# A Word About Ethics

## Appearances of Bias

### When Does a Personal Relationship Create a Conflict with My Government Duties?

- Whenever you are assigned to a task focused on a particular person or organization in which you have a close business or personal relationship, it creates a conflict because members of the public may question your impartiality.

### Do All Close Relationships Create a Possible Conflict of Interest or Appearance of a Conflict?

- No; ethics regulations cover only some personal and business relationships; you have such a “covered relationship” with:  
  - anyone with whom you have (or are seeking) a business or financial relationship;  
  - someone who employed you or was your client during the last year, or two years if you are a political appointee;  
  - a close relative;  
  - a member of your household;  
  - a current or prospective employer or client of your parents, dependent children, or spouse; and  
  - an organization in which you are an active participant.

### Are Any Other Factors Considered in Determining Whether a Personal Relationship Creates a Conflict?

- Yes; a conflict of interest involving a personal relationship is present only when your participation would likely be perceived by the public as affecting your impartiality.

### How Are Conflicts Based on Personal Relationships Resolved?

- You must either:  
  - not work on a matter in which an appearance of bias is likely because of a personal relationship or  
  - obtain special authorization to work on the matter, which may be granted if the agency’s need for your participation outweighs concern about an appearance of loss of impartiality; you or your supervisor can seek such an authorization through the Ethics Law and Programs Division.

### What If an Appearance of Bias is Not from a “Covered Relationship?”

- You should discuss with your supervisor whether a matter should be reassigned if someone with whom you have a personal relationship, such as a friend, is involved. The decision on whether to reassign the matter would be based on management concerns, rather than ethics regulations.