

Leaving on a jet plane? Using federal funds for conference travel

Did you know that you can use ESSER funds to pay for conference travel?

With the deadlines to obligate ESSER quickly approaching, districts are looking for ways that are reasonable and necessary to allocate these funds. Tapping into federal funds to expand professional development for school staff and officials through conference travel, may not be well known.

As long as a few requirements are met, allocating professional development activities during travel is perfectly acceptable. According to *Frequently Asked Questions to Assist U.S. Department of Education Grantees to Appropriately Use Federal Funds for Conferences and Meetings*, 120 LRP 5154 (EDU 03/01/17). "federal grant funds may be used to pay for travel expenses of grantee employees, consultants, or experts to attend a meeting or conference" provided that attendance is necessary to meet the goals and objectives of a federal grant program and reasonable based on the state or district's policies and procedures, as well as state and local laws.

ED says grantees should consider these areas in determining whether the travel expense is necessary and reasonable:

- Could the goals and objectives of the grant program be achieved without attending the meeting or conference?
- Are there equally effective, but potentially less costly and time-consuming, alternatives?
- How does the cost of the conference and travel fees compare with similar events?
- Would attendance at the meeting or conference be seen as a good use of taxpayer dollars?

If the conference attendance and travel meet those standards, the Uniform Grants Guidance at 2 CFR 200.432 allows federal funds to be used to attend a conference, including registration, room, and travel. The guidance, however, does expressly prohibit the use of federal funds for alcohol and for entertainment costs.

For example, a school district interested in sending its staff to **LRP's National Institute on Legal Issues of Educating Individuals with Disabilities**® in New Orleans in April, may be able to use ARP ESSER funds if it can show that the cost is reasonable and necessary for professional development on issues related to COVID-19 response and recovery, such as cybersecurity protocols and tools to protect district assets.

The Uniform Grants Guidance says federal funds can also be used for other professional development expenses, provided they meet the necessary and reasonable standards, including:

- Hosting a conference, which could include paying speaker fees, facility rental fees, and transportation costs, unless restricted by the federal program. 2 CFR 200.432.
- Membership in business, technical, or professional organizations. 2 CFR 200.454(a).
- Online professional courses, including webinars and virtual conferences. 2 CFR 200.472.
- Subscription to a business, technical, or professional periodical. 2 CFR 200.454(b).

As always, consult your state and local spending rules and regulations, and be sure to maintain documentation to meet reporting requirements under the federal Education Department General Administrative Regulations and the Uniform Grants Guidance.

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