

USE OF CORPORATE CREDIT CARDS

PRINCIPLE:

The use of corporate credit cards should build efficiency by simplifying the acquisition, receipt and payment of low-dollar-value purchases and travel expenses, supported by board policies and procedures about the use and safekeeping of the card. These policies should ensure that cardholders are responsible for exercising due care and judgement when using corporate credit cards. These policies must be publicly available on a school board's website.

BEST PRACTICES:

- The appropriate uses of corporate credit cards are specified in board policies and procedures
- Corporate credit card policies and procedures are reviewed with cardholders
- Corporate credit cards are used only for expenses incurred in relation to a cardholder's duties
- The cardholder is responsible for the card and meeting all the terms and conditions
- All expenditures are supported by receipts; hospitality expense claims should be accompanied with names of individuals entertained and their role. Purpose of the hospitality is also clearly stated
- Appropriate approvals of the expenses are obtained from a higher ranking employee (for example, immediate supervisor); in the case of trustees, the Chair of the Board or a designated senior official of the board; in the case of The Chair of the Board, a designated senior official of the board other than the Director of Education; the Chair of the Board should approve all of the expenses initiated by the Director of Education.
- Cash advances are kept to a minimum and limited to unusual circumstances; appropriate approvals should be obtained
- A monitoring process is in place to ensure corporate credit cards are used in accordance with established policies and procedures

EXAMPLES:

Examples of suitable use of a corporate credit card include:

- Payment for travel, meals and hospitality in compliance with established policies and procedures
- Tokens of appreciation for voluntary services such as presentations and guest speakers; retirement presents

Examples of inappropriate use of a corporate credit card include:

- Personal charges, such as booking personal travel
- Lavish gifts
- Split purchases to circumvent approval limits

RESEARCH STATISTICS:

Out of 72 school boards surveyed, 19 had a corporate credit card policy available on the board's public website. Eight boards' policies addressed specific types of expenditures permitted on the corporate card. One board specifically required proof of expenditure to accompany the claim.

TRAVEL, MEALS, AND HOSPITALITY EXPENDITURES

PRINCIPLE:

School board expenditures for travel, meals, and hospitality must be reasonable and transparent, with appropriate accountability and reporting mechanisms based on system-wide policies.

BEST PRACTICES:

- Policies and procedures should be publicly available on a school board's website
- Policy should clearly address:
 - Travel reimbursement costs within and outside the province
 - Kilometric reimbursement rates for personal vehicle use
 - Meal allowances
 - Hospitality expenses
 - Policy on reimbursement of alcohol
 - Standard level of travel and accommodation
 - Non-reimbursable expenses
 - Cash advances
- Expenditures are in compliance with the established policies and procedures
- Policies and procedures specifically address exceptions and processes to follow
- Policies and procedures ensure fair and consistent treatment of all employees and, where applicable, are consistent with collective agreements
- Expenses are associated with employee's duties, support the program objectives of the organization, and maximize the benefits to the organization
- Expenditures are accompanied with original receipts to support the claim; hospitality expense claims should be accompanied with names of individuals entertained and their role. Purpose of the hospitality is also clearly stated.
- Appropriate approvals of the expenses are obtained from a higher ranking employee (for example, immediate supervisor); in the case of trustees, the Chair of the Board or a designated senior official of the board; in the case of The Chair of the Board, a designated senior official of the board other than the Director of Education; the Chair of the Board should approve all of the expenses initiated by the Director of Education.
- The policies clearly address when and if reimbursement of alcohol is permitted; reimbursement of alcohol is not encouraged
- Cash advances are kept to a minimum and should be limited to unusual circumstances; appropriate approvals should be obtained
- Preference to be given to travel services and accommodation that provide specially negotiated rates (such as government rates)
- Periodic review and audit of expenditures are undertaken to monitor the adherence to the policy

EXAMPLES:

Examples of suitable expenditures for travel, meals and hospitality include:

