

Procedure 20310a: Business Meals and Refreshments

All university funds, regardless of their source of origin, are considered to be public funds and are governed by Virginia law and university guidelines. Expenditures from public funds must be able to withstand the test of public review. This procedure provides guidance on the appropriate use of these funds related to business meals and refreshments.

Expenditures for food must be 1) in accordance with state policy, 2) reasonable and necessary, and 3) part of a bona fide business function of the University. Non-public funds (i.e. agency, generated, and private funds) may be used for events considered to be primarily social in nature. Generally, snacks or refreshments are not appropriate on public funds; however, exceptions may be approved. Normally food purchases for Virginia Tech faculty and staff are not allowed on public funds. Alcohol is never an appropriate expenditure on public funds.

Business meals must be within the established per diem limit for the location of the event. The per diem calculation includes taxes, delivery fee, and tip. Service charges, rentals, and set-up fees are not included in the calculation.

The department should gain approval by submitting a food approval form via <https://foodapproval.controller.vt.edu/> prior to purchasing food on public funds. Please allow up to five (5) business days for your request to be processed. The form requires details such as a description of the event, business purpose, date of the event, fund number, beginning and end time of the event, location, attendee designation, and an estimated cost. Accounts Payable will review the request to determine if the expenditure is appropriate on public funds and provide a determination. The approval, including all applicable documentation, should be included with the reimbursements in Chrome River, or with the HokieMart requisitions.

The following procedure provides guidance consistent with university policies for use of public funds for food and refreshment expenditures. These guidelines provide a non-inclusive list of functions for which public funds may or may not be used. In all cases, departments must be very careful to document the business necessity for all food-related expenditures. Generally, it is not considered a business necessity to purchase business meals or reception refreshments at the beginning or the end of an event as employees are then free to make meal or refreshment purchases on their own.

A. In-Person Business Meals

It **MAY BE** appropriate to utilize public funds to provide in-person attendees a **Business Meal** when there is no alternative to schedule meetings outside of normal meal times when the following circumstances apply:

- Interview with applicant for employment opportunity and official university hosts (generally, no more than one or two hosts, but determined by the Department Head). ***Please note, Accounts Payable pre-approval is not required for this type of business meal.*** However, all applicable documentation must be included with the request for payment and the cost of the meal must be within per diem limits.
 - This provision includes the applicant's spouse for positions of Faculty, Department Heads, Directors, Deans, Vice Presidents, Vice Provosts, and President
- Meals for visiting scholars and faculty in host department (number determined by Department Head)
- Meeting with business leaders outside of the University for the purpose of student interaction and/or future contributions to programs
- Meetings with colleagues from other universities to discuss university research, instruction, public service, and administrative functions
- Working sessions with University student leaders (number determined by Department Head)
- Awards ceremonies for students
- Departmental committee meetings for special functions (not routine committee meetings)
- Student meals with Vice Presidents, Deans, or Department Heads
- Multi-department or multi-program meetings if it is the only time they can meet
- Meals provided in private homes in lieu of restaurant or catering services (special event, guest speaker, etc.)
- Employee Awards program in accordance with Human Resources Awards Policy (signed HR approval form should be attached to the invoice submitted for payment)
- University-wide staff appreciation day recognition; Annual staff appreciation day recognition for Extension Offices
- Annual departmental planning event to include one meal within per diem
- When private funds are provided for the event, i.e. Continuing Education Conference where participant fees are collected
- On-campus student programs that promote student engagement and support the university's academic mission (excludes standard classes and labs). Students must be the primary beneficiary of these events.

It is **NOT** appropriate to utilize public funds for **Business Meals** in the following circumstances:

- Virginia Tech staff member's spouse, children, or guests without an official business purpose for attending.
- Lunches for deans or department heads
- Regularly scheduled meetings for university employees, i.e. monthly department head meetings within a college
- Meals at which all participants are university employees of the same department or college (excluding one meal at annual planning event)
- Meals at which all participants report to one individual, i.e. Dean, Director, or Department Head (excluding one meal at annual planning event)
- Round table discussions
- Group planning meetings
- General discussion meals between students and faculty
- Departmental alumni receptions
- Events social in nature

B. In-Person Refreshments

It **MAY BE** appropriate to utilize public funds to provide in-person attendees **Refreshments** in the following circumstances:

- Events which are of a university-wide nature such as orientation or graduation
- Meetings with business leaders outside of the university for the purpose of student interaction and/or future contributions to programs
- Training sessions, workshops, or meetings for employees lasting a minimum of three (3) hours
- Refreshment breaks at conferences when the university program will benefit from such exposure (must be documented)
- Employee Awards program in accordance with Human Resources Awards Policy (signed HR approval form should be attached to the invoice submitted for payment)
- Meetings for departmental faculty to meet interview candidates (must use VTF funds for university spouses if applicable)
- When private funds are provided for the event, i.e. Continuing Education Conference where participant fees are collected
- Annual departmental planning events (in addition to one meal within per diem)
- On-campus student programs that promote student engagement and support the university's academic mission (excludes standard classes and labs). Students must be the primary beneficiary of these events.

It is **NOT** appropriate to utilize public funds for **Refreshments** in the following circumstances:

- Training sessions, workshops, or meetings for employees scheduled for less than three (3) hours
- Regularly scheduled meetings for university employees, i.e. monthly department head meetings within a college
- Departmental faculty meetings
- Student receptions in departments, including graduate seminars or thesis defenses
- Regularly scheduled classes or seminars
- Departmental alumni receptions
- Events which are not of a university-wide nature, i.e. departmental receptions, student group meetings
- Events social in nature

C. Meal/Refreshment Rates

The actual cost per person for food and beverages, including any related taxes, delivery fees, and tips, should not exceed the allowable per diem meal rate for the location of the event.

The applicable per diem meal rate is determined based upon the following timetable:

- a. Breakfast: After 5am until 11am
- b. Lunch: After 11am until 3:30pm
- c. Dinner: After 3:30pm until 5am

Refreshment rate - Refreshments, snacks, or beverage-only service should follow the per diem meal rates for Breakfast.

In certain unique situations, food and beverage expenditures may be authorized up to 150% of the applicable per diem meal rate. An explanation for the need to utilize this rate should be attached to the food approval form for prior approval.

D. Virtual Meals/Refreshments

Employees and students are not restricted by location during virtual meetings and are free to make food arrangements before or after the event. Thus, meals/refreshments should not be delivered/provided to these attendees nor should they be provided gift cards or promotional codes to allow attendees to order meals/refreshments. Virtual meal/refreshments may be appropriate if participant fees generate private funds to cover the cost of the expense (e.g. Continuing Education Conference participant fees) or VTF funds may be used.