




What is the tax rate on gifted money in North Carolina?

What are the rules that apply to gifted money? Are you allowed to call any unearned money you give to someone else, meaning unearned by them, gifted money?

Here's a breakdown of how "gifting" money works, both in North Carolina and under U.S. federal law, plus some thoughts on what counts as a "gift."

1. State (North Carolina) gift tax — basically none



- North Carolina does *not* have a state-level gift tax for gifts made on or after January 1, 2009. 
- Some older North Carolina forms or sources may reference a "Gift Tax Return" for nonresidents in particular circumstances (e.g. real estate or tangible property located in NC), but for most gift-giving among residents there is no NC gift tax liability. 
- Because there is no state gift tax, you don't pay a gift tax to the state, though you may still have federal obligations. 

So in your case in North Carolina, the "tax rate on gifted money" from a state perspective is zero (i.e. no state gift tax).

2. Federal gift tax rules


Since states like NC have no gift tax, the relevant rules are federal. Here are key points:

What is a "gift" under federal law?

- A "gift" is a transfer of money or property (or the use of property) where you do *not* receive full (or adequate) compensation in return. 
- Even if someone "sells" something to another person at less than fair market value, the difference is considered a gift. 
- Also, the intent matters: gifts are traditionally thought of as transfers done out of "detached and disinterested generosity," not in a quid pro quo or business context.



Annual exclusion

- For each recipient, there is an **annual exclusion** amount—the maximum you can gift in a calendar year without needing to report it. For 2025, that amount is **\$19,000** per recipient. 

- Gifts *within* that limit are not taxable and do not reduce your lifetime exclusion.
- If you are married, you and your spouse can each give up to the exclusion to the same person (effectively doubling how much you can give tax-free).
- Note: this exclusion applies only to **present interests**, not gifts of future interests (i.e. where the donee doesn't yet have the right to use or enjoy the gift immediately).

Lifetime exemption and tax rates

- If your gifts to a particular person in a year exceed the annual exclusion, you must **file IRS Form 709** (United States Gift (and Generation-Skipping Transfer) Tax Return) to report the excess.
- That excess doesn't necessarily mean you *owe* tax—rather, it typically reduces your remaining **lifetime gift & estate tax exemption**.
- As of 2025, that lifetime exemption is **\$13.99 million** per individual.
- If, over time, your cumulative taxable gifts (i.e. those above annual exclusions) plus your estate exceed that exemption, then amounts beyond that threshold may be taxed. The federal gift/estate tax rates can go up to **40%** on the portion above the exemption.
- The donor (giver) is responsible for paying the gift tax, not the recipient.
- Recipients generally do *not* include gifts in their gross income for income tax purposes (i.e. gifts are not "income" to the recipient).

3. Can you call *any* unearned money given to someone a "gift"?

In everyday conversation, one might loosely call money you give to someone (and they didn't "earn" it by working or performing a service) a "gift." But from a legal/tax standpoint, not every transfer qualifies as a gift (or is treated as such) for tax purposes. Here are important distinctions and caveats:

- If you pay someone for a service, that is *not* a gift, even if the person calls it "bonus" or "gift." It is compensation and likely taxable to the recipient as income. The IRS is wary of people avoiding payroll or income taxes by labeling payments "gifts."

- Some transfers may look like gifts but have strings attached or expectations, which may affect their tax treatment.
- Also, small “gifts” from employers to employees (in the course of employment) often cannot be excluded as gifts—there are rules about “de minimis fringe benefits” etc.

Wiki... +1

- For a transfer to qualify as a gift for purposes of the gift tax rules, the giver must part with control and not receive something of essentially equivalent value in return. If there is some quid pro quo or the recipient gives something back (even indirectly), it may not be a pure gift under tax law.

So, yes—you *can* call money you give someone (that they did not “earn” by services) a “gift” in casual speech. But for tax purposes, only those transfers that meet the statutory definitions (no adequate compensation, full relinquishment of control, no strings) are treated as “gifts.”

If you like, I can help you run a hypothetical: “If I gave \$100,000 to my child in NC, what would my federal tax consequences be?” Would you like me to do that?



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Sources

What is the federal tax rate? Like say I give someone \$3 million and they have low income outside of that, like \$40,000 or \$50,000 a year or less

Good question — and it's an important distinction: **gift tax is based on the giver, not the receiver.**

So even if the recipient earns only \$40k–\$50k a year, **they don't pay any income tax on the gift at all.** Gifts are *not* taxable income to the recipient. The *giver* is the one who may owe federal gift tax (if any).

