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| Model policies for agencies and boards Gifts, benefits and hospitality |
| This is a model policy on how your agency or board should respond to offers of gifts, benefits and hospitality and provide the same |

As public servants, we strive to earn public trust and work in line with community expectations.

We avoid gifts and excessive hospitality to protect public confidence in the integrity of our decision-making.

This policy will help you deal with:

* offers of gifts, benefits and hospitality, and
* providing gifts, benefits and hospitality to others.

While your policy can be adopted with the discretion provided for in ‘Adopting the Policy’, DELWP encourages agencies to avoid or minimise unnecessary inconsistency with the model policy, including the recommended DELWP position, wherever possible.

# About the model policy

## Which agencies does it apply to?

This applies to board members and employees of all DELWP agencies, including large crown land committees of management (*categories 1 and 2*).

For smaller crown land committees (*category 3*), see On Board, the department’s on-line information resource for agencies.

Agencies subject to the *Financial Management Act 1994* must comply with the minimum accountabilities as outlined in the [Standing Directions 2018](https://www.dtf.vic.gov.au/financial-management-government/standing-directions-2018-under-financial-management-act-1994).

Agencies not subject to the *Financial Management Act 1994*, such as advisory bodies or small committees of management, may choose to adopt the model policy as best practice.

## Minimum accountabilities

This policy incorporates the [minimum accountabilities](https://vpsc.vic.gov.au/html-resources/minimum-accountabilities/) for managing gifts, benefits and hospitalities in the public sector that have been set by the Victorian Public Sector Commission (VPSC). These need to be included in all policies regardless of the size, scope, function or level of risk that that agency has. Minimum accountabilities are listed in Schedule A of this policy.

# Adopting the policy

## Consistency with the departmental model policy

The DELWP model policy adopts and incorporates the VPSC’s minimum accountabilities for managing gifts, benefits and hospitality. These are minimum requirements.

Your organisation may choose to adopt higher standards or processes that take into account your organisation’s role and functions.

Your policy can be adapted to be responsive to your size, function and level of risk but it must incorporate the minimum accountabilities.

The VPSC [Gifts, Benefits and Hospitality Policy Guide](https://vpsc.vic.gov.au/html-resources/gifts-benefits-hospitality-policy-guide/) explains this further.

The DELWP model policy includes text boxes that explain how DELWP is implementing the model policy. This material is designed to assist agencies to meet minimum requirements**.**

The Victorian Auditor-General has criticised a lack of consistency between the policies adopted by portfolio agencies and those of the department.

# Context

Internal reviews identified low understanding and compliance with existing gifts, benefits and hospitality policies both in the department and in our agencies. This has been confirmed in a series of audits.

External reviews have also identified significant issues:

The Victorian Ombudsman’s [2011 investigation into the Foodbowl Modernisation Project and related matters](https://www.ombudsman.vic.gov.au/Publications/Parliamentary-Reports/Investigation-into-the-Foodbowl-Modernisation-Proj)identified financial probity problems with water corporations, including excessive use of public funds for alcohol at employee and contractor events and board meetings.

The Victorian Auditor-General’s Office [report into the results of the 2013-14 audits into water entities](https://www.audit.vic.gov.au/report/water-entities-results-2013-14-audits) highlighted a lack of consistency across agencies and with the department’s model policy, as well as consistent failure by agencies to train and remind staff of their obligations.

A subsequent [2015 audit into the implementation of the Gifts, Benefits and Hospitality Framework](https://www.audit.vic.gov.au/report/implementing-gifts-benefits-and-hospitality-framework) by VAGO reiterated a lack of consistency, lack of information or communication with staff, and poor management by agencies of their own obligations.

