

Federal Income Tax Considerations for Officials

By Rich Schornstein, Ozark Association

Some, but not all of our USA Track & Field officials are aware that federal tax law may permit deductions for expenses associated with volunteer officiating for qualified organizations. Here's a brief overview to help determine if there's a little relief from the taxman.

Who Can Benefit?

If you meet certain criteria, expenses associated with officiating duties *may* qualify as a deductible charitable contribution, claimed on Schedule A (Itemized Deductions) of your federal return. So, *if you file Form 1040 and if your total itemized deductions are near or above the standard deduction amount*, there may be good news for you. But, if your total itemized deductions do not exceed the standard deduction for your filing status, then you should of course take the standard deduction, and the officiating expenses will not help reduce your taxes this year.

What Officiating Work Might Qualify?

"A charitable contribution is a donation or gift to, or for the use of, a *qualified organization*. It is voluntary and is made without getting or expecting to get, anything of equal value." Therefore, *service as a volunteer official* for athletic competition conducted by most non-profit schools, colleges, or universities, or USA Track and Field (a qualified organization) would meet the criteria. (IRS Publication 78 lists all qualified organizations.)

What Expenses Might Qualify?

Out-of-pocket expenses may be deductible when you serve a qualified organization as a volunteer. *The amounts must be:* unreimbursed; directly connected with the services; expenses you had only because of the services you gave; and not personal, living, or family expenses. The amounts must be reduced by the value of any benefits you receive from the organization.

For USATF officials, these may include expenses incurred for the following:

- Travel while away from home performing the volunteer services. You must perform the volunteer duty in a genuine and substantial sense throughout the trip; if you perform only nominal duties or no duties for a significant part of the trip, you cannot deduct the expenses of the trip. Allowable expenses include:
 - Automobile costs directly related to the use of your car in getting to and from a competition. Deduct either actual gas and oil expenses or use the standard rate of 14 cents per mile; also parking fees and tolls.
 - Meals which you eat while you perform the volunteer services, if it is necessary for you to be away from home overnight while performing the services
 - Lodging
 - Air, rail, and bus transportation
 - Taxi/shuttle fare for travel between the airport or station and the hotel
- Dues paid to the USATF and Officials' Associations
- Rule books, and specialized equipment not suitable for other everyday use (for example, field implement weight and measure equipment; pole vault crossbar lifters; starter's pistol, ammunition, and orange sleeve; etc.)

- Convention expenses: unreimbursed travel, transportation, and reasonable meals and lodging expenses while you are away from home overnight in connection with the convention – *if you are a chosen representative* attending a USATF convention (simply attending as a member does not qualify)

What Expenses Do Not Qualify?

- The value of your own time or services
- The cost and upkeep of uniforms – because all of our uniform items, despite the USATF logos, *are likely to be considered suitable for wear* away from competition venues, they probably don't meet the IRS criteria of "...not suitable for everyday use..."
- The cost of meals while performing volunteer services, if not away from home overnight
- Equipment which has other everyday uses; for example clipboards, folding chairs, tape measures, adhesive tape, etc.

What if I Receive Some Payment for My Service?

If you receive a daily allowance or per diem to cover reasonable travel expenses (including meals and lodging while away from home overnight), then you:

- May deduct the necessary travel expenses that are more than the allowance
- Must report as income the amount of the allowance that is more than your travel expenses

How Do I Claim These Deductible Expenses?

Enter your total out of pocket charitable expenses on Schedule A, Itemized Deductions, in the "Gifts to Charity" section, on the line for "Gifts by cash or check." *Keep detailed records* on every meet name and sponsoring organization, date, location, assignment, and mileage; and expenses for mileage, parking, tolls, air/rail/bus/taxi travel, lodging, and meals. Also keep meet assignment sheets, invitations, or selections for meets and conventions. If expenses for any one item or event are \$250 or more, you'll need a written statement from the recipient organization (See Pub 526). Charitable contributions may be limited for some individuals - see Form 1040 Instructions.

Final Thoughts

This article simply summarizes published tax information. For advice on these matters consult your tax professional. You may also go to www.irs.gov/formspubs/ to view, download, or order copies of IRS materials. The following are of particular use for this topic:

- Publication 526, Charitable Contributions
- Form 1040 Forms and Instruction booklet
- Publication 17, Your Federal Income Tax