

Introduction

The guidelines below are in line with Northwestern University and Weinberg College policies and are designed to highlight and clarify appropriate uses of University funds. Special circumstances and policy exceptions should be requested on a **limited basis** and must be submitted to the Weinberg Dean's Office **in advance** to allow for review and any necessary communication with the University's central policy administrators.

University and College policies apply to **all** sources of funds, but more restrictive policies may apply to certain funding sources such as sponsored projects.

General Events

Department-wide meetings at either monthly or quarterly intervals are allowable at a maximum cost of \$15 per person.

Departments may have two events per year that fall under the category of holiday party, general appreciation party, or retreat. The maximum allowable cost is \$30 per employee. Expenses for spouses and other dependents should generally be covered by personal funds. Incidental costs incurred by employees and students to participate (such as taxis, parking, or babysitting) are not reimbursable.

The ratio of food to alcohol at all events must be reasonable.

Budget pre-approval from the Dean's Office is required for the events listed below. Please send budget information to the Senior Director of Finance at least two weeks prior to the event to ensure the request can be reviewed and approved prior to the event.

- Events to recognize retirement of University employees.
- Retreats to analyze department or program issues; events should be held on campus whenever possible.

The following expenses are generally not allowable:

- The cost of meals during normal working hours when not traveling. Specifically, meals while an employee is visiting either the Chicago or Evanston campus for work-related purposes, or "social meals," defined as two or more University employees dining together.
- Purchase of food on a continual basis for employees or students, such as refreshments for regularly scheduled weekly meetings or daily consumption.
- Gifts and flowers in celebration of personal life events, including weddings, birthdays, births, promotions, dissertation defenses, or departure from the University. Contributions may be solicited from friends and fellow workers to cover expenses on these occasions.

Alcohol at Events

For events where alcohol is served, be sure to consult with the [Office of Risk Management](#). If the caterer/vendor/venue is not a preferred vendor and does not have an existing Master Agreement with Northwestern University, the [Northwestern Events Rider](#) may be required.

Faculty Recruitment

Departments are encouraged to host a modest gathering or reception that enables all members of the department to meet faculty candidates. Such events are allowable at a maximum of \$30 per person.

External meals are allowable with faculty candidates and a small group of faculty colleagues. The following expense limits apply:

- Recruitment meals for tenure line faculty should not exceed a total cost of \$520 including tax and tip, regardless of the number of attendees. This figure is based on an allowance of \$130 per person for four people including the candidate. The cost per person should not exceed \$130.
- Recruitment meals for non-tenure line faculty should not exceed a total cost of \$360 including tax and tip, regardless of the number of attendees. This figure is based on the University allowance of \$90 per person for four people including the candidate. The cost per person should not exceed \$90.

To aid in compliance with these policies, the University maintains [a list of restaurants](#) in Evanston and Chicago offering fixed-price dinner menus within the per person limits above.

Candidate spousal expenses should be vetted and authorized by the Dean's Office in advance of events.

Additional policies and procedures related to faculty recruitment can be found in the [Chairperson's Handbook](#).

Speaker Events

Events with speakers internal to Northwestern may include a light on-campus reception at a maximum cost of \$15 per person, but not an external meal.

Events with external speakers may include a light on-campus reception as well as an external meal with a smaller group. The following expense limits apply:

- The cost for on-campus receptions should not exceed \$30 per person.
- The cost of the external meal should not exceed a total of \$360 regardless of the number of attendees. This figure is based on the University allowance of \$90 per person for four people including the speaker. For all meals, the cost per person should not exceed \$90.

In addition to modest receptions and group meals, visiting speakers may be reimbursed for travel, lodging, meals, and incidentals. Visitor travel expenses are reimbursed according to University travel policies and procedures. Departments may also decide whether to offer an honorarium to the speaker. Honoraria are intended to be small tokens of appreciation and should be kept to a maximum of \$1000. Honorarium payments that exceed \$1000 require pre-approval from the Dean's Office.

Conferences

Conferences held at Northwestern that are substantially supported by external funding or external participant fees may include meals with all conference participants. The cost per person for meals should not exceed \$90.

