

# ME Gift Card Guidance

(last updated and posted to our website 3/6/26)

Gift card use is guided by the following policies and procedures: [Gift Cards | Campus Controller's Office | University of Colorado Boulder](#). **Please work with your ME finance professional BEFORE buying any gift cards!**

There are **only four reasons** we can purchase gift cards:

## 1. Non Cash Recognition for Employees

- a. These **must** be reported as taxable income and be pre-approved via the [Recognition Program Authorization \(RPA\) | University of Colorado](#)
  - i. *This process must be followed for faculty/staff gifts such as ME branded shirts as well.*
- b. These requests should fall in one of the following 4 categories:
  - i. Length of service (for years of service 5+)
  - ii. Merit (for recognition for excellence)
  - iii. Participation (for involvement in a university activity)
  - iv. Safety (front line acts of bravery, etc)
- c. There are dollar limits for various types of awards. More information on Recognition Programs is available at [Finance Procedural Statement: Recognition and Training | University of Colorado](#).
- d. These must be reported via the [Payment Reporting](#) form.

## 2. Performance/Supporting Awards Non Cash Non Employee

- a. These **must** be pre-approved via the [Recognition Program Authorization \(RPA\) | University of Colorado](#)
- b. These requests should fall in one of the following 4 categories:
  - i. Length of service (for years of service 5+)
  - ii. Merit (for recognition for excellence)
  - iii. Participation (for involvement in a university activity)
  - iv. Safety (front line acts of bravery, etc)
- c. There are dollar limits for various types of awards. More information on Recognition Programs is available at [Finance Procedural Statement: Recognition and Training | University of Colorado](#).
- d. These must be reported via the [Payment Reporting](#) form.

### 3. Non Cash Participation/Recognition Non Employee

- a. These **must** be pre-approved via the [Recognition Program Authorization \(RPA\) | University of Colorado](#)
- b. These requests should fall in one of the following 4 categories:
  - i. Length of service (for years of service 5+)
  - ii. Merit (for recognition for excellence)
  - iii. Participation (for involvement in a university activity)
  - iv. Safety (front line acts of bravery, etc)
- c. There are dollar limits for various types of awards. More information on Recognition Programs is available at [Finance Procedural Statement: Recognition and Training | University of Colorado](#).
- d. These must be reported via the [Payment Reporting](#) form.

### 4. Study Subjects

- a. Gift cards cannot be distributed to study subjects who are non-US persons.
- b. Study subject payments receiving \$700+ per year must complete an IRS W-9 form.
  - i. Study subject payments of more than \$700 – and study subject payments in any dollar amount made to non-U.S. persons – may not be made through gift cards but must be issued via Study Subject Payment (SSP) forms. Further guidance for Study Subject Payments is available at [PSC Procedural Statement: Study Subject Payments | University of Colorado](#). The form is at <https://www.cu.edu/doc/form-ssp-062421-comments-fieldlsx?download=true>.
  - ii. The FSS (Financial Services and Solutions) team in the President's office grid says that a "cash-like" payment (i.e., gift card) up to \$700, provided to a non-employee, does not require tax reporting. *Therefore, it does not require a W-9.* [Finance Procedural Statement: Recognition and Training | University of Colorado](#)
- c. The requester must provide for the physical security of the cards.

#### **The [Gift Card](#) Procurement and distribution process:**

1. Read the guidance and secure the approvals noted above.
2. Complete the Gift Card Authorization Request at [Gift Card Authorization Request \(GC\) | University of Colorado](#) and circulate it for approvals.

- a. *All required documents should be on file with your finance professional BEFORE purchasing gift cards.*
3. Purchase the gift cards. The preferred procurement method is via Procurement Card.
  - a. **Secure them.**
  - b. Download the Gift Card Audit Log & Reconciliation Template Form at [Gift Card Audit Log & Reconciliation Template | University of Colorado](#)
  - c. Log all of the card serial numbers, values, and speedtypes used to purchase them.
4. Collect recipient names, IDs, and signatures in the Gift Card Audit Log during distribution.
  - a. Gift card issuances should be documented in a log (spreadsheet) or in a standard (pre-numbered) receipt book. This must uniquely identify each payment in order to document the appropriate use of the card for audit purposes.
  - b. Information to be included for each card shall include at a minimum: Recipient name or study subject ID (the study subject ID is any number assigned by the organizational unit to identify the individual in order to protect confidentiality); Date; Purpose of payment; Serial number of gift card; Payment amount; Signature or initials of recipient.
  - c. The custodian must also keep a log (e.g., a spreadsheet) of gift card purchases and disbursements for audit purposes. This log must tie the above receipts (e.g., by receipt number and/or card number) to the purchases of gift cards recorded in the PeopleSoft Finance System (e.g., by Journal ID). This log will be used by the campus controller's (finance) office to audit the accuracy and adequacy of the gift card recordkeeping. This is particularly important in demonstrating that gift cards are reasonably allocable to a grant.
5. Identify if any employees have received a gift card.
  - a. If yes, download and complete the Recognition Reporting Form at [Recognition Reporting \(RR\) | University of Colorado](#).
  - b. Forward the completed form to your finance professional to add employee IDs and send to [HCM\\_Community@cu.edu](mailto:HCM_Community@cu.edu) for **tax reporting purposes**.
  - c. Attach the completed form to the p-card expense report.
6. Once all gift cards from a single purchase have been distributed

- a. Attach the log to the p-card report for the purchase.
- b. Provide your finance professional with the log.
- c. Attach the completed form to the p-card expense report.
- d. **Notify the CCO at [pettycash@colorado.edu](mailto:pettycash@colorado.edu) and [meexpense@colorado.edu](mailto:meexpense@colorado.edu) of the gift card inventory status and that the program has ended.**

Some alternatives to gift card use to consider:

- Host a quarterly appreciation official function
- Work with your finance professional to determine if using the [Additional Pay Form](#) would be appropriate for use with established financial recognition award program.
- Work with Violet Peaks on options to provide guest refreshments and get charged/pay for them after the fact under the Official Functions account code.
  - Email [catering.BE@violetpeak.com](mailto:catering.BE@violetpeak.com) to discuss your needs and available options.
  - *Drink vouchers are considered gift cards and need to be tracked in adherence with the above guidelines.*
- Purchase campus meal cards using a speedtype, good at campus dining centers like C4C (Dining Hours | Housing & Dining | University of Colorado Boulder). The order form is available at [Meal Card Request - Meal Cards & Campus Cash - Service](#) project. ***These require a [Recognition Program Authorization \(RPA\) | University of Colorado](#) and a [Gift Card Audit Log & Reconciliation Template | University of Colorado](#) like other gift card programs.*** They can be used for:
  - Performance Support: employee appreciation, compensation for longer hours, participation, etc.
  - Non-Cash: not direct deposit.
  - Participation: focus group, volunteers, etc.
  - Recruitment: interviews, etc
  - Student functions
  - Training functions