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Travel Funds

Year

2002

Description

This case discusses ethical issues related to responsible spending of travel funds.

Body

As director of a governmental research program, Edward oversees the awarding of center grants to qualified universities. The grants are awarded to twenty different centers across the United States with five- to ten-year funding periods. The centers' annual budgets average \$1 million.

Each year Edward organizes an obligatory annual meeting of the centers' program directors, associated faculty and graduate students in Washington, D.C. Approximately 400 people will attend the meeting this year, and Edward must select a facility that is capable of accommodating a meeting of this size. He could choose among numerous hotels and convention centers around the metropolitan area. As the meeting location, he selects a luxurious, historic hotel in downtown Washington where a number of the presidential inaugural balls have been hosted. This four-star hotel is one of the more expensive locations for accommodating this meeting, but clearly a hotel of this distinction will offer quality service to its guests. Edward signs a three-year contract with the hotel to reserve the meeting space for future years.

Each center will fund travel to the meeting for its participants, including airfare, hotel, additional transportation and meals. Group-rate rooms at this hotel cost each participant \$200-\$250. Each participant has a per diem meal allowance of \$50.

Edward and the other government employees from Washington who are attending the meeting decide also to stay at the hotel for convenient access to the early-morning sessions.

The meeting is a great success, and the service at the hotel is top-notch. On the last day of the meeting, participants completed an opinion survey about the meeting. Later that week, while reviewing the comments on the survey, Edward reads that several people have requested a less expensive site for future meetings. In fact, two of the program directors noted that the accommodations seemed somewhat extravagant. Considering that there are several other more economical options around the city, Edward decides to change the meeting location (after this contract expires with the present hotel) to a less expensive, three-star hotel.

Discussion Questions

1. What are the ethical issues surrounding immoderate spending of taxpayers' money?
2. Should travel money from research grants be allowed to cover a stay at a four- or five-star hotel?
3. Since conference participants generally cover their costs with nonpersonal grant funds, should meeting organizers always choose the most attractive site for a conference, convention or meeting?
4. What factors should play a part in their site-selection decisions?
5. Once the site is chosen, what could a meeting organizer do to make the meeting more affordable to participants?
6. Given that Edward's work location can accommodate groups of this size, should Edward consider holding the meeting there in order to further reduce the cost of future meetings?
7. Since participants would be spending money for food whether or not they were attending the meeting, should travel funds from federal grants even cover food expenses?
8. Given the "public" nature of this funding source, what is a fair amount to offer travelers as a per diem food allowance?

Notes

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