The Victorian Ombudsman’s [2018 investigation regarding officers at Goulburn-Murray Water](https://www.ombudsman.vic.gov.au/getattachment/Publications/Parliamentary-Reports/Investigation-regarding-officers-at-Goulburn-Murra/Investigation-into-allegations-of-improper-conduct-by-officers-at-Goulburn-Murray-Water.pdf.aspx) and [2017 investigation into allegations of improper conduct by officers at the Mount Buller and Mount Stirling Resort Management Board](https://www.ombudsman.vic.gov.au/getattachment/34b6bb85-7040-47ed-a028-eff6ff3f60f9) highlighted the failure of public officials to act consistently with community expectations and public sector values in regards to the expenditure of public monies on hospitality.

# Further information

## On Board

For more information, see the [Gifts, benefits and hospitality module](http://www.delwp.vic.gov.au/onboard) on On Board, the department’s online information resource for agencies.

## VPSC gifts, benefits and hospitality resources

The VPSC has put together [a suite of useful tools and resources](https://vpsc.vic.gov.au/resources/gifts-benefits-and-hospitality-resource-suite/) to support agencies to implement a gifts, benefits and hospitality framework. It includes the policy guide, model declaration form and register.

## DELWP relationship manager and team

DELWP also offers support to its agencies through its divisions and regional offices.

Contact your agency’s relationship manager or phone the Customer Service Centre on 136 186.

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# Purpose

This policy states the <organisation’s> 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 <organisation> to avoid conflicts of interest and maintain high levels of integrity and public trust.

The <organisation> has issued this policy to support behaviour consistent with the <Code of Conduct for Victorian Public Sector Employees, Code of Conduct for Victorian Public Sector Employees of Special Bodies and/or the Code of Conduct for Directors of Victorian Public Entities> (the Code). All employees are required under clause 1.2 of the Code to comply with this policy.

# Application

This policy applies to all workplace participants. For the purpose of this policy, this includes: executives, board members, employees, contractors, consultants and any individuals or groups undertaking activity for or on behalf of the <organisation>.

[Organisation may amend this section to apply to their operating structure. Organisations use various terms to describe ‘employees’ and may substitute their terminology into this policy to suit their purposes.]

# Policy principles

This policy has been developed in accordance with requirements outlined in the minimum accountabilities for the management of gifts, benefits and hospitality issued by the Victorian Public Sector Commission.

The <organisation> is committed to and will uphold the following principles in applying this policy:

Impartiality - 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 reasonable 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.

Integrity: individuals strive to earn and sustain public trust through providing or responding to offers of gifts, benefits and hospitality in a manner that is consistent with community expectations. Individuals will refuse any offer that may lead to an actual, perceived or potential conflict of interest.

Risk-based approach: the <organisation>, 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.

# Minimum accountabilities

Under the Instructions supporting the Standing Directions of the Minister for Finance 2016, the Victorian Public Sector Commission has set binding minimum accountabilities for the appropriate management of gifts, benefits and hospitality. These can be found at Schedule A.

# Definitions

## Business associate

An individual or body that the public sector organisation has, or plans to establish, some form of business relationship with, or who may seek commercial or other advantage by offering gifts, benefits or hospitality.

## Benefits

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.

## Ceremonial gifts

Ceremonial gifts are official gifts provided as part of the culture and practices of communities and government, within Australia or internationally. Ceremonial gifts are usually provided when conducting business with official delegates or representatives from another organisation, community or foreign government.

Ceremonial gifts are the property of the public sector organisation, irrespective of value, and should be accepted by individuals on behalf of the public sector organisation. The receipt of ceremonial gifts should be recorded on the register but does not need to be published online.

## Conflict of interest

Conflicts may be:

Actual: There is a real conflict between an employee’s public duties and private interests.

Potential: 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: The public or a third party could reasonably form the view that an employee’s private interests could improperly influence their decisions or actions, now or in the future.

## Gifts

Gifts are free or discounted items or services and any item or service 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), consumables (e.g. chocolates) and services (e.g. painting and repairs). Fundraising by public sector organisations that is consistent with relevant legislation and any government policy is not prohibited under the minimum accountabilities.

## Hospitality

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

## Legitimate business benefit

A gift, benefit or hospitality may have a legitimate business benefit if it furthers the conduct of official business or other legitimate goals of the public sector organisation, the public sector or the State.

