

## **Highlights of the House Ethics Rules**

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# **“Ask Ethics” for additional guidance.**

**This document is a high-level overview of relevant Ethics rules and is intended to be a primer. The Highlights are *not* a substitute for required Ethics training; or guidance from Committee staff, in the House Ethics Manual, and on the Committee’s website at <https://ethics.house.gov>. Ethics guidance is very fact specific, so please contact the Committee for any questions you may have.**

All communications are confidential.

You can never be placed at risk for seeking Ethics Committee advice about future conduct.

Good faith reliance on written Ethics Committee opinions protects you from sanctions under House rules.

# Gifts<sup>i</sup>

**You may not accept a gift (anything having monetary value) unless an exception to the House Gift Rule applies. The list below summarizes only a few of the 20+ Gift Rule exceptions. Ask Ethics about your specific circumstances.**

- Gifts from relatives (including fiancé(e)s and in-laws).
- Gifts based on personal friendship offered for a non-business purpose (but a gift **over \$250** in value requires written permission from the Ethics Committee).
  - Staff may accept gifts from other House staff or Senate staff. However, supervisors may not accept gifts from a subordinate except on special occasions.
- Gifts related to a special occasion, such as a marriage, baby, or death in the family. (Use the Committee's Special Occasion Gift Waiver form.<sup>ii</sup>)
- Gifts from outside business and other activities (including participation in *some* fellowship/professional development programs) if the gifts (1) were not offered or enhanced because of your position with the House, and (2) are customarily provided to others in similar circumstances.
- Benefits available to the general public (e.g., frequent flyer miles), to members of a group unrelated to congressional employment (e.g., alumni association), or to all federal employees (e.g., federal employee purchasing programs).
- Anything paid for by U.S. federal, state, or local government (e.g., federal agencies, states, counties, towns, and public universities).
- Items of nominal value (i.e., less than \$10) that are not food, drinks, cash, or cash equivalents (e.g., gift cards). Baseball caps, greeting cards, and t-shirts are allowed.
- Any gift, other than cash or cash equivalent, valued at less than \$50, as long as the donor is not a registered federal lobbyist, foreign agent, or entity that retains or employs them.
  - Subject to annual limit of less than \$100 from same private source in a calendar year.

**You may NEVER solicit (ask) for a gift, accept a gift that has been solicited, or accept a gift that is linked to any past or prospective official action.**

# **Gift of Free Attendance at Events**

**You may also be offered the gift of free attendance at an event. Below are some of the more common event exceptions.**

- **Reception:** Food offered must be limited to “food or refreshments of nominal value” that are not “part of a meal” (e.g., light appetizers and drinks, or soda and cookies).
  - Source of invitation and number of people in attendance is immaterial, but reception may not be a one-on-one event.
  - Receptions may be purely social in nature or be related to official activities.
- **Widely-Attended Event:** You must receive the invitation from the event organizer(s), not from a financial sponsor. You must determine that attendance is related to your official duties. The event organizer(s) must expect at least 25 attendees from a broad group of people other than congressional attendees or the event organizer’s own employees.
  - May accept a meal that is offered to all attendees as part of event.
  - May accept local transportation to event, if offered by event organizer.
  - May not accept a gift bag unless otherwise permitted by Gift Rule.
- **Charity Event:** You must receive the invitation from the event organizer(s), not from a financial sponsor. The event’s primary purpose must be to raise funds benefiting an Internal Revenue Code (IRC) § 170(c) organization (primary purpose typically met if at least half of the proceeds are tax-deductible charitable contributions).
  - May accept meals, local transportation, and some long-distance travel if offered by event organizer.
- **Political Event:** You must receive the invitation from the event organizer. The organizer must be an IRC § 527 organization (e.g., a party organization or a PAC).
  - Travel, lodging, and other gifts also may be accepted in some circumstances.

