

Refreshments Reference Guide September 2001

- Food or refreshments may NOT be purchased with appropriated funds when the purpose is to:
 - (1) maximize the time of executives;
 - (2) get the participants acquainted and interacting;
 - (3) encourage participants to arrive on time;
 - (4) break the ice;
 - (5) be an award;
 - (6) prevent participants from going to their offices for snacks and delaying their return to the training; and
 - (7) reward employees for arriving punctually at their assigned duty location.
- Purchases of refreshments that are not supported by the appropriate documentation may result in loss of charge card privileges, repayment of expenses, and potential disciplinary action.
- When in travel status, if a lunch or dinner meal is paid for by the sponsor of an event, attendees must reduce the per diem claim on their travel voucher by the amount allotted for that meal.
- The cost of refreshments may not be made as part of another fee, such as a conference room rental, when they are otherwise not allowable.
- There is no statutory authority that allows us to purchase meals for people outside of the Federal Government.

The situations where we can provide meals and refreshments are divided into three different categories of approval and documentation requirements as follows;

APPROVAL BY ASSISTANT SECRETARY, LAND AND MINERALS MANAGEMENT

Internal Conferences and Meetings With Over 30 Attendees

In accordance with Federal Travel Regulation Amendment 89, light refreshments are an allowable expense for conferences with over 30 attendees. These conferences must be approved by the Assistant Secretary, Land and Minerals Management. This authority may be redelegated to the Deputy Assistant Secretary, Land and Minerals Management. Recurring internal meetings up to 50 attendees may be exempted by the Assistant Secretary; however, an exempted meeting may not include light refreshments. The expense for light refreshments may not exceed 30 percent of the Meals and Incidental Expenses rate per day per attendee. With very limited exceptions, refreshments are to be provided only to Federal employees where the majority of attendees are in travel status. An exception to the rule would be to pay for a small number of non-Federal participants who are requested to speak or participate in the conference at the agency's request.

If the costs of meeting rooms, refreshments, etc., associated with a conference exceed \$2,500, they will need to be procured by a contracting officer. Contact your contracting officer early in the planning process to help with making the arrangements. If under \$2,500, the meeting room and refreshment costs can be paid for by a non-warranted cardholder who has authority to use the purchase business line of the Government charge card.

Documentation Requirements

Conference planning requests must be routed to the Assistant Secretary through your State/Center Director and your Washington Office Program Assistant Director. The Department of the Interior (DOI) Financial Administration Memoranda (FAM) No. 2001-011 and No. 2001-012, and Federal Travel Regulation (FTR) Amendment 89 contain DOI and Federal guidance related to planning conferences and meetings.

Documentation must be filed with the obligation document, e.g., purchase order or charge card account and include a copy of the Assistant Secretary's approval to conduct the conference/meeting, a determination that refreshments are prudent, and an attendance log showing the name and duty station of each attendee.

STATE/CENTER DIRECTOR APPROVAL

Award and Recognition Ceremonies

The Government Employees Incentives Award Act (GEIAA) authorizes expenditure of appropriated funds for light refreshments to complement agency functions when the principal purpose is to recognize employees.

Light refreshments may be purchased not to exceed \$2 per person or \$500, whichever is less, per event per organizational entity, to facilitate public recognition of award recipients under GEIAA. Examples of light refreshments are coffee, tea, cookies, pastries, cake, punch, and other food provided in quantities that are not considered to be a meal, nor can they be used to supplement a meal.

Attendance at the event may not be confined to the award recipients and the donor. For the purpose of this determination, an organizational entity is defined as:

State Office - Deputy State Director or Staff Chief
Field Office - Assistant Field Office Manager
National Center - Group Manager
Washington Office - Deputy Assistant Director/Group Manager

Combined Federal Campaign (CFC)

Agencies may cooperate in charity fundraising campaigns for health and welfare activities, even though these activities are not specifically provided for by statute (67 Com. Gen. 254). Light refreshments may be purchased to promote the CFC, not to exceed \$2 per person or \$500, per event, whichever is less.

Ethnic Celebrations

Samples of ethnic foods prepared and served as part of celebrations intended to promote Equal Employment Opportunity objectives by increasing employee appreciation for cultural heritage of differing ethnic groups are allowable. The ethnic food samples are intended to serve an educational and not merely an entertainment function. Samples must not be served as a meal. Comptroller General (CG) Decision B-199387)

Training

The Government Employees Training Act (GETA) authorizes payments for meals or refreshments for those attending training programs, in travel status, or at their duty stations when it is determined that providing meals or refreshments is a necessary expense incidental to providing the training and to the employees' achieving the objectives of the program.

