

ADVISORY BULLETIN

FUNDRAISING and ACCEPTANCE OF SPONSORSHIPS AND DONATIONS FOR COMMUNITY EVENTS

Background

Rule 3 of the Code of Conduct for Members of Council (“the Code”) states:

3. Fundraising

Members shall not solicit funds from any person or organization if doing so would constitute an improper use of the influence of their office.

Members of Council (“members”) may show public support for or raise awareness of the activities of registered charities or non-profit community-based organizations, including arts and cultural organizations, but they must do so in a way that does not constitute an improper use of the influence of their office.

Members must also be mindful as to whether any fundraising efforts they undertake create a conflict of interest for them, either real or apparent.

Analysis

1. Fundraising

The concern that arises when a member uses their influence for fundraising, even for a good cause, is that a request for donations can create a sense of obligation on the part of the person who receives it.

As has been pointed out about fundraising:

“...the problem with using one’s influence, even for a good cause, is that such a request can be received in many different ways. The recipient may wish to do business with the City, lobby the City or be appointed by the City. Alternatively, the individual may work for the City or appear as an advocate for other citizens. The recipient may have made a deputation before committees or community councils. The recipient could take such a request as a way to gain an advantage by making a donation. Alternatively, ... recipients could feel uncomfortable for declining to donate.”¹

¹ Former Integrity Commissioner for the City of Toronto – now The Honourable Janet Leiper: Report Regarding Conduct of then Councillor Rob Ford, 2010, p.12

While elected officials are often called upon to support community causes, their role as a public officeholder demands that they conduct themselves with the utmost integrity, independence and impartiality when they do so.

It is a fundamental tenet of an open and accountable government that no individual or organization receive or appear to receive special access to government as a result of making financial contributions or donations.

As noted earlier, the key risk associated with members' fundraising activities is the perception or reality of undue influence either because a potential donor believes they may secure an advantage with the City if they make a donation in response to the member's fundraising request or conversely, fears they will not receive fair treatment before Council if they do not comply with the request.

To mitigate this risk, most jurisdictions across the country emphasize the need to avoid making direct solicitations or "targeting" specific donors with a fundraising request.

In particular, members must be careful not to solicit donations from registered lobbyists or from persons who have an application before the City or who do business with or may wish to do business with the City.

In saying this, however, it is important to recognize that because the City of Winnipeg's lobbyist registry is voluntary, it is not always possible to know who is a lobbyist. Nor is it always possible to predict whether a person plans to bring an application before or intends to do business with the City.

Accordingly, in order to avoid misusing their influence as a member or creating a conflict of interest for themselves, members should avoid directly "targeting" or soliciting a person – whether an individual or a corporation - to make a donation, regardless of the nature of the cause the member wants to support.

In particular, when performing their duties of office, members must not:

- financially or personally benefit from any fundraising activities;
- exert pressure on donors or potential donors to make donations or offer them preferential treatment in exchange for making a donation;
- fundraise for private charitable activities, for example, their family member's wedding social or a GoFundMe campaign;
- receive, track or manage donations.
- supply names or mailing lists to be used for invitations to a fundraising event; or
- allow their name, title or signature identifying themselves as a member of Council to appear on a solicitation for donations, including on an invitation to or advertisement for a charitable activity.

When a member wants to show support for a charitable activity or a non-profit community-based organization or initiative, the member may:

- publicly encourage support for the activity without soliciting or handling donations or funds; or
- act as honorary chair of the event, so long as they do not sign their name to any requests for donations.

Examples of permitted activities

- a member shares information about a local food bank's fundraiser on their social media, encouraging the public to make donations directly to the organization; or
- a member serves as honorary chair for a hospital foundation gala, helping raise awareness of the event without soliciting or handling donations.

Other considerations

Nothing in the fundraising rule affects a member's entitlement to use funds as allowed in existing policies, such as, for example, the Councillor's Ward Allowance Fund Policy.

Nor does the rule affect a member's ability to provide support for charitable activities or non-profit community-based organizations in their capacity as a private citizen.

It should also be understood that this bulletin is not applicable to fundraising which a member undertakes to raise campaign contributions for the purpose of the municipal election. That activity is governed by Rule 7 of the Code: Election-Related Activity.

2. Sponsorships and donations for community events

Under the Code, members' ability to receive sponsorships and donations for community events which they run themselves or which are run on their behalf, is permitted as an exception to the general prohibition on their ability to accept gifts and benefits as set out in Rule 4 of the Code.

That rule starts by saying:

4. Gifts or Benefits

Acceptability

a. Members shall not solicit or accept any gift or benefit that would, to a reasonable, well-informed person, create the appearance that the donor is seeking to influence the Member or gain the favour of the Member.

There are, however, some exceptions to the rule:

c. For clarification, it is generally not a violation of Rule 4.a. to accept the following:

....

vii sponsorships and donations for community events organized or run by a Member or a third party on behalf of a Member.

A “community event” is an event that a member holds for the benefit of their ward or their constituents. By way of example, in the CWAF Policy where it discusses eligible expenses related to the undertaking of “community events”, the policy uses the example of a “neighbourhood clean-up”.

But accepting sponsorships and donations for member run events can still give rise to the same concerns that accompany fundraising activity, for example, the potential to create an expectation on the part of the donor that they can secure future advantage from a member to whose event they make a donation or the creation of a conflict of interest for the member when it comes to making or influencing decisions about the person who gave them a donation.

Accordingly, to avoid these concerns:

- Members must be careful not to directly solicit a sponsorship or donation for a community event that they run or that is run on their behalf; and
- If a sponsorship or donation is offered to them members need to consider whether the donor is seeking to gain their favour or influence them such that if they accept the offer it will create a conflict of interest for them, requiring them to recuse themselves from any decision making that involves the donor, going forward.

In my 2025 Annual Report to Council, I recommended that unless Council wishes to amend the Code to put some form of regulation in place that limits or restricts members’ ability to accept sponsorships or donations for community events, in order to avoid the very harm which the rule prohibiting the acceptance of gifts is intended to avoid, from occurring, Council should consider removing this exception from Rule 4 of the Code.

Doing that would not affect Members’ ability to use eligible funds under the CWAF Policy to hold their community events.

Date: April 9, 2026