

**TITLE:** Gifts, Benefits and Hospitality Policy  
**TYPE:** Policy  
**DEPARTMENT:** Governance  
**SECTION:** Human Resources

### **POLICY STATEMENT**

This policy has been developed in accordance with requirements outlined in the *Minimum accountabilities for managing gifts, benefits and hospitality* issued by the Victorian Public Sector Commission (schedule A).

The Western District Health Service is committed to and will uphold the following principles in applying this policy.

### **PURPOSE**

This policy states Western District Health Service position on:

- responding to offers of gifts, benefits and hospitality; and
- providing gifts, benefits and hospitality.

This policy is intended to support individuals and the Western District Health Service to avoid conflicts of interest and maintain high levels of integrity and public trust.

The Western District Health Service has issued this policy to support behavior consistent with the Code of conduct for Victorian public sector employees (the Code). All employees are required under clause 1.2 of the Code to comply with this policy.

### **TARGET AUDIENCE/SCOPE**

Organisational wide

### **DEFINITIONS/ OF KEYWORDS**

**Business associate** an external individual or entity which the organisation has, or plans to establish, some form of business relationship, or who may seek commercial or other advantage by offering gifts, benefits or hospitality.

**Benefits** include preferential treatment, privileged access, favours or other advantage offered to an individual. They may include invitations to sporting, cultural or social events, access to discounts and loyalty programs, and promises of a new job. The value of benefits may be difficult to define in dollars, but as they are valued by the individual, they may be used to influence the individual's behaviour.

#### **Conflicts of interest**

**Actual conflict of interest** there is a real conflict between an employee's public duties and private interests.

**Potential conflict of interest** an employee has private interests that could conflict with their public duties. This refers to circumstances where it is foreseeable that a conflict may arise in future and steps should be taken now to mitigate that future risk

**Perceived conflict of interest** the public or a third party could form the view that an employee's private interests could improperly influence their decisions or actions, now or in the future.

**Gifts** are free or discounted items and any item that would generally be seen by the public as a gift. These include items of high value (e.g. artwork, jewellery, or expensive pens), low value (e.g. small bunch of flowers) and consumables (e.g. chocolates). Fundraising by public sector organisations that is consistent with relevant legislation and any government policy is not prohibited under the minimum accountabilities.

**Gifts Declaration** – is the form an employee or Board Member uses to declare a reportable gift.

**Gifts register** is a register of all declarable gifts, benefits and hospitality. It records the date a gift was offered, information about the donor and recipient, the nature of the gift, its estimated value and how it was handled. The Chief Executive Officer (or delegate) maintains the register, which is reviewed by the Audit & Compliance committee on a regular basis.

**Hospitality** is the friendly reception and entertainment of guests. Hospitality may range from offers of light refreshment at a business meeting to restaurant meals and sponsored travel and accommodation.

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**Legitimate business benefit** gifts, benefits and hospitality accepted or provided for a business purpose, in that it furthers the conduct of official business or other legitimate goals of the organisation, public sector or State.

**Public official** has the same meaning as under section 4 of the Public Administration Act 2004. This includes:

- public sector employees;
- statutory office holders; and
- directors of public entities.

**Token offer** is an offer of a gift, benefit or hospitality that is offered as a courtesy or is of inconsequential or trivial value to both the person making the offer and the individual.

Whilst the primary determinant of a token offer is that it would not be reasonably perceived within or outside the organisation as influencing an individual or raising an actual, potential or perceived conflict of interest, it cannot be worth more than \$50 (including cumulative offers from the same source over a 12 month period).

**Non-token offer** is an offer of a gift, benefit or hospitality that is, or may be perceived to be by the recipient, the person making the offer or by the wider community, of more than inconsequential value. All offers worth more than \$50 are non-token offers and must be recorded on a gift, benefit and hospitality register.

#### **EQUIPMENT**

N/A

#### **PROCEDURE/PROTOCOL/GUIDELINES**

##### **1. Policy principles**

**Public interest:** individuals have a duty to place the public interest above their private interests when carrying out their official functions. They will not accept gifts, benefits or hospitality that could raise a perception of, or actual, bias or preferential treatment. Individuals do not accept offers from those about whom they are likely to make business decisions.

**Accountability:** individuals are accountable for:

- declaring all non-token offers of gifts, benefits and hospitality;
- declining non-token offers of gifts, benefits and hospitality, or where an exception applies under this policy, seeking approval to accept the offer; and
- the responsible provision of gifts, benefits and hospitality.

