

Integrity Spotlight

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Advisory

Accepting gifts or benefits, no matter how seemingly small or trivial, can create a sense of obligation and may be the first step in a process of grooming.

Gifts and Benefits

Confidence in public administration can be eroded where public officers accept gifts or benefits that might lead the public to think the delivery of public services has been compromised in some way.

What is the problem?

The offer of a gift or benefit could be perceived as an attempt to influence a public officer in the performance of their public duties, and accepting a gift or benefit could result in the assumption that the public officer or their agency have been influenced.

Perceptions of bias, which might lead to people think decisions have been made unfairly or for personal gain, threaten the integrity of public administration.

Accepting gifts or benefits, no matter how seemingly small or trivial, can create a sense of obligation and may be the first step in a process of grooming.

It is important that public officers and their agencies are transparent and accountable in relation to any gifts or benefits they are offered or accept.

An agency should prohibit the acceptance of gifts and benefits except in narrow circumstances. These should generally be limited to offers of common courtesy, small tokens of appreciation, or low-value mementos.

What is a gift or benefit?

Gifts include any free item or hospitality offered to public officers or public authorities in association with their work.

Benefits include any preferential treatment, privileged access, discount, favour or other advantage offered to public officers or public authorities that may be perceived as influencing the discharge of their public duties.

Gifts and benefits can comprise:

- Free or discounted accommodation, travel, entertainment, hospitality, memberships, services, or products
- Shareholdings and directorships of companies, paid board memberships, or 'silent' partnerships
- Fees for speaking at or attending events
- Items of historical, cultural, or commercial value
- Income, honorarium, or financial interests
- Items such as Christmas hampers or bottles of wine.

Policies and procedures

Agencies should adopt a gifts and benefits policy which provides guidance to staff who are offered a gift or benefit during the course of their employment. The policy should complement any obligations arising from the code of conduct which applies to their staff.

An agency should prohibit the acceptance of gifts and benefits except in narrow circumstances. These should generally be limited to offers of common courtesy, small tokens of appreciation, or low-value mementos.

An offer of common courtesy is a free item or hospitality of low value which would be rude to refuse. This might include a cup of coffee at a meeting or light refreshments at a work event.

Tokens of appreciation or mementos are usually symbolic. For example, a plaque or symbolic gift offered by a representative of another organisation, items such as cups, pens and notebooks presented to conference attendees, or flowers for speakers at an event.

Agencies should also adopt a **gifts and benefits register** to ensure transparency and accountability. The register should detail:

- Any offer or acceptance of a gift or benefit
- The organisation or individual who offered or provided the gift or benefit, and to whom it was offered or provided
- The nature and approximate value of the gift or benefit
- What was done with the gift or benefit
- Any gifts or benefits provided by the agency (eg. to its partners, suppliers or contractors)

Where possible, any offer of a gift or benefit should be politely declined. You should still declare that the offer was made.

What happens if I am offered a gift or benefit?

Familiarise yourself with your agency's gifts and benefits policy, and any obligations which may arise under the code of conduct which applies to you.

If you are offered a gift or benefit during the course of your employment, ask yourself:

- What am I being offered?
- Who is making the offer and why has it been made?
- Is anything expected of me or my agency in return?
- How might a third party perceive the acceptance of the gift or benefit?

Where possible, any offer of a gift or benefit should be politely declined. You should still declare that the offer was made.

If it is not possible to decline, ensure the gift or benefit is **declared** in line with your agency's gifts and benefits policy. You may be required to surrender a gift or benefit for shared enjoyment or for another purpose (e.g. donation).

Be aware of any gifts or benefits offered or provided to close friends and family members that could be perceived as an attempt to influence your work.

Never request a gift or benefit.

Further information and resources

Consult your agency's gifts and benefits policy

[Public Sector Code of Ethics](#)


[Code of Conduct for Elected Members](#)

[Code of Conduct for Council Employees](#)

Commissioner for Public Sector Employment's [Guideline on Gifts and Benefits](#)

[Integrity Spotlight on Conflicts of Interest](#)

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