[INSERT GOVERNMENT NAME]’s Policy on

# **Making Gifts With [Insert Government Name]’s Public Funds**

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| I commit to join my colleagues at [insert government name] in following our policy on making gifts with [insert government name]’s public funds. |
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## Why do we have this policy?

Our funding comes mostly through taxes. Citizens must be able to trust that their taxes will be used for the good of the community. Taxpayer money should not be used to unfairly benefit private groups or persons or be redirected from the critical public services that taxpayers expect.

## What is our policy?

The elected officials and staff of [insert government name] should not use [insert government name]’s resources to make charitable donations or gifts to other parties. This includes anything paid for with taxpayer money such as equipment, vehicles, supplies, staff time, and buildings.

## What else do I need to know?

A donation or a gift is any offer of our resources to another party where [insert government name] does not receive any good or service in exchange for the resources given. Even if the other party will make a “moral” or “socially beneficial” use of the resources, it is still considered a gift.

However, [insert government name] may award grants to private or nonprofit groups. Grants are not viewed as a gift or charitable donation because there is a process used to decide how they are awarded. In cases where the federal or [state/provincial] government provides funding to [insert government name] for local grants, there are rules for how the funds must be used. Also, [insert name of governing board] must approve the grants.

[Note: If your government allows elected officials a choice to give gifts, you could note that in the policy here. Also state that the ability to give these gifts is limited to funds set aside for that purpose in the adopted budget and are subject to reporting requirements. You can also refer to any other policies you have that address gifts by elected officials more specifically.]

Waiving taxes or fees that are normally charged for a service we provide is viewed as a gift.

Employees should never feel pressured to donate funds to any cause. Members of [insert government name] in a supervisory or decision-making position should never ask for donations from staff.

Use of staff time for political purposes, such as campaigning, is not allowed.

Staff time should not be used to conduct charitable activities for other groups.

## What reasons and rationalizations do I need to watch out for?

You might hear some reasons why it would be OK to ignore this policy. It is not OK. Here are some reasons you might hear and examples of a right response.

* **Reason:** It’s a small gift, so it is not a big deal.
* **Right response:** I know it might not seem like much, but small things can be the start of big problems later. Let’s not go down that path.
* **Reason:** It’s a nice group that we are giving a gift to, so it is OK.
* **Right response:** Yes, they are a nice group; however, we only have so much money in our budget. The community expects us to use that money to provide important public services. I think we should stay focused on the critical work that we do.
* **Reason:** I know I shouldn’t make this gift (like spending work time doing the job of another group), but my boss wants me to.
* **Right response:** Your boss is violating our policy if he or she says you should make a gift of your professional (or personal) resources to another organization. If you make this gift, you both could be in trouble…and resources you spend on this other activity are resources not spent providing the services our community expects from you.

Think about your responses so that you are ready if someone gives you a reason to ignore the policy.

## What if I’m in a situation that this policy doesn’t cover?

Think about the situation. Compare the action you are unsure about to the steps below.

