

Using Federal Education Funds to Pay for Food

Food Costs for Families and/or Students

Using federal education funding for food for parents/families during school-based events is allowable only when there is a connection to a programmatic purpose and the cost is reasonable. Funding can pay for food for Title I meetings that support student and school achievement through events such as parent advisory councils, family math and reading training, family curriculum and assessment training, the annual Title I meeting, meetings to plan and discuss the Parent and Family Engagement Policy and/or the School-Parent Compact, etc.

The following costs are allowable for parents/families or students:

- Nutritional snacks for students in extended day (after-school) programs,
- Nutritional snacks for children in childcare while families are participating in grant activities,
- Food necessary to conduct nutrition education programs for families, and
- Food for family engagement activities in which **refreshments** are necessary to encourage participation or attendance by parents/families and thus meet program objectives.

Full meals for families/parents or students are not allowable for these purposes under any

circumstances. The IRS defines a meal as, “A quantity of food that equals a full serving of breakfast, lunch or dinner,” whereas refreshments include, but are not limited to, “coffee, tea, milk, juice, soft drinks, ice cream, donuts, bagels, muffins, fruit, vegetable trays, cheese trays, pretzels, cookies and chips.” (IRM, § 1.32.20.16[5] and IRM § 1.32.20.16[6])

When using federal funds to purchase food for family engagement events, local education agencies (LEAs) and schools should avoid the following:

- Purchasing food items that could be interpreted as constituting a full meal such as, pizza, tacos, hot dogs, sandwiches, etc.
- Purchasing multiple of food items, that when combined, constitute a full meal. For example, purchasing a sandwich tray, fruit tray, veggie tray, and cookie tray all for the same event.

In addition, all food expenditures must be reasonable in cost, necessary to accomplish program objectives, and an integral part of the instructional program.

Food Costs for Staff

It is not allowable to use federal education funding for food for staff professional development. Federal funds may not pay for food, meals, and snacks for professional development including onsite training or offsite conferences and workshops, except in rare instances where you can prove that, paying for food and beverages with federal funds is necessary to meet the goals and objectives of a federal grant.

Use these five questions to determine if using federal education funds to pay for lunch for professionals is an allowable expense.

1. Is a working lunch necessary? The information must be critical to the overall agenda. The agenda must state this is a working lunch.
2. Is the lunch portion of the agenda a critical, substantive discussion?

3. Is there a genuine time constraint to get lunch due to a topic-packed agenda prohibiting time for lunch? In very rare cases, are there no meal places within a couple of hours' access?
4. Is the lunch cost reasonable?
5. Has the local education agency (LEA) carefully documented that it is reasonable and necessary?

Additional information about using federal education funds for conferences and meetings can be found on the U.S Department of Education's website [here](#).