

Part I

Section 501.--Exemption From Tax on Corporations, Certain Trusts, Etc.

26 CFR 1.501(c)(3)-1: Organizations organized and operated for religious, charitable, scientific, testing for public safety, literary, or educational purposes, or for the prevention of cruelty to children or animals.
(Also §§ 61, 102, 1012.)

Rev. Rul. 2006-27

ISSUES:

1. Whether organizations that otherwise meet the requirements of § 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code and are described in the situations below operate exclusively for charitable purposes.
2. Whether home buyers who receive down payment assistance from the organizations may exclude the amount of the assistance from their gross income as gifts under § 102.
3. Whether home buyers who receive down payment assistance from the organizations may include the amount of the assistance in the cost basis of their homes under § 1012.

FACTS

Situation 1

X is a non-profit corporation that helps low-income individuals and families purchase decent, safe and sanitary homes throughout the metropolitan area in which X is located. As a substantial part of its activities, X makes assistance available exclusively to low-income individuals and families to provide part or all of the funds they need to make a down payment on the purchase of a home. X uses standards set by Federal housing statutes and administered by the Department of Housing and Urban Development to determine who is a low-income individual. Individuals are eligible to receive assistance from X's program if they are low-income individuals, have the employment history and financial history necessary to qualify for a mortgage, and would so qualify but for the lack of a down payment. X also offers financial counseling seminars and conducts other educational activities to help prepare potential low-income home buyers for the responsibility of home ownership.

X will consider applications for assistance in connection with an applicant's purchase of any home that meets X's standards for habitability. Before making a grant of down payment assistance, X requires a home inspection report for the property that the applicant intends to buy to ensure that the house will be habitable.

To fund its down payment assistance program and other activities, X conducts a broad based fundraising program that attracts gifts, grants and contributions from several foundations, businesses and the general public.

X's grantmaking process is structured to ensure that X's staff awarding grants on behalf of X does not know the identity of the party selling the home to the grant applicant or the identities of any other parties, such as real estate agents or developers, who may receive a financial benefit from the sale. The staff also does not know whether any of the interested parties to the transaction have been solicited for contributions to X or have made pledges or actual contributions to X. Further, X does not accept any contributions contingent on the sale of a particular property or properties.

Situation 2

Y is a nonprofit corporation that is like X in all respects as set forth in Situation 1, except as follows. Under Y's grantmaking procedures, Y's staff considering a particular applicant's application knows the identity of the party selling the home to the grant applicant and may also know the identities of other parties, such as real estate agents and developers, who may receive a financial benefit from the sale. Moreover, in substantially all of the cases in which Y provides down payment assistance to a home buyer, Y receives a payment from the home seller. Further, there is a direct correlation between the amount of the down payment assistance provided by Y in connection with each of these transactions and the amount of the home seller's payment to Y. Finally, Y does not conduct a broad based fundraising campaign to attract financial support. Rather, most of Y's support comes from home sellers and real estate-related businesses that may benefit from the sale of homes to buyers who receive Y's down payment assistance.

Situation 3

Z is a nonprofit corporation formed to combat community deterioration in an economically depressed area that has suffered a major loss of population and jobs. Studies have shown that the average income in the area is below the median level for the State. Z cooperates with government agencies and community groups to develop an overall plan to attract new businesses to the area and to provide stable sources of decent, safe and sanitary housing for the area residents without relocating them outside the area. As part of the renewal project, Z receives funding from government agencies to build affordable housing units for sale to low and moderate-income families. As a substantial part of its activities, Z makes down payment assistance available to eligible home buyers who wish to purchase the newly-constructed units from Z. Z also offers financial counseling seminars and conducts other educational activities to help prepare potential low and moderate-income home buyers for the responsibility of home ownership.

To fund its down payment assistance program and other activities, Z conducts a broad based fundraising program that attracts gifts, grants and contributions from several foundations, businesses and the general public.

LAW

Section 501 of the Code provides for the exemption from federal income tax of corporations organized and operated exclusively for charitable or educational purposes, provided that no part of the net earnings inures to the benefit of any private shareholder or individual. See § 501(c)(3).