## Public official

Public official has the same meaning as section 4 of the Public Administration Act 2004 and includes, public sector employees, statutory office holders and directors of public entities.

## Public register

A public register is a record, preferably digital, of a subset of the information contained in a register, for publication as required by the minimum accountabilities. Guidance regarding the information that should be published is provided in the [Victorian Public Sector Commission Policy Guide](https://vpsc.vic.gov.au/html-resources/gifts-benefits-hospitality-policy-guide/).

## Register

A register is a record, preferably digital, of all declarable gifts, benefits and hospitality. Guidance regarding the information that should be recorded is provided in the Policy Guide.

## Token offer

A token offer is a gift, benefit or hospitality that is of inconsequential or trivial value to both the person making the offer and the recipient (such as basic courtesy). The minimum accountabilities state that token offers cannot be worth more than $50.

## Non-token offer

A non-token offer is 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.

[Public sector organisations may also choose to set their threshold for non-token offers at a value less than $50.]

# 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 relevant organisational delegate, <delegate>.

## Conflict of interest and reputational risks

When deciding whether to accept an offer, individuals should first consider if the offer could be perceived as influencing them in performing their duties or lead to reputational damage. The more valuable the offer, the more likely that a conflict of interest or reputational risk exists.

### Figure 1. GIFT test

This table is a useful tool when considering how to respond to a gift offer.

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| **G** | **Giver** | Who is offering the gift, benefit or hospitality and what is their relationship to me?  Does my role require me to select contractors, award grants, regulate industries or determine government policies? Could the person or organisation benefit from a decision I make? |
| **I** | **Influence** | Are they seeking to gain an advantage or influence my decisions or actions?  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 my endorsement of a product or service? |
| **F** | **Favour** | Are they seeking a favour in return for the gift, benefit or hospitality?  Has the gift, benefit or hospitality been offered honestly? Has the person or organisation made several offers over the last 12 months? Would accepting it create an obligation to return a favour? |
| **T** | **Trust** | Would accepting the gift, benefit or hospitality diminish public trust?  How would the public view acceptance of this gift, benefit or hospitality? What would my colleagues, family, friends or associates think? |

## Requirement for refusing offers

Individuals should consider the GIFT test at Figure 1 and the requirements below to help decide whether to refuse an offer. Individuals are to refuse offers:

* likely to influence them, or be perceived to influence them, in the course of their duties or that raise an actual, potential or perceived conflict of interest;
* could bring them, their <organisation> or the public sector into disrepute;
* made by a person or organisation about which they will likely make or influence a decision (this also applies to processes involving grants, sponsorship, regulation, enforcement or licensing), particularly offers:
  + made by a current or prospective supplier;
  + made during a procurement or tender process by a person or organisation involved in the process; or
  + [add any further prohibited offers];
* likely to be a bribe or inducement to make a decision or act in a particular way;
* that extend to their relatives or friends;
* 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 [specify how the number of employees attending an event will be limited under the policy];
* 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 organisations; or
* made in secret.

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

## 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 that would be considered a basic courtesy, such as light refreshments during a meeting.

The minimum accountabilities state that token offers cannot be worth more than $50.

Individuals may generally accept token offers without approval or declaring the offer on the <organisation’s> register, as long as the offer does not create a conflict of interest or lead to reputational damage.

[Organisations may require the acceptance of token offers to be approved and declared on the register, based on their risk profile. They may also include specific examples of what is or is not a token offer e.g. modest box of chocolates may be regarded as a token of thanks etc.]

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| DELWP policy and practice:  DELWP does not require token gifts to be declared on registers. |

## Non-token offers

Individuals can only accept non-token offers if they have a legitimate business benefit. All accepted non-token offers must be approved in writing by the individual’s manager or organisational delegate, 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, their <organisation> or the public sector into disrepute; 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 <organisation>, 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 their manager within five business days.

Where the gift would likely bring you or the organisation into disrepute, the organisation should return the gift. If it represents a conflict of interest for you, the organisation should either return the gift or transfer ownership to the organisation to mitigate this risk.

