

WAC 292-110-010 is the rule that allows some use of state resources for activities of a personal nature or for activities that are related to an official state purpose, but not directly related to an individual employee's official duty. Under WAC 292-110-010(5)(b) resources may NOT be used for the purpose of supporting, promoting the interests of, or soliciting for an outside organization or group, including, but not limited to, a private business, or a political party, or supporting, promoting the interests of, or soliciting for a nonprofit organization unless provided for by law or authorized by an agency head or designee.

Under WAC 292-110-010(2)(b) an agency head or designee may authorize a use of state resources that is related to an official state purpose, but not directly related to an individual employee's official

duty, and under (c) an agency may authorize a specific use that promotes organizational effectiveness or enhances the job-related skills of a state officer or state employee. State employee appreciation events or an agency day at a ballgame would be an activity that promotes organizational effectiveness and an agency head could allow de minimis use of state resources to promote the event as long as they did not link the ball club's website to their intranet site.