

# MS 729 Food and Refreshment Expenses

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**Responsible Office:** Office of the Chief Financial Officer

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## Attachment

[Attachment A – Food and Event Matrix](#)

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## 1.0 Purpose

This Manual Section establishes agency policy regarding the use of agency funds to purchase food and refreshments to be served to Volunteers and Trainees (V/Ts), staff, and other attendees at Peace Corps “Events,” as defined below.

## 2.0 Authorities

- (a) 22 U.S.C. 2501, et seq.
- (b) 5 U.S.C. 4109 – 4111, Expenses of training, attendance at meetings
- (c) 5 U.S.C. 4503, Agency awards
- (d) 41 CFR 300 – 3.1, Conference

### 3.0 Definitions

For the purposes of this Manual Section and its implementing procedures:

- (a) **Peace Corps Events (Events)** are gatherings related to Peace Corps programs or operations, including:
  - (1) **Cultural Awareness Ceremonies, Presentations, and Similar Events** – Programs intended to recognize the cultural heritages of the United States and of host countries.
  - (2) **Entertainment Events** – Domestic official gatherings that are for the entertainment of non-Executive Branch entities or are social in nature.
  - (3) **Non-Staff Training** – An instructional course conducted by the Peace Corps, another U.S. government agency, or a private entity for the benefit of V/Ts, host country counterparts, and/or other non-staff. *See MS 729 Attachment A.*
  - (4) **Peace Corps Speaker Program** – An organized gathering, open to the public or other guests, for the purpose of recognizing members of the public and their contributions in connection with Peace Corps programs and operations. *See MS 729 Attachment A.*
  - (5) **Recruitment Events** – Any organized gathering having the objective of explaining Peace Corps programs or operations to potential Volunteers and promoting public interest in volunteering with the Peace Corps.
  - (6) **Representation Events** – Overseas official gatherings that are for the purposes of promoting the Peace Corps to overseas partners (i.e., host country partners and government entities) or are social in nature (as opposed to programmatic or operational).
  - (7) **Staff Award and Recognition Ceremonies** – Scheduled Events where staff are honored and recognized for their specific contributions or service to the Peace Corps, in accordance with MS 662 *Peace Corps Incentive Awards Program*.
  - (8) **Staff Conferences** – A meeting, retreat, seminar, symposium, or Event at which at least 75% of conference participants are on travel status. The term “conference” also applies to training activities that are conferences in accordance with 5 CFR 410.404. Staff Conferences can be held either at Peace Corps facilities or at non-Peace Corps facilities.
  - (9) **Staff Meetings** – Gatherings typically held at Peace Corps facilities to discuss general day-to-day business of the Peace Corps and its operations.
  - (10) **Staff On-Boarding** – Required gathering, regardless of length, of newly-hired staff members for orientation, training, and a basic introduction to working at the Peace Corps. This is not considered Staff Training (*see* (12) below).

- (11) **Staff Retreat** – Gathering generally held at a location other than at Peace Corps facilities to discuss the day-to-day business of the Peace Corps and its operations, including strategic planning, budget, and programming discussions and related presentations.
  - (12) **Staff Training** – A planned, prepared, and coordinated program, course, curriculum, subject, system, or routine of instruction or education, in scientific, professional, technical, mechanical, trade, clerical, fiscal, administrative, legal or other fields, which will improve individual and organizational performance and assist in achieving the agency’s mission and performance goals. Such an Event is conducted by the Peace Corps, another U.S. government agency, or a private entity for the benefit of Peace Corps staff. This excludes Staff On-Boarding (*see* (10) above).
  - (13) **V/T Meetings, Conferences, Trainings, and Similar Events** – Official gatherings, primarily for the benefit of V/Ts, for the purpose of training and enhancing volunteer service.
- (b) **Unofficial Peace Corps Events** – Staff member birthdays, personal milestones, holiday parties, informal staff lunches, and the like.
  - (c) **Food Supplies** – Stock food items, such as uncooked rice, pasta, beans, flour, canned and frozen goods, fruits, vegetables, and similar food.

## 4.0 Policy

Food is generally considered to be a personal expense. Peace Corps V/Ts receive allowances, and Peace Corps staff receive salaries. Both receive travel allowances when on official travel. Therefore, V/Ts and staff are able to provide food for themselves. There are, however, limited circumstances detailed below, in which the Peace Corps has the authority to provide food for V/Ts or staff not on official travel who attend official Peace Corps Events. Provision by the agency of such food must have an obvious and logical relationship to the achievement of the objective of that Event, and the agency must reasonably be able to assert that not providing food would make the Event less successful and less likely to achieve its objective and therefore diminish the ability of the agency to achieve its mission under the Peace Corps Act.

### 4.1 Domestic Policies

In no circumstance can the Peace Corps use direct appropriations to provide meals or refreshments for Unofficial Peace Corps Events, such as birthdays, personal milestones, staff holiday parties, and informal staff lunches.

In general, the Peace Corps may not use regular funding from direct appropriations to provide refreshments or meals for Staff Training, Meetings, On-Boarding, or Retreats held at official duty stations.

Food provided for any Event must be modest in both cost and appearance.

The agency may provide refreshments and meals domestically in each of the following limited circumstances (*see Attachment A* for which funds may be used):

**(a) Recruitment Events**

Refreshments can be provided at any organized gathering having the objective of explaining Peace Corps programs or operations to potential Volunteers and promoting interest in volunteering with the Peace Corps. The Associate Director for the Office of Volunteer Recruitment and Selection (VRS) and the Associate Director for Peace Corps Response (PCR) or their designees can make the determination that food at a given Recruitment Event is a reasonable use of agency funds to promote successful recruitment of prospective Volunteers.

