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A Blog for the BSA's Adult Leaders

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Tips for deducting Scouting expenses on your tax return

🕒 February 6, 2018 👤 Bryan Wendell 📁 Scouting Tips 💬 110 Comments



UPDATED: This text, first published in 2011, was updated Feb. 6, 2018, with 2017 tax season info. This includes a complete refresh and an accuracy review by Eagle Scout **Michael B. Carr, CPA**. (Thanks, Michael!)

DISCLAIMER: While this text was reviewed by a CPA, this material is intended for informational purposes only. It is not intended to provide, and should not be relied on for, tax, legal or accounting advice. Always consult your own tax, legal and accounting advisors before engaging in any transaction.

When Baden-Powell said "Be Prepared," I'm pretty sure he wasn't talking about income tax returns.

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Bryan Wendell, an Eagle Scout, is senior editor of *Boys' Life*, *Scouting*

But still, there's no better advice than that two-word phrase during tax time.

Scouters who heeded the Scout Motto last year remembered to track and document their Boy Scouts of America-related expenses. And now, they know that they can include those expenses if they plan to itemize their deductions.

But what if you didn't know that BSA expenses were deductible? Or what if your "filing system" is really your glove compartment that's stuffed with gas receipts and crumpled-up napkins? And what qualifies as an eligible expense, anyway?

Your fellow Scouters and I are here to help. Along with [other Scout leaders on Facebook](#), I've collected some tips to help you track and deduct your BSA-related expenses.

And with the **April 17, 2018, deadline** approaching fast, there's no better time than now to get started.

General facts you need to know

Further clarification for this section comes from the Taxwise Giving newsletter (November 2016 edition).

- On IRS Form 1040, "[2017 Instructions for Schedule A](#)", the Boy Scouts of America is listed by name on page A-9 as a "qualified charitable organization," so BSA expenses are eligible.
- Four types of contributions **can** be deducted:
 - Cash/check donations
 - Property donations
 - "Out-of-pocket expenses you paid to do volunteer work"
 - Uniforms for leaders. "Uniforms that aren't suitable for everyday use and that you wear while performing donated services for a charitable organization are charitable items in the year purchased," Carr says. "Scout uniforms for leaders qualify."
 - The cost of driving to and from BSA events
- Some types of relevant contributions **cannot** be deducted:
 - The value of your time
 - Scouting dues or membership fees
 - A contribution to a specific individual. This includes giving to the Boy Scouts and specifying a particular person or Scout as the beneficiary of your donation.
- [IRS Publication 526](#) has lots more info (thanks, William)

and *Eagles' Call* magazines.



Michael Freeman, an Eagle Scout, is associate editor of *Boys' Life*, *Scouting* and *Eagles' Call* magazines.

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Easy enough, right? Scouters will mainly be concerned with that third type of eligible deductions, “out-of-pocket expenses you paid to do volunteer work.”

Some items that you purchase to benefit your unit can be deducted, provided your unit didn't reimburse you for them. You'll want to check with your tax professional to be sure, but Scouters have told me they deduct merit badge pamphlets, den meeting activity kits, Wood Badge course fees and much more — again, as long as their pack or troop didn't reimburse them.

However, there's one expense that I'm certain you *can* deduct: the cost of driving to and from BSA events.

How to include driving expenses

Included in the third category is driving to or from a BSA event. Here's what the IRS says about mileage:

- First, you're eligible to deduct the cost of driving to and from the volunteer work, which would include most BSA activities.
- You have two options here:
 - You can take the actual cost of gas and oil, **OR**
 - You can take **14 cents a mile** (note: the **2017 rate for volunteer work mileage** remains at 14 cents a mile)
- You **can** deduct parking and tolls, so add that to the amount you claim under either method above.
- As a reminder, you **cannot** deduct any expenses, mileage included, that were repaid to you by your unit, district, council or anyone else.
- You also **cannot** deduct insurance or depreciation on the car.

Traveling as a volunteer

If you travel as a volunteer and must be away from home overnight, reasonable payments for meals and lodgings, as well as your transportation costs (previous section), are deductible. Also deductible: your transportation costs (air, rail and bus tickets, or mileage as described in the previous section).

