[INSERT GOVERNMENT NAME]’s Policy on

# **Vendor Relations and Gifts**

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| I commit to join with my colleagues at [insert government name] in following our policy on vendor relations and gifts. |
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## Why do we have this policy?

Our relationship with the vendors that serve [insert government name] is a high-profile opportunity to show our citizens that we protect their tax dollars. We can show that we use public funds wisely and the decisions we make about purchasing goods and services are fair and free of bias.

## What is our policy?

You should never accept the following from vendors:

* Any gift of cash or that is like cash. For example, a prepaid debit card is like cash.
* An individual gift valued at more than $[insert dollar amount]. This is any kind of gift, including but not limited to meals, tickets to concerts, games, etc.
* Gifts from one vendor with a total value of more than $[insert dollar amount] in a year. Many small gifts are just as bad as one large gift.

## What else do I need to know?

We must avoid special treatment of one vendor over another. Therefore, all officials and staff of [insert government name] should treat all vendors the same.

Even the appearance of dishonesty or unfairness can tarnish our reputation. If you are involved in buying goods or services, your personal reputation could be harmed if people suspect that the process of buying them is unfair or “rigged.” Here are ways you can avoid harming your own reputation or the reputation of [insert government name].

* You should never accept an anonymous gift in any amount. If you don’t know who sent it, you don’t know what their motives are.
* You should never ask for gifts or favors from any vendor.
* Gifts might be disguised as an “award” or recognition for your public service. This is still a gift and should be treated like one.
* Gifts might be given as a “prize,” like as part of a raffle. This is still a gift.
* You might be in a questionable situation that is not covered by this policy. Refer to the chart at the end of this policy for help.

## 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 really OK that you take gifts. Everyone does it. It is even expected.
* **A right response:** We do business with many vendors each year. The vast majority never give gifts to officials or staff, so if I were to accept a gift from one vendor, it could appear that we unfairly favor that vendor.
* **Reason:** It’s a small gift. It won’t hurt anyone.
* **A right response:** While I appreciate the gesture of the gift, even the appearance of unfairness could harm our reputation. For example, if a citizen were to see this gift, he or she might assume it is a sign of larger conflicts of interest.
* **Reason:** I don’t decide whom we buy from, so it is OK for me to accept a gift.
* **A right response:** Citizens don’t know who decides, so if one of us gives the appearance of unfairness, it makes us all look bad. Also, maybe someday you *will* be in a position to decide whom to buy from. You wouldn’t want to risk your reputation over a vendor’s gift.
* **Reason:** I know I shouldn’t take this gift, but I don’t want to make a fuss and make waves in my department.
* **A right response:** That is a difficult problem. In the end, your department will be much better off if it keeps a reputation for fairness when buying goods and services.

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.