Section 1.501(c)(3)-1(c)(1) of the Income Tax Regulations provides that an

organization operates exclusively for exempt purposes only if it engages primarily in activities that accomplish exempt purposes specified in § 501(c)(3). An organization must not engage in substantial activities that fail to further an exempt purpose. In Better Business Bureau of Washington, D.C. v. U.S., 326 U.S. 279, 283 (1945), the Supreme Court held that the “presence of a single . . . [nonexempt] purpose, if substantial in nature, will destroy the exemption regardless of the number or importance of truly . . . [exempt] purposes.”

Section 1.501(c)(3)-1(d)(1)(ii) provides that an organization is not organized or operated exclusively for exempt purposes unless it serves a public rather than a private interest. To meet this requirement it is necessary for an organization to establish that it is not organized or operated for the benefit of private interests.

Section 1.501(c)(3)-1(d)(2) defines the term “charitable” as used in § 501(c)(3) as including the relief of the poor and distressed or of the underprivileged, and the promotion of social welfare by organizations designed to lessen neighborhood tensions, to eliminate prejudice and discrimination, or to combat community deterioration. The term “charitable” also includes the advancement of education.

Section 1.501(c)(3)-1(d)(3)(i) provides, in part, that the term “educational” as used in § 501(c)(3) relates to the instruction of the public on subjects useful to the individual and beneficial to the community.

Section 1.501(c)(3)-1(e) provides that an organization that operates a trade or business as a substantial part of its activities may meet the requirements of § 501(c)(3) if the trade or business furthers an exempt purpose, and if the organization’s primary

purpose does not consist of carrying on an unrelated trade or business.

In Easter House v. U.S., 12 Cl. Ct. 476, 486 (1987), aff'd, 846 F.2d 78 (Fed. Cir. 1988), the U.S. Court of Federal Claims considered whether an organization that provided adoption and related health services to pregnant women who agreed to place their newborns for adoption through the organization qualified for exemption under § 501(c)(3). The court concluded that the organization did not qualify for exemption under § 501(c)(3) because its primary activity was placing children for adoption in a manner indistinguishable from that of a commercial adoption agency. The court rejected the organization's argument that the adoption services merely complemented the health-related services to unwed mothers and their children. Rather, the court found that the health-related services were merely incident to the organization's operation of an adoption service, which, in and of itself, did not serve an exempt purpose. The organization did not provide health-related services to unwed mothers who wished to keep their children or who arranged for an adoption independent of the organization. The organization's sole source of support was the fees it charged adoptive parents, rather than contributions from the public. The court also found that the organization competed with for-profit adoption agencies, engaged in substantial advertising, and accumulated substantial profits. Accordingly, the court found that the "business purpose, and not the advancement of educational and charitable activities purpose, of plaintiff's adoption service is its primary goal" and held that the organization was not operated exclusively for purposes described in § 501(c)(3). Easter House, 12 Cl. Ct. at 485-86.

In American Campaign Academy v. Commissioner, 92 T.C. 1053 (1989), the court held that an organization that operated a school to train individuals for careers as political campaign professionals, but that could not establish that it operated on a nonpartisan basis, did not exclusively serve purposes described in § 501(c)(3) because it also served private interests more than incidentally. The court found that the organization was created and funded by persons affiliated with a particular political party and that most of the organization's graduates worked in campaigns for the party's candidates. Consequently, the court concluded that the organization conducted its educational activities with the objective of benefiting the party's candidates and entities. Although the candidates and entities benefited were not organization "insiders," the court stated that the conferral of benefits on disinterested persons who are not members of a charitable class may cause an organization to serve a private interest within the meaning of § 1.501(c)(3)-1(d)(1)(ii). The court concluded by stating that even if the political party's candidates and entities did "comprise a charitable class, [the organization] would bear the burden of proving that its activities benefited members of the class in a non-select manner." American Campaign Academy, 92 T.C. at 1077.

In Columbia Park and Recreation Association v. Commissioner, 88 T.C. 1 (1987), aff'd without published opinion, 838 F.2d 465 (4th Cir. 1988), the court held that an association formed in a private real estate development to operate parks, swimming pools, boat docks, and other recreational facilities did not qualify as a § 501(c)(3) organization. Although the organization provided some benefit to the general public, the primary intended beneficiaries were the residents and property owners of the private

development. Thus, the organization operated for a substantial non-exempt purpose rather than for exclusively charitable purposes.