Let's break it down step by step:



1. Who pays

- The **giver (donor)** pays federal gift tax, not the recipient.
 - The recipient pays **no federal or state income tax** on money received as a gift. (They don't even report it on their income tax return.)
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2. Annual exclusion (2025)

- You can give **\$19,000 per person per year** with no tax or reporting requirement.
 - If you're married, you and your spouse can "split" gifts and give up to **\$38,000** per recipient per year with no tax.
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3. Lifetime exemption and tax rate

- The **federal lifetime gift and estate tax exemption** for 2025 is **\$13.99 million per individual**.
 - That means you can give away up to \$13.99 million over your lifetime (beyond annual exclusions) **without owing any tax**.
 - Gifts beyond that exemption are taxed at the **federal gift tax rate**, which is **progressive up to 40%** (the top marginal rate).
 - The rate schedule roughly mirrors the estate tax brackets.
 - For gifts that exceed the exemption, only the excess is taxed.
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4. Example — your \$3 million gift

Assume:

- You give one person **\$3,000,000** in 2025.

- You've never used your lifetime exemption before.

Step 1. Subtract annual exclusion

$\$3,000,000 - \$19,000 = \$2,981,000$ taxable gift

Step 2. Apply lifetime exemption

That \$2.981 million is **covered by your lifetime exemption**, so:

- You must **file IRS Form 709** to report it.
- But you **owe \$0 in actual tax**, because it just reduces your remaining exemption.

Your new remaining exemption = \$13.99 million – \$2.981 million = **\$11.009 million**.

Only after you've given away **more than \$13.99 million total** (in lifetime gifts and at death combined) would any gift/estate tax become payable.



5. What if you *did* exceed the exemption?

- Once your total taxable gifts exceed your lifetime exemption, the **federal gift tax rate is 40%** on the excess amount.
 - Example: if you had already used all your exemption and gave \$1 million more, the tax due would be \$400,000.
 - But again, that threshold is very high — most people never reach it.
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6. For the recipient

- They owe **no tax**.
 - The gift is not treated as income.
 - However, if the gift produces *income* later (e.g., interest, dividends, capital gains), *that* income is taxable to them.
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Summary

Situation	Who Pays	Rate	Notes
Gift \leq \$19,000	No one	—	Annual exclusion applies
Gift $>$ \$19,000 but lifetime total \leq \$13.99 million	No one	—	Must file Form 709, but no tax
Lifetime gifts $>$ \$13.99 million	Giver	40% on excess	Recipient still pays nothing

If you'd like, I can show you how the lifetime exemption works together with your estate at death (since it's a unified system — gift and estate tax are the same tax applied at different times). Would you like me to show that example next?



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And all that matters, in calling it a gift, is that you do not receive anything in return, tangible or intangible (like rights, etc)?

Exactly — that's the essence of it.

Under federal tax law, a **"gift"** is defined by what you *don't* get back.

Here's a precise breakdown of how the IRS defines and interprets that idea.



1. Core definition

The IRS defines a gift as **"a transfer to an individual, either directly or indirectly, where full consideration (measured in money or money's worth) is not received in return."**

(Source: *IRS Publication 559* and *26 U.S.C. § 2511*.)

That phrase — "money or money's worth" — means *anything of measurable economic value*, whether tangible or intangible.

So if you give someone \$1 million and receive **nothing of value** (no property, no services, no rights, no promises, no benefit), it's a **pure gift**.



2. What *doesn't* count as a gift (i.e., when you receive something)

Even if you don't get *cash* back, any of the following makes it **not a gift** (or at least not fully a gift):

- **Services rendered** – paying someone for work or effort (even "helping out") is compensation, not a gift.
 - **Loans** – if there's an expectation of repayment, it's a loan, not a gift.
 - **Property or rights exchanged** – if you give money in return for property, shares, real estate, or a right (like intellectual property or a license), that's an exchange, not a gift.
 - **Forgiving a debt** – if you forgive someone's loan, the cancellation of the debt *is* treated as a gift (because you no longer receive repayment).
 - **Quid pro quo situations** – if there's a mutual expectation (e.g., you "gift" someone money and they later help your business), the IRS can deem that partial consideration, not a gift.
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3. The "detached and disinterested generosity" standard

Courts have long used this phrase (from *Commissioner v. Duberstein*, 363 U.S. 278 (1960)):

A gift proceeds from a *detached and disinterested generosity*, out of affection, respect, admiration, charity, or like impulses.

