UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

THE UNDER SECRETARY

September 29, 2025

SUBJECT: Reminder Regarding Prohibited Use of Federal Grants Funds for Lobbying and Allowable Membership Costs.

SUMMARY: This document provides guidance clarifying the longstanding statutory and regulatory prohibitions on the use of federal grant funds for lobbying, including membership dues that support lobbying activity, and reminds grantees of their responsibilities under applicable law and regulations.

Dear Colleague:

We are writing to remind you of the legal restrictions on using federal grant funds for lobbying activities. Although grantees may belong to professional or trade organizations, including national associations that support students and institutions participating in federal grant programs, the use of federal grant dollars to engage in or subsidize lobbying remains strictly prohibited.

Statutory and Regulatory Background

Section 1352 of Title 31 of the United States Code prohibits recipients of federal grants, loans, or cooperative agreements from using federally appropriated funds to pay any person for influencing or attempting to influence any officer or employee of an agency, a Member of Congress, or congressional staff in connection with the awarding, extension, continuation, renewal, amendment, or modification of a federal grant. This prohibition applies to both direct lobbying by the recipient and indirect support through payments to third parties.

In addition, under the Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards (commonly referred to as the Uniform Guidance), lobbying costs are unallowable charges to a federal award. Specifically, 2 C.F.R. § 200.450 prohibits the use of grant funds for lobbying activities, including influencing activities associated with obtaining grants or attempting to influence, either directly or indirectly, an employee or officer of the executive branch of the Federal Government to give consideration or to act regarding a Federal award or a regulatory matter.

Further, 2 C.F.R. § 200.450(c) applies additional restrictions to nonprofit organizations and institutions of higher education (IHEs). Those additional restrictions include prohibiting any costs associated with attempting to influence federal or state legislation, establishing, administering, contributing to any organization to influence the outcomes of elections in the United States, or engaging in legislative liaison activities.

Although 2 C.F.R. § 200.454(a) allows the use of federal funds for membership in business, technical, and professional organizations, that allowance does not extend to organizations whose primary purpose is lobbying (*see* § 200.454(e)). Nor does it allow payment of dues to any organization that fails to segregate lobbying from non-lobbying costs. It is the responsibility of the grantee to ensure that any membership fee funds are not used for lobbying, even when the membership organization's primary purpose is not lobbying. As with all costs, including membership costs in business, technical, and professional organizations, those costs must be reasonable and necessary to the performance of the grant (*see* the cost principles in 2 C.F.R. Part 200 Subpart E).

Grantee Responsibilities

As grantees, you are responsible for ensuring that your use of federal funds complies with applicable federal statutes and regulations. This includes:

- Ensuring no federal grant dollars are used directly or indirectly to pay for lobbying efforts;
- A presumption that membership fee amounts tied to a percentage of a federal grant are unallowable;
- Maintaining adequate documentation to demonstrate compliance to ensure that membership fees are not used on lobbying and are reasonable and necessary; and
- Avoiding payment of dues to organizations that cannot or do not report the proportion of their activities that are dedicated to lobbying.

Although membership in certain organizations may be allowable in limited circumstances, federal grant funds may not be used to subsidize any portion of dues that support legislative advocacy or lobbying. Grantees are responsible for requesting appropriate breakdowns of dues and ensuring compliance with 31 U.S.C. § 1352, 2 C.F.R. §§ 200.454 and 200.450, and all other applicable law related to lobbying.

Consequences for Noncompliance

Failure to comply with these provisions may result in disallowed costs, audit findings, program reviews, and additional oversight or enforcement actions by the Department up to the termination of your grant. Additionally, violations may lead to civil penalties, including fines and the potential suspension or debarment of grantees or individuals. Grantees should consult with their legal and compliance teams to review current expenditures and ensure they align with these existing federal requirements.

Disclaimer

As with any "Dear Colleague" letter and guidance document, the contents of this document do not have the force and effect of law and are not meant to bind the public or the Department. This document is intended only to provide clarity to the public regarding existing requirements under the law and regulations.

Sincerely,



Nicholas Kent
Under Secretary

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