

Conference Cost Approvals FAQ's



This document provides guidelines for the conference cost approval process.

These guidelines have been established to assist NCA subrecipients in determining if the meeting or conference that they are organizing requires prior written approval and understanding limits on the allowable costs for conferences. Also included is information on the NCA approval process for NCA grant funded meetings and conferences as well as post conference reporting that takes place after a conference has been held.

DOJ Guidance

All subrecipients should be knowledgeable of the Department of Justice "Grants Financial Guide", which can be found at <https://www.ojp.gov/funding/financialguidedojo/overview> by clicking "View PDF Version".

What is a Conference?

- Meeting
- Retreat
- Seminar
- Training
- Symposium

Typically a prearranged formal event with some of the following characteristics:

- designated participants and/or registration;
- a published substantive agenda;
- and scheduled speakers or discussion panels on a particular topic.

What is NOT a Conference?

- **Technical Assistance Visit**
 - Travel by an individual or a small group of awardee/contractor staff members or consultants to provide training or technical assistance to a particular entity.
 - No costs to DOJ funds for meeting rooms, conference planning, or trinkets.
 - Reasonable travel costs (lodging, transportation, local transportation, audio-visual, printing, and meals and incidental expenses [M&IE]) for technical assistance staff may be reimbursed.
- **Routine Operational Meeting** - Typically does not have a formal published agenda, scheduled speakers, or discussion panels, and is defined as an event where:
 - Primary focus is the recipient's day-to-day operations and concerns (e.g., staff meetings, all hands meetings).
 - Attendees overwhelmingly are internal to the organization holding the meeting.

- **Video conferences and webinars** - where there are no costs for logistical conference planning (beyond incidental expenses necessary for webinar set-up and registration of participants)

Conference Determination Questions

1. Is the cost of the event greater than \$20,000?
2. Are there meeting room costs?
3. Are audio-visual costs greater than \$31.25 per attendee or more than \$1,250 in total?
4. Are there any food and beverage costs? *(cannot be charged to NCA grant)*
5. Did the request for the meeting come from multiple jurisdictions or agencies?
6. Are there trinkets being purchased? *(cannot be charged to NCA grant)*
7. Is there a formal published agenda? (Is it on website, available publicly?)
8. Are formal discussions or presentation panels planned?
9. Are there logistical planning costs beyond incidental internal administrative costs necessary to arrange travel and lodging for a small number of individuals?

*If answers to any of the questions is “Yes,” then the event **DOES** require prior approval. Please use [NCA’s Conference Cost Approval Form](#) to complete your request.*

Approval Requirements

All conferences conducted by subrecipients funded by NCA must receive written prior approval. An approved award budget is not a prior approval. Subrecipients must comply with the approval process regarding logistical conference planning and must keep their program associate informed of all decisions being made during the conference planning process. No hotel/venue or audio-visual contracts may be entered into before such prior approval has been obtained in writing from NCA.

All subsequent changes prior to the start date of the event should be sent to your Program Associate for review/approval, preferably at least 30 days prior to the event start date. This applies to changes to start and end date, location, number of attendees and any costs related to the event.

The NCA Conference Cost Approval Form can be found at

<https://www.nationalchildrensalliance.org/conference-cost-approval-form-2024/>. Subrecipients must complete and submit this form as well as a conference agenda to the grantee portal for approval.

Timeline for Requesting Conference Approvals

Events costing \$100,000 or less and not exceeding any cost thresholds: Minimum of 90 calendar days in advance of the start date.

Events over \$100,000 or exceeding any one cost threshold: Minimum of 120 calendar days in advance of the earliest of the following: start date of the conference, deadline to sign contracts, or obligation of funds for conference costs.

If timelines are not met, Awardee will likely need to reschedule date of event.

Tips for Quicker Approvals

Agenda:

- Needs to be clearly aligned with the goal and objectives of the grant award and the purpose of the event.
- Must show all meals as "on your own." (Make it clear NCA funds are not paying for meals).

Justification:

- Must support the goal and objectives of the grant award.
- Encouraged to add supporting document that clearly spells this out narratively.

Cost Thresholds and Limitations

Meeting room/audio-visual services combined (lesser of \$31.25 per day per attendee or \$25,000)

Logistical planners (lesser of \$62.50 per attendee or \$11,000)

Programmatic planners (lesser of \$250 per attendee or \$43,750)

Food and beverage (not allowed)

Refreshments (not allowed)

Conference Costs

The following are cost categories to be included when determining the total conference cost:

- Conference meeting space (including rooms for break-out sessions);
- Audio-visual equipment and services;
- Printing and distribution;
- Lodging;
- Transportation, such as air travel to/from conference location;
- Local transportation (e.g., rental car, POV to and from airport, taxi or shuttle services);
- Logistical conference planner;
- Programmatic conference planner;
- External trainers/instructors/presenters/facilitators;
- Other costs: all other costs must be identified individually

Meeting Space and Audio-Visual Equipment

The cost of meeting space and audio visual (AV) equipment rental must be limited to \$31.25 per day per attendee, not to exceed a total of \$25,000 for the conference. For example, if there are 50 people meeting

for a 2-day conference, the cost for meeting space and AV combined cannot exceed \$3,125 (50 attendees x \$31.25 x 2 days). Recipients must include trainers, instructors, presenters, and facilitators, as well as all other attendees, in the total number of attendees when estimating the threshold for meeting space and AV costs.