Individuals with direct reports are accountable for overseeing management of their direct reports' acceptance or refusal of non-token gifts, benefits and hospitality, modelling good practice and promoting awareness of gifts, benefits and hospitality policies and processes.

**Risk-based approach:** the Western District Health Service, through its policies, processes and audit committee, will ensure gifts, benefits and hospitality risks are appropriately assessed and managed. Individuals with direct reports will ensure they are aware of the risks inherent in their team's work and functions and monitor the risks to which their direct reports are exposed.

##### **2. Minimum accountabilities**

The Victorian Public Sector Commission has set binding minimum accountabilities for the appropriate management of gifts, benefit and hospitality. These can be found at Schedule A.

##### **3. Management of offers of gifts, benefits and hospitality**

This section sets out the process for accepting, declining and recording offers of gifts, benefits and hospitality. Any exceptions to this process must have the prior written approval of the Chief Executive.

**Token offers**

A token offer is an offer of a gift, benefit or hospitality that is of inconsequential or trivial value to both the person making the offer and the individual. It may include promotional items such as pens and note pads, and modest hospitality which would be considered a basic courtesy, such as light refreshments offered during a meeting.

Whilst the primary determinant of a token offer is that it would not be reasonably perceived within or outside the organisation as influencing an individual raising an actual, potential or perceived conflict of interest, it cannot be worth more than \$50. If token offers are made often by the same person or organisation, the cumulative value of the offers, or the perception that they may influence the recipient, may result in the offers becoming non-token.

Individuals may accept token offers of gifts, benefits and hospitality without approval or declaring the offer on the gift register.

Individuals are to refuse all offers (excluding token hospitality, such as sandwiches over a lunchtime meeting):

- made by a current or prospective supplier;
- made during a procurement or tender process by a person or organisation involved in the process; or
- token offers may include a modest box of chocolates as a token of thanks.

**Requirement for refusing non-token offers**

Individuals should consider the GIFT test at **Table 1** and the requirements below to help respond to a non-token offer.

Individuals are to refuse non-token offers:

- likely to influence them, or be perceived to influence them, in the course of their duties or raise an actual, potential or perceived conflict of interest;
- by a person or organisation about which they will likely make a decision (also applies to processes involving grants, sponsorship, regulation, enforcement or licensing);
- likely to be a bribe or inducement to make a decision or act in a particular way;
- that extend to their relatives or friends;
- with no legitimate business benefit;
- of money, or used in a similar way to money, or something easily converted to money;
- where, in relation to hospitality and events, the organisation will already be sufficiently represented to meet its business needs;
- where acceptance could be perceived as endorsement of a product or service, or acceptance would unfairly advantage the sponsor in future procurement decisions;
- made by a person or organisation with a primary purpose to lobby Ministers, Members of Parliament or public sector agencies; and
- made in secret.

If an individual considers they have been offered a bribe or inducement, the offer must be reported to the Chief Executive (who should report any criminal or corrupt conduct to Victoria Police or the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission).

**Table 1. GIFT test**

<b>G</b>	Giver	<p><b>Who is providing the gift, benefit or hospitality and what is their relationship to me?</b></p> <p>Does my role require me to select suppliers, award grants, regulate industries or determine government policies? Could the person or organisation benefit from a decision I make?</p>
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<b>I</b>	Influence	<p><b>Are they seeking to gain an advantage or influence my decisions or actions?</b></p> <p>Has the gift, benefit or hospitality been offered to me publicly or privately? Is it a courtesy or a token of appreciation or valuable non-token offer? Does its timing coincide with a decision I am about to make or endorse a product or service?</p>
<b>F</b>	Favour	<p><b>Are they seeking a favour in return for the gift, benefit or hospitality?</b></p> <p>Has the gift, benefit or hospitality been offered honestly? Has the person or organisation made several offers over the last 12 months?</p> <p>Would accepting it create an obligation to return a favour?</p>
<b>T</b>	Trust	<p><b>Would accepting the gift, benefit or hospitality diminish public trust?</b></p> <p>How would the public view acceptance of this gift, benefit or hospitality? What would my colleagues, family, friends or associates think?</p>

**Requirements for accepting non-token offers**

There will be some exceptions where there is a legitimate business reason for accepting a non-token offer. All accepted non-token offers **must** be approved in writing by the Chief Executive, recorded in the gifts, benefits and hospitality register and be consistent with the following requirements:

- it does not raise an actual, potential or perceived conflict of interest or have the potential to bring the individual, the Western District Health Service or the public sector into disrepute (the ‘GIFT’ test at **Table 1** is a good reminder of what to think about in making this assessment); and
- there is a legitimate business reason for acceptance. It is offered in the course of the individual’s official duties, relates to the individual’s responsibilities and has a benefit to the Western District Health Service, public sector or the State.

