

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

SPONSORED TRAVEL

The following FAQs are intended to help UW Medicine workforce members, including UW faculty, non-UW faculty healthcare professionals and staff comply with the applicable laws, policies and rules governing sponsored travel. Sponsored travel is defined as transportation, lodging, meals or other travel-related expenses paid for, in part or in full, by an external, non-UW Medicine entity, such as a professional or non-profit organization or a commercial entity, usually in exchange for your expertise and/or participation in an event. Because UW Medicine entities have different requirements for sponsored travel, you should always consult entity-specific policies, and seek approval from your department chair, director, supervisor or manager as applicable. Also, for UW Medicine workforce members who are UW employees, the UW Travel Services office has numerous policies, procedures and other resources you and/or your department or unit administrator should consult before you engage in any activities involving sponsored travel. See the last page for references.

1. When is sponsored travel permissible?

- a) *Non-profit professional associations or organizations, institutions of higher education or governmental agencies* may pay for your travel expenses when you are performing a service or providing your expertise as follows:
- When you will be speaking at or organizing a professional association meeting, program or event;
 - When you are serving on a public commission or on a board of a non-profit/ philanthropic organization (Note that the non-profit/charitable organization cannot be created and supported by a commercial entity);
 - When you are required to travel as part of a contractual arrangement between a UW Medicine entity and the entity, such as a purchasing agreement, professional services agreement, or sponsored research agreement.
 - When you have obtained appropriate approval pursuant to your UW Medicine entity's policies.
- b) *Vendors or commercial entities* may pay for your travel expenses as follows:
- When you are required to travel as part of a contractual arrangement between a UW Medicine entity and the paying vendor/commercial entity, such as a purchasing agreement or professional services agreement;
 - When your travel is part of an approved research protocol and agreement or the travel is required by the research contract so that you may participate in an investigator's meeting;
 - When you have an approved outside work request and the travel is for your outside work, such as speaking at the commercial entity's sponsored event or program or consulting (please note that state employees, including UW faculty, are prohibited from providing testimonials for, marketing for, or endorsing a vendor or its products).

2. When is sponsored travel problematic and why?

Sponsored travel is problematic:

- When it has not been approved or authorized in advance as required by your entity's policies;
- When you are not performing a service or providing your expertise, such as when you are merely attending an educational program;
- When you are attending an event that is primarily marketing in nature.

Sponsored travel may be problematic because it may create the appearance of a conflict of interest. Accepting sponsored travel from a commercial entity might be perceived as creating a favorable bias toward that entity. In some circumstances, sponsored travel may implicate state or federal laws, such as the Anti-Kickback Statute, and UW Medicine policies prohibiting acceptance of gifts from industry. Examples of activities that could be problematic include:

- Companies selecting high-prescribing healthcare providers to speak favorably about their products at events where they will be compensated (some to the tune of hundreds of thousands of dollars);
- Companies inviting speakers to present at events where the educational value of the program appears low, such as at locations where entertainment or recreational events are featured (e.g., wineries, golf clubs, resort destinations, etc.) or at expensive restaurants where alcohol is served (especially if it is free);
- Companies inviting family and friends of speaking healthcare providers to also attend, when those other individuals have no legitimate business reason to attend;
- Healthcare providers who repeatedly speak at (or attend) programs that are on the same or similar topic.

3. I've been invited to speak at or help with planning my non-profit professional association's upcoming meeting. Can I accept their offer of airfare, registration fees, accommodations and meals if I am presenting at or helping to organize the meeting?

Yes, you may accept the non-profit professional association's offer to pay for travel expenses at the professional association meeting if you are presenting at or helping to organize the meeting, provided you first obtain the appropriate approvals required by your entity's policy.

If you are a physician, physician assistant, or an advanced practice nurse, (e.g., an ARNP, CNM, or CRNA), ask if the association is paying for your travel expenses with funds donated by industry. If so, the association may be required to report the payment of your travel expenses to the company who will in turn report that payment to the federal government per the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) Open Payments program (which promotes healthcare system transparency by providing publicly available data on certain financial payments by "reporting entities," including drug and device companies, to "covered entities," which include the healthcare provider types listed above as well as teaching hospitals).

You may not accept the offer of travel expenses if you are merely attending the meeting.

4. A commercial entity is offering to pay for my travel to attend their annual executive summit at an out-of-state resort. I'll have a chance to network and meet colleagues from around the nation. Can I accept their offer?

You may only accept a commercial entity's offer to pay for your travel expenses if both of the following are true:

- a) Covering your travel expenses is part of a contractual UW Medicine arrangement;
- b) The travel is necessary for the implementation or use of the commercial entity's products and is part of your work-related duties. Otherwise, the payment could be considered a gift.

5. My department's budget is a little thin and a vendor has offered to make up the difference by paying for my travel to their annual meeting at no charge. Can I accept the offer?

You may only accept vendor offers of sponsored travel as noted in 1(b) on page 1.

6. A commercial entity is the main sponsor of my professional association's national meeting. The meeting organizers have asked me to participate in a panel discussion and they will cover my airfare, hotel, registration fees and meals for the conference. Can I accept this support knowing that a commercial entity has sponsored the conference?

Yes, you may accept speaking engagements at conferences that are organized by your profession's association or governing body if you have obtained the appropriate approvals required by your entity's policy and the commercial entity does not dictate the content of your speech or your selection as a speaker. Because the professional organization—and not the commercial entity—is in charge of the meeting, there is sufficient distance between the commercial entity's support for the organization and your travel to reduce the risk of perceived or real bias toward the commercial entity. Note that if you are a physician, physician assistant, or an advanced practice nurse, the payment of your travel expenses and meals may be reported to CMS's Open Payments program by the commercial entity.

7. Is there anything I can do when a commercial entity offers to pay for travel, such as travel to educational programs?

Refer the commercial entity to UW Medicine Advancement at **206.543.8205**, and notify your department's director or vice-chair for finance and administration. Commercial entities can make unrestricted donations to UW Medicine which could help offset your entity's or department's costs for the travel.

8. What are the expectations with regard to travel accommodations, including air travel, hotel, and meal accommodations?

UW Medicine workforce members should plan for modest, non-luxury travel accommodations. For example, if your travel involves flying, then economy/coach class air travel is expected; first class or business class air travel is only approved in exceptional circumstances by UW or UW Medicine senior leadership. Likewise, hotel and meal accommodations should align with per diem standards established by the federal General Services Administration (GSA). Limited exceptions to this standard include attending a professional association conference or similar work-related meeting which directly relates to your UW Medicine position/work responsibilities and the conference or meeting location is at a hotel which exceeds the lodging per diem standards. Please see the [UW Travel Services website](#) for additional information.

REFERENCES

UW Medicine Compliance Gifts, Food, and Meals from External Sources – FAQs:

<https://depts.washington.edu/comply/resources/frequently-asked-questions-faq/gifts-food-andmeals-from-external-sources-faq/>

UW Medicine Compliance Code of Conduct:

https://depts.washington.edu/comply/docs/UWM_CodeofConduct.pdf

University of Washington Travel Services office:

<https://finance.uw.edu/travel/>

UW School of Medicine Policy on Potential Financial Conflicts of Interest for Commercial and Non-Profit Entities:

<https://www.uwmedicine.org/about/policies-and-notice/conflicts-interest-commercial-non-profit-entities>

Washington State Ethics in Public Service Act:

<https://apps.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=42.52&full=true>

Washington State Code of Ethics for Municipal Officers:

<https://apps.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=42.23&full=true>

Anti-Kickback Statute:

http://www.ssa.gov/OP_Home/ssact/title11/1128B.htm