5 Ws: Documenting a Business Purpose

Specific documentation is required to substantiate business travel, meals and entertainment expenses under IRS regulations. Expense documentation must include the following information:

- **Who** - The name of individual who incurred the expense.
- **What** - What the expense entailed.
- **When** - The date the travel, meal or entertainment occurred.
- **Where** - The location including city/state/country.
- **Why** - Topic discussed, business activity or agenda and how it relates to Harvard/fund charged.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why’s Below Are Not Sufficient</th>
<th>Why’s Below Do Meet IRS Requirements</th>
<th>Who/What Meet Requirements (must clearly relate to the Why)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“discussed finances”</td>
<td>“discussed University’s fiscal year-end procedures to compare with another institution’s procedures”</td>
<td>Jane Doe, Vice President of Finance at MIT</td>
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<tr>
<td>“discussed upcoming economics conference”</td>
<td>“discussed possible keynote speaker and presenters for Economics Conference with Conference co-chair”</td>
<td>Ellen White, Economics Professor from Stanford University</td>
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<tr>
<td>“staff luncheon”</td>
<td>“staff luncheon to celebrate the holidays in connection with Christmas and Chanukah”</td>
<td>Religion Department staff: Joe Claus, Jane Holly, Mike Bell and Candy Cane</td>
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<tr>
<td>“attended ABC Conference in early April”</td>
<td>“attended American Bottle Cappers conference in Boulder, Colorado from April 1-7, 2008 to present paper on loss of carbonation from loose caps”</td>
<td>John Coors, Busch Professor of Chemistry Conference expenses charged to NSF grant on effervescence; Hotel, airfare, travel meals, taxis</td>
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<tr>
<td>“traveled to New York to meet with Peter Parker”</td>
<td>“traveled to New York City to meet with Peter Parker for collaboration on the impact of spider webs on inner-city street congestion, October 31, 2008”</td>
<td>Betty White, Marvel Professor of Entomology</td>
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<tr>
<td>“reception”</td>
<td>“public reception in Emerson Hall on July 1, 2008 following the Abraham Lincoln lecture on “The Historical Significance of Stovepipe Hats”</td>
<td>Since this was a reception open the public, not necessary to document those in attendance. Account charged should be related in some capacity to the lecture.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• **Who:**
  o Names of others if more than one individual was involved
  o For up to five people: List full names of each
  o More than five people: List readily identifiable groups
    ▪ (Example: Prof. Smith’s 10 graduate students)
  o For non-Harvard individuals, title and affiliation are also required

• **What:** Clear description of event, activity, or purchase
  o “chemical supplies for Barker Lab” vs. “supplies”
  o “trip to Spider Monkey Conference” vs. “trip to conference”
  o “trip to collaborate with Super Hero Peter Parker from Marvel Comics on impact of spider webs on street congestion” vs. “trip to meet with P. Parker”

• **When:**
  o Beginning and end dates of a trip
  o Date item was purchased

• **Where:**
  o Exact location of trip – if city is not easily recognizable, include state and/or country
  o For trips with multiple locations, list them all

• **Why:**
  o Why the expense was incurred and how it relates to the fund being charged
    ▪ “Trip to collaborate with Super Hero Peter Parker from Marvel Comics on impact of spider webs on street congestion for DOT study on impact of traffic obstructions”
  o With regard to purchases, be specific!
    ▪ “Books for Prof. Brown’s research on world cinema for National Endowment for the Humanities cinematography grant” rather than just “Books”