



# Government Ethics & Gifts

As City officers and employees, we serve the public. Everyone who lives, works, or plays in San Francisco trusts us with important decisions, every day. We honor that trust by making decisions the right way, not for personal benefit.

Ethics rules support the trust that the people of San Francisco have put on us. When our decisions are fair and transparent; when we are accountable to the public and to one another, we live up to our ideals.

## **What Does This Have to Do With Gifts?**

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If someone gives you a gift, they might expect something in return. If you accept a gift, you may feel pressured to give something in return. Even if you do not feel pressured to do anything in return, members of the public could perceive it differently. That is called a **real or perceived conflict of interest**. To ensure our government decisions are fair and not based on personal interest, state and local laws impose restrictions and limits on gifts.

## **What Are Gifts?**

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A gift is something that gives you a personal benefit, for which you do not pay full price. These are some examples:

- Free or discounted passes and tickets to special events
- Free or discounted food and drink
- Free or discounted travel or upgrades (airfare, accommodations, transportation, etc.)
- Free or discounted services
- Gift baskets
- Gift cards
- Any other discounts not available to the public
- Other presents

These are only examples. Anything of value that is offered to you may be a gift.



## What Are the Rules for Gifts?

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The following rules apply to anyone who works for the City and its agencies:

- **Do not accept or solicit gifts for doing your job.** In other words, accepting or asking for gifts for providing City services, assistance, advice, or anything related to our City jobs is prohibited.
- **Do not accept or ask for gifts from the people you manage.** Some exceptions apply:
  - Non-cash gifts of \$25 or less for birthdays, holidays, or traditional “gift-giving occasions” are acceptable.
  - Food and drink to share with the whole office are also acceptable.
- **If a restricted source gives you a gift, say no.** Restricted sources include a contractor or someone who seeks to contract with your department. A restricted source is also anyone who has tried to influence you in any legislative or administrative action in the past 12 months.

**In addition to the rules described above, if your position is listed in the City’s Conflict of Interest Code and therefore requires you to disclose your financial interests on the Form 700 (Statement of Economic Interests), more gift rules apply.** You may have to refuse certain gifts or disclose them on your Form 700 even if they don’t come from restricted sources.

If your disclosure category requires you to publicly disclose gifts from a particular source, then you cannot take gifts from that source that in a calendar year add up to more than \$520. For category 1 filers, this applies to all sources of gifts. Any gift between \$50-\$520 from a reportable source within your disclosure category must be publicly disclosed on your Form 700. Visit the [information page for Form 700 Filers](#) for more information.

**Keep in mind: Whether or not you file Form 700, gifts from restricted sources are prohibited.**

Because gifts laws and limits can vary depending on specific circumstances, it is always important to seek guidance before accepting a gift to avoid violating the law if you have questions.

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## Pop-Quiz

Test your knowledge of the governmental ethics and gift rules. Take our pop quiz below:

1. I am a City employee who provides direct services. A community member I have known for years sent me a lovely gift to thank me. I don't think it is necessary, but I don't want to be rude. Should I accept it?

Yes                      No
2. One of our contractors sent me and my colleagues tickets for the Warriors game. Can I accept them?

Yes                      No
3. It's my boss' birthday and I am thinking of getting them expensive tickets to the opera. They are such a good boss! Can I do that?

Yes                      No
4. A friend at a different department gave me a sweater for my birthday. Is this okay?

Yes                      No

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### Answers:

1. In simple terms, No. No employee should accept gifts from anyone other than the City for doing their jobs. Perhaps it would be helpful to explain that, while you really appreciate the gesture, it is your job to help the community. And that you aren't allowed to accept gifts for doing that.
2. No. You can't accept anything over \$25 from a contractor with your department.
3. No. Your boss cannot accept anything of value (over \$25) from an employee they supervise, not even on their birthday. Even if you scored a great deal and the tickets were under \$25 total, in practical terms, you may be creating an awkward situation for your boss to navigate. It's easier to just say "Happy Birthday!"
4. Unless you have reason to believe your friend is trying to influence you in the performance of an official duty by giving you the sweater, it should be okay. However, if you are a Form 700 filer, this may be a reportable gift, and subject to the annual limit, depending on your filing requirement.



City & County of San Francisco  
Ethics Commission

**Have questions about  
Gift Rules?**

Contact the Ethics Commission:

**Phone:**

**[415-252-3100](tel:415-252-3100)**

**Email:**

**[ethics.commission@sfgov.org](mailto:ethics.commission@sfgov.org)**

In cases where there is a discrepancy between this summary and the law, the law governs.