



## **Local Association Guidelines for Local Legislative Meetings**

(Prepared August 2020 for Use by Local Associations)

When planning a local legislative function, such as a meal with your legislators, you must keep in mind certain requirements in order to be compliant with the NYS ethics laws. All New York State elected officials, their employees, the officers and employees of state boards, bureaus, division, commissions, councils, and agencies, and members, directors and employees of state authorities are subject to restrictions on gifts.

### **Overview of Gift Regulations**

#### **When do these gift rules apply to me or my local association?**

The regulations apply whenever you offer a “gift” to any of the public officials described above. A gift is defined as an item or service that is “more than nominal value.” Nominal value is not specifically defined in the regulations but the Joint Commission on Public Ethics (JCOPE) ordinarily considers nominal value to be \$15 or less.

A gift includes, but is not limited to, money, services, loans, travel, lodging, meals, refreshments, entertainment, forbearance (agreeing to change the terms for repayment of a debt), or a promise having a monetary value.

#### **What is not a gift?**

The following does not constitute a gift, provided that it does not create an actual or apparent conflict of interest or give the impression of improper influence.

- Awards or plaques in recognition of public service;
- Honorary degrees;
- Promotional items with no resale value;
- Discounts available to the general public, e.g., wireless providers offer discounts to all government employees;
- Gifts from family members and personal relationships where it is clear that the relationship is not being used as a pretext to give an otherwise impermissible gift;
- Contributions to political campaigns;
- Meals and beverages provided to participants at professional and educational programs;
- Local travel payments for tours related to one's official activity;
- Food or beverage valued at \$15 or less per event; and,
- Complimentary attendance at certain events.

**What rules apply to inviting public officials to events?**

Public officials are allowed to accept complementary attendance, including food and beverage to a bona fide charitable event, political event, or “widely attended event.”

**What is a “widely attended event?”**

The following conditions must be satisfied:

- Complimentary admission must be offered by the sponsor of the event; and,
- 25 individuals attend or are in good faith invited to attend; and,
- The event is related to the legislator’s official duties or responsibilities or allows them to perform a ceremonial function appropriate to their position; or, (b) a speaker or attendee at the event addresses an issue of public interest or concern.

**Best Practices**

Generally speaking, most legislative breakfasts, policy forums, agency visits, and charitable events are permissible events to invite public officials to. Make sure you invite at least 25 people (in addition to legislators) to attend your event. If in doubt, review the [Joint Commission on Public Ethics gift rules webpage](#) and/or ask Scott Hobson.

**Questions**

Contact Scott Hobson, AVP of Government Relations at Big I New York.

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