

Who should provide refreshments for monthly staff meetings?

Question: "I work for a nonprofit organization where only a few staff members occasionally bring in a treat for the monthly staff meeting. We all bring our own coffee or water. Is this the norm for nonprofit organizations? I personally feel that the association should provide the refreshments since the meeting is part of the workday and we are required to attend." — *Anonymous*

Comments

This may be something for the next meeting agenda. Since you work for a non-profit, the budget may not include refreshments for meetings. If that is the case, I suggest you do without refreshments, get down to business and possibly the meetings will be shorter and more to the point. You have to be flexible with your expectations.

Posted by: gamehen | April 04, 2008 at 01:18 PM

If the company had to provide refreshments every time it held a meeting, the money spent would be outrageous. I worked for a not-for-profit for many years and the only meetings we provided refreshments for was Board meetings, Executive Staff and of course, any all-day training sessions. Any other meetings held, you brought your own drink. I suppose I am surprised you feel your company owes you a refreshment just because you are attending a meeting. Do you get something to drink when you go to church? They too are a not-for-profit organization. Just be glad you are blessed to have a job and bring your own drink to the next meeting.

Posted by: Tess | April 04, 2008 at 01:22 PM

Why do people think we have to have food at every meeting? I work for government, and we have weekly staff meetings. The City will not pay for refreshments for a staff meeting. If someone brings "goodies" that's fine, we share. However, it is not required nor is it expected.

Posted by: Courtney L | April 04, 2008 at 01:22 PM

Whether for a "for profit" or "nonprofit" facility, I don't see where it would be up to the company to provide refreshments during the meeting. You are getting paid while attending the meeting. My suggestion would be for those of you interested in refreshments to develop a sign up sheet, and take turns to bring in refreshments. I work for a "for profit" company that has monthly meetings and we do not provide food. My husband runs a "nonprofit" agency that does not provide food either. Most companies these days do not have extra monies in the budget to spend on occasions such as staff meetings.

Posted by: CC | April 04, 2008 at 01:23 PM

I also work for a not for profit organization. We do not provide meals and refreshments for most meetings. We just had a situation where a coordinator asked about serving lunch for a conference that about 15 employees will be attending. My thought - the company is paying for this conference (to the tune of \$299) and I'm getting paid for attending...I can supply my own lunch. I do not feel the company needs to supply refreshments for every meeting just because its mandatory.

Posted by: Michelle | April 04, 2008 at 01:23 PM

I work for a not-for-profit, and the monthly staff meeting beverages were always BYOB. For all-staff meetings (including other departments), it depended if we were on-site or off-site. If we were on-site, we would bring our own. If we were off-site, they were provided by the company.

Posted by: Diane Johnson-Hung | April 04, 2008 at 01:27 PM

Since you work for a non-profit organization, ask yourself this question: Do your donors think they're giving their money to buy your snacks or to fund a compassionate cause? I, too, work for a non-profit; 99% of my (darn long) career has been in government or non-profit, so I appreciate the sensitivities about where funding comes from and where it's used. The owner of a for-profit company can spend her proceeds as she sees fit, within the bounds of the law. Government and non-profit organizations have less flexibility, or at least they need to consider the perceptions...because taxpayers and financial donors don't normally think their money is going into snacks for staff meetings.

That being said, the non-profit I work for has a pretty clear custom. We provide our own snacks for regular meetings but if it's an all-day marathon and we work through lunch, the company provides lunch.

Posted by: Kathy | April 04, 2008 at 01:32 PM

Offering refreshments is a great way to prevent brain fade and gives folks a extra energy boost especially when the meeting is long (over 2 hours). This is of course if you company can afford it. If they can, go a long way snacks can increase productivity and make people happy.

Posted by: | April 04, 2008 at 01:33 PM

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Posted by: Lynne | April 04, 2008 at 01:35 PM

The meeting may be part of your workday and you may be required to attend, however, unless you're a prisoner that works within the prison or you're on the front lines as an enlisted military person, I don't know of any job that is required to provide you with refreshments; there very well may be companies that offer this, however, it's not the norm nor should it be "expected". I'm not sure where this sense of entitlement comes from that is so prevalent in the workplace these days, but if you agree to work for a "non-profit", that term alone should tell you that your company is not going to be able to give you all kinds of perks. I'm right there with gamehen, you need to be much more flexible with your expectations... in fact, maybe it's your turn to bring in the treats. :)

Posted by: Realistic | April 04, 2008 at 01:35 PM

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Posted by: Realistic | April 04, 2008 at 01:36 PM

I am the director of a non-profit organization, and we have an all day staff meeting once a month where employees do not go home for lunch. Because I require them to work through lunch it is provided by the company. At our monthly board meeting we all volunteer to bring dinner rotating a different person each month, the company does not pay. I hope this is helpful.

Posted by: Krystle Moore | April 04, 2008 at 01:37 PM

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Posted by: Realistic | April 04, 2008 at 01:38 PM

I think "non-profit" is a clue. And, why do you need refreshments (fatter bottoms)? If you were working at your desk would you get paid company refreshments delivered to you? The only difference is you're "working" in a different location together rather than at your desk. If you're not getting paid for attending this meeting (after-hours), then I'd say paid refreshments may be a nice perk.