[Organisations may insert specific business reasons to guide individuals e.g. acceptance of a conference invitation where the subject matter relates to an individual’s official duties].

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| DELWP policy and practice:  DELWP allows conference organisers to pay the costs for a staff member to present at a conference in their area of expertise including flights, accommodation, meals and conference admission. |

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

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

Individuals should consider the following examples of acceptable and unacceptable levels of detail to be included in the <organisation’s> register when recording the business reason:

### Unacceptable

* “Networking”
* “Maintaining stakeholder relationships”

### Acceptable

* “Individual is responsible for evaluating and reporting on the outcomes of the <organisation’s> sponsorship of Event A. Individual attended Event A in an official capacity and reported back to the <organisation> 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 on behalf of the <organisation>.”

[Organisations to insert process for declaring gifts (e.g. how and to whom). The VPSC has provided a template declaration form and gifts register that organisations may adopt. Organisations are expected to take into account their relevant privacy requirements when recording and publishing their register, such as restricting access to relevant persons within the organisation.]

Access to the register is restricted to relevant persons within the <organisation>.

The <organisation’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 <organisation’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.

The public register will contain a subset of the information detailed in the <organisation’s> internal register.

[Organisations may adopt higher standards for recording offers, for example by including token offers.]

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| DELWP policy and practice:  DELWP does not require staff to record token offers or sustenance (light food and drink with business meetings, such as juice and sandwiches). |

## Ownership of gifts offered to individuals

Non-token gifts with a legitimate business benefit that have been accepted by an individual for their work or contribution may be retained by the individual where the gift is not likely to bring them or the <organisation> into disrepute, and where their manager or organisational delegate has provided written approval. Employees must transfer to the <organisation> official gifts or any gift of cultural significance or significant value.

[Organisations may include additional rules regarding individuals retaining gifts or what should happen with gifts transferred to the organisation’s ownership e.g. disposing of gifts etc.]

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| DELWP policy and practice:  DELWP encourages gifts such as food hampers to be auctioned to staff with the proceeds donated to charity. |

## Repeat offers

Receiving multiple offers (token or non-token) from the same person or organisation can generate a stronger perception that the person or organisation could influence you. Individuals should refuse repeat offers from the same source if they create a conflict of interest or may lead to reputational damage.

## Ceremonial gifts

Ceremonial gifts are official gifts provided as part of the culture and practices of communities and government, within Australia or internationally. Ceremonial gifts are the property of the organisation, irrespective of value, and should be accepted by individuals on behalf of the <organisation>. The receipt of ceremonial gifts should be recorded on the <organisation’s> register but this information does not need to be published online.

## Hospitality provided by Victorian public sector organisations

Victorian public sector organisations may provide hospitality to stakeholders, as part of their functions. When offered hospitality by a Victorian public sector organisation, individuals should consider the requirements of the minimum accountabilities.

Accepted hospitality offered by a Victorian public sector organisation as part of official business does not need to be declared or reported, where the reason for the individual’s attendance is consistent with the <organisation’s> functions and objectives and with the individual’s role.

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| DELWP policy and practice:  DELWP policy is that hospitality offered by both public and private sector organisations as part of official business is not published in the public register. This is based on the need to attend events for the purposes of stakeholder engagement, to develop professional and sector knowledge, and to collaborate on projects.  DELWP practice is that both public and private sector hospitality is declared and recorded on an internal register. This allows for monitoring and oversight of declarations. Hospitality that is offered, but not accepted is not declared or recorded.  An Official Business Events policy and declaration form is provided at Appendix 1 for adoption if desired. |

# Management of the provision of gifts, benefits and hospitality

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

### Figure 2. HOST test

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| **H** | **Hospitality** | To whom is the gift or hospitality being provided?  Will recipients be external business partners, or individuals of the host organisation? |
| **O** | **Objectives** | For what purpose will hospitality be provided?  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? |
| **S** | **Spend** | Will public funds be spent?  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? |
| **T** | **Trust** | Will public trust be enhanced or diminished?  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? |

## Requirements for providing gifts, benefits and hospitality

Gifts, benefits and hospitality may be provided when welcoming guests, to 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 that 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 Figure 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.

