

MEALS

Frequently Asked Questions

Summary Issue: Charging meals to a federal grant is only allowable under certain circumstances. Meals for subject participants and people in travel status associated with grant business are allowable. All other meals need to meet certain criteria for being necessary and reasonable for the benefit of a project related goal/aim. The following are a set of specific scenarios under which certain meals are considered allowable or unallowable to a grant. It is the Principal Investigator's (PI) or his/her designee's responsibility to ensure that all meals charged to a sponsored agreement are in compliance with University and sponsor policies. Sponsored Projects Accounting (SPA) reviews meals submitted via check request, purchase order, interdepartmental invoice, travel report, etc for compliance and may disallow any meals that do not appear to be reasonable (e.g. over \$50) and allowable.

We have a grant that requires us to bring subject participants in for all day screenings and testing. Can we provide them with lunch while they are here?

Yes – the cost of meals for subject participants is allowable on a Federal Grant.

We host retention events for our subject participants. Can we provide meals/refreshments at the event?

Yes – the cost of meals for subject participants is allowable on a Federal Grant.

Note – be careful to only include necessary WU staff in this event. While it may be necessary to have staff on hand for the event, we should not charge the grant for unnecessary WU participants.

The PI is taking a post-doc recruitment candidate out to dinner to interview them for an open position on the grant. Can the cost of the dinner be charged to the grant?

Yes and No - the cost of the meal for the candidate may be charged to the grant, but the cost of the meal for the PI is not allowable.

My Principal Investigator (PI) has a NIH Kirschstine/NRSA Training Grant (T32). He/She would like to hold monthly meetings for all the trainees on the Grant. A guest speaker will attend every meeting to accomplish the teaching mission. Can we charge the cost of providing refreshments or meals to the grant during these monthly meetings?

No – the cost of refreshments/meals for routine training sessions and meetings of WU students/trainees/faculty/staff are not allowable.

We have a grant that requires we coordinate and host a Conference. Can we charge the cost of providing refreshments and/or meals to the grant during the conference?

Yes – the cost of meals/refreshments during a Conference/Seminar/Meeting with a formal agenda and participants from different locations are allowable.

MEALS - FAQ

Page 2

Note: It is not allowable to charge the grant for WU staff/faculty meals when taking the out of town participants to dinner following the all day meeting.

My PI holds weekly lab meetings to discuss the progress on the grant. Can the cost of the catered lunch be charged to the grant?

No – the cost of meals/refreshments for routine lab meetings are not allowable.

My PI recently took a trip to attend a conference in Cambridge, MA. During the trip, the PI had dinner with a colleague/collaborator from Harvard, a colleague/collaborator from Duke and a friend from Vanderbilt. They spent a large amount of time discussing their research projects. Can the cost of the meal be charged to the grant?

The cost of the PI's meal is allowable as he/she is in travel status, however, the cost of the collaborator/colleague's meal depends on if he/she is also in travel status and the nature of their relationship to the project being charged. In this case, the collaborator from Harvard is not in travel status so the cost of the meal could not be charged to the project. The Duke collaborator's meal may be allowable if he/she is devoting effort to the grant being charged (via a sub-agreement or consulting agreement from WU) and attending the conference for the purpose of that grant. The Vanderbilt friend's meal is not allowable.

A consultant is coming in from out of town to do some work for a grant. While here, the PI plans to take the consultant out to dinner to discuss the progress of the project. May the cost of the meal be charged to the grant?

The cost of the dinner for the consultant would be allowable to charge to the grant as the consultant is in travel status. The cost of the dinner for the PI or any other WU faculty/staff attending the dinner would NOT be allowable as they are not in travel status.

We have a grant that requires we hold quarterly advisory committee meetings with various collaborators from all over the country. Can the cost of catering in lunch be charged to the grant?

Yes – the cost of meals/refreshments during a Conference/Seminar/Meeting with a formal agenda and participants from different locations is allowable.

Note: It is not allowable to charge the grant for WU staff/faculty meals when taking the out of town participants to dinner following the all day meeting.

My grant requires that we hold focus groups with various St. Louis agencies to obtain information for the study – can the cost of meals/refreshments be charged to the grant?

Yes – the cost of meals/refreshments during a Conference/Seminar/Meeting with a formal agenda and participants from different locations is allowable.

MEALS – FAQ
Page 3

We had a federal employee come to WU as a speaker at a conference – can the cost of meals for the federal employee be charged to the grant?

No – the cost of meals for a Federal Employee is NOT allowable on a Federal Grant.

Additional policies and guidelines can be found on the SPA website, see www.spa.wustl.edu.

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