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PROGRAM ADVISORY

TO: Designated Agency Ethics Officials

FROM: Shelley K. Finlayson
Chief of Staff and Program Counsel

SUBJECT: Maintaining Ethics Program Continuity during the COVID-19 Pandemic

This Program Advisory provides suggestions for maintaining ethics program continuity during the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Many agencies are working directly to address the COVID-19 pandemic; many others are working to manage the social, economic, and other effects. The United States government and its employees are facing challenges, both as public officials and as individuals and families. Ethics officials are facing the same challenges and will be called upon to support agencies and employees during this pandemic.

Below are some suggested steps ethics officials can take now to make employees and leaders aware of the support the ethics program can provide. Ethics officials should consider:

- Protecting their own health and the health of their colleagues by following all CDC and agency health and safety guidance at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html> including the CDC's guidance on stress and coping (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/managing-stress-anxiety.html>)
- Ensuring that employees can access ethics resources and continue to receive individualized ethics advice, including remotely
- Reevaluating agency risk in light of operational changes due to the pandemic and raising those risks to the appropriate decision makers
- Providing proactive reminders about ethics issues likely to be faced by employees during this time, such as the use of nonpublic information, misuse of government equipment, and the gift rules
- Including ethics contact information in periodic status communications to all employees
- Strategizing about how your agency can continue to conduct ethics orientations, annual ethics education, and other briefings remotely



- Exploring online resources created by OGE and other agencies that may help your agency meet education and communication needs
- Seeking IT support to facilitate virtual meetings and events in support of the ethics program
- Documenting any impacts the disruption has on your agency carrying out any aspect of its ethics program

In times of stress and emergency, it is important for employees to know that the ethics office is available to assist them in navigating ethics challenges. As always, OGE is here help. Please reach out to your OGE Desk Officer to discuss these suggestions or with any questions or concerns.