



## Holiday Season Gifts FAQ

Ho Ho Ho! It's that time of year when customers and vendors may visit your city office with gift baskets, lunches, and other holiday treats. Remember that city ethics laws discourage city officers and employees from accepting gifts, especially from customers of city services and particularly from those regulated by your city agency. Do not accept gifts from individuals seeking licenses or permits from your agency.

**Why?** The act of giving a gift to a city employee can create an expectation of receiving something in return. On the other hand, a city employee who requests a gift may become obligated to the giver. In either case, the public may think that even a small gift influences or rewards you for performing your city duties. Kindly decline gifts and build public trust!



## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

**Q1: What is a gift?**

**A:** Anything that you did not pay full value for such as food, gifts cards, or gift baskets.

**Q2: Someone left a gift card on my service counter and hurried away. What should I do?**

**A:** Inform your director and forward the gift card to their office. The gift card will be treated as a gift to the city and your director may choose to donate it to a not-for-profit organization.

**Q3: A customer presented me with a gift. They got upset when I politely refused the gift. Was I impolite to refuse?**

**A:** No, you did the right thing. Here's a response to use the next time this happens: "No thank you, the best gift you can give me is a positive review." Provide them with a comment form that can be forwarded to your supervisor's and director's office. Scan the QR code in this newsletter to access the comment form.

**Q4: What about small food gifts, like musubi, cookies, manapua, and snacks to share with the office? Can I accept these gifts from customers or vendors at my service counter?**

**A:** Yes, small gifts valued at under \$25 from customers and vendors are considered "tokens of aloha" and are allowed under current city gifts guidelines. But, if the gift giver is applying for a license, permit, or registration, or is a vendor or contractor, it's best to politely refuse the gifts even if they are less than \$25. City employees generally cannot accept personal gifts. If your department has a stricter gift policy, then follow the stricter policy.

**Q5: Development companies, architectural firms, and contractors offer a holiday lunch for my entire department. They claim each lunch is only worth \$10 (a small bento and bottled water), is it okay to accept?**

**A:** No, even if each lunch may be valued at \$10, lunch for the entire department can be worth thousands of dollars. Breaking up the total is a way for the company to sidestep the ethics laws.



Scan the QR for the comment form.

### Still have questions?

Contact the Ethics Commission for specific guidance on city ethics laws:

p: 808-768-9242

w: [honolulu.gov/ethics](http://honolulu.gov/ethics)

e: [ethics@honolulu.gov](mailto:ethics@honolulu.gov)