

Wisconsin Government Accountability Board

For county, city, village, town, school district and other local officials

**Local officials' receipt of food, drink, favors,
services, etc.**

Wisconsin law forbids a public official to use free or discounted transportation, traveling accommodation, or communication services for which the supplier would usually charge [§946.11, Wisconsin Statutes; Art. 13, §11, Wisconsin Constitution],¹ otherwise—

Consistent with the statutes administered by the Government Accountability Board, **local public officials² may accept and retain:**

a. ITEMS AND SERVICES UNRELATED TO PUBLIC POSITION.

Food, drink, transportation, lodging, items, and services which are offered for a reason unrelated to the recipient's holding a public position [§ 19.59(1)(a)] and which could not reasonably be expected to influence an official's vote, official actions or judgment, nor reasonably be considered a reward for any official action or inaction;

b. EXPENSES PROVIDED BY OR FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENTAL UNIT.

Food, drink, transportation, lodging, or payment or reimbursement of costs that are provided by or for the benefit of the local governmental unit, not for a private benefit; and

c. ITEMS OF INSUBSTANTIAL VALUE.

Mere tokens and items or services of only nominal, insignificant, or trivial value.

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¹ Consult local ordinances and other state law not administered by the Government Accountability Board for any additional restrictions.

² "Local public officials" include: (a) elected officers of political subdivisions and special purpose districts of the state; (b) county administrators or administrative coordinators; (c) city or village managers; (d) individuals appointed to a position in a political subdivision or special purpose district for a specified term; and (e) individuals appointed to a position by the governing body, executive, or administrative head of a political subdivision or special purpose district and serving at the pleasure of the appointing authority.

This is a guide. For authoritative information consult Wisconsin Statutes.

Specific questions may be directed to your local governmental attorney or local ethic board.

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STATUTORY RESTRAINTS

Except as noted on the other side of the page, ***local public officials should not accept:***

1. ITEMS OR SERVICES OFFERED BECAUSE OF PUBLIC POSITION.

Any item or service, including food, drink, and travel, of more than nominal value offered because of the person's holding a public office [§ 19.59(1)(a)];

2. ITEMS THAT COULD INFLUENCE JUDGMENT.

Any item or service that could reasonably be expected to influence an official's vote, official actions or judgment [§19.59(1)(b)];

3. REWARDS FOR OFFICIAL ACTION.

Any item or service that could reasonably be considered a reward for any official action or inaction [§19.59(1)(b)]; and

4. TRANSPORTATION OR TRAVELING ACCOMMODATIONS.

Discounted transportation, traveling accommodations, or communication services for which the supplier would usually charge [§946.11; Art. 13, §11].

**To analyze a situation in which you are offered
items or services, ask yourself these questions:**

1. With respect to the item or service offered:
 - a. Is it being offered because of my public position?
 - b. Is it of more than nominal or insignificant value?
 - c. Is it primarily for my personal benefit rather than for the benefit of my local unit of government?

If you answer "**yes**" to all three questions, you may not accept the item or service.

2. Would it be reasonable for someone to believe that the item or service is likely to influence my judgment or actions or that it is a reward for past action?

If you answer "**yes**," you may not accept the item or service.

**If you have any doubts about a situation,
seek advice from your local governmental attorney.**

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