This is where it gets tricky. You can't deduct travel expenses if there's a “significant element of personal pleasure, recreation or vacation.” But enjoying your volunteer time doesn't rule out a deduction.

For example, if you're an on-duty troop leader who takes Scouts on a BSA camping trip, you may deduct those travel expenses even if you had a good time.

Important caveats

Next, there's the tricky part of "gifts from which you receive benefit." Let's say, for example, that you attend your council's annual dinner. Can you deduct that expense? Sort of.

Here's what the IRS says: "If you made a gift and received a benefit in return, such as food, entertainment, or merchandise, you can generally only deduct the amount that is more than the value of the benefit."

So if tickets for the council dinner were \$75 and the value of the dinner was \$35, you can only deduct \$40.

Or if you paid \$110 for a \$100 gift card at a silent auction, you can only deduct \$10.

Make sense?

Also, you'll want to consult a tax professional or the IRS site for individual gifts of \$250 or more. There are special rules that apply to those larger gifts.

How to deduct gifts of more than \$250

Here's what Carr says:

If the leader is deducting more than \$250 in a single charitable contribution, he or she should maintain a record of these expenses (credit card receipts for travel, copy of a cancelled check for cash donations), as well as a letter from the charitable organization showing:

- Donee's name
- Contribution date
- Contribution amount
- Indication the donee received no goods or services were in return for the gift.

How tax law changes will affect Scouters

Carr says:

The threshold for itemizing (filling out the Schedule A) will increase from \$12,700 for a married-filing-jointly (MFJ) return in tax year 2017 to \$24,000 for an MFJ return in tax year 2018.

As a result, a lot of the detailed tracking Scout leaders may have done in the past for charitable givings will no longer be necessary in 2018.

Unless charitable givings, mortgage interest, and state and local tax deductions are greater than \$24,000 (MFJ) or \$12,000 (Single), a Scout leader won't be itemizing, and as a result the charitable donation won't be deductible.

Ten tips for keeping track of it all

Here are 10 tips your fellow Scouters offered:

1. **Theresa W.** keeps a "notebook in the car for tracking mileage! Man, it adds up faster than you think!"
2. "I update an Excel Spreadsheet with costs, and a folder for receipts," says **Jeff B.** "I print out the Excel table when I do my taxes."
3. **Jamie D.** also has a high-tech approach: "I use [Mint.com](https://www.mint.com) to track all our expenses. I set up a category just for Scouts."
4. So does **Tom H.**: "I have a program called NeatReceipts that comes with a scanner. I use it for my expense reports for work. Just drop the receipts in the scanner then categorize them. Set up a group for Scouting and everything is there at tax time."
5. But **Michelle H.** prefers the low-tech method: "We have a calendar and a folder (calendar stays in the folder) to keep track of everything!"
6. **Patricia L.** makes it easy on her accountant: "I keep a file and drop my charitable receipts in it all year. Our accountant appreciated copies of online maps that we used for driving directions. Date, purpose, and mileage all in one place."
7. **Julus P.** doesn't itemize, but he might start some day. "Scouting is not for profit, and not a hobby. Granted, it feels like a hobby sometimes! I don't keep track of all these things but really should!"
8. For **Mark F.**, it's not worth the trouble. "I don't keep up with it. I enjoy being a Cubmaster and camp promotions chair, and so far, it's cheaper than going to NASCAR races and cheaper than maintaining my boat and related gear I use for fishing!"
9. **Shawna R.** keeps track of mileage, but not for every trip: "I don't keep track of mileage for going to the store to pick up Scout items, even if it's the only thing I'm going to the store for." That's probably a good call.
10. And finally, please remember to heed the advice of **Ann O.**: "Check with your tax person on what you can deduct. It wasn't as straightforward as I thought, and the rules seem to change."

Want even more tips? Find them in the comments section below, and please share your own.

Oh, and good luck!

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Derrick T ownsend • a month ago

I use google maps to determine the miles driven to and from a campout or event. Then I use ItsDeductible.com to log the miles (and any other expenses). At tax time, since I use TurboTax, I can just import my log into TurboTax and it makes it really easy.

