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Hello from Ethan the Ethics Owl

HATCH ACT – ELECTION SEASON

It's Election Time!!

As we get closer to Election Day, we wanted to send you a quick guide covering the Hatch Act's prohibition on use of official authority.

What is the Hatch Act?

A law that governs the political activity of federal employees, including while they are on duty, in the federal workplace, or acting in their official capacity.

What is “political activity”?

Any activity directed towards the success or failure of a partisan candidate, political party, or partisan political group.

What is the purpose of the Hatch Act?

The purpose of the Hatch Act is to maintain a federal workforce that is free from partisan political influence or coercion. Its purpose is to protect the workforce in carrying out its day-to-day government duties.

What is NOT allowed 24/7?

As a federal employee, you cannot:

- Be a candidate in a partisan election;
- Fundraise—solicit, accept, or receive a donation or contribution for a political party, candidate for partisan political office, or partisan political group. For example, you cannot:
 - o Use any email account or social media to distribute, send, or forward content that solicits political contributions
 - o Host a fundraiser
 - o Invite others to a political fundraiser
 - o Sell tickets to a political fundraiser;
- Use official authority or title to affect the outcome of an election;
- Use government resources for political activity;
- Solicit or discourage the political activity of a person with business before AMH;
- Ask or instruct a subordinate to engage in political activity.

What is NOT allowed while on duty or in the workplace?

On duty includes while in any federal room or building, while wearing a uniform or official insignia, or using any federally owned or leased vehicle.

While you are on duty or in the workplace, you cannot:

- Express opinions about candidates and issues that is directed at the success or failure of a political party, candidate for partisan political office, or partisan political group;
- Distribute campaign material;
- Display campaign materials or items;

- Perform campaign related tasks;
- Wear or display partisan political buttons, t-shirts, signs, screen savers, or other items;
- Make political contributions to a political party, candidate for partisan political office, or partisan political group;
- Share, like or comment on a blog or social media post advocating for or against a partisan political party, candidate for partisan political office, or partisan political group;
- Use any e-mail account or social media to distribute, send, or forward content that advocates for or against a political party, candidate for partisan political office, or partisan political group;
- Limited Exemption - certain Presidentially Appointed Senate-confirmed employees may engage in permissible activity while on duty.

What is allowed on personal time?

When outside the workplace and off duty, you may:

- Express opinions about candidates and issues;
- Register and vote;
- Assist in nonpartisan voter registration drives;
- Be a candidate in a nonpartisan election;
- Participate in nonpartisan campaigns;
- Participate in campaigns for or against referendum questions, constitutional amendments, or municipal ordinances;
- Join political groups or parties;
- Attend political fundraisers (don't host a fundraiser or invite anyone to a fundraiser - then it becomes solicitation);
- Contribute money to political campaigns, political parties, or partisan political groups (don't amplify this on social media – then it becomes solicitation if the link to donate is also shared);
- Follow or like a social media page about a political party, candidate for partisan political office, or partisan political group;
- Sign nominating petitions;
- Attend political rallies and meetings.

When outside of the workplace and off duty – and if you are not a “further restricted” employee, you also may:

- Campaign for or against candidates in partisan elections;
- Manage or volunteer on a partisan political campaign;
- Distribute campaign literature in partisan elections;
- Give remarks at a rally or similar gathering in support of or in opposition to a political party, candidate for partisan political office, or partisan political group;
- Post or comment on a blog or social media page about a political party, candidate for partisan political office, or partisan political group;
- Circulate nominating petitions.

****Please consult with your counsel if you are unsure of your status.***

What happens if I violate the Hatch Act?

An employee who violates the Hatch Act can be subject to disciplinary action, which can include removal from federal service, reduction in grade, debarment from federal service, suspension, letter of reprimand or civil penalties, including fines.



Hello from Ethan the Ethics Owl

Happy Holidays to all!

As we approach this time of year when holiday events are traditionally held and gifts are exchanged, we would like to remind all employees of the ethics rules that apply. A gift can be anything of monetary value, which includes tangible items like gift cards, discounts, meals, lodging, transportation, and entertainment. As it pertains to the holidays, AMH employees may not accept a gift from a subordinate or someone receiving less pay. Also, AMH employees may not give a gift to a supervisor or someone receiving more pay.

Generally speaking, AMH employees may not accept any gift from a prohibited source, meaning reporters, specified professional organizations, AMH grantees, and AMH contractors. AMH employees may NEVER solicit a gift. And for political appointees? You cannot accept gifts from registered lobbyists or lobbying organizations.