Rev. Rul. 67-138, 1967-1 C.B. 129, held that helping low-income persons obtain adequate and affordable housing is “charitable” because it relieves the poor and distressed or underprivileged. In Rev. Rul. 67-138, the organization carried on several activities directed to assisting low-income families in obtaining improved housing, including (1) conducting a training course relative to various aspects of homebuilding and homeownership, (2) coordinating and supervising joint construction projects, (3) purchasing building sites for resale at cost, and (4) lending aid in obtaining home construction loans.

Rev. Rul. 70-585, 1970-2 C.B. 115, discussed four situations of organizations providing housing and analyzed whether each organization qualified as charitable within the meaning of § 501(c)(3). Situation 1 described an organization formed to construct new homes and renovate existing homes for sale to low-income families who could not obtain financing through conventional channels. The organization also provided financial aid to low-income families eligible for loans under a Federal housing program who did not have the necessary down payment. The organization made rehabilitated homes available to families who could not qualify for any type of mortgage. When possible, the organization recovered the cost of the homes through very small periodic payments, but its operating funds were obtained from federal loans and contributions from the general public. The revenue ruling held that by providing homes for low-income families who otherwise could not afford them, the organization relieved the poor

and distressed.

Situation 2 described an organization formed to ameliorate the housing needs of minority groups by building housing units for sale to persons of low and moderate-income on an open-occupancy basis. The housing was made available to members of minority groups who were unable to obtain adequate housing because of local discrimination. The housing units were located to help reduce racial and ethnic imbalances in the community. As the activities were designed to eliminate prejudice and discrimination and to lessen neighborhood tensions, the revenue ruling held that the organization was engaged in charitable activities within the meaning of § 501(c)(3).

Situation 3 described an organization formed to formulate plans for the renewal and rehabilitation of a particular area in a city as a residential community. The median income level in the area was lower than in other sections of the city and the housing in the area generally was old and badly deteriorated. The organization developed an overall plan for the rehabilitation of the area, sponsored a renewal project, and involved residents in the area renewal plan. The organization also purchased an apartment building that it rehabilitated and rented at cost to low and moderate-income families with a preference given to residents of the area. The revenue ruling held that the organization was described in § 501(c)(3) because its purposes and activities combated community deterioration.

Situation 4 described an organization formed to alleviate a shortage of housing for moderate-income families in a particular community. The organization planned to build housing to be rented at cost to moderate-income families. The Service held that the organization failed to qualify for exemption under § 501(c)(3) because the

organization's program was not designed to provide relief to the poor or further any other charitable purpose within the meaning of § 501(c)(3) and the regulations.

Rev. Rul. 72-147, 1972-1 C.B. 147, held that an organization that provided housing to low-income families did not qualify for exemption under § 501(c)(3) because it gave preference to employees of a business operated by the individual who also controlled the organization. Although providing housing for low-income families furthers charitable purposes, doing so in a manner that gives preference to employees of the founder's business primarily serves the private interest of the founder rather than a public interest.

Rev. Rul. 72-559, 1972-2 C.B. 247, held that an organization that subsidized recent law graduates during the first three years of their practice to enable them to establish legal practices in economically depressed communities that have a shortage of available legal services, and to provide free legal services to needy members of the community, qualified for exemption under § 501(c)(3). Although the recipients of the subsidies were not themselves members of a charitable class, the resulting benefit to them did not detract from charitable purposes. Rather, the young lawyers were merely the instruments by which the organization accomplished the charitable purpose of providing free legal services for those unable to pay for, or obtain, such services.

Rev. Rul. 74-587, 1974-2 C.B. 162, held that an organization providing low-cost or long-term loans to, or equity investments in, businesses operating in economically depressed areas qualified for exemption under § 501(c)(3). The organization provided financial assistance only to businesses that were unable to obtain funds from

conventional sources, and gave preference to businesses that would provide training and employment opportunities for unemployed or under-employed area residents.