Conferences (continued)

Conferences held at Northwestern that are supported largely by University funds may include group meals with external participants and University attendees. The ratio of University attendees to external participants should be 3 to 1, and the cost per person should not exceed \$90.

Budgets for large scale conferences and events consisting of expenses beyond standard meals should be submitted in advance to the Dean's Office for review and approval.

University [preferred vendors](#) should be used whenever possible. Please consult the University's current preferred vendor list. Note that the list includes diverse vendors, including Minority and Women Owned Businesses and Small Businesses, as well as vendors that engage in Sustainable practices.

Event contracts for hotel booking, restaurant reservations, and catering must be routed to the Dean's Office for review and signature.

Undergraduate Student Entertainment

Departments are encouraged to host community building events for faculty and undergraduate students. Events may be held on or off campus and must take place outside of class time. Events that extend the learning experience outside of class time are allowable monthly for majors/minors in a department, and quarterly for students in a specific class. Faculty members must be present, and cost should not exceed \$15 per person.

Alcohol may not be purchased using University funds for undergraduate student events. Please consult the University's [Policy Regarding Alcohol at Events for Undergraduate Students](#) for additional information.

Food during class or end of quarter parties during or in lieu of class time are **not** allowable expenses and will not be reimbursed.

Graduate Student Recruitment & Entertainment

Departments may host a modest gathering or reception that enables all members of the department to meet graduate student recruitment candidates. Such events are allowable at a maximum of \$30 per person.

Graduate student recruitment may include external meals with candidates. The cost for meals should not exceed \$90 per person. The number of University attendees should be reasonable and contribute to the recruitment effort, such as current graduate students and a few department faculty.

Departments are encouraged to host community building events for faculty and graduate students up to once per month. Large research lab communities, including groups of graduate students, may also hold quarterly events. Faculty members are also encouraged to build positive relationships with their teaching assistants and may host up to one event per quarter for active teaching assistants. Community building events should be of modest cost, not exceeding \$15 per person.

Graduate Student Recruitment & Entertainment (continued)

Graduate student events in restaurants or bars that implicitly encourage extended consumption of alcohol are not appropriate. The ratio of food to alcohol at all events must be reasonable. Please consult the University's [Policy Regarding Alcohol at Off Campus Events for Graduate and Professional Students](#) for additional requirements.

Graduation and Commencement

Departments may host a modest gathering or reception for graduating students and their guests. Costs for these events should not exceed \$30 per person.

Travel

Travel is permissible when it applies to research, teaching, or other activities relating to the University's mission.

Travel should be booked through Northwestern's [Travel Agencies](#) whenever possible.

Meals while traveling should be of reasonable cost, not to exceed \$90 per person per meal.

Reimbursement for travel booked using points or rewards is not allowable.

Per University policy, reimbursement will not be made prior to completion of travel, including conference fees when paid with personal funds. Reimbursement requests must be submitted within 90 days after completion travel or incurrence of non-travel-related expense. Exceptions may be requested for expenses past the 90-day period. Exception requests should be limited, and approval is not guaranteed. Reimbursement is not allowable for expenses over one year old.

Travelers are encouraged to use the per diem method of reimbursement. Per diem reimbursement is allowable for travel longer than 12 consecutive hours. Per diem amounts must follow the government's published standards, including only 75% of the per diem rate on the first and last days of travel. Employees may not be reimbursed for local Chicago-area lodging or related travel expenses, except in cases where early or late hours require such expenses. Justification must be included when submitting the expense report.

Private auto usage may be reimbursed based on the US Federal Government mileage rate. Additional documentation is required for travel to points more than 300 miles beyond the point of origin. See the [Procurement & Payment Services Policies & Reimbursements website](#) for guidance.

Faculty on leave on absence should consult with the Dean's Office about allowable travel expenses when they are applying for leave. Discretionary funds may **not** be used for standard living expenses, including food, lodging, or per diem, while on leave.

