

A WORD ABOUT ETHICS

SERVING WITH OUTSIDE ORGANIZATIONS

May a Federal employee be active in a non-Federal organization, such as a professional society, industry association, or civic group?

- Yes, under most circumstances.

Under what circumstances would activity in a non-Federal organization pose a problem?

- When the organization has agreements, contracts, issues, projects, or other matters before the employee's office and the employee holds a position or is "actively involved" with the organization in a "private capacity."

What does it mean for an employee to be "actively involved" in a non-Federal organization in a "private capacity?"

- "Actively involved" means that the employee is doing more than merely paying dues or attending meetings, such as working on projects for the organization.

- "Private capacity" means that activities for the organization are performed on personal time and not as part of Government duties, a performance plan, or under a supervisor's direction.

How could an employee's activities in a non-Federal organization conflict with the employee's Government position?

- In most situations, the employee may not work on anything as an agency employee in which the organization is before the agency, such as:

- recommending or approving staff to attend the organization's conference;
- working on or assigning a project or task involving the organization; or
- attending an organization conference or submitting a paper to the organization (or directing a subordinate to do so) on behalf of the agency.

Are there any exceptions?

- Yes. If the needs of the agency outweigh appearance concerns, an exception may be available. The employee should contact the Ethics Law and Programs Division in such cases.

Are there any limits on private activities with a non-Federal organization?

- Yes. A Federal employee may not:

- use his or her agency title or affiliation in organization materials, or
- disclose nonpublic Government information.