



State of Wisconsin  
Ethics Commission

# **WI CAMPAIGN FINANCE: CANDIDATE COMMITTEES – KEY TERMS & DEFINITIONS**

APRIL 2020

# KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS: CANDIDATE

- The definition of candidate provided in Wisconsin Statutes includes the following individuals:
  - An individual who takes affirmative actions to seek nomination or election to state or local office such as by filing nomination papers, being nominated by caucus or political party and certified by the filing officer, or if an individual begins receiving contributions or making disbursements to bring about their nomination or election for office.
  - A current state or local office holder.
  - A current state or local office holder subject to a recall petition.

[Wis. STAT. § 11.0101\(1\)](#)



# KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS: CANDIDATE COMMITTEE

- Every candidate is required to establish a candidate committee, even if that committee is only the candidate themselves or themselves and a treasurer.
- Candidate committee is defined as a committee authorized by a candidate or a candidate's agent to make or accept contributions or make disbursements in support of a candidate's campaign. [WIS. STAT. § 11.0101\(2\)](#).



# KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS: CONTRIBUTION

- What is a contribution?
  - Gifts, loans, or transfers of money to a committee;
    - Example: An individual mails you or your committee a check for \$100.00.
  - Transfer of funds between registered committees;
    - Example: A registered PAC or another candidate committee writes your committee a check for \$500.
  - Tangible personal property or services transferred to the committee;
    - Example: A friend buys stamps at the post office and gives them to your committee to use in mailing brochures (tangible personal property), or a friend who is a professional website developer volunteers to develop your campaign website free of charge (service).
    - These are in-kind contributions.
  - A ticket purchase for a fundraising event, or a sale of merchandise.
    - Example: When an individual buys tickets for an event held by a committee these are contributions.
    - Example: The committee has T-shirts or bumper stickers made and sells them to individuals. The entire amount of the purchase price counts as a contribution from the individual to the committee.

[Wis. STAT. § 11.0101\(8\)\(a\)](#)

Note: CFIS.wi.gov refers to contributions, interest income, other income, and refunds collectively as “receipts.” These all must be reported, even if they are not within the definition of contributions.



# KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS: CONTRIBUTION

- Examples of things that **are not** considered contributions:
  - Volunteer services;
  - Costs of preparing and transmitting personal correspondence;
  - Interest earned on an interest-bearing account;
  - Rebates or awards earned in connection with a debit or credit card;
  - A loan from a commercial lending institution made in the regular course of business;
  - News stories, commentaries, editorials, etc.;
  - Reuse of surplus materials from a previous campaign, if materials previously reported as a contribution; or
  - The cost of invitations, food, and beverage *only if* it is held in a private residence on behalf of the candidate committee.

» Note: For a complete list of things that are not considered contributions, please see the list provided in [Wis. STAT. § 11.0101\(8\)\(b\)](#).



# IN-KIND CONTRIBUTIONS

- In-kind contributions are goods, services, or property offered to the candidate's committee free of charge or at less than usual cost, or payment to a third party to purchase goods, services, or property on behalf of the candidate.
- When reporting in-kind contributions, use the fair market value of the good, service, or property.
- In-kind contributions must be itemized when they are reported, and they are added to contribution amounts received in monetary form (cash, check, or credit/debit) for the purpose of calculating contribution limits.
  - Example: Jane Smith provides your committee with \$50 in donated goods and a check for \$200, her total contribution for the purpose of determining compliance with contribution limits is \$250.

WIS. STAT. § [11.0101\(8\)\(a\)2](#), [11.1109](#)



# KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS: DISBURSEMENT

- What is a disbursement?
  - An expenditure by the committee from the committee’s depository account;
  - A transfer of tangible personal property or services by the committee;
    - Example: The candidate committee donates office supplies to another committee.
  - Transfer of funds to another committee; and
    - Example: Your campaign committee writes a check for \$100 to another candidate committee.
  - Purchasing a ticket for an event for another committee, regardless of whether the ticket is used to attend the event.
    - Example: The committee purchases tickets to a dinner hosted by a PAC for the candidate and treasurer to attend.

[WIS. STAT. § 11.0101\(10\)\(a\)](#)

Note: CFIS.wi.gov refers to disbursements as “expenses”



# KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS: DISBURSEMENT

- Disbursements do not include any of the following:
  - A nominal fee paid for a communication to the general public;
  - News stories, commentary, editorials by a broadcasting station, cable television operator, producer, or programmer, Internet site, or newspaper or other periodical publication, including an Internet or other electronic publication unless a committee owns the medium in which the news story, commentary, or editorial appears; or
  - A communication or Internet activity by an individual acting in his or her own behalf, or acting in behalf of another person if the individual is not compensated specifically for those services, including the cost or value of computers, software, Internet domain names, Internet service providers, and any other technology that is used to provide access to or use of the Internet, but not including professional video production services purchased by the individual.
    - » Note: For a complete list of things are not considered disbursements, please see the list provided in [WIS. STAT. § 11.0101\(10\)\(b\)](#).



# KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS: OBLIGATIONS AND LOANS

- An obligation is an express agreement by the candidate committee to make a disbursement. This includes the following:
  - A loan or loan guarantee;
  - A promise to purchase, rent, or lease tangible personal property; or
  - A promise to pay for a service that has been or will be performed.
- Example of an obligation:
  - Your candidate committee needs pamphlets printed for canvassing. You go to your local printer and provide them with the template to be printed and are expected to pay when you pick up your printed pamphlets. This is an obligation that you have incurred.

[Wis. Stat. § 11.0101\(23\)](#)



# WHERE TO GET MORE INFORMATION

- [State Candidate Committee Manual \(2019\)](#)
- [Candidate Committee Overview Page](#)
- Wisconsin Ethics Commission website (<https://ethics.wi.gov>)
- Wisconsin Ethics Commission staff:  
[campaignfinance@wi.gov](mailto:campaignfinance@wi.gov) or (608)266-8123

101 East Wilson Street, Suite 127  
P.O. Box 7125  
Madison, WI 53707-7125