Individuals may be offered a gift or hospitality where there is no opportunity to seek written approval from their manager prior to accepting. For example, they may be offered a wrapped gift that they later identify as being a non-token gift. In these cases, the individual must seek approval from the Chief Executive within five business days.

An offer to provide a non-token gift by way of travel and accommodation to present at a conference does not present a conflict of interest if the funding is for academic purposes only.

**Recording non-token offers of gifts, benefits and hospitality**

All non-token offers, whether accepted or declined, must be recorded in the Western District Health Service’s gifts, benefits and hospitality register. The business reason for accepting the non-token offer must be recorded in the register and provide sufficient detail to link the acceptance to the individual’s work functions and benefit to the Western District Health Service, public sector or State.

Individuals should consider the following examples of acceptable and unacceptable levels of detail to be included in the Western District Health Service’s register when recording the business reason:

- Unacceptable:** “Networking”  
“Maintaining stakeholder relationships”
- Acceptable:** “Individual is responsible for evaluating and reporting outcomes of the Western District Health Service’s sponsorship of Event A. Individual attended Event A in an official capacity and reported back to the Western District Health Service on the event.”  
“Individual presented to a visiting international delegation. The delegation presented the Individual with a cultural item worth an estimated \$200. Declining the gift would have caused offence. The Gift was accepted, written approval was subsequently obtained for the gift, which became the Western District Health Service’s property.”

The Western District Health Service’s Audit and Risk Management Committee will receive a report at least annually on the administration and quality control of the gifts, benefits and hospitality policy, processes and register. The report will include analysis of Western District Health Service’s gifts, benefits and hospitality risks (including multiple offers from the same source and offers from business associates), risk mitigation measures and any proposed improvements.

**Ownership of gifts offered to individuals**

Non-token gifts accepted by an individual for their work or contribution may be retained by the individual where the Chief Executive has provided written approval. Employees must transfer to the Western District Health Service official gifts or any gift of cultural significance or significant value (over \$50).

**Representing Western District Health Service**

When employees attend a conference either as a participant or speaker or apply for an award in recognition of their public sector work, they are representing the Western District Health Service. The employer has paid for the employee’s costs; their time, labour or accommodation. Any benefits accruing from the employee’s activities therefore belong to the Service. This includes door prizes, fees for speaking and financial grants. Western District Health Service would record any revenue from fees and grants in the general ledger and, in the case of the grants, may choose to fund the employee’s further work or development.

**4. Management of the provision of gifts, benefits and hospitality**

This section sets out the requirements for providing gifts, benefits and hospitality.

**Requirements for providing gifts, benefits and hospitality**

Gifts, benefits and hospitality may be provided to welcome guests, facilitate the development of business relationships, further public sector business outcomes and to celebrate achievements.

When deciding whether to provide gifts, benefits or hospitality or the type of gift, benefit or hospitality to provide, individuals must ensure:

- any gift, benefit or hospitality is provided for a business reason in that it furthers the conduct of official business or other legitimate organisational goals, or promotes and supports government policy objectives and priorities;
- that any costs are proportionate to the benefits obtained for the State, and would be considered reasonable in terms of community expectations (the ‘HOST’ test at **Table 2** is a good reminder of what to think about in making this assessment); and
- it does not raise an actual, potential or perceived conflict of interest.

**Table 2. HOST test**

<b>H</b>	Hospitality	<b>To whom is the gift or hospitality being provided?</b> Will recipients be external business partners, or individuals of the host organisation?
<b>O</b>	Objectives	<b>For what purpose will hospitality be provided?</b> Is the hospitality being provided to further the conduct of official business? Will it promote and support government policy objectives and priorities? Will it contribute to staff wellbeing and workplace satisfaction?
<b>S</b>	Spend	<b>Will public funds be spent?</b> What type of hospitality will be provided? Will it be modest or expensive, and will alcohol be provided as a courtesy or an indulgence? Will the costs incurred be proportionate to the benefits obtained?
<b>T</b>	Trust	<b>Will public trust be enhanced or diminished?</b> Could you publicly explain the rationale for providing the gift or hospitality? Will the event be conducted in a manner which upholds the reputation of the public sector? Have records in relation to the gift or hospitality been kept in accordance with reporting and recording procedures?