So — intent matters.

If your motive is generosity or affection, it's a gift.

If your motive is business, reputation, influence, or expected benefit, it's not.

4. Intangibles count too

The IRS includes intangible value in "money's worth." Examples:

- Giving money in exchange for a **right**, such as a trademark, copyright, or an agreement not to compete — that's not a gift.
- Giving money in exchange for a **promise**, such as future services, a relationship obligation, or preferential treatment — also not a gift.

Even if what you receive can't be easily measured in dollars, if it has **economic substance** or **expectation of benefit**, the IRS may treat it as consideration.

5. Simple rule of thumb

You can call money a **gift** — and the IRS will agree — **if all three of these are true**:

1. You **voluntarily transfer** it (no legal or contractual obligation).
2. You **get nothing in return** of measurable value (tangible or intangible).
3. You **intend it as generosity**, not payment or exchange.

If all three hold, it's a legitimate gift, no matter how large the amount.

Would you like me to show a few *gray-area examples* (like "gift with strings attached," "gift to a romantic partner," or "gift to a business partner") to illustrate where the line gets blurry?



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What if you have someone that you did something you consider wrong to, who has no conceivable legal claim, and your gift is a way of saying "I'm sorry for every wrong that has ever been done to you."

That's a beautifully human question — and an excellent legal one, too.

The short answer: **yes, that can still be a true gift** under federal law, *as long as there's no expectation of anything in return and no legal obligation*.

Let's unpack the reasoning carefully, because this kind of situation sits at the intersection of **law**, **intent**, and **human motivation** — and the IRS does distinguish among those layers.

1. The legal standard

The IRS and courts care about *intent and consideration* — not emotional motive.

So the key test is still this:

Did you transfer money or property **without receiving anything of value in return**, and **without a legal or contractual duty to do so**?

If yes, then it's a **gift**.

It does not matter whether your reason was affection, guilt, apology, charity, admiration, or sorrow — as long as:

- There is no expectation of repayment, forgiveness, or any other benefit to you.
- The person has no claim or entitlement that you are settling.

Then the IRS classifies it as a **gift given out of personal motivation**, which is still covered by the ordinary gift-tax rules.

2. When it might *not* be a gift

It becomes **not a gift** (or partly not a gift) *only* if:

- You are **settling or preventing a claim** — for example, paying someone who could conceivably sue you, even if you just think “they might.” That would be viewed as **consideration for releasing a claim**, not a gift.
- You **gain something of measurable value**, even emotional or reputational — for example, if you do it publicly to repair your image, it could be treated as a business or reputational expense rather than a gift.

But if your payment is **strictly personal** and **motivated by remorse or compassion**, and there's **no real or potential claim**, then it remains a *pure gift*.

3. Example comparisons

Situation	Legal Treatment
You give an ex-partner \$50,000 “because I feel guilty for how I treated you” and there’s no contract, lawsuit, or expectation.	Gift (voluntary, no consideration).
You pay someone \$50,000 as part of a “confidential settlement” after they threaten to sue.	Not a gift — it’s a legal settlement, compensation for a claim.
You pay a former employee \$10,000 as “a gesture of goodwill” after firing them, but to avoid bad publicity.	Not a gift — a business expense or compensation.
You donate \$100,000 anonymously to someone you wronged years ago, with no communication or expectation.	Gift — entirely gratuitous.

4. The IRS’s perspective on emotional motive

Courts recognize that gifts can stem from complex human emotions.

In *Commissioner v. Duberstein* (1960), the Supreme Court made clear that what matters is whether the payment was made:

“from detached and disinterested generosity ... out of affection, respect, admiration, charity, or like impulses.”

That covers a wide range of moral or emotional motives — including remorse, sorrow, or a wish to make amends — so long as it’s not tied to any benefit to the giver.

5. Bottom line

If your payment:

- isn’t legally required,
- doesn’t settle any claim,
- gives you no material or contractual benefit, and
- comes purely from personal generosity or regret,

then it's treated as a **gift** for tax purposes.

You would file **Form 709** if it exceeds the annual exclusion (\$19,000 in 2025), and it would count against your lifetime exemption — but **no one pays tax** unless you surpass that \$13.99 million lifetime total.

Would you like me to show how the IRS would likely handle it if the situation were *borderline* — for example, if your apology gift could be construed as a form of restitution or settlement?