## Containing costs

Individuals should contain costs involved with providing gifts, benefits and hospitality wherever possible, and should comply with the financial probity and efficient use of resources guidance outlined in the <Code of Conduct for Victorian Public Sector Employees, Code of Conduct for Victorian Public Sector Employees of Special Bodies and/or the Code of Conduct for Directors of Public Entities>. The following questions may be useful to assist individuals to decide on 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?
* Is the gift symbolic, rather than financial, in value?
* Will providing the gift, benefit or hospitality be viewed by the public as excessive?

[Organisations may add additional questions to reflect their operating environment and also incorporate their policies on:

* financial expenditure and approval processes;
* catering for employees and for office functions;
* reward and recognition programs, if relevant;
* provision of alcohol; and
* recording and reporting on the provision of gifts, benefits and hospitality in accordance with their requirements under the *Financial Management Act 1994*].

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| DELWP policy and practice: Reward and recognition programs Modest gifts may be provided to employees in exceptional circumstances as part of the *Recognising Our Staff* program. Financial gifts to employees such as vouchers or gift cards are prohibited. Where financial gifts for reward and recognition programs are currently in use, it is recommended that they be phased out by mid-2020. Maximum expenditure on unbudgeted gifts DELWP has set a nominal limit of $150 for the maximum expenditure on gifts to others, where the expenditure has not been explicitly budgeted for. This nominal limit is a total for a discrete, unbudgeted gift. It is not per person or an annual total. Flowers Flowers can be purchased from public funds in the event of the death of an employee or close family member. Should work colleagues choose to recognise life events such as the birth of a child flowers and gifts are funded through staff collections. Providing catering and alcohol for external events Catering is provided at functions for external guests subject to the following criteria:   * there is a real benefit to the department, * the expenditure is modest and proportionate to the benefit, * it is not excessive, * it is not too frequent, and * it is consistent with community expectations.   Alcohol may be purchased with public funds to serve at functions for external guests based on the following:   * provision of alcohol would be relatively uncommon and be associated with a meal, * any event where alcohol is served should be held at a time that minimises the risk of employees returning to work impaired by alcohol (e.g. if standard office hours are worked, the event should be held in the late afternoon or early evening), * events with alcohol service do not exceed two hours in duration, * no more than two standard drinks per person are provided, and * the provision of alcohol should be incidental to the overall level of hospitality provided.  Providing alcohol at internal events DELWP does not permit the purchase of alcohol with public funds for internal events. Having non-employees, guests or stakeholders at an event does not necessarily mean it is not an internal event.  DELWP practice for recognition events is that the business unit funds a modest meal and soft drinks. Staff purchase alcohol if they choose. Providing catering at internal events DELWP provides modest catering for employees for events such as annual recognition events or marking the completion of a major project based on the following considerations:   * the extent to which the event will contribute to organisational objectives by, for example, reinforcing particular values or motivating staff, * whether there have been multiple recent events that would result in perceptions of excess, or * the need to balance the positive benefits of public recognition with community expectations in relation to modest expenditure by public officials.   Celebrations of events such as birthdays, marriages or the birth of a child are not catered with public funds.  DELWP practice is that meetings are scheduled to avoid conflict with meal times. Where that is not possible, a break is encouraged to enable participants to seek their own refreshments. If an event or meeting extends over meal times, modest hospitality can be provided.  As a guideline, provide refreshments when meetings exceed these times:   * 2 hours - for morning or afternoon tea * 3 hours - for lunch * 5 hours - for lunch and either morning or afternoon tea * 7 hours - for lunch, morning tea and afternoon tea |

# Related policy, legislation and other documents

* Minimum accountabilities for the management of gifts, benefits and hospitality (see Instructions supporting the Standing Directions of the Minister for Finance)
* the <organisation’s> Conflict of Interest Policy
* Public Administration Act 2004
* Code of Conduct for Victorian Public Sector Employees
* Code of Conduct for Victorian Public Sector Employees of Special Bodes
* Code of Conduct for Directors of Victorian Public Entities
* Victorian Public Sector Commission’s Gifts, Benefits and Hospitality Policy Guide
* [Other legislation as relevant]
* [Other organisational policies as relevant]

# Authorising Officer and organisational delegate

This policy is issued under the authority of the Authorising Officer <role> and is subject to annual review.