Posted by: joyce | April 04, 2008 at 01:54 PM

I honestly have never heard of refreshments being considered to be an expectation at a meeting. Even in a for-profit business I do not think this should be a requirement, but for a not-for-profit, the answer is right there in the name. I know if I was a donor to a charity, I would be a little upset if I knew some of my donation money was going towards buying someone a Pepsi just because they have to sit through a meeting. I have been at my current employer for 18 years, and the employer has never paid for refreshments, nor do I think they should have to.

Posted by: Mark | April 04, 2008 at 01:58 PM

I worked for a non-profit organization for many years. Our staff meetings were weekly and refreshments were never provided. There were occasions that different staff brought in snacks to share for special occasions or just for fun but all in all the company never provided refreshments. We also had a kitchen where we could purchase cans of soda and bottles of water for 50 cents on the honor system which worked very well. We never expected the company to provide extras for us because we all understood we worked for a non-profit and what little extra they might make financially they tried to use to increase our salaries.

Bringing in treats or holding pot lucks made us all closer as associates and I think that is also part of the philosophy of a non-profit. To do good to others and make a difference in the world. Kind of like a big family. At least that's how we felt about it all. Corny as that may sound.

Posted by: Jacelyn | April 04, 2008 at 02:41 PM

We have refreshments at larger more important meetings but we are not non-profit. I would never expect there to be refreshments and when provided I am thankful. Being that you work at a non-profit agency, not to be cold, but you should have a good understanding about why that might not be in the budget??? You are working together for a better good and bringing in things for yourself and others is the correct way vs the company. I would not want my donations going to refreshments for meetings.

Posted by: Jocelyn | April 04, 2008 at 03:50 PM

Working for a non-profit agency is a lot like working for the government. Purchasing food and/or beverages for employees to attend a meeting is not looked at favorably by donors or tax-payers. In the state government agency I work for, we are all responsible for our own drinks and if someone wants to bring a snack to share that's fine, but not expected. Why would you think it should be provided?

Posted by: cal | April 04, 2008 at 05:01 PM

I work for a public agency. Our department has staff meetings scheduled about twice a month. The only time we have ever had food is when we are celebrating a staff member's employee anniversary milestone (10 years, 15 years, etc., and we have to comply with agency policy about how much to spend and what to serve, even though it comes from the department budget) Our meetings are strictly business. If you want food, eat before or after the meeting. You are already attending the staff meeting on paid time.

Posted by: Anon | April 04, 2008 at 06:02 PM

I work for a non-profit organization with 400+ employees, and feel that we provide food/beverages far too often for meetings. I think that the company should only provide food/beverages if the meeting is held during a lunch hour and there is no other option of a meeting time. The cost of food for meetings can be very draining on the budget.

Posted by: Sandy | April 07, 2008 at 08:29 AM

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Posted by: Sandy | April 07, 2008 at 08:30 AM

I think that the fact that you work for a non-profit is irrelevant. Regardless of who you work for you should NOT EXPECT refreshments for attending a meeting. The meeting is a required job function. Refreshments are a benefit. When did we get to the point where we think our company (for profit or not-for-profit) has to do these things for us?

There obviously is no rule saying you can not eat during the meeting so if everyone brings their own beverage why can't everyone bring your own snack. Or take turns providing a snack for the entire group that way the same person is not always providing the team with a snack.

If the problem is the fact that you are spending too much to provide your own refreshments for meetings you might want to think about what effect it has on the company as well.

Posted by: tlg | April 07, 2008 at 08:54 AM

I work for the government and the only refreshments provided is coffee for staff meetings, Why would you expect snacks at a meeting anyway? The only time lunch may be provided is if its the Executive Board members coming in for a meeting during their lunch hour. Refreshments are a benefit in the workforce not a mandate. Refreshments would be a waste of donor monies having it spent on refreshments for staff meetings.

Posted by: Jo | April 07, 2008 at 01:22 PM

No wonder your question was from 'anonymous'.

Posted by: HRforSmFamilyBiz | April 08, 2008 at 11:27 AM

We've all heard 'There are no stupid questions...' but there are certainly questioners who are oblivious to the dynamic in which they work/live/question, which sometimes is quite obvious to your average 100 people if you were to take a poll.

Posted by: HRforSmFamilyBiz | April 08, 2008 at 11:32 AM

Wow! This topic certainly heated up! All the questioner asked was "Is this the norm?" and got attacked and insulted.

Yes, Anonymous, it is pretty common that companies (not just non-profit) do not furnish employees with refreshments at meetings.

Many of the answers nailed it: how would people feel if they knew their donations were going toward donuts?

Posted by: | April 08, 2008 at 02:02 PM

Unless the monthly meeting is held during lunch hours no food is required. As you say everyone brings their own beverage. Meetings are for discussing business, when goodies are involved the meetings drag out longer then necessary. If by chance it is held during the lunch hour then you could suggest pizza, etc where all who are interested chip in, otherwise they would eat whatever they brought in for lunch.

Posted by: Louise | April 11, 2008 at 08:39 AM