

Providing Food, Beverages, and Alcohol at SC&I Events

Recent updates: 2024, 2019

What counts as university funds and how are they managed?

All monies that come to Rutgers University are considered university funds and must comply with university policies and procedures. This is true whether the money is

- paid as tuition,
- contributed as a donation,
- given by an organization as part of a grant or contract,
- payment for a product or service,
- given to Rutgers through any means.

All funds are subject to possible audit, and any misuse can result in penalties.

All university funds have a designated manager.

- In the case of school funds, the manager is the dean.
- Where the school allocates some of its budget to a department, the department chair or director is the manager.
- Where the school allocates some of its budget as annual faculty support, the faculty member is the manager.
- In the case of grants or contracts, the manager is the PI.

In all cases, the designated manager of the funds is responsible for following university policies. In cases where the manager of the funds would not know all policies – which is almost everyone outside the business office - we have a secondary approver.

In all cases, the university strongly prefers purchases to be made through the Rutgers procurement system, for several reasons: it enables the purchase to benefit from any negotiated/discount rates, it takes into account tax exemptions, and there is review and approval before money is expended. Reimbursements are to be used only when the regular purchasing processes impede the business need, such as in the case of an emergency.

In no case can the manager of funds approve payments to him/herself. In those cases – such as reimbursements for out-of-pocket expenditures – others must approve the reimbursement.

Certain types of income may carry more restrictions than others. Examples are donations designated for particular purposes, or grant funds where the funder sets out policies about the use of its support. In those cases we follow the more stringent rules.

All expenditures of university funds must be reasonable, necessary, appropriate, and have a legitimate business purpose.

- **Reasonable:** The cost of the good(s) or service(s) is not excessive.
- **Necessary:** The expenditure is required to achieve the expected goals or outcomes of the program, project or task, where there is a clear business purpose.

- **Appropriate:** Consistent with objectives of the program, project or task. Appropriate also means that the expenditure is allowable under the terms and conditions of the underlying funding source and/or policies.
- **Business purpose:** The expense is incurred while carrying out university business and is required for the performance of duties by employees and in support of the mission of the school and university.

All uses of university funds should be effective, efficient, and productive ways to use university resources.

Applying the standard of “reasonable, necessary, appropriate, and with a business purpose” to food and alcohol

Some major university policies related to food and alcohol purchases are:

- Policy 40.4.1 - Travel and Business Expense Policy - <https://policies.rutgers.edu/sites/default/files/40.4.1%20-%20current.pdf>
- Policy 60.1.11 – Alcohol and Other Drugs Policy - <https://policies.rutgers.edu/sites/default/files/60.1.11%20-%20current.pdf>

Alcohol

Alcohol cannot be paid from tuition or state appropriations. When it is allowed, it must be paid from gifts and some other types of funds. On the other hand, we should always consider whether it is appropriate to use certain donations for alcohol purchases.

With good reason, the consumption of alcohol is regulated by law and custom. We want to assure that no one who is underage gains access to alcoholic drinks at a school-sponsored function. And when we do serve alcohol, we need to assure that no injury results from over consumption either at the event or when the person leaves.

The annual round of events at SC&I includes numerous social functions. Employees of the School of Communication and Information host visitors such as guest speakers, visiting scholars, site supervisors of internship students or employers of graduates, professionals in fields related to our curricula, candidates, and others. We host guests in the school building, in New Brunswick, across New Jersey, as well as in conference cities around the world.

In these circumstances, it is sometimes appropriate for one or more faculty to host a meal function with a guest or small group of guests. At such occasions, the School of Communication and Information will not sponsor the cost of any alcohol through any type of account. Alcohol cannot be purchased through a purchase order payment nor through reimbursement. If meal participants would like to purchase alcohol, it should be a personal purchase.

There are occasions when the school sponsors a reception for purposes of recruiting, marketing, fundraising, and/or other institutional objectives. With approval of the Dean's office, a purchase order to pay for the reception may include allowance for wine and beer only, on the condition that guests at the reception are given limited tickets by the faculty/organizers of the event to entitle them to a defined quantity of wine or beer

As of the implementation of this policy, the school asks the organizer of each event that is providing alcohol to return to the school any unopened bottles of alcohol left at the end of the event, since it is school property. Past experience shows we often have bottles left over and we can use them at future events, reducing our overall expenses.

Food and beverages

Rutgers does not pay for employee meals during a normal business day.

Food can be paid for by university funds when it is an integral part of a special business activity, not as a matter of convenience to an individual or group of individuals. In other words, working late is not a reason for the university to pay for a meal. When we have in the past asserted that a meeting has to be held through mealtime and therefore we should provide a meal to university employees, we have been questioned and in at least one case a faculty member was asked to produce their calendar to prove that they had no other time for a meeting.

Being in "travel status" is an obvious exception to this rule. The university will cover expenditures for daily food within reason when someone is traveling for work. But the travel must have a clearly defined business purpose.

Guests and job candidates

SC&I employees host visitors such as guest speakers, visiting scholars, site supervisors of internship students, employers of graduates, professionals in fields related to our curricula, job candidates, and others. We host guests in school buildings, in New Brunswick, across New Jersey, as well as in conference cities around the world.

When outside speakers are presenting to a SC&I-only audience, it can be reasonable to provide very light refreshments for all, and then for the host(s) to take the speaker out for a meal. When people are taking a guest speaker or faculty candidate out for a meal that will be paid by the school, it is reasonable to expect a limit of about three or four people to go out with the individual since the purpose is for everyone to have an opportunity to speak with the individual. At such occasions, the school will not cover the cost of alcohol for school employees, even through reimbursement, although employees may choose to order a drink and pay for it themselves. The school will cover the cost of up to two glasses of wine or beer for the visitor.

Special school events

When there are special internal events that happen rarely – once a year or so – providing food may be reasonable. It's best to email the SC&I business office at payables@comminfo.rutgers.edu in advance to confirm that the purchase can be supported by the school.

To assess whether it is reasonable for university funds to pay for food at an event, these questions are asked:

- What is the business purpose of the event itself (not the food)? The event as a whole should have a purpose that justifies university support.
- Who will be in attendance and what is their affiliation? If the event is attended exclusively by SC&I employees, it is harder to justify an expenditure on a meal or significant food since the university does not pay for daily food for employees. When there is a gathering that is completely or primarily SC&I employees and the event is held at mealtime, the expectation is for people to brown-bag.
- Why does the event require that food be served? Even if there are outside attendees, what is the business purpose of the food?
- Can the event be held at a time of day when refreshments are not needed, or when lighter refreshments are possible rather than a full meal?

Organizers of an event should work to order a reasonable amount of food from an appropriate vendor to limit the amount of food leftover. In-house catering options such as Rutgers Catering can often provide quality food at a more reasonable cost than outside vendors.

As of 2024, SC&I has asked anyone holding an event in the building to refrain from ordering individual bottles of water or soda. The school has pitchers the organizers can use to provide water for attendees, easily filled from our filling stations or any water fountain.

Faculty and staff are responsible for cleaning up all food and garbage for their events, including making sure all food-related garbage is tied securely in plastic bags. There are not always custodians in the building after 1:30pm until 5:00am the next morning.