The organisational delegate is <role>.

# 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 <organisation’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, Code Of Conduct for Victorian Public Sector Employees of Special Bodies and/or the Code of Conduct for Directors of Public Entities>, such as sections of the Code covering conflict of interest, public trust and gifts and benefits; and
* individuals making improper use of their position.

For further information on managing breaches of this policy, please contact <role>.

The <organisation> 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.

# Speak up

Individuals who consider that gifts, benefits and hospitality or conflict of interest within the <organisation> may not have been declared or is not being appropriately managed should speak up and notify their manager or <organisational delegate>. Individuals who believe they have observed corrupt conduct in their colleagues may also make a protected disclosure directly to the Independent Based-based Anti-corruption Commission (IBAC).

The <organisation> will take decisive action, including possible disciplinary action, against individuals who discriminate against or victimise those who speak up in good faith.

[Organisations may insert links to further information on raising concerns internally if they exist].

# 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 accepting a gift, benefit or hospitality, or the application of this policy, should ask their manager or <Authorising Officer or organisational delegate> for advice.

Policy issued on: \_\_/\_\_/\_\_

Review date: \_\_/\_\_/\_\_

# Schedule 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 head of the public sector organisation or their delegate (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:

1. 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.
2. Ensure that any costs are proportionate to the benefits obtained for the State, and would be considered reasonable in terms of community expectations.
3. 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:

1. Establish, implement and review organisational policies and processes for the effective management of gifts, benefits and hospitality that comprehensively address these minimum accountabilities.
2. 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.
3. 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.
4. 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.
5. 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.
6. 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.

# Appendix 1 – Optional official business events policy

This section is optional. If your agency adopts it, insert this policy below “Hospitality provided by Victorian public sector organisations”.

DELWP developed an official business events policy to reduce the administrative burden on staff having to declare every invitation they received to industry, professional development or training events as a gifts, benefits and hospitality declaration. This policy ensures that DELWP meet their legal obligations in collecting data on gift offers (in this case, event invitations) while reducing the paperwork employees would have to complete to fulfil their obligations.

## Official business events

An official business event is when an event hosted by external organisation that it is in the public interest for an employee to attend. These invitations are different to gifts, benefits and hospitality offers and include seminars, conferences and working lunches.

Official business events need to have a tangible connection to an employee’s role and be directly related to the agency’s work.

Most official business events fall under five categories:

* *funded service delivery* – opportunities to observe the delivery of programs funded by state government grants
* *stakeholder engagement* – opportunities to develop networks with people interested in the department’s activities
* *sector knowledge –* opportunities to develop a deeper knowledge of the industry and to improve government programs
* *business leveraging* – opportunities to network with partners interested in investment and collaboration
* *professional knowledge* – opportunities to maintain knowledge relating to a qualification (*e.g. CPD points*), build expertise in a technical field or become acquainted with industry changes.

In addition to those five categories, there are situations where it is in the public interest for the public service to be represented in some capacity. Those include:

* *state functions* – attending an event or function hosted by the Government or the Governor
* *accompanying the Minister* – supporting a government spokesperson (including Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries) in the execution of their duties
* *government events* – attending a function organised and hosted by another government agency or public sector entity
* *industry stakeholders* – attending an event hosted by industry or community stakeholders where attendance provides a legitimate business benefit.

Employees are required to declare their attendance as official business events.