**If you are offered free attendance at an event for yourself and a guest which otherwise complies with the House Gift Rule, you may accept the offer for any kind of guest.<sup>iii</sup>**

# **Privately-Sponsored Travel<sup>iv</sup>**

**Before you participate in *officially-connected travel paid for by a private source*, you must receive individualized written approval from the Ethics Committee. You must file required post-travel disclosures with the Clerk after your trip. All trips must comply with the Committee's Travel Regulations.<sup>v</sup>**

- **Process for Approval:** You must submit your travel request to the Ethics Committee at least **30 days before your departure**.
  - Travel requests include your Traveler Form (signed by employing Member for staff travel), Primary Trip Sponsor Form (completed by trip sponsor), agenda, and other documents provided by trip sponsor.
  - Travelers may use travel calculator<sup>vi</sup> on Ethics Committee website for deadlines.
  - If you add personal days to the start of your trip, the due date will move up.
- **Trip duration:** Varies based on a number of factors.
  - If trip sponsor employs or retains a registered federal lobbyist or foreign agent, trip is limited to one calendar day of officially-connected activities, and generally one night of lodging.
    - Registered federal lobbyist/foreign agent involvement in requesting or planning trip must be *de minimis*.
  - If trip sponsor does not employ or retain a registered federal lobbyist or foreign agent—or if trip sponsor is a private U.S. college or university—trips are limited to 4 days (domestic) or 7 days (international).
  - Travelers may extend trips at personal expense in some cases.
- **Purpose of trip:** The purpose must be related to your official duties.
  - Privately-sponsored travel (PST) may not be combined with campaign travel or use of the MRA for travel.
  - Campaign activities may not take place on PST.

**\*\*These rules do not apply to travel funded by (1) the House or Senate (e.g., personal office or Committee travel, or CODELs); (2) federal, state, or local government travel (e.g., travel paid for by state university); (3) foreign governments (e.g., MECEA trips); or (4) political organizations.**

**You may NEVER solicit for travel or accept travel that has been solicited. This includes telling a sponsor what to include on the agenda or suggesting substitute travelers or additional congressional invitees to the sponsor.**

# **Campaign Activities**

**As a House employee, you may choose to volunteer or be paid for work on a campaign.**

- You may not be compelled to volunteer for or work on any campaign, including as a condition of your House employment.
- If you wish to work on a campaign other than for your employing Member, you must receive approval from your employing Member/office.
- If you choose to work on a campaign of any kind—not just federal—you may not conduct those activities
  - On House grounds (e.g., DC or district office space),
  - On House time (e.g., when expected to be “on the clock”), or
  - While using House resources (e.g., House computer and other devices, House email account).
- A criminal statute prohibits solicitation from, and/or acceptance of political contributions in, any House building.
  - Unsolicited contributions mistakenly sent to the House office may be forwarded to the campaign, but forwarding must take place within 7 days of receipt.
    - You may not use the Frank or the MRA for postage.
    - You may use campaign stamps and envelopes.
- You may not make a contribution to your employing Member’s campaign.
- You may not make an outlay to your employing Member’s campaign other than to pay only for your own campaign-related travel (e.g., transportation, lodging, meals).
  - You may not sidestep the prohibition by paying for your employing Member’s campaign expenses through your single-member LLC.
  - Prompt reimbursement of an impermissible outlay does not negate the impermissibility of the outlay.

**Members may NEVER accept a campaign contribution that is directly linked to any specific past or prospective official action.**

## **Other Non-House Activities**

**Your status as a House employee may affect your ability to engage in certain activities. Ask Ethics if you have questions.**