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Timothy W Havens • a month ago

So if you volunteer at a National Jamboree, you have the cost of travel which is reimbursable in theory as are the meals to get there. What about the "cost" that staffers pay to attend the event.

1 ^ | ▾ • Reply • Share ›



John Sorensen → Timothy W Havens • 4 hours ago

How is travel to Volunteer at the Jamboree Reimbursable?

I have volunteered at 3 National Jamborees, and working on World next year, and I have never been offered reimbursement by anyone. I would rather be reimbursed than be able to deduct it.

you can reply by email at johnrsemt@gmail.com

Thank you in advance to anyone who replies

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Jay Gregg → Timothy W Havens • 18 days ago

Timothy - the Jamboree staff fee is an "Out-of-pocket expense you paid to do volunteer work", therefore eligible to be a deduction.

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Dean • a year ago

Was audited years ago, primarily questioning my Scouting deductions. After the IRS glanced at my troop's activity log (and my Commissioner Service miles), he said, "I don't know why we bothered you."

1 ^ | ▾ • Reply • Share ›



Carla • 3 years ago

BUT I DIDN'T TRACK MILEAGE!!!

If you come to the end of the year and realize that you weren't organized enough to keep track of mileage, don't worry. Go back to your calendar. If you're like me, you put everything on your calendar and tag them by category. Export all the scouting events into a spreadsheet (most calendar apps do this), and then figure out mileage from home to the event location and back. (Our troop meetings are 15 miles from my house, and I function as a leader there, so that was 2000 miles a year just for meetings.)

It adds up quickly, and you have a record of when and where.

If you didn't put it in your personal calendar, go back to your unit calendar and your district/council calendars online, and work from those. It might take you an hour, but it's worth it for the deduction.

1 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Derrick T ownsend • a month ago

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I use google maps to determine the miles driven to and from a campout or event. Then I use ItsDeductible.com to log the miles (and any other expenses). At tax time, since I use TurboTax, I can just import my log into TurboTax and it makes it really easy.

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Beth Katz • a month ago

It doesn't make financial sense for me to itemize deductions, so all of this goes out the window. I'm thinking with the increase in the standard deduction, even fewer people will need to do this.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Amy • a year ago

I don't know if this applies but if you donated for friends of scouting, can you get reimbursed from the troop, if requested?

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Natasha Haas-W illiams • a year ago

I made myself a Google Form which I have basic questions that I ask myself: Who I am volunteering for, Miles driven, price of gas at time of service, hours volunteered (for other purposes), costs (deductible costs only), name of location/destination etc. When I answer my own Google form it automatically generates an Excel-type spreadsheet that I can convert in different ways or even import into different programs etc.

I put a link onto my phone (for any phone- Android or iPhone) I can either download the form App or just open the form webpage on a browser and save that webpage to my homescreen (so it looks like an app) and I can add in the info on the fly.

It works well for me. I can add entries as needed- it records the date and time I make the entry or I can add a date of service to my questions.

I can change my form however I like and track whatever I would like in this method.

In-fact, I use Google forms for a lot of scout related things! Give it a try~

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Anthony Greene • 2 years ago

YOU CAN DEDUCT UNIFORM COSTS. See page 5 of IRS Publication 526 (linked above).

The caveat is that the items can't be suitable for everyday use. That's a judgement call. Almost nobody would wear a uniform shirt or neckerchief around the town. Some people might wear the pants/shorts/belt. Uniform baseball caps are wearable outside scouting (I have one on now), but a felt brimmed hat, not so much. You could probably even deduct the green socks and the red jackets. Bottom line, if you wear it as a Scouter and you simply don't like to wear it for other things, then it's not suitable and is deductible. If you do wear it for other things, then don't deduct it. The IRS can't audit whether it's suitable as you do not itemize uniforms items and wouldn't give a second glance at reasonable deductions unless you got audited for some other reason. But a Scout is Trustworthy. Scout's Honor. Suitable is your call, and taxes are the price we pay for roads/highways, police/fire, the military, sewers, the electrical grid, tap water, sea- and airports, public education, medical research, and your congressman's amazingly awesome health plan.