Discretionary/Research Guidelines

Discretionary research funds may be used for research, teaching, and professional business expenses, such as computer hardware and software (including a campus office computer), other equipment purchases, standard campus office furniture, technicians, postdoctoral fellows and other research assistance, manuscript preparation, purchase of books and supplies, research services, and travel for research and professional meetings.

Discretionary research funds may not be used for a variety of other purposes including but not limited to; summer salary (unless in accordance with the summer salary policy), course buyouts, green card and visa legal expenses, entertainment, and furniture for a home office.

Discretionary research funds may be used to pay independent contractors for services rendered. Payment to individuals must be made through University sanctioned payment methods. Out of pocket payment to an individual for services will **not** be reimbursed. Faculty should work with department staff and the Finance Office to best determine the appropriate payment method.

Discretionary research accounts assigned to a faculty member are University funds, not personal funds. Items purchased using University funds are the property of Northwestern University.

Once a faculty member has decided to resign from the University, preapproval from the Dean's Office will be required for spending of further monies from a discretionary account. Typically, travel to give previously scheduled conference presentations is approved, but not the purchase of equipment, books, or supplies. Items purchased remain the property of Northwestern University. The University does not pay any of the costs for a faculty member to move to a new institution, nor should department staff be detailed to pack boxes. The faculty's new institution is responsible for moving costs.

Faculty who retire from the University and hold emeritus status may continue to use discretionary research funds for three years after the date of retirement, in accordance with their retirement contract and University and College policies.

University Tax-Exempt Status

- A. Northwestern University is exempt from the following taxes:
 - a. Sales tax
 - b. Use tax
 - c. Retailer's Occupation Tax
 - d. Service Occupation Tax (both state and local)
 - e. Service Use Tax in the State of Illinois
- B. Northwestern University is **not** exempt from the following taxes:
 - a. Food and Lodging Tax on hotel rooms and meals (Exceptions to this rule apply to catered meetings and events, which fall under Sales Tax and Use Tax)
 - b. Other taxes associated with catered meetings and events, such as: City Tax, A/V Equipment Tax, Entertainment Tax, etc.
 - c. Taxes in states that do not recognize the University's tax exemption. A full list of states that recognize the University's tax-exempt status can be found [here](#).

University Tax-Exempt Status (continued)

Employees are **not** reimbursed for taxes in the first category (A) on an expense report. Exceptions to this are very rarely granted – Northwestern does not reimburse for taxes the University is exempt from paying unless it can be demonstrated that it was unavoidable or an emergency.

Taxes in the second category (B) are reimbursable when they are paid for using personal funds. It is extremely common for employees to use personal credit cards for meals while traveling or for approved (non-catered) meals at restaurants for staff, faculty, donors, etc. Taxes on these types of travel or meals generally fall into category (B) and are reimbursable.

Taxes in category (A) are prohibited on corporate card transactions. If taxes are charged in error, the cardholder must see reimbursement from the vendor before reconciling the expense.

Tax-Exempt One-Time Use Letter

Procurement and Payment Services keeps information related to Northwestern’s tax-exempt status on file. Departments requiring proof of tax-exempt status for University purchases can find the letter [here](#) (login require).

The Tax-Exempt One-Time Use Letter is to be used **only** with one of the University’s official purchasing methods (Requisitions, Payment Requests, and Corporate Cards). The letter is generally **not** to be used to make University purchases using personal funds. Exceptions to this should be extremely rare. Employees should use the University’s official purchasing methods to procure goods and services. If another form of payment must be used, the transaction must be less than \$400 and the purchaser must request a separate Employee Certification Form from Procurement and Payment Services. See the [Tax Exempt Update](#) for more information.

Definitions and Resources

Department – independent unit within Weinberg College; department or program

External – persons, events, and locations outside Northwestern University

Per diem – a standard daily allowance for meals and incidental expenses incurred while traveling

Per person cost is inclusive of Northwestern employees and students only

Pre-approval – advance notification to the Dean’s Office before expenditures are authorized.

University and Weinberg Policy Links

[Northwestern University Travel and Entertainment Policy](#)

[Northwestern University Travel Program](#)

[Procurement & Payment Services Policies & Forms](#)

[Weinberg College Chairperson’s Handbook](#)