



# THE HOLIDAY SEASON

## Ethics Survival Tips for Federal Employees

With the new year approaching, there will be opportunities to celebrate with family, friends, and colleagues and, for federal employees, there will also be potential, but avoidable, ethics pitfalls. These tips will help you, the federal workforce, foresee challenges and take steps to ensure a joyous and ethical holiday season!

### Federal Workplace Office Parties

Congratulations party people, you have been selected to plan your office holiday party. Here are some things to keep in mind.

✱ **Your challenge:** Collecting funds from colleagues to pay for food, beverages, and decorations without running afoul of the ethics rules.

#### Pro Tips

- Make sure the solicitation clearly states that contributions are voluntary.
- If you include a suggested donation, make sure the solicitation indicates that employees are free to give the suggested amount, a different amount, or not contribute at all.
- Make sure the solicitation does not come from a supervisor or executive. We want to make sure no one feels pressured to contribute.
- **Most important:** Have your ethics office review the solicitation before you send it out.

✱ **Your challenge:** Holding a gift exchange with your colleagues without running afoul of the ethics rules.

#### Pro Tips

- Make sure any invitation to participate clearly indicates that participation is voluntary.
- Have someone other than a supervisor or executive send out the invitation.
- Keep the suggested gift value at \$10 or less to ensure compliance with ethics rules.
- **Most important:** Have your ethics office review the invitation before you send it out.



## Corporate Holiday Parties

**It's a party! You have friends and family outside of the federal workforce and you've been invited to a holiday party hosted by a company or organization outside of the government. Here are some things to keep in mind.**

**\* Challenge:** Deciding to accept or decline a holiday party invitation from a company or organization that works with you in your official capacity or works with your agency.

### Pro Tips

- Speak with your ethics office. Gifts from people or organizations that seek to do or do business with your agency, such as contractors and regulated entities, can pose serious ethics challenges.

**\* Challenge:** Deciding to accept or decline an invitation from your spouse, friend, or relative to their office holiday party.

### Pro Tips

- Consider whether the host of the party does business with your agency or the government. If they do, consider speaking with your ethics office. You can probably attend, but it is good to check.
- Even if the host doesn't do business with your agency or the government, if you want to attend, ask your ethics office. Even if an invitation isn't prohibited, it is "always appropriate and frequently prudent" to decline an otherwise permissible invitation.

## Giving and Receiving Gifts from Colleagues

**Happy holidays! You have friends who are also federal employees. You'd like to recognize your friendship by getting them gifts for the holidays.**

**\* Your challenge:** You'd like to give a gift to a supervisor or other official superior to celebrate the holidays.

### Pro Tips

- Keep it small. Greetings cards or items valued at \$10 or less will keep you clear of any ethics problems.

**\* Your challenge:** You have good friends who are also federal employees but are not in your chain of command, and you'd like to give them holiday presents.

### Pro Tips

- Small gifts, valued at less than \$10, will keep you clear of the ethics rules.
- If you have a long-standing friendship, and your friend is not an official superior, you can probably give them a larger gift. It is always best to check with the ethics office just to be sure.

