



Publication 526 [Extracted]

To read Publication 526 in its entirety go to:
http://www.irs.gov/publications/p526/ar02.html#en_US_publink1000229693

The legal reasoning why membership dues are not considered tax deductible donations have been highlighted for your convenience.

Contributions You Can Deduct

Generally, you can deduct your contributions of money or property that you make to, or for the use of, a qualified organization. A gift or contribution is "for the use of" a qualified organization when it is held in a legally enforceable trust for the qualified organization or in a similar legal arrangement.

The contributions must be made to a qualified organization and not set aside for use by a specific person.

If you give property to a qualified organization, you generally can deduct the fair market value of the property at the time of the contribution. See *Contributions of Property*, later.

Your deduction for charitable contributions is generally limited to 50% of your adjusted gross income, but in some cases 20% and 30% limits may apply. In addition, the total of your charitable contributions deduction and certain other itemized deductions may be limited. See *Limits on Deductions*, later.

Table 1 in this publication lists some examples of contributions you can deduct and some that you cannot deduct.

Contributions From Which You Benefit

If you receive a benefit as a result of making a contribution to a qualified organization, you can deduct only the amount of your contribution that is more than the value of the benefit you receive. Also see *Contributions From Which You Benefit* under *Contributions You Cannot Deduct*, later.

If you pay more than fair market value to a qualified organization for merchandise, goods, or services, the amount you pay that is more than the value

of the item can be a charitable contribution. For the excess amount to qualify, you must pay it with the intent to make a charitable contribution.

Example 1.

You pay \$65 for a ticket to a dinner-dance at a church. All the proceeds of the function go to the church. The ticket to the dinner-dance has a fair market value of \$25. When you buy your ticket, you know that its value is less than your payment. To figure the amount of your charitable contribution, you subtract the value of the benefit you receive (\$25) from your total payment (\$65). You can deduct \$40 as a charitable contribution to the church.

Example 2.

At a fund-raising auction conducted by a charity, you pay \$600 for a week's stay at a beach house. The amount you pay is no more than the fair rental value. You have not made a deductible charitable contribution.

Athletic events. If you make a payment to, or for the benefit of, a college or university and, as a result, you receive the right to buy tickets to an athletic event in the athletic stadium of the college or university, you can deduct 80% of the payment as a charitable contribution.

If any part of your payment is for tickets (rather than the right to buy tickets), that part is not deductible. In that case, subtract the price of the tickets from your payment. 80% of the remaining amount is a charitable contribution.

Example 1.

You pay \$300 a year for membership in an athletic scholarship program maintained by a university (a qualified organization). The only benefit of membership is that you have the right to buy one season ticket for a seat in a designated area of the stadium at the university's home football games. You can deduct \$240 (80% of \$300) as a charitable contribution.

Example 2.

The facts are the same as in *Example 1* except that your \$300 payment included the purchase of one season ticket for the stated ticket price of \$120. You must subtract the usual price of a ticket (\$120) from your \$300 payment. The result is \$180. Your deductible charitable contribution is \$144 (80% of \$180).

Charity benefit events. If you pay a qualified organization more than fair market value for the right to attend a charity ball, banquet, show, sporting event, or other benefit event, you can deduct only the amount that is more than the value of the privileges or other benefits you receive.

If there is an established charge for the event, that charge is the value of your benefit. If there is no established charge, your contribution is that part of your payment that is more than the reasonable value of the right to attend the event. Whether you use the tickets or other privileges has no effect on the amount you can deduct. However, if you return the ticket to the qualified organization for resale, you can deduct the entire amount you paid for the ticket.



Even if the ticket or other evidence of payment indicates that the payment is a “contribution,” this does not mean you can deduct the entire amount. If the ticket shows the price of admission and the amount of the contribution, you can deduct the contribution amount.

Example.

You pay \$40 to see a special showing of a movie for the benefit of a qualified organization. Printed on the ticket is “Contribution—\$40.” If the regular price for the movie is \$8, your contribution is \$32 (\$40 payment – \$8 regular price).

Membership fees or dues. You may be able to deduct membership fees or dues you pay to a qualified organization. However, you can deduct only the amount that is more than the value of the benefits you receive. You cannot deduct dues, fees, or assessments paid to country clubs and other social organizations. They are not qualified organizations.

Certain membership benefits can be disregarded. Both you and the organization can disregard certain membership benefits you get in return for an annual payment of \$75 or less to the qualified organization. The benefits that can be disregarded are:

1. Any rights or privileges, other than those discussed under *Athletic events*, earlier, that you can use frequently while you are a member, such as:
 - a. Free or discounted admission to the organization's facilities or events,
 - b. Free or discounted parking,
 - c. Preferred access to goods or services, and
 - d. Discounts on the purchase of goods and services.
2. Admission, while you are a member, to events that are open only to members of the organization if the organization reasonably projects that the cost per person (excluding any allocated overhead) is not more than \$9.50.

Token items. You can deduct your entire payment to a qualified organization as a charitable contribution if both of the following are true.

1. You get a small item or other benefit of token value.
2. The qualified organization correctly determines that the value of the item or benefit you received is not substantial and informs you that you can deduct your payment in full.

The organization determines whether the value of an item or benefit is substantial by using Revenue Procedures 90-12 and 92-49 and the inflation adjustment in Revenue Procedure 2008-66.

Written statement. A qualified organization must give you a written statement if you make a payment to it that is more than \$75 and is partly a contribution and partly for goods or services. The statement must tell you that you can deduct only the amount of your payment that is more than the value of the goods or services you received. It must also give you a good faith estimate of the value of those goods or services.