If you got a full audit for some other reason (you won't get audited over uniform deductions), they might ask for receipts, so just pay with your credit card and that's that. 2% of taxpayers get audited in any given year, but the vast majority of those audits are computer detected math errors, or computer detected missing 1099s or other misc income. You get a letter and either mail a check or go to the local IRS office and pay your bill.

You can't deduct dues, meals or entertainment. I can't make a firm determination as to whether you can deduct costs like attending Wood Badge, going to Scout Summer Camp as a unit leader, or travel to and from Scouting-only events (not sight-seeing). The IRS weighs in on attending "conventions" as a designated representative (you can deduct all unreimbursed costs for that), but doesn't bother to tell you about other events

of obligation where there's no such thing as a designated representative.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Cris McKinzie • 2 years ago

FYI. There's a free program out there to use on web or app on a tablet, called Expensify. I use it to log my scout deductions. It figures mileage for you at volunteer rate. You can also upload maps as receipts, upload other receipts as deductions like for uniforms, and create monthly reports on expenses. You can then email the reports to yourself or anyone else as PDF attachments. It also lets you itemize your expenses, like I have mine set up for Council events, Troop events, etc. When you print the report it will group like items together so you can see how much mileage you're putting on for your Troop or Pack versus District or Council.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Jon C • 2 years ago

I use a mileage tracking app on my smart phone to track mileage like evidence which is for iPhone and I have used mileage tracker for Android both are available in Google Play or the iPhone App Store.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Don Schmidt • 2 years ago

One important thing to keep in mind is that itemized deductions don't make sense if the standard deduction is larger. I make the even-numbered year the year in which I bunch deductible expenses; real estate tax, most localities are set up with this in mind. I paid 2015 real estate tax in Jan 2016. I will pay 2016 real estate tax in Dec 2016 and deduct both payments in one year. I make 13 monthly payments to my church in the even-numbered years and 11 in the odd-numbered years. I am in the position that we need to file estimated income tax. Again, I paid the 4th quarter of 2015 in Jan 2016. I will pay the 4th quarter of 2016 in Dec 2016.

I started keeping track of vehicle use when I spent some time on the road for my job duties. I just revised the process when I retired and continued keeping track. I don't find it that cumbersome if I stay on top of the process.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Steven Phillips • 2 years ago

As a CPA, please do NOT follow the incorrect advice on treating a monthly payment to FOS as 12 separate gifts . . . The total amount of cash given should be treated as a single gift, with all appropriate restrictions and documentation.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Bryan Wendell → Steven Phillips • 2 years ago

Thanks, Steven, for clarifying. Let me change that.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



ashley v. • 2 years ago

I am a den leader and was wondering what expenses I can claim as tax deductible. Can I claim supplies for the activities and for the cost of outings and events?

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



John Sorensen → ashley v. • 4 hours ago

Yes as long as your chartering organization does NOT reimburse you. If it comes out of your pocket and your pocket only and it is for troop, pack etc it is deductible. In my case I have a \$200 annual budget from our church so I pay ALOT out of my pocket and I deduct everything. Keep track of everything, because it will add up. I have had years with over \$24,000 in deductions, so deciding not to keep track of everything will cost you

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Kristi • 2 years ago

I'm curious if anyone out there may know if there is anyway I could use a charitable tax contribution to go towards my sons trip to the jamboree in 2017 the same way my daughter could use my charitable tax donation to go on a school trip to Europe. Ideally many of our family members could use their charitable tax donation to help offset the cost for our son to attend the jamboree.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Bob → Kristi • a year ago

Hi @Kristi. When we as parents are paying for learning opportunities for our kids, that's just our duty as parents. It's not a charitable contribution. If your daughter went on a school trip to Europe and you deducted that expense, you may have accidentally committed tax fraud.

