

Volunteer Activity

Federal Election Commission

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Introduction

This brochure applies only to volunteer activity related to Federal elections. It explains how individuals may volunteer their services and certain goods to candidates for Federal office and to political party committees. Such activity does not count as a contribution or expenditure and is not reportable. However, certain activities are subject to a monetary limit; the volunteer's expenses that exceed the limit must be reported by a candidate or party committee as an in-kind contribution. For example, an individual might decide to offer his/her home to a candidate for a fundraising event. As host, the individual may spend up to \$1,000 for food, beverages and invitations without making a contribution. If the individual exceeds the limit by spending \$1,500, the \$500 would be a reportable in-kind contribution and would count against the individual's contribution limit.

Citations below refer to the Federal Election Commission regulations, contained in Title 11 of the Code of Federal Regulations (11 CFR) and to Advisory Opinions (AOs). If you have any questions after reading this brochure, please call the Commission in Washington, D.C., toll free, 800/424-9530.¹

Volunteer Activity Subject to Limits

Food, Beverage and Invitations

An individual may buy food, beverage and invitations used in connection with candidate- or party-related activity conducted in his/her home or in a church or community room (see below). The individual may spend up to \$1,000 per candidate, per election, for these items, and up to \$2,000 on behalf of all political committees of each party in a calendar year. 11 CFR 100.77. If an individual exceeds these limits, the excess amount would be a reportable in-kind contribution and would count against that individual's contribution limit. If an individual who is not a resident of the home co-hosts the event, his or her expenditures are considered contributions to the committee benefiting from the event. See AO 1980-63 for additional information.

¹ The reader should not rely solely on this brochure but should also consult the Federal Election Campaign Act, Commission regulations and the referenced advisory opinions.

Vendor Discounts

A vendor (whether or not it is incorporated) may sell food and beverages to a candidate's campaign or to a political party committee at a discount as long as the amount is at least equal to the vendor's cost for the items. The cumulative value of any such discounts (i.e., the difference between the normal charge and the amount paid by the committee) must not exceed \$1,000 per candidate, per election, or \$2,000 on behalf of all political committees of each political party in a calendar year. 11 CFR 100.78 and 11 CFR 114.1(a)(2)(v). If an unincorporated vendor exceeds these limits, the excess amount would be a reportable in-kind contribution and would count against that vendor's contribution limit. An unincorporated vendor may also sell food and beverages to a candidate's campaign or to a political party committee below cost, but the value of the portion of the discount that is below cost would be a reportable in-kind contribution and would count against that vendor's contribution limit.

Travel

An individual may pay for his/her own travel expenses related to candidate or party activity. The individual may spend up to \$1,000 per candidate, per election, and up to \$2,000 on behalf of all political committees of each party in a calendar year. 11 CFR 100.79. If an individual exceeds these limits, the excess amount would be a reportable in-kind contribution and would count against the individual's contribution limit.

Incidental Use of Corporate Facilities

Corporate employees and stockholders and labor organization employees, members and officials may make occasional, isolated or incidental use of corporate/labor organization facilities for their own individual volunteer activities in connection with a federal election. The Commission has said that the use of facilities for one hour per week or four hours per month is considered "incidental use." The individual must reimburse the organization to the extent that his/her activity increased the corporate/labor organization's overhead or operating costs. See 11 CFR 114.9 (a)(1) and (b)(2). This safe harbor does not apply when the employee is asked by a superior to do the volunteer work as part of his/her regular duties. Please consult Chapter 10 of the FEC's *Campaign Guide for Corporations and Labor Organizations*.

Volunteer Activity with No Limits

Personal Services

An individual may volunteer any personal service provided he or she is not compensated for the service by any other committee, individual or organization. 11 CFR 100.74.

If an individual provides free legal or accounting services, without compensation during his or her personal time, he or she is considered a volunteer. If any other entity (e.g. a committee, corporation, union or partnership) wishes to provide such services free of charge to the committee, they are subject to certain restrictions. See Chapter 7 of the *Campaign Guide for Congressional Candidates* for additional information.

Activities in the Home

An individual may offer the use of his/her home or the recreation room of his/her residential complex for candidate- and party- related activities, provided the room is available without regard to political affiliation. Any nominal fee paid by the individual for the room is not considered a contribution. 11 CFR 100.75. See also AOs 1986-28 and 1980-63.

Activities in Church or Community Room

An individual may obtain the use of a church or community room for candidate- and party-related activities, provided the room is used on a regular basis by members of the community, without regard to political affiliation, for noncommercial purposes. Any nominal fee paid by the individual for the room is not considered a contribution. 11 CFR 100.76. See also AO 1979-81.

Living Expenses

An individual may spend any amount for his/her living expenses incurred while engaging in volunteer activity. 11 CFR 100.79.

Internet Activity

An individual may engage in a variety of different campaign-related activities on the Internet without making a contribution to a federal candidate's committee. For example:

- A volunteer may prepare a web site supporting the committee, using his or her personal property at home, without making a contribution. The ongoing cost of maintaining the site also falls under the volunteer exemption at 11 CFR 100.74.
- Volunteers may send campaign-related e-mail messages using their own personal computers without making a contribution to the committee. Any cost associated with the activity is covered by the volunteer exemption at 11 CFR 100.74

For additional information, please consult AO 1999-17.