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Special Occasion License/Virtual Non-Profit Auctions Compliance

You may be seeing an increase in donation requests, as non-profits get creative with fundraising and move more and more to virtual events. Many non-profits may not be aware that a Special Occasion License is still needed to sell or auction alcohol - even for virtual events.

The LCB has released the following helpful guidelines for virtual auctions vs online auctions.

Are online or virtual auctions of alcohol allowed?

Virtual auctions of alcohol are allowed by non-profit organizations under a special occasion license, but online auctions are not allowed. For more detail on the difference between the two, see directly below:

Virtual Auctions

Virtual auctions of alcohol are allowed by non-profit organizations that have obtained a special occasion license. This license allows the non-profit organization to auction alcohol at a specific date, place, and time. To be in compliance with the special occasion license while auctioning alcohol, the non-profit's auctioneer must be located at a licensed location with the auction items and auction the alcohol to people in real time. These people would teleconference into a meeting to bid and win during the event. The alcohol would then be shipped to the winners or the winners could come pick the alcohol up as soon as they win.

Online Auctions

Online auctions are auctions that take place online for a period of time longer than a few hours (such as a "silent auction" that lasts for a day). Since these events do not take place at a specific date, place, and time, the special occasion license would not cover the event and there is currently not a license type that would allow such practice. As a result, selling alcohol this way is not currently allowed under Washington law.

Donations of Experiences/other where alcohol may be incidental

These donations are allowed without the nonprofit needing a special occasion license. These donations may not be only alcohol (ex: special release beers, tastings for 2). These donations may be experiences or similar in a licensed establishment (ex: gift certificates as long as it can be used to purchase anything and is not limited to beer purchases, only).