



## Natural Disasters: Employees Accepting Assistance & Fundraising in the Workplace

### Frequently Asked Questions

September 2017

Many individuals and organizations have expressed an interest in supporting U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) field stations, and agency employees and families, affected by hurricanes, wildfires, earthquakes and other natural disasters. Following is general guidance regarding employee acceptance of gifts or donations, and charitable fundraising in the workplace. If you have questions, please contact your servicing Ethics Counselor ([www.fws.gov/ethics/contacts.html](http://www.fws.gov/ethics/contacts.html)).

#### **SERVICE EMPLOYEES ACCEPTING ASSISTANCE AFTER NATURAL DISASTERS**

##### ***Q. What assistance can Service employees accept from non-Federal sources?***

**A:** Service employees may accept assistance from many non-Federal sources. However, Federal regulations restrict employees from soliciting or accepting gifts offered because of their official positions or if offered by certain interested sources ("prohibited sources"). For Service employees, a "prohibited source" is defined as a person, company, or organization that does business or is seeking to do business with the Service, conducts operations that are regulated by the Service, or has any interests that might be affected by the performance or non-performance of the employee's official duties, or is an organization a majority of whose members are described above. *Examples of prohibited sources for the Service include non-profit conservation organizations, friends groups, oil/mining/forestry companies, and contractors.* Exceptions to this rule allow Service employees to accept the following:

- **Gifts, other than cash, valued at \$20 or less:** Employees may accept gifts valued at \$20 or less per occasion from a prohibited source, if they do not accept more than \$50 from the same source in a calendar year. *Example: Service employees may accept a \$20 meal offered by a friends group, if the employees do not accept more than \$50 in gifts from the friends group in 2017.*
- **Coffee, donuts, soft drinks, or other modest food items:** Employees may accept snacks from a prohibited source that are not offered as part of a meal. *Example: Service employees may accept coffee and donuts provided by an oil company during clean-up efforts after a flood.*
- **Opportunities and benefits offered to all Federal employees and the general public:** Employees may accept opportunities, discounts and benefits from a prohibited source if offered to the general public and/or all Federal employees (even if restricted to a particular geographic region.) *Example: A non-profit conservation organization sets up a disaster supply site near a refuge. Service employees may accept donations (i.e. food, water, diapers, etc.) if they are offered to the general public or ALL Federal employees in the affected geographical location.*
- **Gifts to groups of Service employees:** Employees may accept gifts offered to groups of Service employees by an entity that is not a prohibited source if the group of employees is not distinguished on the basis of official position, pay or rank. *Example: All Service employees affected by a particular disaster may accept gift cards from a local grocery store.*
- **Gifts to individual employees from a person or organization:** Employees may accept in-kind or cash donations from a person or organization that is not a prohibited source. *Example: A Service employee may accept donations from the Red Cross or the Federal Employee Education and Assistance (FEAA) Fund.*



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- **Gifts from a family member, close personal friend or related to an outside employment relationship:** Employees may accept gifts or donations from a prohibited source if the gift clearly is motivated by a family relationship, personal relationship or outside employment relationship and has not been offered because of the employee's official status or position. *Example: a Federal employee may accept meals, lodging, and other benefits from their spouse's employer if the benefit was not offered because of the employee's official position.*
- Q. What assistance can Service employees accept from other Federal employees?**
- A.** Employees may accept donations from other Federal employees through the following:
- **In-kind donations:** Employees may accept in-kind donations directly from their co-workers. *Example: A regional office may gather food, water, clothing, etc. for field office employees impacted by a hurricane.*
  - **Cash donations:** Employees may accept cash from co-workers to assist them with disaster assistance. Even though employees affected by a natural disaster are allowed to accept individual cash donations directly from co-workers, the Office of Government Ethics recommends that individual gifts be bundled, so that the affected employees are not aware of the amount donated by each employee. If funds are collected in an office, these funds should be collected by a junior employee to avoid employees feeling coerced to donate. The donations should be anonymous; no lists of donors should be kept. The donor must determine the amount of the contribution. The collected donations may be given directly to the affected employees, or used to purchase items or gift cards. Service employees may not set up official "Go Fund me" accounts or similar websites. (**Note:** The gift rules generally limit gifts that a supervisor can receive from an employee. However, supervisors may accept modest gifts from their employees on "special and infrequent occasions" including natural disasters.)

### CHARITABLE FUNDRAISING IN THE WORKPLACE

**Q. Are Service employees allowed to fundraise for charities in the workplace?**

**A.** The Combined Federal Campaign is the only authorized solicitation of funds from employees in the Federal workplace on behalf of charitable organizations. The Director of the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) also may grant Federal agencies approval to authorize special solicitations of Federal employees, outside the CFC campaign timeframe, in support of victims of emergencies and natural disasters. The Department of the Interior (DOI) is responsible for authorizing and providing implementation guidance regarding a special solicitation of DOI employees. (**See:** [OPM CFC Frequently Asked Questions](#) for additional information.)

**Q. Are Service employees allowed to conduct food drives, etc. in the workplace?**

**A.** Yes. Service employees may conduct food, clothing, school supply, toy and other in-kind collections in the workplace for local charities (local food bank, Salvation Army, etc.) any time of year if approved by Service management. This in-kind collection may not include the donation of funds.