

Q&A: Using Program Funds to Purchase Food for Events

Q1: Can I use Program funds to buy food for an event?

A: Only if the **primary audience is students**; the **event supports student success**; and the **funding source explicitly allows food purchases**.

Q2: What is considered an account code 4500 event vs. 4710 event?

A: Events such as orientations, resource fairs, or workshops that serve students already enrolled in a specific program are considered **program events** and should use **account code 4500**.

Events that are *non-program specific* — open to all students, with at least 75% of attendees being students, and designed to engage, educate, or recruit — should use **account code 4710**.

Q3: What if employees are working the event? Can they eat too?

A: Yes, if:

- They are **working or presenting** at the event (listed on the event form), **and**
 - Food is a component of the event, **and**
 - The event is primarily **for students**.
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Q4: Can we buy food for a staff meeting, training, or retreat?

A: No. **Food for employees is not allowed**, even if the meeting is work-related. This would be considered a **gift of public funds**, which is prohibited.

Q5: Are there funds that do not allow food at all?

 **Yes, many do not. However, some do — and others place strict limits.**

- **Perkins (federal):** Generally does not allow food purchases, except in limited cases like advisory committee meetings (with meeting minutes).
- **Strong Workforce Program (SWP):** Food is only allowed when it is directly tied to student engagement, retention, or completion, and clearly documented as necessary to the event's purpose.

Examples

A Strong Workforce-funded event hosts a Career Skills Bootcamp for students in CTE pathways. The full-day event includes resume building, mock interviews, and industry guest speakers. Modest food (e.g., box lunches) is provided so students can remain fully engaged and complete the entire session. Staff supporting the event may also partake, but food is not the primary draw, and students remain the main focus.

Financial Aid hosts a FAFSA workshop for students, with financial aid staff assisting. Food is allowable for students and the financial aid employees assisting at this event.

In all cases, you must:

- Provide detailed documentation

- Ensure food is modest and incidental
- Confirm the fund source permits it

 **Food is never permitted for staff-only meetings, retreats, or celebrations.**

Q6: What kind of food is allowed?

A: Modest, incidental items (e.g., box lunches). Food must **not be the main draw** of the event, and **alcohol is never allowed**.

Q7: Can I submit an open PO when using 4710?

A: No. Each event needs its own PO. On occasion, we may allow multiple events on one PO if they are within a week of each other. Each event must be listed on the form, with a Food Justification Form uploaded for each event.

Q8: What documentation do I need to provide?

A: Every food-related expense must include:

- New Event (Program) Food Expense Justification Form.
 - Confirmation that the fund allows food purchases (snip of grant/program language).
 - Cafeteria approval if using an outside vendor.
 - Itemized receipts or invoices.
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Q9: What happens if I don't follow the rules?

A: The purchase may be **disallowed**, your department may be asked to **reimburse the expense through an allowable funding source**, and the issue could be flagged in an **audit**. Please refer to AP6380.

Q10: Who can I ask if I'm unsure?

A: Contact **your fiscal services representative** before making any food-related purchase. We're happy to help review fund restrictions and guide proper use.

Q11: Are there other resources that can provide additional guidance?

A: Yes, there is a Program/Event Quick Reference Food Guide flow chart on the Financial and Fiscal Services web page.