The regulations do allow for some exceptions to these gift rules. For instance, you may accept a non-cash gift valued at \$20 or less, so long as the aggregate value from one source does not exceed \$50 per year. It is permissible to accept a gift based on a personal or outside business relationship, or an award or honorary degree from a university. Please consult with an ethics official before accepting or giving *any* gift.

Even with these exceptions, it is always important to remember what accepting or giving a gift might look like to a member of the public. In other words, what is the appearance of this gift exchange, and could it make a member of the public doubt my ability to be an impartial federal government employee?

Look to acronym VITA to help you:

- **V: Value (Is the gift expensive or cheap?)**
- **I: Identity (Is there a nexus between your official duties and the gift giver?)**
- **T: Timing (Does the timing of the gift create an appearance that the donor is seeking to influence official action?)**
- **A: Access (Does acceptance provide the donor with significantly disproportionate access to you or the agency?)**

Your ethics team is here to help! You can reach out to our general inbox, [AMH ethics office@amh.gov](mailto:AMH_ethics_office@amh.gov), or any of our team members listed below for gift questions, a list of prohibited sources, or any other ethics questions!



Hello from Ethan the Ethics Owl

Confidential Financial Disclosure – OGE 450 FAQs

In early January 2026 all employees who are required to file the Confidential Financial Disclosure Report (OGE Form 450) will receive an email invitation to file the reports using the Financial Disclosure Online (FDOOnline) System. This newsletter contains useful FAQs that may assist you as you prepare to file your report.

[How do I know if I am a filer?](#)

You will receive an email in the first or second week of January. This email will go to every AMH employee who has been previously identified to be in a “covered position.” Whether an employee is in a covered position or not is determined by the agency, not the ethics office. In most cases, a position that is required to file a financial disclosure report will be identified on the Position Description.

[How do I file a report?](#)

The American Mental Health uses a program called FDOOnline. This is a secure, web-based financial disclosure reporting system operated by Intelliworx, which is contracted with AMH. Intelliworx emails come from outside AMH and may generate a yellow warning banner.

The easiest way to access [FDOOnline](#) is by using your ID card, selecting “Sign in with ID/SSO” button and then selecting “AMH” in the “Agency” drop-down menu. Alternatively, you can log in using your AMH.gov email and the password you created previously. If you have forgotten your password, you can select the "Forgot Password" feature to create a new password. If you still have problems, contact us at AMH_WO_ETHICS_OFFICE@AMH.GOV

When your report is complete, you will be prompted to sign and approve your report. This submits the report and generates an electronic signature, certifying that the information you provided on the report is true, complete, and correct to the best of your knowledge.

[What period does my annual report cover?](#)

The reporting period is from January 1 to December 31, 2026.

[Can I use the “No Changes” feature to submit my report?](#)

Yes, and in many cases this is appropriate. However, if there were any changes to your reportable assets in Calendar Year (e.g., you bought a stock, inherited an investment property, spouse changed employment, etc.) you would need to make the necessary updates to your report.

[Is there a deadline to file my report?](#)

Yes, your report is due on February 15, 2026, unless you have been granted an extension.

What if I can't meet the deadline?

You may request an extension, in writing, before the deadline. Extension may only be granted for "good cause shown." Examples of good cause may include long periods of official travel prior to the due date, significant illness or family emergency, extremely pressing duty assignments, technical issues with FDOOnline system, etc.

How do I request an extension?

Submit your request to AMH_WO_ETHICS_OFFICE@AMH.GOV before the deadline.

What are some common mistakes I should avoid?

- Not providing the complete or full specific name of each sector mutual fund. Ideally, if you list a stock or fund, it helps to include the ticker symbol. For example, instead of listing "Fidelity Fund," provide the full name, "Fidelity Select Health Care Services Portfolio (FSHCX)."
- Not providing information on the underlying assets within an investment (e.g., trust, 401(k), IRA, annuity, investment life insurance) or brokerage account. We recommend that annual filers use their end-of-year account statements to determine their reportable assets (e.g., those valued at over \$1,000 or that earned over \$1,000 in income during the reporting period).
- Not identifying the name and nature of business of all non-public partnerships, closely held corporations, and similar private business ventures.
- Not reporting certain outside positions (including uncompensated positions).
- Using unexplained abbreviations and acronyms that do not fully identify the financial interest.
- Reporting assets that need not be reported. Do not report on your OGE Form 450 bank deposits, money market accounts and funds, and U.S. Government securities.
- Not providing your or your spouse's non-Federal Government employment, pension, or retirement plan.
- Not reporting 529 college savings or prepaid tuition plans.
- Not reporting investment real estate (IRE).