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### **Containing costs**

Individuals should contain costs involved in the provision of gifts, benefits and hospitality wherever possible. The following questions may be useful to assist individuals to decide the type of gift, benefit or hospitality to provide:

- Will the cost of providing the gift, benefit or hospitality be proportionate to the potential benefits?
- Is an external venue necessary or does the organisation have facilities to host the event?
- Is the proposed catering or hospitality proportionate to the number of attendees?
- Does the size of the event and number of attendees align with intended outcomes?
- Will providing the gift, benefit or hospitality be viewed by the public as excessive?
- Are the costs approved in accordance with the WDHS's instrument of delegation?
- Does this meet the requirements regarding recording and reporting on the provision of gifts, benefits and hospitality in accordance with their requirements under the *Financial Management Act 1994*?

### **5. Breaches**

Disciplinary action consistent with the relevant industrial instrument and legislation, including dismissal, may be taken where an individual fails to adhere to this policy. This includes where an individual fails to avoid wherever possible or identify, declare and manage a conflict of interest related to gifts, benefits and hospitality in accordance with the Western District Health Service's Conflict of interest policy.

Actions inconsistent with this policy may constitute misconduct under the *Public Administration Act 2004*, which includes:

- breaches of the binding *Code of conduct for Victorian public sector employees*, such as sections of the Code covering conflict of interest (section 3.7), public trust (section 3.9) and gifts and benefits (section 4.2); and
- individuals making improper use of their position.

For further information on managing breaches of this policy, please contact the Human Resources Manager.

The Department will communicate its policy on the offering and provision of gifts, benefits and hospitality to contractors, consultants and other business associates. Those identified as acting inconsistently with this policy may be subject to contract re-negotiation, including termination.

### **6. Speak up**

Individuals who consider that gifts, benefits and hospitality or conflict of interest within the Western District Health Service may not have been declared or is not being appropriately managed should speak up and notify their manager or Human Resources Manager.

The Western District Health Service will take decisive action, including possible disciplinary action, against individuals who discriminate against or victimise those who Speak Up in good faith.

### **7. Contacts for further information**

A conflict of interest resulting from the acceptance of a gift, benefit or hospitality is not always clear to those who have them. Individuals who are unsure about the acceptance of a gift, benefit or hospitality, or the application of this policy, should ask their manager or Human Resources Manager for advice.

### **CONSUMER INFORMATION**

N/A

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**EXPECTED OUTCOME**

1. That staff/board members of the Service do not accept gifts of more than a nominal value or that may be considered an attempt to influencing their roles or actions
2. All reportable gifts are declared and recorded on the Gift Register
3. Updates on the Gift Register are presented to the Audit & Compliance Committee as a standard Agenda item.

**EVALUATION**

This policy is issued under the authority of the Human Resources Manager and is subject to annual review.

**KEY ALIGNED DOCUMENTS**

N/A

**KEY LEGISLATION, ACTS and STANDARDS**

- [Minimum accountabilities for the management of gifts, benefits and hospitality \(see Instructions supporting the Standing Directions of the Minister for Finance\)](#)
- [Conflict of Interest Policy](#)
- [Public Administration Act 2004](#)
- [Code of conduct for Victorian public sector employees 2015](#)
- [Code of conduct for Directors of Victorian public entities 2016](#)
- [Victorian Public Sector Commission's Gifts, benefits and hospitality policy framework.](#)

**REFERENCES TO BEST PRACTICE**

1. [Gifts, benefits and hospitality policy framework - Victorian public sector \(State Services Authority revised October 2016\)](#)

**DOCUMENT OWNER**

Human Resources Manager

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**VALIDATION**

Chief Executive

**APPROVED BY Executive**

**DATE INITIATED**

July 7, 2010

**DATE REVIEWED**

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**ATTACHMENT A**  
**Minimum accountabilities**

**Public officials offered gifts, benefits and hospitality:**

1. Do not, for themselves or others, seek or solicit gifts, benefits and hospitality.
2. Refuse all offers of gifts, benefits and hospitality that:
  - are money, items used in a similar way to money, or items easily converted to money;
  - give rise to an actual, potential or perceived conflict of interest;
  - may adversely affect their standing as a public official or which may bring their public sector employer or the public sector into disrepute; or
  - are non-token offers without a legitimate business benefit.
3. Declare all non-token offers (valued at \$50 or more) of gifts, benefits and hospitality (whether accepted or declined) on their organisation's register, and seek written approval from their manager or organisational delegate to accept any non-token offer.
4. Refuse bribes or inducements and report inducements and bribery attempts to the Chief Executive (who should report any criminal or corrupt conduct to Victoria Police or the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission).

