

DEPARTMENT OF ADMINISTRATION GUIDANCE ON LOBBYING AND ETHICS LAWS

The guidance below provides a summary of the prohibitions on solicitation and acceptance of items of value under Wisconsin law. This guidance does not provide a comprehensive overview of the regulations that apply to state officials. For further information, please consult the Wisconsin Ethics Commission (<http://ethics.wi.gov/content/resources>) and Chapters 13 and 19 of the Wisconsin Statutes.

Lobbying law. Chapter 13, Wisconsin Statutes.

General Rule: Members of state agencies, boards, commissions, or councils that have rulemaking authority cannot **solicit** or **accept** anything of pecuniary value from a lobbyist or lobbying principal, even if they offer to pay for it. (§13.62, §13.625, 80 OAG 205). [Involvement in rulemaking is defined very broadly; you are likely considered to be involved in rulemaking just by virtue of the fact that you are appointed to a board, commission or council with rulemaking authority. §13.62(3)]. *Note that the Wisconsin Ethics Commission recently withdrew a formal opinion that allowed agency officials to remove themselves from the prohibitions of the lobbying law by refraining from engaging in rulemaking activities.*

Applies to members of boards with rule-making authority (“agency officials”). [Defined in §13.62(3)].

Exceptions:

- If the thing provided by a principal (not an individual lobbyist) is available to the general public on the same terms and conditions and is available to anyone who wants it and who meets the criteria for eligibility. [§13.625(2); 80 OAG 205]. For example, a member of the State Bar could attend a generally advertised continuing legal education conference put on by the State Bar (a lobbying principal) so long as it was available to anyone who wished to attend and met the criteria for eligibility, such as membership in the State Bar.
 - The criteria for eligibility must be:
 - Established and readily identifiable; and
 - Drawn without the purpose or effect of giving a preference to or conferring an advantage upon you.
 - There must be no offer or notice of availability directed to you that gives you an advantage.
- The lobbyist or principal is your employer and the thing provided does not exceed what the employer customarily provides to all employees (e.g., a paycheck). [§13.625(6r)]. (*Note that one’s status as a lobbyist does not prevent service as an agency official.*)
- The expense is provided as a benefit to the state, such as meals, transportation or lodging in connection with an event related to your state duties, which the state would otherwise pay. [§13.625(7); §19.56(3)(a)].
- Informational or educational materials. [§13.625(6t)].
- The lobbyist is a relative or resides in the same household [§13.625(6)].

*All lobbyists and lobbying principals are required to register here: <https://lobbying.wi.gov/Home/Welcome>.

Ethics Law. Chapter 19, Wisconsin Statutes.

General Rule: No state public official may use his or her public position or office to obtain financial gain or anything of substantial value for the private benefit of himself or herself or his or her immediate family, or for an organization with which he or she is associated. [§19.45(2); §19.42(2)].

Applies to individuals appointed by the governor, and other positions defined in Wis. Stat. 19.42(13).

Exceptions: (*Note that these exceptions are to the ethics code only. They are not exceptions to prohibitions under the lobbying code.*)

- The thing offered is unrelated to your state position (e.g. a family member or long-time friend).
- The expense is provided as a benefit to the state, such as meals, transportation or lodging in connection with an event related to your state duties which the state would otherwise pay. [§19.56(3)(a)].

**IF YOU HAVE ANY DOUBT IF SOMETHING IS PERMITTED,
ASK YOUR LEGAL OFFICE OR THE ETHICS COMMISSION**