

April 7, 2003
RE: IO-03-27

You inquired whether an employee in your department may apply for and accept a scholarship to attend the Spring 2003 Government CIO Summit conference in Savannah, Ga. The ethics commission advises that you may not accept the scholarship to this conference.

The conference is being held by the FCW Media Group, a private entity that focuses on the public sector. The fifteen scholarships, to be awarded among about 70 government CIOs, are worth \$895. They will pay for the conference fee and three nights of accommodation.

The scholarship fund was established by a pool of several hosts and sponsors, vendors who provide products and services to government users, among others.' On the conference website, potential hosts and sponsors are advised that:

The Government CIO Summit conference series provides unparalleled networking opportunities with government's highest-level IT professionals. The Summit is an excellent environment to brand your company's name and to forge relationships with these influential technology investors.

Conference hosts and sponsors receive a number of benefits in exchange for their financial contributions. They are given the list of conference attendees, free advertising in conference literature, and "extra exposure" in Federal Computer Week, an FCW online and print publication.

The sponsors and hosts for this conference include: Hughes Network Systems, Oracle, Accenture, Blackberry, DigitalNet, Cognos, Genesys, HP Invent, Information Builders, Internet Security Systems, VeriSign, and Tripwire.

In a number of previous opinions, the ethics commission has advised that this type of gift may not be accepted. See, 10-01-31, IO-99-64, AO-98-31, AO-98-24. The gift provisions of the Public Ethics Law prohibits an employee from accepting a gift of more than nominal value from a controlled donor. Although the named host of the conference is not a controlled donor, the donors of the scholarships are most assuredly entities that are seeking to do business with the county. Article 9, §3-106(b). One exception to this prohibition permits an employee to receive travel, lodging, or other expenses from a controlled donor, in connection with attendance at a conference, if the recipient will be a scheduled speaker at the conference.

Since the person requesting this opinion will not be a featured speaker, the exception to this gift prohibition does not apply. For these reasons, the employee may not accept the scholarship to this conference.

Thank you for your inquiry.

Sincerely,

Betsy K. Dawson
Executive Director