Training is defined in GETA as “. . . the process of providing for and making available to an employee . . . a planned, prepared, and coordinated program, course, curriculum, subject, system, or routine of instruction or education, in . . . fiscal, administrative or other, fields which are . . . directly related to the performance by the employee of official duties for the Government . . .”

The mere fact that employees may become informed or learn about a subject as a result of a scheduled meeting does not necessarily qualify the meeting as a “program . . . of instruction or education” for the purposes of this document.

Documentation Requirements

A written determination must be made and filed with the obligation document, e.g., purchase order or charge card account. The determination should include, at a minimum, the following information when applicable:

- (1) Date and location of event;
- (2) Estimated number of attendees;
- (3) Number of honorees, if applicable;
- (4) Estimated cost; and
- (5) Authorizing statute citation.

Authority for approving expenditures is delegated to the State Director. This authority may be redelegated.

NO SPECIAL APPROVALS REQUIRED

Meetings and Conferences–Non-Government Sponsored

Meals and refreshments at meetings and conferences sponsored by others may be a necessary expense when attendance is determined to be essential to ensure full participation and the meeting is not an internal business meeting. These meetings must involve topical matters of general interest to Government and non-Government participants (68 CG Decision 606).

Registration or Attendance Fees, With Meals Included

Payment of registration fees that include a nonseparable charge for the cost of a meal or refreshments representing an incidental part of the training that is externally organized or sponsored, regardless of whether the training is held at or away from the duty station, may be an allowable cost. A written determination must document that:

- (1) Attendance is necessary to full participation;
- (2) The employees are not free to take meals elsewhere without missing essential formal discussions, lectures, or speeches concerning the purpose of the meeting; and
- (3) The meal is part of a formal conference or meeting that includes not only functions such as speeches or business carried on during the meal, but also substantial functions taking place separate from the meal.

Registration or Attendance Fees, With Meals as a Separate Item

Meal expenses may be an allowable cost when the benefits of attendance would be lost if the employee missed the meals. All of the conditions in the previous paragraph must be met and documented.

Documentation Requirements

A written determination to the purchase order or charge card file must document that:

- (1) Attendance is necessary to full participation;
- (2) The employees are not free to take meals elsewhere without missing essential formal discussions, lectures, or speeches concerning the purpose of the meeting; and
- (3) The meal is part of a formal conference or meeting that includes not only functions such as speeches or business carried on during the meal, but also substantial functions taking place separate from the meal.

Volunteers

The Bureau of Land Management Manual Section 1114, Volunteers, allows for the reimbursement of meal expenses while on assignment. Fixed rates are determined as part of the volunteer agreement. Volunteers may be paid only the amount specified in their volunteer agreement, and volunteers are responsible for their own meals and refreshments.

As with employees, award ceremonies for volunteers may include light refreshments not to exceed \$2 per person or \$500, whichever is less, per event and cannot be used to supplement a meal.

UNALLOWABLE EXPENDITURES

Internal Business Meetings

The payment of meal or refreshment expenses in connection with internal business meetings sponsored by Government agencies is not an allowable expenditure. The presence of a mealtime speaker between two segments of a general meeting to discuss business, management, and day-to-day operations does not provide an adequate basis to treat the meeting as other than an internal Government business meeting (CG Decision B-230939).

Social Gatherings, Including Retirement Ceremonies

Appropriated funds are not available for social events or gatherings, including retirement ceremonies

References.

Amendment 89 to the Federal Travel Regulations, 1/14/2000

DOI Financial Administration Memorandum No. 2001-011, Conference Planning - Implementing Guidance, 7/25/2001

DOI Financial Administration Memorandum No. 2001-012, Conference Planning - Clarification on Internal Meetings, 9/7/2001

5 U.S.C. 4101 Training. Definitions.

5 U.S.C. 4109 Expenses of Training.

5 U.S.C. 4110 Expenses of Attendance at Meetings.

5 U.S.C. 4501 Incentive Awards. Definitions.

67 CG Decision 254: CFC.

68 CG Decision 606: Internal Business Meetings and Conferences.

CG Decision File: B-230939 Meals for Attendees at Internal Government Meetings.

CG Decision File: B-247966 Coast Guard -- Coffee Break Refreshments at Training Exercise - Non-Federal Personnel.

CG Decision File: B-270199 Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation -- Provision of Food to Employees.

CG Decision File: B-247563.4 Expenditures by the Department of Veterans Affairs include decisions on (1) employee breakfasts, (2) refreshments at employee meetings, (3) Christmas cards and stamps, (4) per diem in excess of amount authorized, and (5) CFC receptions.

CG Decision File: B-199387 Army -- Food Served at Cultural Awareness Celebrations.

CG Decision File: B-250250 General Services Administration incurring food and entertainment expenses at the grand opening of a Government cafeteria.