

Can I accept an offer to participate in a sponsored tour?

From time to time Members may receive invitations to take part in a tour for which all of their expenses are paid for by a third party. Most commonly, such opportunities are international in scope and are described as “fact-finding” tours or missions. To be considered a genuine fact-finding tour, Members must demonstrate that participating in the tour will allow them to become better informed regarding subject matters closely related to their official duties.

This Bulletin is designed to clarify the circumstances in which Members may appropriately accept such offers.

Is a sponsored tour a gift that has to be disclosed?

The *Members’ Conflict of Interest Act* prohibits Members from accepting a gift given in connection with the performance of their duties of office, unless given as an “incident of protocol or social obligations” (section 7).

Approved “sponsored travel” is considered to be a gift to the Province rather than a gift to the Member personally. However, the public has the right to know who is providing sponsored travel to Members and the value of such trips. Accordingly, in keeping with best practices in other Canadian Provinces and Territories, Members are now required to submit a Statement of Gifts and Personal Benefits as contained in our Form 5 (available on our website at <https://coibc.ca/disclosure-process/#Forms>). The Form should be submitted after the Member returns, when the full cost of the trip is known. This information will be included on the Member’s next Public Disclosure Statement.

What factors are considered?

Members are encouraged to request the Commissioner’s written opinion before accepting an invitation to participate in a tour for which the costs are partially or entirely paid for by a third party.

The following chart (overleaf) outlines the major factors the Commissioner takes into consideration when determining whether it is appropriate for a Member to participate in a sponsored tour.

The onus is on the Member to advise the Commissioner of the invitation and provide the required supporting documentation as far in advance as possible.

Factor	Supporting information required
<i>Who is the donor?</i>	Provide the name and some background information about the sponsor. Generally, invitations from a governmental, professional or public interest body will more readily be approved than invitations from a corporate or commercial enterprise.
<i>Does the tour have an educational purpose?</i>	Provide a copy of the letter of invitation, brochures, etc., and any other information describing the purpose of the tour. The letter of invitation should indicate why the donor selected you to participate. Note if you have any specific duties (e.g. speech, presentation).
<i>Is the subject matter of the tour directly linked to Member's duties of Office?</i>	Describe how the subject matter of the tour relates to your legislative or caucus committee role, or a particular issue facing your constituency.
<i>What educational activities/opportunities are there?</i>	Provide a detailed agenda or schedule of events, including (as far as possible) the names of individuals or organizations you will be meeting with. NB: While some socializing and networking sessions are appropriate, most events and activities should provide a learning opportunity for the Member or a platform to promote British Columbia.
<i>How is the public interest served?</i>	Describe how you will use the information learned or relationships developed to benefit your constituents or the people of British Columbia upon your return. Note if there are any follow-up activities planned (e.g. report to committee, presentation in constituency).

If you have any questions, please contact our Office for more information. We can be reached by phone at (250) 356-0750 or by email at conflictofinterest@coibc.ca.