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Yes

Excellent — this is where things get subtle.

We're now in the gray zone between a **moral gesture** (true gift) and a **compensatory transfer** (not a gift).

The difference comes down to how the IRS and courts interpret your **intent** and **the recipient's rights or expectations** — whether real, implied, or even just plausible.

Let's look at both sides clearly.



1. When an “apology gift” remains a *true gift*

The IRS will usually treat an “I’m sorry” payment as a legitimate **gift** if these three conditions hold:

1. No legal duty or claim exists.

The recipient has no current, potential, or implied right to the money.

Example: You hurt someone’s feelings, or regret having treated them unfairly years ago — but there was no contract, crime, or tort.

That’s *personal remorse*, not a legal settlement.

2. No expectation of benefit.

You don’t expect the payment to buy forgiveness, reputation repair, cooperation, or any other tangible or intangible return.

(It must be emotionally one-directional: you’re not trying to *get* something.)

3. The motivation is moral, not transactional.

It proceeds from what the IRS calls “detached and disinterested generosity” — including compassion, affection, remorse, or moral duty.

Courts consistently uphold that these motives produce valid gifts.

✓ Result:

Gift rules apply.

You file *Form 709* if it’s above the annual exclusion, but there’s no immediate tax.

The transfer counts toward your \$13.99 million lifetime exemption.

The recipient owes nothing.



2. When an “apology gift” drifts into *restitution or settlement*

The gray area appears if your payment could be interpreted as **compensation for a harm** (even emotional harm) that someone could, in principle, claim — or if the gift serves a **self-protective purpose**.

Examples

Scenario	IRS View
You tell someone, “I know you could have sued me for that accident; I want to make it right,” and give them \$50 000.	Likely not a gift. Consideration for release of a potential claim; the IRS treats it as a settlement .
You wire someone \$10 000 after a confrontation and say “Please don’t go to the police.”	Definitely not a gift. Payment in exchange for forbearance or silence — a legal or quasi-contractual exchange.
You pay a former employee you mistreated to “help them out” but also to ensure they say nice things about you publicly.	Not a gift. Payment in exchange for reputational benefit — considered compensation or a business expense.
You give your ex-partner \$100 000 “for all the pain I caused” but you both know there’s no legal wrongdoing.	Gift. Purely moral transfer, no rights released, no benefit expected.



3. How the IRS determines which side you’re on

When reviewing a questionable large transfer, the IRS looks for **objective evidence** of intent and consideration:

- 1. Correspondence or agreements** – Was there any mention of a claim, “compensation,” “settlement,” “release,” or “nondisclosure”?
If yes, that strongly indicates it’s not a gift.
- 2. Timing** – Was the payment made immediately after a dispute, legal notice, or accusation?
That timing suggests it’s linked to a claim.
- 3. Recipient’s reporting** – Did the recipient treat it as taxable income?
The IRS often cross-checks both parties’ returns.
- 4. Giver’s deduction** – Did the giver try to deduct it as a business or restitution expense?
If so, that contradicts a “gift” position.
- 5. Public or reputational context** – Was the payment publicized or tied to PR?
That can convert it into a business expenditure.



4. Tax implications if it's *not* a gift

If the IRS deems it compensation, restitution, or settlement:

- **For the giver:** it may be deductible as a business or legal expense (if related to business activity).
- **For the recipient:** it becomes **taxable income**, unless it compensates for *physical* injuries (which are excluded under §104(a)(2)).
- It's then subject to ordinary income tax rates, not gift tax rules.



5. Rule of thumb: "Was the transfer meant to repair a relationship, or to neutralize a liability?"

- If it's *repairing a relationship* (moral, personal, emotional) → **Gift**.
- If it's *neutralizing a liability* (legal, reputational, or practical) → **Not a gift**.

The line hinges on *intent and context*, not just words.

Even calling it a "gift" in writing won't protect you if it's functionally a settlement — the IRS looks at *substance over form*.



6. Best practice for clarity

If you ever wanted to make such a transfer and ensure it is legally recognized as a gift:

- Document it simply as a **personal gift given voluntarily and without consideration**.
- Avoid language suggesting any exchange ("for," "in return for," "in settlement of").
- Keep it private (publicity can make it look transactional).
- File Form 709 if it's large, and state that it's a **gratuitous personal gift**.

Would you like me to show you what a one-paragraph **statement of intent** might look like (the kind you'd keep with your tax records) to clarify that such a transfer was a gift, not a settlement?



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