

Chatham County Internal Purchasing Guidelines: Food Purchases

In our continuing effort to be good stewards of County funds, we continually evaluate our expenses. These guidelines attempt to clarify which internal departmental purchases are considered appropriate and which are not with attention to cost effectiveness. This policy applies to all Chatham County departments, including staff support of boards or committees during or outside of regular business hours. Department Heads may enact additional requirements dependent upon budget or resources available.

The County recognizes that there may be emergency or extenuating circumstances which merit provision of food for meetings, though not previously planned (e.g., extended meeting on business - critical issues, emergency activation during natural disasters). These exceptions should be approved by a Department Head. In this example, County staff should document and retain a description of the event and justification for the exception with the receipt or invoice for the purchase. This policy does not address food purchases related to business travel (See the County [Travel Policy](#) regarding business travel).

When meetings of an administrative nature are held that are directly related to the business of the County, the cost of meals or light refreshments may be paid from budgeted funds with approval from a Department Head or their designee. Food and refreshments may be purchased with budgeted funds for one or more of the following purposes or activities (the following are examples and not an exhaustive list):

- Meetings of the Board, advisory committees, public officials, and community members in supporting and collaborating in program success
- Trainings, workshops, and seminars
- Countywide employee events (i.e. Employee Appreciation or wellness events). Such events must be open to all County employees
- Retreats of departments or other units, or events to recognize a class or unit of employee

Those planning for food expenses should consider the following principles:

- **Appropriateness:** Meals should be necessary and integral to the business meeting, not a matter of personal convenience. The provision of food for gatherings of employees daily is not considered an appropriate use of funds. Staff lunches, where work can be conducted during other times of the workday, regular staff meetings, and personal celebrations (i.e., birthday, or baby shower celebrations) **do not** qualify as appropriate activities.

Retirements are considered appropriate after an employee has obtained 20 years of service with the County. Expenditures should be limited to food and non-alcoholic beverages.

Years of Service	Amount
20	\$200
25	\$300
30	\$500

- **Cost Effectiveness:** The expenditure of budgeted funds for food and refreshments should be cost-effective and reasonable. Generally, meal costs should be no more than the local

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Government Services Administration (GSA) per diem meal rates, and light refreshments should be no more than the cost of half of the set per diem rate per attendee. Breakdown of per meal rates can be found at the GSA site at: <https://www.gsa.gov/travel/plan-book/per-diem-rates/meals-and-incidentals-expenses-mie-breakdown>. Those planning these events should receive as close an estimate as possible to the actual number of expected attendees. These events must be planned and requisitioned at least two weeks prior to the event.

- **Documentation** – Events must have an agenda attached to the requisition and the number of attendees should be noted in the line-item description within the requisition. This documentation should be attached to the receipt or invoice for such purchase and retained in the department files for review as requested.
- **Special Accommodations** – Dietary needs will be met with a one-week advanced notice and will be accommodated with the same consideration for cost effectiveness as outlined above.
- **Healthy Foods Policy** - Chatham County Government is dedicated to the overall health of our employees and community members. The goal of the healthy foods policy is to encourage healthy eating among staff and members of the community to reduce the risk of chronic diseases. The [Healthy Foods Policy](#) ensures that foods served at meetings and will include water and one or more servings of fruits, vegetables, low-fat milk and dairy products.

All internal or external events sponsored or supported by the Chatham County Government that includes refreshments will **always include water** and one or more of these healthier items:

- Fruit and/or vegetables
 - Examples of such items include fresh, frozen, canned, or dried fruits (such as grapefruit, oranges, apples, raisins, or 100% fruit juices), and fresh, frozen or canned vegetables.
- Low-fat milk and dairy products
 - Examples include skim/nonfat or 1% milk; low-fat and fat-free yogurt; cheese and ice cream.
- Foods made from grains (like wheat, rice and oats), especially whole grains
 - Examples include low-fat whole wheat crackers, bread and pasta, whole grain ready-to- eat cereal, low-fat baked tortilla chips, pita bread.

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Generally, meal costs should be no more than the local Government Services Administration (GSA) per diem meal rates, and light refreshments should be no more than the cost of half of a lunch per diem per attendee. Breakdown of per meal rates can be found at the GSA site at: <https://www.gsa.gov/travel/plan-book/per-diem-rates/meals-and-incidentals-expenses-mie-breakdown>. Where applicable, the use of grant funds are strongly recommended. Always support local businesses when possible.

The following situations are acceptable for the use of County funds for food expenses:

Board/Committee Meetings

A County board or committee is defined as an elected or appointed group of County employees and members of the community who meet for the purpose of addressing a specific charge. Food can be provided if the budgeted funds are available and the meeting spans the typical lunch and/or dinner hours when those attending would not otherwise be able to have a meal.

County Events

County events are those which are sponsored by the County and may, but do not necessarily, include non-County employees. Examples of County events include the events sponsored by the County Wellness Committee such as lunch and learns and other all-staff events. County events require the approval of the County Manager.

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Department Retreat/Team Building

A retreat is an event that is typically designed and organized specifically to facilitate the ability of a group to step back from their day-to-day demands and activities for an extended period of concentrated discussion, dialogue, and strategic thinking about the department's future or about specific issues. Retreats are generally held away from the County office for this reason. These events are limited to once per fiscal year and require the approval of the Department Head.

Department Trainings/Workshops/Seminars

A training, workshop, or seminar is a meeting where a department's employees gather to receive training for a specific skill related to their day-to-day job duties and this training spans the typical lunch hours.

The following situations are not acceptable for the use of County funds for food expenses:

Department/Division Meetings

Reimbursement for snacks or meals at department meetings is not permitted. Department meetings are a routine occurrence, and the corresponding recurring expense will not be covered by the County. Budgeted snacks or meals are only acceptable for the department's annual retreat/team building event.

Department/Division Socials

No expenses for department/division parties or socials (i.e. birthdays, anniversaries, holiday parties) are reimbursable.

Webinar

A webinar is a skill specific training conducted virtually and will not be reimbursed.

Potluck Luncheons

Since the spirit of a potluck luncheon is that food is provided by the attendees, reimbursement of any kind is not permitted for a potluck luncheon.