

National Aeronautics and Space Administration

Headquarters
Washington, DC 20546-0001



December 9, 2019

Reply to Attn of: General Law Practice Group

TO: Distribution

FROM: Agency Counsel for Ethics

SUBJECT: Determination Regarding Attendance by NASA Employees at the Virgin Space Reception December 17, 2019

On December 17, 2019, Virgin Space, which is comprised of Virgin Galactic, Virgin Orbit, The Spaceship Company, and VOX Space, will host a reception at the Calico Restaurant in Washington, D.C. starting at 6:30 p.m. The event will provide an opportunity for informal discussion on the challenges surrounding human spaceflight. Virgin Orbit is sending the invitations with advice from the other Virgin Space members. Virgin Space is in control of the planning and organizing for the reception.

Approximately 150 people are expected to attend the reception. The estimated cost for the reception, including all food and beverages, is approximately \$50 per person. Attendees will have a diversity of views or interests and will include personnel from other federal agencies, representatives from the legislative branch of the government, academia, industry, media, and members of the public. Attendance at this event will allow NASA attendees to exchange information regarding various NASA missions and programs. I find that this event meets the requirements of a "widely attended gathering" as defined in 5 C.F.R. § 2635.204(g).

I further determine that there is an Agency interest in having NASA personnel attend these events because it will provide an opportunity for the invited persons to exchange ideas and views pertaining to NASA's policies, programs and operations. Accordingly, NASA employees who do not have a significant role in a matter affecting the interests of any of the Virgin Space members may accept an invitation for free attendance to this event. In those circumstances, I find that the Agency's interest in attendance outweighs any concern that the individual may be, or may appear to be, improperly influenced in the performance of their duties.

However, NASA employees in non-career positions who are required to sign the ethics pledge under Executive Order 13770 may only attend the reception if they reimburse the organizers the fair market value of the event. Additionally, NASA employees who have a significant role in any pending matter affecting the interests of any of the organizers, such as procurement duties, program management, or negotiating or administering a Space Act

Agreement, should seek a separate determination from their local ethics counselor as to whether they may accept the invitation for this event.

You are also reminded of the \$20 gift exception at 5 C.F.R. § 2635.204(a), at which provides that employees may accept gift items valued at no more than \$20 per occasion (and no more than \$50 from one source in a calendar year). We understand Virgin Orbit will be giving beanie hats (value \$6.00), a pen (value \$1.00), and a flight tag (value \$1.00) for a total value of \$8.00 to all attendees. NASA employees in non-career positions who have signed the ethics pledge may only accept the items if they reimburse the sponsor.



Adam F. Greenstone