- You must behave at all times in a manner that reflects creditably on the House.
- You may not use your official position for personal gain.
- Your outside activities and investments may create a conflict for you and your office.
- Your non-House activities may not include working/volunteering for a lobbying entity or otherwise lobbying or advising on lobbying the federal government.
- Pursuant to a criminal statute, you may not represent anyone before the federal government in a matter where the U.S. is a party or has a direct and substantial interest—even if you are not paid.
- For all non-House activities, you
  - Must obtain approval from your employing Member/office;
  - May only participate in non-House activities on your own time (e.g., while on annual leave, after hours, on weekends);
  - May not use any House resources (e.g., official email, phone, computer, staff title); and
  - Must be somewhere other than on House grounds (e.g., DC or district office space, committee rooms).
- Although you generally may not solicit for anything of value, you may solicit for a § 501(c)(3) charity or other entities qualified under § 170(c) of the IRC, provided that you do not use any official resources, no official endorsement is implied, you and your immediate family do not personally benefit from the solicitation, and the solicitation does not target registered federal lobbyists/foreign agents.
  - You must receive prior written approval from the Ethics Committee to solicit for any entity that is not qualified under § 170(c). This includes, for example, fundraising through GoFundMe.
  - *Regardless of tax status*, you must receive the Ethics Committee's prior written approval to solicit for an organization that was established or is controlled by current House Members, officers, or employees.
  - Only Members may use their personal titles (e.g., "Representative").
- If you are not senior staff (see page 6), you may accept an honorarium (payment for speech, article, or appearance) **unless** (1) the subject matter is directly related to your official duties, (2) the payment is made because of your status with the House, or (3) the payor has interests before the House that you may affect as a congressional employee.

**Examples of honoraria include payments for surveys, participating in podcasts, recording cameos, and posting product reviews on social media (influencer).**



# Senior Staff

**If you are compensated at or above the senior staff rate, you are subject to additional requirements and restrictions.**

- You are senior staff if you receive a base rate of pay equal to or more than the senior staff rate for 60 days or more in a calendar year.<sup>vii</sup>
  - You can find the current senior staff rate at *ethics.house.gov*.
  - Temporary increases in base rate of pay may make you senior staff.
  - Senior staff must file Financial Disclosure Reports (FDs).
    - You *may* be eligible for a due date extension if the Committee receives your request prior to your due date.
    - Late filing fee of \$200 for FDs submitted later than grace period.
  - You may need to file Periodic Transaction Reports (PTRs) for transactions in certain assets.
    - Due earlier of (a) 30 days from being made aware of the transaction or (b) 45 days from the transaction.
    - Staff may use PTR due date calculator<sup>viii</sup> on Ethics Committee website.
    - **No** extensions are available for PTRs.
    - Fee for late PTR filings **starts at \$200**; increases with repeated lates.
  - Clerk of the House makes FDs and PTRs available to the public.
- If you are senior staff **and** you receive the senior staff rate for more than 90 days in a calendar year, you
  - May not receive compensation for performing professional services involving a fiduciary relationship (e.g., law, real estate, insurance sales, financial services, consulting or advising). Ask *Ethics* for guidance to determine whether you may be compensated for providing political consulting services to a campaign.
  - May not receive compensation for affiliating with any firm that provides such professional services.
  - May not allow such a firm to use your name.
  - May not receive compensation for serving on a board.
  - May receive no more than the Outside Earned Income Limit (current limit at *ethics.house.gov*) from all permissible non-House sources in a calendar year.<sup>ix</sup>
  - Must receive written approval from the Ethics Committee prior to each semester during which you plan to teach for compensation.
  - May not receive copyright royalties from a publishing contract unless you first seek and receive approval from the Ethics Committee.
    - Contracts must contain usual and customary terms, be with an established publisher, no advance on royalties.
  - May not accept an honorarium (payment for a speech, article, or appearance, see page 5 for examples), regardless of the topic, even if unrelated to your job.
    - You may recommend that up to \$2,000 of an offered honorarium be instead contributed to a charitable organization. Ask *Ethics* for additional guidance if you are in this situation.

**Certain shared staff & Principal Assistants also need to file FDs.**

# **General Office Operations**

**Below is just a small sample of the Ethics rules that govern your office's operations.**

## **Family Members**

- Members may not hire family members in their congressional offices.
- Supervisors may not recommend, hire, or promote family.
- All employees must receive compensation commensurate with their duties.
- If Member or employee's spouse or immediate family member engages in lobbying or similar activity, Ask *Ethics* for guidance related to their interactions with Congress. Members may accept, without limit, volunteer services in their congressional office from a spouse, child, or parent.

