I. Purpose

In certain cases it is in the best interest of the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education (“OCHE”) to provide catered meals for meetings, work sessions, training sessions, conferences, or other similar OCHE functions (“OCHE Functions”). Federal programs must adhere to specific federal fund restrictions and requirements associated with their program when providing a meal. The purpose of this policy is to provide uniform guidelines to all OCHE divisions and programs concerning when catered meals may be provided and to ensure the most efficient and cost-effective use of public funds for catered meals.

II. Definitions

For purposes of this policy, the following definitions apply: (1) “Catered meal” includes meals, snacks, and refreshments such as bottled or canned, non-alcoholic beverages. It does not include alcoholic beverages; and (2) “Normal mealtimes” means 12:01 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. for morning meal; 10:01 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. for midday meal; and 3:01 p.m. to 12:00 a.m. for evening meal, per Montana Operations Manual Policy (MOM’s Meal Allowances). Meetings should be scheduled in line with regular working hours, as identified in OCHE Personnel Policy 305.0.

III. Policy and Procedures

OCHE may provide a catered meal to allow for adequate travel time to and from an OCHE Function site or to increase meeting efficiencies for an OCHE Function. The OCHE Function should span normal mealtimes and be for official OCHE or Montana University System (“MUS”) business. The average per person cost of the catered meal should not exceed state per diem rates, inclusive of any snacks, bottled or canned non-alcoholic beverages, costs for tips (not to exceed 20% of total cost), and delivery services. However, the Commissioner may approve a catered meal up to 20% more than the appropriate per diem rate if the Commissioner determines that extenuating circumstances require higher cost meals.

Catered meals may be provided to OCHE/MUS employees and to non-employees who are invited to attend an OCHE Function for a specific purpose that directly benefits OCHE or the MUS. If an OCHE or MUS employee is in travel status, the employee may not claim the cost of the catered meal as a travel reimbursement, even if the employee declines the catered meal.

If a catered meal is provided only to OCHE/MUS employees, the Commissioner or appropriate Deputy Commissioner must determine that the employees are required to remain onsite through normal mealtimes because of extenuating circumstances or because an intra-departmental meeting or training session will extend beyond normal mealtimes.

OCHE staff must complete the Catered Meal Form and obtain pre-approval from the Commissioner or Deputy Commissioner for the program requesting the catered meal. The purpose of the OCHE Function, agenda, and list of attendees must be detailed or attached to the Catered Meal Form. This form, along with all supporting documentation such as an itemized receipt, ProCard log, or invoice, must be submitted to OCHE Operations and Administration staff to ensure prompt payment as referenced in OCHE Purchasing Policy (OCHE 504) and Procurement Card Policy (507).

It is the responsibility of every OCHE and MUS employee to comply with state conduct and ethics policies.