Although some of the individual business owners receiving financial assistance from the organization were not themselves members of a charitable class, the benefit to them did not detract from the charitable character of the organization's program. As in Rev. Rul. 72-559, the recipients of aid were instruments for accomplishing the organization's charitable purposes.

Rev. Rul. 76-419, 1976-2 C.B. 146, held that an organization that converts blighted land in an economically depressed community to an industrial park and leases space on favorable terms to businesses that agree to hire a significant number of unemployed area residents and train them in needed skills qualifies for exemption under § 501(c)(3). The organization furthered charitable purposes by improving economic conditions for the poor and distressed and combating community deterioration. The organization offered inducements to businesses solely for the purpose of advancing charitable goals.

Section 61 provides that, except as otherwise provided in subtitle A (relating to income taxes), gross income means all income from whatever source derived.

Section 1012 provides, generally, that the basis of property shall be its cost to the taxpayer.

Section 1016(a)(1) provides that proper adjustment shall be made to the basis of property for expenditures, receipts, losses, or other items properly chargeable to capital account.

Section 1001(a) provides that the gain from the sale or other disposition of property is the excess of the amount realized over the adjusted basis for determining gain provided in § 1011. Section 1011(a) provides generally that the adjusted basis for determining gain from the sale or other disposition of property is the basis determined under § 1012, adjusted as provided in § 1016.

Section 102 provides that the value of property acquired by gift is excluded from gross income. A gift “proceeds from a ‘detached and disinterested generosity,’ . . . ‘out of affection, respect, admiration, charity or like impulses.’” Commissioner v. Duberstein, 363 U.S. 278, 285 (1960). Payments that proceed from “the constraining force of any moral or legal duty,” or from “the incentive of anticipated benefit’ of an economic nature,” are not gifts. Duberstein, 363 U.S. at 285. Thus, payments attendant to ordinary business or commercial transactions, or that proceed primarily from the moral or legal obligations attendant such transactions, are not gifts. However, a payment made to an individual that responds to the individual’s needs, that is made without economic or other consideration being received by the donor, and that does not proceed from any moral or legal duty, is motivated by detached and disinterested generosity, and may be excluded from gross income as a gift under § 102. See, e.g., Rev. Rul. 99-44, 1999-2 C.B. 549.

ANALYSIS

In Situation 1, X’s purposes and activities relieve the poor, distressed and underprivileged by enabling low-income individuals and families to obtain decent, safe and sanitary homes. The way X conducts its down payment assistance program

establishes that X's primary purpose is to address the needs of its low-income grantees. See Rev. Rul. 70-585, Sit.1. As a condition of providing assistance, X requires a home inspection to ensure that the house the applicant intends to buy will be habitable. X's financial counseling seminars and other educational programs help to prepare potential home buyers for the responsibility of home ownership. See Rev. Rul. 67-138. X conducts a broad based fundraising program, and X receives support from a wide array of sources. X's policies of ensuring that its grantmaking staff does not know the identity or contributor status of the party selling the home to the grant applicant (or any other party who may receive a financial benefit from the sale), and of not accepting contributions contingent on the sale of any particular properties, ensure that X is not beholden to any particular donors or other supporters whose interest may conflict with that of the low-income buyers X is working to help.

X's grantmaking procedures combined with its efforts to educate homebuyers ensure that X is operated primarily to benefit the low-income beneficiaries of its downpayment assistance. The low-income beneficiaries constitute a charitable class. Any benefit to other parties (such as home sellers, real estate agents, or developers) who participate in the transactions does not detract from the charitable purpose of relieving the poor and distressed. See Rev. Ruls. 72-559, 74-587, 76-419. Because X is operated exclusively for charitable purposes, X qualifies for exemption from federal taxation as an organization described in § 501(c)(3).