The organization can give you the statement either when it solicits or when it receives the payment from you.

Exception. An organization will not have to give you this statement if one of the following is true.

1. The organization is:
 - a. The type of organization described in (5) under *Types of Qualified Organizations*, earlier, or
 - b. Formed only for religious purposes, and the only benefit you receive is an intangible religious benefit (such as admission to a religious ceremony) that generally is not sold in commercial transactions outside the donative context.
2. You receive only items whose value is not substantial as described under *Token items*, earlier.
3. You receive only membership benefits that can be disregarded, as described earlier.



You must keep records showing the time, place, date, amount, and nature of the expenses. For details, see Revenue Procedure 2006-50, 2006-47 I.R.B. 944, which is available at www.irs.gov/irb/2006-47_IRB/ar12.html.

Contributions You Cannot Deduct

There are some contributions you cannot deduct. There are others you can deduct only part of.

You cannot deduct as a charitable contribution:

1. A contribution to a specific individual,

2. A contribution to a nonqualified organization,
3. The part of a contribution from which you receive or expect to receive a benefit,
4. The value of your time or services,
5. Your personal expenses,
6. A qualified charitable distribution from an individual retirement arrangement (IRA),
7. Appraisal fees,
8. Certain contributions to donor advised funds, or
9. Certain contributions of partial interests in property.

Detailed discussions of these items follow.

Contributions to Individuals

You cannot deduct contributions to specific individuals, including the following.

- Contributions to fraternal societies made for the purpose of paying medical or burial expenses of deceased members.
- Contributions to individuals who are needy or worthy. This includes contributions to a qualified organization if you indicate that your contribution is for a specific person. But you can deduct a contribution that you give to a qualified organization that in turn helps needy or worthy individuals if you do not indicate that your contribution is for a specific person.

Example. You can deduct contributions for flood relief, hurricane relief, or other disaster relief to a qualified organization. However, you cannot deduct contributions earmarked for relief of a particular individual or family.

- Payments to a member of the clergy that can be spent as he or she wishes, such as for personal expenses.
- Expenses you paid for another person who provided services to a qualified organization.

Example. Your son does missionary work. You pay his expenses. You cannot claim a deduction for your son's unreimbursed expenses related to his contribution of services.

- Payments to a hospital that are for a specific patient's care or for services for a specific patient. You cannot deduct these payments even if the hospital is operated by a city, state, or other qualified organization.

Contributions to Nonqualified Organizations

You cannot deduct contributions to organizations that are not qualified to receive tax-deductible contributions, including the following.

1. Certain state bar associations if:
 - a. The state bar is not a political subdivision of a state,
 - b. The bar has private, as well as public, purposes, such as promoting the professional interests of members, and
 - c. Your contribution is unrestricted and can be used for private purposes.
2. Chambers of commerce and other business leagues or organizations.
3. Civic leagues and associations.
4. Communist organizations.
5. Country clubs and other social clubs.
6. Foreign organizations other than:
 - a. A U.S. organization that transfers funds to a charitable foreign organization if the U.S. organization controls the use of the funds or if the foreign organization is only an administrative arm of the U.S. organization, or
 - b. Certain Canadian, Israeli, or Mexican charitable organizations. See *Canadian charities, Mexican charities, and Israeli charities* under *Organizations That Qualify To Receive Deductible Contributions*, earlier.
7. Homeowners' associations.
8. Labor unions. But you may be able to deduct union dues as a miscellaneous itemized deduction, subject to the 2%-of-adjusted-gross-income limit, on Schedule A (Form 1040). See Publication 529, *Miscellaneous Deductions*.
9. Political organizations and candidates.

Contributions From Which You Benefit

If you receive or expect to receive a financial or economic benefit as a result of making a contribution to a qualified organization, you cannot deduct the part of the contribution that represents the value of the benefit you receive. See *Contributions From Which You Benefit* under *Contributions You Can Deduct*, earlier. These contributions include the following.

- Contributions for lobbying. This includes amounts that you earmark for use in, or in connection with, influencing specific legislation.
- Contributions to a retirement home that are for room, board, maintenance, or admittance. Also, if the amount of your contribution depends on the type or size of apartment you will occupy, it is not a charitable contribution.
- Costs of raffles, bingo, lottery, etc. You cannot deduct as a charitable contribution amounts you pay to buy raffle or lottery tickets or to play bingo or other games of chance. For information on how to report gambling

winnings and losses, see *Deductions Not Subject to the 2% Limit* in Publication 529.

- Dues to fraternal orders and similar groups. However, see *Membership fees or dues* under *Contributions From Which You Benefit*, earlier.
- Tuition, or amounts you pay instead of tuition, even if you pay them for children to attend parochial schools or qualifying nonprofit daycare centers. You also cannot deduct any fixed amount you may be required to pay in addition to the tuition fee to enroll in a private school, even if it is designated as a “donation.”
- Contributions connected with split-dollar insurance arrangements. You cannot deduct any part of a contribution to a charitable organization if, in connection with the contribution, the organization directly or indirectly pays, has paid, or is expected to pay any premium on any life insurance, annuity, or endowment contract for which you, any member of your family or any other person chosen by you (other than a qualified charitable organization) is a beneficiary.

Example. You donate money to a charitable organization. The charity uses the money to purchase a cash value life insurance policy. The beneficiaries under the insurance policy include members of your family. Even though the charity may eventually get some benefit out of the insurance policy, you cannot deduct any part of the donation.