



## Maintaining a neutral view

- **“At any given moment, there is a certain percentage of the population that is up to no good.”**
- **Maintaining a neutral view requires keeping an open and questioning mind.**
- **If something does not appear right or proper, get the additional information you need to make an informed decision.**

As much as we hate to admit it, some of our vendors, contractors, grantees, or even our coworkers may not be totally honest. As the late J. Edgar Hoover, former head of the FBI once put it, “At any given moment, there is a certain percentage of the population that is up to no good.” It is important that we consider this sobering fact in our dealings as state employees. This means maintaining a neutral view when considering the behavior or claims of those with whom we do business as part of our jobs.

Maintaining a neutral view involves neither assuming that those with whom we deal are honest nor dishonest but, rather, keeping an open and questioning mind. A questioning mind requires a thorough examination of all the facts, withholding judgment pending a methodical and full evaluation, and requiring sufficient documentation to support conclusions. Some refer to this as the “trust but verify” approach.

As we build work relationships with people inside and outside of our organizations, it may be increasingly difficult not to let bias creep into our work. Over time, confidence in those we deal with naturally develops, sometimes prompting us to blindly trust the statements and assertions of others. However, in our role as stewards of the state’s resources, we need to resist that temptation, regardless of how long of a history we may have with certain people. Unfortunately, we can not automatically assume that everyone is honest, and is giving us complete and accurate information in all cases.

When interacting with outside parties, such as vendors, contractors, or grantees, make sure you receive and review all required paperwork before making payments. Perform periodic reconciliations, if needed, and investigate and resolve any identified differences. Principled external parties understand that you have a

responsibility to ensure the appropriateness of the information being provided. They should not become defensive or uncooperative when asked for additional explanations or documentation.

Even when dealing with coworkers, it is important that you perform due diligence on the information you receive before acting on it. You may find it difficult to be professionally skeptical of a colleague who, over time, may have become a friend or who you believe is capable and competent. However, you have a responsibility to question any unclear or unusual items, and be satisfied with the explanations received. It is important that you feel comfortable talking to the appropriate parties within your agency if a coworker is unable or unwilling to provide you with the necessary information or documentation to support decisions you have been asked to make.

In maintaining a neutral view, do not ignore your intuition regarding the behaviors or claims of others. If something does not appear right or proper, it is important that you follow your instincts. Obtain the additional evidence you need to assure yourself that the information or transaction is accurate and appropriate. Do not be embarrassed to ask the questions necessary to make an informed decision.

*Suggested action steps:* Pay attention to the way you react to information provided by your vendors, contractors, grantees or coworkers. Can you always maintain a neutral view? Do you satisfy yourself that the transactions or information provided by others is what it claims to be before making a decision?

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