**(b) Domestic Staff Conferences**

Refreshments and meals may be provided to attendees at Staff Conferences held domestically where at least 75% of the attendees are on official travel orders. Meals provided for attendees on official travel orders at domestic Staff Conferences must be deducted by those attendees from their per diem expenses. Refreshments may be provided to facilitators and presenters who are formally required by the agency to attend the Staff Conference. Meals may be provided to facilitators and presenters who are formally required by the agency to attend the Staff Conference, perform critical roles in the execution of the conference, and are unable to take meals elsewhere during the conference.

**(c) Cultural Awareness Ceremonies, Presentations, and Similar Events**

Food samples can be provided for Cultural Awareness Ceremonies, Presentations, and similar Events at which culturally representative foods will serve to demonstrate cultural heritage and awareness.

**(d) Staff Award and Recognition Ceremonies**

Modest refreshments may be provided at Staff Award and Recognition Ceremonies, in accordance with MS 662.

**(e) Limited Entertainment and Other Protocol Events**

The Director may provide meals or refreshments for Events that are for the entertainment of non-Executive Branch entities or are social in nature only when using entertainment funds, as set aside from Peace Corps annual appropriations and in a manner consistent with Manual Section 725 *Entertainment Funds*.

## **4.2 Overseas Policies**

In no circumstance can the Peace Corps use direct appropriations to provide meals or refreshments for Unofficial Peace Corps Events, such as birthdays, personal milestones, staff holiday parties, and informal staff lunches.

In general, the Peace Corps may not use regular funding from direct appropriations to provide refreshments or meals for Staff Training, Meetings, On-Boarding, or Retreats held at official duty stations.

Food provided for any Event must be modest in both cost and appearance.

Limited circumstances in which the agency can provide refreshments and meals to V/Ts, staff, or others overseas when not on travel status are as follows (*see Attachment A* for which funds may be used):

**(a) Volunteers/Trainees**

Post may provide meals and modest refreshments to V/Ts at Post, consistent with federal law and regulation and this Manual Section and upon approval by the Country Director (CD).

**(b) Food Supplies for Training Centers, Consolidation, and Similar Events**

Posts may purchase Food Supplies for V/T Meetings, Conferences, Trainings, and similar Events held at training sites, consolidation points, medical facilities, and other facilities that are for the benefit of V/Ts and their service, safety, or care.

**(c) Attendees Other than V/Ts Who Attend Events Conducted for the Purposes of Enhancing Volunteer Service**

Meals and refreshments may be provided for required attendees other than V/Ts at V/T Meetings, Conferences, Trainings, and similar Events where there are not opportunities for meals and refreshments other than what is provided at the Event or where, in the judgement of the CD or their designee, the availability of meals or refreshments will enhance the training or service of the V/Ts. The value of meals provided to participants other than V/Ts who are on official travel must be deducted by those participants from their per diem expenses.

Select Peace Corps staff not on official travel attending these same Events with V/Ts and host country counterparts may also be provided with food if the CD or their designee has determined their participation is required to achieve the objective of the Event.

**(d) Overseas Staff Conferences**

Refreshments and meals may be provided to attendees at Staff Conferences at which at least 75% of the attendees are on official travel orders. The value of meals provided for attendees at overseas Staff Conferences must be deducted by those attendees from their per diems. Refreshments may be provided to facilitators and presenters who are required to attend the Staff Conference. Meals may be provided to facilitators and presenters who are required to attend the Staff Conference, perform critical roles in its execution, and are unable to take meals elsewhere during the Staff Conference.

**(e) Cultural Awareness Ceremonies and Presentations**

Food samples can be provided for Cultural Awareness Ceremonies, Presentations, and similar Events where providing culturally representative foods will serve to demonstrate cultural heritage and awareness.

**(f) Staff Award and Recognition Ceremonies**

Modest refreshments may be provided at Staff Award and Recognition Ceremonies, in accordance with MS 662.

**(g) Limited Representational and Other Protocol Events**

The CD or their designee may provide meals or refreshments for Events that are for the purposes of promoting the Peace Corps to overseas partners or are social in nature only when using representation funds, as set aside in Peace Corps annual appropriations and consistent with MS 724 *Representation Allowances*.

**(h) Overseas Significant Strategic Planning Events and Staff Retreats and Trainings**

Refreshments and meals can be provided for significant strategic planning Events and all-Staff Retreats and Trainings held away from the main office in those cases where Post staff participation is mandatory for the duration of an event that continues for at least one full business day.

**(i) Initial Visits to Host Family Sites and Other Initial Site Development Activity**

Post may provide modest refreshments when staff is meeting with potential host families and counterparts during site development activities where the CD determines that doing so is culturally appropriate.

Select Peace Corps staff attending events together with V/Ts and host country counterparts may also be provided refreshments if the CD or their designee has determined their participation is required for the success of the Event.

### **4.3 Alcoholic Beverages**

Alcoholic beverages may only be purchased by the agency domestically, using entertainment funds, and overseas, using representation funds. See MS 646 *Staff Alcohol Use* for agency policy on staff consumption of alcohol.

## **5.0 Procedures**

Implementing procedures are outlined in the Domestic Financial Management Handbook (DFMH), Chapter 26 and in the Overseas Financial Management Handbook (OFMH), Chapter

66, and purchasing food must be approved by an appropriate “Peace Corps Officer.” *See* MS 729 Attachment A.

Procurement of food by the agency must also be consistent with MS 731 *Peace Corps Purchase Card Program* and MS 732 *Peace Corps Overseas Acquisition System*.

## **6.0 Effective Date**

The effective date of this Manual Section is the date of issuance.