Printing and Distribution

All costs associated with printing and postage costs required for training materials should be included. Grantees should make every effort to provide conference materials electronically or via print-on-demand services. Printed materials should maximize paper usage (print on both sides) and minimize higher cost options (color printing, heavy paper, etc.) when possible.

Lodging

Ensure that nightly rates do not exceed the prevailing Federal per diem rate for lodging. If the lodging rate is not the Federal per diem rate or less, none of the lodging costs associated with the event are allowable costs to the award. As a result, the recipient would be required to pay for all lodging costs for the event with non-award funds, not just the amount in excess of the Federal per diem.

Transportation (Common Carrier)

All costs associated with transportation to and from the conference such as flights, baggage fees, parking, etc., must be included as part of the total conference cost.

Local Transportation

All costs associated with local transportation to and from the airport or conference, such as taxi, shuttle services, rental car, mileage, public transportation, etc., must be included as part of the total conference cost.

Conference Planning Costs

Subrecipients are required to track any time and activity spent on planning conferences separate from time and activity spent on substantive matters. Subrecipients must include this information in the required conference reporting. Conference planning has been divided into two categories, logistical and programmatic.

Logistical planning includes activities such as recommending venues, advertising, setting up audio-visual equipment, securing hotel rooms, and other non-programmatic functions. The cost allowed for logistical conference planning (regardless of whether the recipient is planning in-house or is contracting with an outside conference planner) is limited to \$62.50 for each attendee, not to exceed a cumulative total of \$11,000. For example, if the number of attendees at a conference is 100, the cost allowed for a logistical planner is \$6,250 (\$62.50 X 100 attendees). Recipients must include trainers, instructors, presenters, and facilitators as well as all other attendees when estimating the cost for logistical planning per attendee.

Programmatic planning includes developing conference agendas, content, and written materials. The cost allowed for programmatic conference planning (regardless of whether the recipient is planning in-house or is contracting with an outside programmatic conference planner) is limited to \$250 for each attendee, not to exceed a cumulative total of \$43,750. For example, if the number of attendees at the conference is 100, the cost allowed for a programmatic planner is \$25,000 (\$250 X 100 attendees).

Recipients must include trainers, instructors, presenters, and facilitators as well as all other attendees when estimating the cost for programmatic planning per attendee.

External Conference Facilitator/Trainer/Instructor/Presenter

Costs of trainers, instructors, presenters, facilitators, or anyone who will be considered “faculty” at the conference should be included as part of the cost of the conference. “External” refers to individuals who are not employed by the subrecipient that is holding the conference. This may include speakers from private organizations, consultants, and other federal agencies. Only the cost of the services should be included in this category; costs of related travel, lodging, etc. should be included in the specific categories for those costs.

Other Conference Cost Items

Any other cost that is not included within these guidelines that is directly associated with the conference must be included as part of the cost of the conference and should be included in this category.

Basic supplies that are necessary for use during the conference (e.g., pens, paper, name tags) may be purchased.

Prohibited Costs

The following costs are prohibited:

Trinkets (items such as hats, mugs, portfolios, t-shirts, coins, etc., regardless of whether they include the conference name or logo) may not be purchased with NCA grant funds.

NCA funds may not be used for costs of entertainment, including amusement, diversion, social activities, and any costs directly associated with such costs (such as tickets to shows or sports events, meals, lodging, rentals, transportation, and gratuities).

Post-Conference Reporting

All subrecipients must submit reports on conferences with total costs that exceed \$20,000. The report must be submitted by the next fiscal report following the event. The reporting form is on the same form as the conference request tab titled Post Conference Reporting. After the actual cost amounts have been entered, provide justifications where indicated. The completed report form is to be uploaded to the grantee portal. If the recipient submitted a conference request form with estimated costs of more than \$20,000, but the actual costs were under \$20,000, the recipient must either file the report with the actual costs or submit a letter stating that the final actual costs of the event did not exceed \$20,000 on the organization’s letterhead.

Recipients that have additional questions about any part of the conference request and reporting process should contact their program associate for guidance.

Blanket Requests

Subrecipients may request approval for more than one conference at the same time if the name and purpose of each conference are the same and they occur during the same award year. The location and dates of the conferences must be identified in the request (if known). The requirements for a blanket

request are the same as for requesting individual conferences. Expenditures for each conference must be reported individually and follow the reporting guidelines outlined above.