​Employees can attend an official business event when:

* the invitation was extended by the event host rather than a third party
* the event is directly related to their official duties at the agency
* it is for a business purpose consistent with the agency’s functions and objectives
* it is in the public interest and the best interests of the agency to be represented at the event
* the activities and level of hospitality at the event is consistent with community expectations
* there is no conflict of interest (real, potential or perceived) for the employee to attend
* attending the event will not bring the employee, the agency, the department or the public service into disrepute
* the host does not have an interest in any business decision the employee is likely to make or influence as part of their official duties.

Before an official business event invitation is accepted, consider:

* whether the employee is the most appropriate person to attend
* the number of people from the agency attending
* what the employee’s purpose to attend is – to present, develop work skills or purely out of interest
* if the event is a gift offer rather than official business event attendance

Events that provide a personal benefit or are limited to providing hospitality and serve no business purpose can be regarded as an official business event only if non-attendance would bring the agency into disrepute.

To report a gift, the employee must disclose the offer to the responsible person (either by email or in person) as soon as practicable.

If the agency maintains a **register of official business events**, employees must also:

* sign and lodge an **official business events attendance form** within fourteen working days, and
* ensure the declaration is added to the **register of official business events**.

If the agency does not maintain a **register of official business events**, alternative administrative systems like a dedicated email inbox may be used.

# Appendix 2 – Gifts, benefits and hospitality declaration form

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| Gifts, benefits and hospitality  declaration form |
| We have an obligation to protect public confidence in the integrity of our decision-making by minimising offers of gifts. |

Instructions

To be completed by the recipient of the reportable gift, benefit or hospitality offer within 14 days of the offer being made and sent to [insert your contact person’s details here].

**Important note** – fields shaded in:

* light grey will be published on the agency’s public register on our website.
* dark grey will only be published on the public register if you accept the gift, benefit or hospitality.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| You to complete | |
| Your name | [**your name**] |
| Your position *(e.g. Policy Officer)* | [**your position**] |
| Your unit or division *(e.g. Climate Change)* | [**your unit or division**] |
| Details of the gift, benefit or hospitality | |
| Date offered | [**date offered**] |
| Description of the gift, benefit or hospitality | [**description of the gift, benefit or hospitality**] |
| Estimated or actual value | [**estimated or actual value**] |
| Name of the person making the offer | [**name of the person making the offer**] |
| Position or title of the person making the offer | [**position or title of the person making the offer**] |
| Name of the organisation making the offer | [**name of the organisation making the offer**] |
| Type of organisation *(e.g. conference organiser, government agency, consulting firm)* | [**type of organisation**] |
| Why is the offer being made? | [**reason for the offer being made**] |
| Is the person or organisation making the offer a business associate of the agency?  **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 *(e.g. friendship)*. | **Select yes or no from this list.** |
| [**relationship between the department and offeror**] |
| [**relationship between you and the offeror**] |
| Would accepting the offer create an actual, potential or perceived [**conflict of interest**](https://delwpvicgovau.sharepoint.com/AskAda/Pages/ManagingConflictsOfInterest.aspx)?  **If yes**, then the offer must be declined. | **Select yes or no from this list.** |
| Would accepting the offer bring you, the agency or the public sector into disrepute?  **If yes**, then the offer must be declined. | **Select yes or no from this list.** |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Is there a legitimate business benefit to the department or public sector for accepting the offer?  *For example:* | **Select yes or no from this list.** |
| [**details of the legitimate business benefit**] |
| * *Was it offered during your official duties?* |
| * *Does it relate to your official responsibilities?* |
| * *Does accepting bring any benefit to the agency, public sector or State?* |
| **If no**, then the offer must be declined.  **If yes**, then the business benefit must be detailed. |
| Is the offer an official or ceremonial gift provided when conducting business with official delegates or representatives from another organisation, the community or another government? | **Select yes or no from this list.** |
| [**details of the official or ceremonial purpose**] |
| **If yes**, please provide details. |
| Did I accept or decline the offer? | **Select accept or decline from this list.** |
| I declare that the details above are accurate and complete. | Signature: |
|  | Date: |
| Your manager or organisational delegate to complete | |
| Your name | [**reviewer’s name**] |
| Your position or title *(e.g. Director)* | [**reviewer’s position or title**] |
| Your unit or division *(e.g. Climate Change)* | [**reviewer’s unit or division**] |
| Your relationship to the declarant *(e.g. line manager)* | [**reviewer’s relationship to declarant**] |
| Complete if the declarant declined the offer | |
| I have reviewed this declaration form and submitted it for inclusion on our Gifts, Benefits & Hospitality Register. | Signature: |
| Date: |
| Complete if the declarant accepted the offer | |
| What decision was made about the ownership and disposal of the gift?  *(e.g. was it kept by the declarant, transferred to the agency, returned, or donated to charity)* | [**details on how the gift was disposed of**] |
| I confirm that, to my knowledge, accepting this offer: | Signature: |
| * does not raise an actual, potential or perceived conflict of interest for the individual or myself; **and** |
| * will not bring the individual, myself, the agency or the public sector into disrepute; **and** |
| * will provide a clear and legitimate business benefit to the agency, the public sector or the State. |
| Date: |