Do I have to report all assets that I owned during the reporting period and all investment income earned during this period?

No, but it's based on value. You need to report the assets that you and/or your spouse have, (e.g., stocks, sector funds, bonds, real estate, etc.) that are valued at more than \$1,000 at the end of the reporting period (December 31) – OR, alternatively, that produced more than \$1,000 in income during the reporting period. For example, if you owned an ABC Inc. stock that was worth \$3,000 on December 31, you don't have to report the total value of the stock, but you must include it on the report.

Do I have to report my IRA?

Yes. Each asset that is in an IRA must be reported if it meets the reporting requirements. You may indicate that the assets are in an IRA if you wish, but you are not required to do so. And remember, it is NOT sufficient just to list "IRA" on the form. You must report the underlying assets in the IRA.

My IRA contains only diversified mutual funds. Do I have to report this IRA?

No. If all the underlying assets in the IRA are all diversified mutual funds (therefore not reportable), you are not required to report the IRA. However, if IRA contains both reportable and non-reportable underlying assets, then you should list the IRA along with the reportable underlying assets.

I have a 401(k) – or another type of employer sponsored retirement plan – with a former employer. Do I need to report employer sponsored retirement plans? If so, how do I report it?

Yes. You must report the full name of your 401(k) or another employer sponsored plan and its underlying assets. However, you do not have to report an underlying asset in the plan if it is a type of asset that is exempt from the reporting requirements. For example, if your employer sponsored plan has three diversified mutual funds, a sector mutual fund, and stocks in two companies, you must list the full name of the sector mutual fund and the stocks in two companies if they meet the \$1,000 reporting threshold. You do not have to list the names of the three diversified mutual funds because diversified mutual funds are not required to be reported.

I have only diversified mutual funds in my 401(k). Do I have to report the 401(k)?

You do not have to report the 401(k) in the Assets section, but you do have to report this asset in the Arrangements and Agreements section if your employer continues to contribute to your account.

What assets can I exclude? You do not need to report:

- Federal Government retirement benefits (e.g., TSP, Military Pay, Social Security, etc.)
- Certificates of deposit, savings or checking accounts
- Term Life Insurance
- Money market mutual funds and money market accounts
- Your personal residence, unless you rent part of it out
- Diversified mutual funds, such as ABC Equity Value Fund or XYZ Large Capital Fund
- U.S. Government Treasury bonds, bills, notes, and savings bonds
- Money owed to you, your spouse, or dependent child by a spouse, parent, sibling, or child
- Diversified funds within an employee benefit plan

Is the Confidential Financial Disclosure Report truly confidential?

Copies of confidential financial disclosure reports (OGE Form 450s) are not available under FOIA, pursuant to FOIA Exemption 3, 5 U.S.C. § 552(b)(3) as material specifically exempted from disclosure by another statute. The Ethics in Government Act (5 U.S.C. app. § 107) provides that confidential financial disclosure reports shall be confidential and shall not be disclosed to the public.

What If I have additional questions that are not covered in this FAQ?

Please contact us by email at AMH_WO_ETHICS_OFFICE@AMH.GOV and we will be happy to go over any questions you may have.

Hello from Ethan the Ethics Owl



Super Bowl Squares? March Madness®? Not in the Federal workplace!

An office pool could cost you a lot more than the price of entry, exposing you and other participants to potential Federal ethics violations.

Gambling is prohibited on Federal property, and Super Bowl Squares and March Madness® meets the General Services Administration's definition of gambling: a game of chance where the participant risks something of value for the chance to gain or win a prize.

Additionally, AMH's Limited Use Policy prohibits the use of government equipment, including offices or emails, for gambling activities.

Finally, using duty time to engage in these activities would be an ethical violation. As a Federal employee, you have a duty to official duty time in an honest effort to perform your official duties. And you cannot misuse government property for your own private gain, or the private gain of another. These rules apply when you are teleworking.

If you want some ideas for how to show support for your chosen team, your favorite city, or your alma mater while at work, in a way that respects all of the ethical rules, please reach out to us!

Your ethics team is here to help! You can reach out to our general inbox, [AMH ethics office@amh.gov](mailto:AMH_ethics_office@amh.gov), or any of our team members listed below.