- Cost for official board representatives to attend a meeting of benefit to the school board (such as education/business conferences, stakeholder association meetings, professional development sessions)
- Tokens of appreciation for voluntary services such as presentations and guest speakers; retirement presents

Examples of inappropriate expenditures for travel, meals and hospitality include:

- Excessive meal expenses and accommodation
- Hotel movies and mini-bar snacks
- Re-furnishing of offices due to staff changes
- Supporting a fundraiser or event for a specific political party
- Lavish gifts

RESEARCH STATISTICS:

Out of 72 school boards surveyed, 44 had a travel, meal, and hospitality policy available on board's public website. 31 boards required original receipts to be submitted for reimbursement of expenses. Approval to travel was addressed in the policy of 29 boards, and 12 boards required additional approvals for travel outside the province or country. 24 boards addressed daily meal allowance in their policy. One board allowed reimbursement of alcohol expenses.

ADVERTISING EXPENDITURES

PRINCIPLE:

Advertising expenditures should be for the purposes of informing and educating the public, as well as creating awareness of education programs, services, issues, events and community activities of specific interest or benefit to students and families. The level of expenditure should be appropriate to school board status as a taxpayer funded organization whose primary purpose is to educate students.

BEST PRACTICES:

- School boards exercise due diligence in determining the advertising medium that maximizes cost efficiency
- Appropriate approvals support the nature and the extent of an advertising campaign
- Advertising campaigns are targeted to specific groups that have a demonstrable need for information
- Advertising presents objective, factual and explanatory information based on verifiable facts in an unbiased, fair and equitable manner
- Advertising campaigns are in compliance with any applicable laws and regulations
- School boards are able to produce measurable outcomes as a result of advertising activities (for example, increase in number of inquiries or participation rates; awareness surveys)
- School boards have a process in place to ensure that advertising expenditures are adequately managed to achieve planned outcomes (such as ensuring that the actual advertisement was done appropriately and checking actual against planned outcomes)
- School boards have a process in place to ensure that significant advertising expenditures are competitively placed

EXAMPLES:

Examples of suitable uses for advertising include:

- School registration including kindergarten registration
- Program offerings
- Extracurricular activities
- Public consultations
- Employment opportunities
- Requests for tenders for goods and services
- School board accountability to the public (for example, annual publication of board financial statement)

- Information to Catholic and French-language education rightholders about their constitutional rights and the availability of Catholic and French-language education in their community

Examples of inappropriate uses of advertising include:

- Recruiting students from other school boards or schools
- Providing unverifiable or inaccurate information or comparisons
- Using paid advertising or communications with parents, teachers, or students for the sole purpose of advocating the government or other education partners
- Using advertising that is not targeted to appropriate groups, for example through widespread phone calls and automatic phone messages

RESEARCH STATISTICS

Out of 72 surveyed school boards, 13 had an advertising policy publicly available on school board's website. Out of those 13 boards, only 2 boards addressed communication plan and budget requirements in their policy, as well as approval of exceptions to the policy. Five school boards specifically addressed competitive selection processes in their advertising policy.

ADVOCACY EXPENDITURES

PRINCIPLE:

School board communication with the Ontario government is an important activity to identify, discuss and find solutions to policy and financial issues. Ontario has an effective education governance structure to ensure there is open and ongoing communication between school boards and the province, including partnership tables, regular meetings and other vehicles established by the government.

BEST PRACTICES:

- Focus on ongoing communication between school boards, education partners and governments through established mechanisms and channels
- Avoid basing communications on personal or partisan political agendas
- Maximize resources for student success and achievement

EXAMPLES

Examples of suitable advocacy expenditures include:

- Membership dues and fees to appropriate organizations

Examples of inappropriate advocacy expenditures include:

- Placing content intended to advocate for a particular position with report cards and annual reports
- Using students as vehicles for board or school advocacy to the public, education partners and governments
- Use of board funds to attend events for specific political parties

RESEARCH STATISTICS:

None of the boards surveyed had a distinct, publicly available policy on advocacy.