## **Interns**

- House offices may accept temporary services of an unpaid intern if participating in a program that is primarily of educational benefit to the intern, and the intern does not supplant House staff.
- Rules for paid interns also apply to unpaid interns.
- Unpaid interns may be compensated by or receive benefits from an outside entity (e.g., university program provides D.C. housing).
  - Conduct conflicts analysis based on who compensates or provides benefits to an unpaid intern.
- Members may not establish an internship program or accept interns from programs for which the Member solicited within 12 months.

## **Fellows**

- House offices may accept temporary services of a fellow in a mid-career education program while being paid by their employer.
- Rules for paid fellows also apply to unpaid fellows.
- Conduct conflicts analysis based on who compensates a fellow.

## **Use of Campaign Funds**

- Although Members may use principal campaign funds for many official expenses, these funds may never be used for mail and communications; compensation for services; office space, furniture, and equipment; and information technology services (except handheld devices).

**Other House entities have rules that govern your office's operations, including the Committee on House Administration (CHA), the Communications Standards Commission (CSC, formerly Franking), the Office of House Employment Counsel (OHEC), and the Office of the General Counsel (OGC).**

# **Casework**

**The starting point before you may use any House resources (including your time) is a connection to a Member's district/constituents and a federal nexus.**

- Members have broad discretion in helping constituents before *federal* government agencies.
- Generally may provide official assistance only to *current* constituents.
- Treat all constituents equally irrespective of political considerations, or family or personal relationships.
- May not directly or indirectly threaten reprisals against agency officials or promise favoritism or benefit.
- Members and employees' ability to contact an agency on a matter in which they have a personal financial interest may be absolutely prohibited or require additional checks.
  - *Ask Ethics* for guidance beforehand; this is not an area where you should act first.
- May make a status inquiry; urge prompt consideration on the merits; arrange appointments; or, when warranted by the merits of the case, express judgment or ask for reconsideration of a decision.
  - *Ask Ethics* for ways to signal to the addressee of a letter that you are not attempting to exercise undue influence.
  - Avoid off-the-record communications with a decision-maker without prior notice to all parties – called *ex parte* communications – in cases, adjudications, and enforcement actions before agencies or courts.
  - May generally provide letters of recommendation for government service.
    - Content of letters of recommendation, to whom you may provide a letter of recommendation, and whether you may use letterhead for letters of recommendation is very fact-specific.

**Ask Ethics about casework involving other governments, intervening with non-governmental parties, and other types of casework requests.**

# Official and Privately Sponsored Events

**Make decisions about event sponsorship early when planning.  
Appropriate use of resources for an event flows from this decision.**

- Events *generally* may be sponsored either by your congressional office *or* by an outside entity, but not both.
- If your congressional office sponsors an event, you may not accept cash or in-kind support from any individual or outside entity/organization for an official event.
  - You may accept unsolicited support from U.S. federal, state, or local government entities.
  - You may use funds from a Member's principal campaign committee only to pay certain expenses for official House events.
    - Permissible expenses include food and beverages, room rental, and travel expenses for guest speakers, but see page 7 for prohibited uses of campaign funds for official events.
- If an outside entity sponsors an event, the entity must use its own resources to plan, organize, and execute the event.
  - You may reserve a room on Capitol grounds for the event.
  - You may not allow the use of official resources for an outside entity's event (e.g., official letterhead, official seals).
  - You may not use official resources to advertise an outside entity's event (e.g., the Frank, official social media or websites).
    - You may issue a "Dear Colleague" as a reminder of an outside entity's event only if held on the Capitol Complex, and after the outside entity sends out invitations for the event.
  - Members may be named on outside entity invitations in certain cases (*Ask Ethics*), but invitations must clearly identify the sponsor.
- Personal offices may co-sponsor a constituent service event with one or more entities qualified under IRC § 170(c) in a Member's congressional district that provides information or tangible assistance to constituents in limited circumstances (see Joint Guidance Regarding Co-Sponsored Constituent Service Events).
  - Office and co-sponsor(s) jointly plan, advertise, and pay for event.
  - Promotional materials for event must be approved by CSC.
  - May not take place during blackout period.