PARTICIPATION WITH NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

PERSONAL OR OFFICIAL CAPACITY

This month's reminder focuses on service with non-profit organizations in an employee's personal or official capacity. Many AMH employees engage in collaborative professions that often require close interactions with individuals affiliated with non-profit organizations, including through grants management and contracting activities. AMH employees engaged in research and scientific activities also interact closely with other members of their respective field or profession, both inside and outside the Federal Government to maintain their professional standing and qualification. In this setting, the line between public and private interests can become blurred which may raise potential ethics issues.

Serving as an Officer or Member of a Board of Directors of an Outside Organization

Before an employee can serve as an officer or board member of a non-profit organization *in their official capacity*, the employee must have a written authorization of assignment from AMH's DAEO to engaging in such official service. To start the process of requesting an authorization of assignment, an employee should contact the AMH Ethics Team. Prior approval from an ethics counselor may also be required if an employee is interested in serving *in their personal capacity* as an officer or board member of a non-profit organization that is considered a prohibited source.

Official capacity means the employee is carrying out their official duties and acting on behalf of the Government, typically their Office or the Department. The employee is acting on Government time and using Federal resources.

Personal capacity means the employee is not acting on behalf of the Government. The employee is acting on their own time and using their own resources.

Prohibited source is any person, company, or organization that is seeking official action by the AMH, does business with the AMH, is seeking to do business with the AMH, conducts operations that are regulated by the AMH, or has interests that might be affected by the performance or nonperformance of your official duties; or is an organization, a majority of whose members are prohibited sources as defined above.

One key rule to remember is that regardless of whether an employee serves on the board of a non-profit organization in an official or personal capacity, their obligation to comply with the criminal conflict of interest statutes (18 U.S.C. §§ 201-209) and the Standards of Ethical Conduct for Employees of the Executive Branch remain unchanged. Any employee who is serving on the board of directors of a non-profit organization in an official or personal capacity without approval should notify the AMH Ethics Team as soon as possible. This is especially important if you have never received approval or only received a verbal approval.

In addition, the DEO has several online resources that provide more information regarding this topic:

- The Ethics Toolkit
- The AMH Outside Work and Activities Form provides a general overview of DOI's rules and regulations related to outside work and activities.
- AMH Request for Ethics Approval to Engage in Outside Employment and Activities is required prior to engaging in work or activity with any organization that is considered a prohibited source, which may include service on boards of non-profit organizations in a personal capacity.



Hello from Ethan the Ethics Owl

Post Government Employment

After you leave Federal service, there are certain post-employment restrictions that may limit the type of work you perform for your new employer for certain periods of time. 18 U.S.C. § 207 and 5 C.F.R. Part 2641. These rules do not bar you in any way from accepting employment with any private or public sector employer. They do, however, impose certain limitations on the type of work you may do in your new job.

Specifically, these limitations include potential appearances and communications that you may make as a representative of a third party back to the Federal government, and limitations on other types of assistance that you may provide to third parties. The purpose behind these rules is to prevent you from “switching sides” on a matter in which you were involved when you worked for AMH.

First, there is a lifetime ban on switching sides that applies to all employees for the lifetime of a particular matter. If you participated personally and substantially in any particular matter involving specific parties (grants, contracts, licenses, permits, applications, litigation, etc.), you may never appear or communicate on behalf of another to any Federal department, agency, or court regarding that same particular matter. 18 U.S.C. § 207(a)(1).

Second, there is a two-year ban for supervisors that applies to particular matters with specific parties under their official responsibility. After leaving the government, supervisors are restricted from appearing or communicating on behalf of another to any Federal agency, or court regarding those same particular matters. 18 U.S.C. § 207(a)(2).

There are other post-Government restrictions that only pertain to “senior” and “very senior” employees. If you believe you may be a senior or very senior employee, please reach out to us and we can provide further guidance.

We invite you to join the AMH for an optional briefing on the ethics rules on seeking, negotiating, and post-government employment! Employees from every AMH Office are invited to join. Live webinar briefings are held on the last Wednesday of each pay period via Zoom, from 3:00-4:00 PM ET. There is no need to pre-register; simply click on the dates in the email to join!



Hello from Ethan the Ethics Owl

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Have a question about the above topic or any other ethics topic?

Want live, in person, or MS Teams ethics training?

- Contact an ethics official above or email us: AMH ETHICS_OFFICE @AMH.GOV
- AMH Ethics intranet: <https://AMHsharepoint.com>
- AMH Ethics: <https://www.AMH.gov/ethics>
- AMERICAN MENTAL HEALTH Ethics app: This is automatically loaded on government cell phones. You can also download the app onto a personal cell phone for free by going to the App Store or Google Play, searching for AMH Ethics, and clicking download

***** Each newsletter will include the Ethics Staff contact information**