

Ethics Tip of the Month



Lending a helping hand

As the holiday season approaches, you or your agency may be gearing up to help those in need by adopting a family or needy child. While this outpouring of generosity is a wonderful testament to your thoughtful and caring spirit, there are some ethical issues that you need to be aware of to make sure that your actions do not violate the Ethics in Public Service Act:

1. **Can you use state resources to support charities?** The limited use of state resources to support charities may be allowed if an agency head or his/her designee approves the activity as one that promotes organizational effectiveness. Such uses shall be specifically authorized in writing and any use shall strictly conform to specific agency guidance. (See WAC 292-110-010(2))
2. **What is meant by “Organizational effectiveness?”** Organizational effectiveness relates to an agency’s mission and encompasses activities that enhance or augment the agency’s ability to perform its mission. State agencies may allow employees to participate in activities that are not official state duties but promote organizational effectiveness by supporting a collegial work environment, so long as the employees who participate in the activity limit their use of state resources. While the Ethics Act normally prohibits the use of state resources to support outside organizations or groups, including charities, unless the support is part of the agency’s official duties, WAC 292-110-010(2) allows agency heads to nevertheless approve a de minimis use of state resources for activity that promotes organizational effectiveness even if that activity may incidentally support a private organization. Agency heads are cautioned, however, that activity allowed under this rule may not involve a state agency’s endorsement or promotion of a commercial activity such as advertising or selling products.
3. **Can you solicit donations for charitable events from outside businesses?** The Ethics Act contains a very strong presumption against solicitation by you for any purpose, including charitable events. Solicitation by state employees can create the appearance that a donation might result in favorable treatment from the state and a failure to donate might result in unfavorable treatment. Therefore, you may not use your official state positions to solicit goods and services from private organizations and businesses.
4. **Are there any other considerations I should take into account when conducting charitable solicitations?** Yes, avoid direct personal solicitations of your co-workers and colleagues and opt for voluntary participation. Managers and supervisors should always avoid direct personal solicitations of employees who work under their supervision.