**You may NEVER solicit or direct an entity to sponsor an event for  
your office.**

# **Leaving House Employment**

**If you are planning to leave House employment, you should review the Committee's Negotiations for Future Employment and Restrictions on Post-Employment memo for details – the memo and related forms are available on the Committee's website.**

- You are subject to all ethics rules until you are no longer on House payroll, including the House Gift Rule.
- If you plan to leave the House to be a lobbyist or work for another branch of government, you must be off House payroll before beginning your new job.
  - **Note:** Leave paid out at the end of your tenure with the House may mean your last date on House payroll is later than the last date you physically report to your office.
- For one year *after* you leave the House (“cooling off period”), you may not use confidential information obtained through personal and substantial participation in ongoing trade or treaty negotiations during the year *prior* to leaving the House in the course of representing, aiding, or advising anyone other than the United States regarding those ongoing negotiations.
- You are subject to **additional restrictions** if your annual base rate of pay for at least 60 days in the 12 months prior to leaving House employment is above the post-employment rate.<sup>x</sup>
  - You must submit a notice of negotiations to the Ethics Committee within three days after negotiations begin with a future employer.
  - You may need to submit a recusal form to the Ethics Committee after beginning employment negotiations.
  - During your cooling off period, you may not
    - communicate with/appear before former employing office with intent to influence official actions or decisions.
    - represent a foreign entity before any federal official with the intent to influence an official decision of the official.
    - aid or advise a foreign entity with the intent to influence an official decision of any federal official.

**If someone you know is prohibited from contacting your office because they are in their one-year cooling off period, you may not have any contact with them about official business, regardless of your own House salary or who initiates the contact. Violations are subject to criminal penalties.**

## Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> Staff who are required to file Financial Disclosure reports (*see* page 6) may need to report certain gifts on Schedule G of their annual and termination reports.

<sup>ii</sup> The [Special Occasion Gift Waiver Form](https://ethics.house.gov) can be found at <https://ethics.house.gov> under “Forms.”

<sup>iii</sup> *See* Comm. on Ethics, [Guest Policy Change and Reminder of Gift Rules for Attendance at Events](#) (Sept. 19, 2022).

<sup>iv</sup> Staff who are required to file Financial Disclosure reports (*see* page 6) may need to report certain trips on Schedule H of their annual and termination reports.

<sup>v</sup> *See* Comm. on Ethics, [Travel Regulations](#) (April 1, 2021).

<sup>vi</sup> The [Travel Calculator](#) can be found at <https://ethics.house.gov> under “Travel.”

<sup>vii</sup> The senior staff rate in 2025 is a base rate of pay of \$150,160 annually, or \$12,513 per month. *See* Comm. on Ethics, [The 2025 Outside Earned Income Limit and Salaries Triggering the Financial Disclosure Requirement and Post-Employment Restrictions](#) (Mar. 12, 2025).

<sup>viii</sup> The [PTR Due Date Calculator](#) may be found at <https://ethics.house.gov> under “Financial Disclosure.”

<sup>ix</sup> In 2025, the Outside Earned Income Limit is \$33,285. *See* Comm. on Ethics, [The 2025 Outside Earned Income Limit and Salaries Triggering the Financial Disclosure Requirement and Post-Employment Restrictions](#) (Mar. 12, 2025).

<sup>x</sup> In 2025, the post-employment rate for House staff who are not employees of “other legislative offices” is \$130,500. The post-employment rate for House staff who are employees of “other legislative offices” is \$192,500. *See* Comm. on Ethics, [The 2025 Outside Earned Income Limit and Salaries Triggering the Financial Disclosure Requirement and Post-Employment Restrictions](#) (Mar. 12, 2025).