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| Send completed form to [*[email*](mailto:integrity@delwp.vic.gov.au) *address]* (scanned as PDF) |

# Appendix 3 – Official business events attendance form

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| Official business events  attendance form |
| We have an obligation to protect public confidence in the integrity of our work by disclosing official events we attend. |

**Instructions**

To be completed by the invitee within 14 days of the offer being made and sent to [insert your contact person’s details here].

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| You to complete | |
| Your name | [**your name**] |
| Your position *(e.g. Policy Officer)* | [**your position**] |
| Your unit or division *(e.g. Climate Change)* | [**your unit or division**] |
| Details of the official business event | |
| Invitation date | [**date invited**] |
| Name of the event | [**name of the event**] |
| Brief description of the event | [**description of event**] |
| Type of event (*e.g. government, industry, Ministerial*) | [**type of event**] |
| Date and time for the event | [**date and time for event**] |
| Location for the event | [**location of event**] |
| Estimated or actual value of a ticket to the event | [**estimated or actual value**] |
| Name of the person extending the invitation | [**name of the person extending the invitation**] |
| Position or title of the person extending the invitation | [**position or title of the person extending the invitation**] |
| Name of the organisation extending the invitation | [**name of the organisation making the offer**] |
| Type of organisation *(e.g. conference organiser, government agency, consulting firm)* | [**type of organisation**] |
| Is the person or organisation extending the invitation from the organisation hosting or organising the event?  **If no**, you must decline the invitation. | **Select yes or no from this list.** |
| Why is the invitation being extended to you? | [**reason for the invitation being extended**] |
| Is attending this event directly related to your official duties as a public servant?  **If yes**, detail how your attendance is relevant to your role.  **If no**, you must decline the invitation. | **Select yes or no from this list.** |
| [**how is this** **relevant to your work**] |
| What business purpose does attending the event serve (*e.g. stakeholder engagement, business leveraging or observing funded service delivery*)? | [**what is the business purpose**] |
| Does the host have a business interest in any decisions you are likely to make as part of your official duties?  **If yes**, you must decline the invitation. | **Select yes or no from this list.** |
| Would accepting the invitation create an actual, potential or perceived [**conflict of interest**](https://delwpvicgovau.sharepoint.com/AskAda/Pages/ManagingConflictsOfInterest.aspx)?  **If yes**, you must decline the invitation. | **Select yes or no from this list.** |
| Would accepting the invitation bring you, the agency or the public sector into disrepute?  **If yes**, you must decline the invitation. | **Select yes or no from this list.** |
| Is level of hospitality offered reasonable, proportionate and likely to meet community expectations?  **If no**, you must decline the invitation. | **Select yes or no from this list.** |
| Did I accept or decline the offer? | **Select accept or decline from this list.** |
| I declare that the details above are accurate and complete. | Signature: |
|  | Date: |

|  |
| --- |
| Send completed form to [*[email*](mailto:integrity@delwp.vic.gov.au) *address]* (scanned as PDF) |