By contrast, in Situation 2, Y does not qualify as an organization described in § 501(c)(3). To finance its down payment assistance activities, Y relies on sellers and

other real-estate related businesses that stand to benefit from the transactions Y facilitates. Furthermore, in deciding whether to provide assistance to a low-income applicant, Y's grantmaking staff knows the identity of the home seller and may also know the identities of other interested parties and is able to take into account whether the home seller or another interested party is willing to make a payment to Y. Y's receipt of a payment from the home seller corresponding to the amount of the down payment assistance in substantially all of the transactions, and Y's reliance on these contributions for most of its funding indicate that the benefit to the home seller is a critical aspect of Y's operations. In this respect, Y is like the organization considered in Easter House, which received all of its support from fees charged to adoptive parents, so that the business purpose of the adoption service became its primary goal and overshadowed any educational or charitable purpose. Like the organization considered in American Campaign Academy, Y is structured and operated to assist private parties who are affiliated with its funders. Like the organizations considered in American Campaign Academy, Easter House, and Columbia Park Recreation Association, Y also serves an exempt purpose, but because Y is not operated exclusively for exempt purposes, Y does not qualify for exemption from federal income tax as an organization described in § 501(c)(3).

In Situation 3, although Z does not limit its down payment assistance program to low-income recipients, Z's down payment assistance program still serves a charitable purpose described in § 501(c)(3) because it combats community deterioration in a specific, economically depressed area that has suffered a major loss of population and

jobs. Through a combination of counseling and financial assistance, Z helps low and moderate-income families in that area to acquire decent, safe and sanitary housing and to prepare for the responsibilities of home ownership. In this respect, Z is like the organization described in Situation 3 of Rev. Rul. 70-585. Because Z is operated exclusively for charitable purposes, Z qualifies for exemption from federal taxation as an organization described in § 501(c)(3).

Down payment assistance payments for home buyers in Situations 1 and 3 are made by those organizations out of a detached and disinterested generosity and from charitable or like impulse, rather than to fulfill any moral or legal duty, and thus qualify for exclusion from such home buyers' gross incomes as "gifts" under § 102. The benefits provided to the home buyers in these circumstances are sufficiently removed from the interests of any home sellers or sales agents that they proceed from a detached and disinterested generosity on the part of the donor organization, and such grants lack the indicia of a rebate, price adjustment, or *quid pro quo* incident to a sale. Favorable treatment under § 102 is thus appropriate. The home buyer's payment of such amount toward the purchase of the residence will be included in his or her cost basis under § 1012.

In Situation 2, in substantially all of the cases in which Y provides down payment assistance to a home buyer, Y receives a payment from the home seller that directly correlates to the amount of the down payment assistance Y provides to the home buyer. In those cases, the payments received by the home buyers do not qualify for exclusion from gross income as gifts under § 102. The payments do not proceed from detached

and disinterested generosity, but rather are in response to an anticipated economic benefit, namely facilitating the sale of a seller's home. Under Duberstein, supra, such payments are not gifts for purposes of § 102. Unlike in Situations 1 and 3, in Situation 2, the down payment assistance received by those home buyers represents a rebate or purchase price reduction. As a rebate or purchase price reduction, the down payment assistance is not includible in a home buyer's gross income under § 61 and the amount of the down payment assistance is not included in the home buyer's cost basis under § 1012, as adjusted under § 1016.

HOLDINGS

1. In Situations 1 and 3, the organization is operated exclusively for charitable purposes and qualifies for exemption from federal income tax as an organization described in § 501(c)(3). In Situation 2, the organization is not operated exclusively for charitable purposes, and consequently, does not qualify for exemption from federal income tax as an organization described in § 501(c)(3).

2. In Situations 1 and 3, the home buyers may exclude the down payment assistance from their gross income as gifts under § 102. In Situation 2, the home buyers may not exclude the down payment assistance as gifts under § 102. However, in Situation 2, the down payment assistance is excluded from the gross income of home buyers because it represents a rebate or purchase price reduction.

3. In Situations 1 and 3, the home buyers may include the down payment assistance in the cost basis of their homes under § 1012. In Situation 2, the home buyers may not include the amount of the down payment assistance in the cost basis of

their homes under § 1012. Rather, the amount of the down payment assistance represents a rebate or purchase price reduction that is excluded from the home buyer's cost basis under § 1012.

DRAFTING INFORMATION

The principal author of this revenue ruling is Elizabeth C. Kastenbergh of Exempt Organizations, Tax Exempt and Government Entities Division. For further information regarding this revenue ruling, contact Elizabeth C. Kastenbergh on (202) 283-9468 (not a toll-free call).