**Public officials providing gifts, benefits and hospitality:**

5. Ensure that any gift, benefit and hospitality is provided for a business purpose in that it furthers the conduct of official business or other legitimate organisational goals, or promotes and supports government policy objectives and priorities.
6. Ensure that any costs are proportionate to the benefits obtained for the State, and would be considered reasonable in terms of community expectations.
7. Ensure that when hospitality is provided, individuals demonstrate professionalism in their conduct, and uphold their obligation to extend a duty of care to other participants.

**Heads of public sector organisations:**

8. Establish, implement and review organisational policies and processes for the effective management of gifts, benefits and hospitality that comprehensively address these minimum accountabilities.
9. Establish and maintain a register for gifts, benefits and hospitality offered to public officials that, at a minimum, records sufficient information to effectively monitor, assess and report on these minimum accountabilities.
10. Communicate and make clear within the organisation that a breach of the gifts, benefits and hospitality policies or processes may constitute a breach of binding codes of conduct and may constitute criminal or corrupt conduct, and may result in disciplinary action.
11. Establish and communicate a clear policy position to business associates on the offering of gifts, benefits and hospitality to employees, including possible consequences for a business associate acting contrary to the organisation's policy position. This must take into consideration any whole of Victorian Government supplier codes of conduct.



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12. Report at least annually to the organisation's audit committee on the administration and quality control of its gifts, benefits and hospitality policy, processes and register. This report must include analysis of the organisation's gifts, benefits and hospitality risks (including repeat offers from the same source and offers from business associates), risk mitigation measures and any proposed improvements.
13. Publish the organisation's gifts, benefits and hospitality policy and register on the organisation's public website (applies only to organisations with an established website). The published register should cover the current and the previous financial year. Establish, implement and review organisational policies and processes for the effective management of gifts, benefits and hospitality that comprehensively address these minimum accountabilities.

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**ATTACHMENT B**  
**Gifts Declaration – Western District Health Service**

This declaration form supports the Western District Health Service’s Gifts, benefits and hospitality policy. Employees must declare all non-token offers of gifts, benefits and hospitality (whether accepted or declined) on and seek written approval from their manager or organisational delegate to accept any non-token offer.

Individual to complete	
1. Declaration date	
2. Name, position and unit/division	
<b>Details of the gift, benefit or hospitality</b>	
3. Date offered	
4. Describe the gift, benefit or hospitality offered	
5. Estimated or actual value	
6. Offered by (name of individual/organisation making the offer)	
7. Is the person or entity making the offer a business associate of the organisation (Y/N)? If yes, describe the relationship between them and the organisation. If no, describe the relationship between you and the person or organisation making the offer.	
8. Reason for making the offer	
9. Would accepting the offer: a) create an actual potential or perceived conflict of interest exist (Y/N); or b) bring you, the organisation or the public sector into disrepute (Y/N)?  (If either is answered YES, then the offer must be declined in accordance with the minimum accountabilities)	<i>Detail of conflict of interest:</i>
10. Is there a legitimate business benefit to the organisation, public sector or State for accepting the offer, i.e. does it meet the following: a) it was offered during the course of the your official duties (Y/N); and b) it relates to your official responsibilities (Y/N); and c) it has a benefit to the organisation, public sector or State (Y/N).  (If NO then offer must be declined, and if YES then the business benefit must be detailed, in accordance with the minimum accountabilities).	<i>Detail of business benefit:</i>
11. I accepted the offer <b>YES / NO</b>	<i>Signature</i> <i>Date</i>

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Chief Executive to complete	
1. Name, position and unit/division	
2. Relationship to employee	
<b>Complete if individual declined offer</b>	
3. I have reviewed this declaration form and submitted it for inclusion on the organisation's gifts, benefits and hospitality register.	Signature:  Date:
<b>Complete if individual accepted offer</b>	
4. I have reviewed this declaration form and, confirm that, to my knowledge, accepting this offer:  a) does not raise an actual, potential or perceived conflict of interest for the individual or myself; <b>and</b> b) will not bring the individual, myself, the organisation or the public sector into disrepute; <b>and</b> c) will provide a clear business benefit to the organisation, the public sector or the State.	Signature:  Date:
5. Detail decision regarding ownership of tangible offers (e.g. specify whether employee retained gift; transferred to organisation's ownership; returned to offeror; donated to charity etc.)	
<i>Completed form to be submitted for inclusion on the organisation's gifts, benefits and hospitality register.</i>	