If you gave money to your troop for camperships, and your troop decided to use the money to pay for your son's best friend to go to the jamboree, then that you can deduct.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



GeorgiaASM • 3 years ago

How do you track "actual gas"? MPG and miles driven? It doesn't take a full tank of gas every week so I don't fill up every meeting day.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Suzanne → GeorgiaASM • 3 years ago

We do not track gas unless you deduct actual expenses for the vehicle. We keep s mileage log book and record odometer readings at beginning and end of each travel for medical and scouts or other chsrity miles. It is only 14c a mile, but easier to calculate by moving the entries in an Excel spreadsheet. Mileage really counts up. We also prepare an expense report for each long trip that includes hotel, meals, etc. Hope this helps. We were recently informed by the IRS to proof our deductions for 2012. Glad we had these records to send.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Anthony Greene • 3 years ago

If you're concerned about any of it, and have significant deductions of any form (mortgage interest, donations, daycare, etc.) then have your taxes done for what, \$200?? They'll find deductions you never dreamed of, they know offhand the answers to questions you can only guess the answer to (as we see in this thread, different people pull up different IRS pamphlets) and you don't waste an entire day, and if a small error is made, the tax preparer dives on the grenade for you. Or if that's too expensive for your blood, TurboTax or other tax preparation software is meticulous about knowing where certain deductions go in to the forms, what the limits are, method of calculation, even if you used your own computer for the volunteer work, TurboTax will determine the amount of deterioration/depreciation for your charitable contribution. It's really not as difficult as all of this.

Regarding the clause that you cannot deduct the activity if your receive significant pleasure from it, that is an absurd and

[see more](#)

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



iowasuz • 3 years ago

How do you find out the true cost of a special meal, so you can deduct the amount over that as an expense? I have never seen the cost of a meal at either the council or annual national meeting. I am a volunteer. The past two years, my husband and I deducted the full amount of each meal.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Joe Schey • 3 years ago

I drove nearly 4000 miles for my troop in 2014, claimed the \$0.14 a mile on the taxes, and got back an extra \$30 from the government. Not even a tank of gas, but its something.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Dan Vitous → Joe Schey • 2 years ago

I use actual expenses for this vs charitable allowance.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



iowasuz • 3 years ago

How do you find out the cost of a special occasion BSA meal so you can deduct the difference between the cost and what you paid? I have never seen it. Thanks

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Suzanne • 3 years ago

In regard to council or national BSA conference meals, how do you find out the cost of the meal to be able to deduct the difference? I never see that published.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Alan • 3 years ago

According to my CPA, just about everything involved in Jamborees is deductible, from the total fee (although we were fed out of the fees), gasoline/mileage, lodging while traveling, uniforms, required camping equipment, ... and the total fee amount was confirmed by a letter from the BSA National Office.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Tom Carvin • 4 years ago

I thought there was a distinction between BSA at the national and council level and the individual troops. It was my understanding that expenses incurred at the individual troop level are treated as expenses / donations to the chartering organization. If I donate \$50 to BSA through Friends of Scouting then it counts, but a donation to my local troop for a piece of equipment it does not. I'd love to see something official on this distinction.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Paul Wolf • 4 years ago

Publication 463 covers BUSINESS Expenses, not out of pocket expenses as a volunteer. Here's what Publication 17 (Page 169) says on the subject:

<http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-...>

Car expenses. If you claim expenses directly related to use of your car in giving services to a qualified organization, you must keep reliable written records of your expenses. Whether your records are considered reliable depends on all the facts and circumstances. Generally, they may be considered reliable if you made them regularly and at or near the time you had the

expenses. For example, your records might show the name of the organization you were serving and the dates you used your car for a charitable purpose. If you use the standard mileage rate of 14 cents a mile, your records must show the miles you drove your car for the charitable purpose.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



btphelps • 4 years ago

If you want to deduct your mileage, it's not enough to submit a list of places you went and their mileage. If you're audited, the IRS expects to see a log that was kept concurrently with the actual trips. That log must be detailed, including the date, destination, purpose, odometer readings, mileage, and more. For complete details, see Publication 463.

<http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-...>

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



q • 4 years ago

A 21st century tip for counting mileage: pull up last year's calendar, list the locations you drove to for charity (multiple stages on separate lines if there was a complicated itinerary), look up directions via google maps (making sure you select the route you actually took), it gives the mileage that route at the top of the directions.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



John Sorensen → q • 4 hours ago

Better protection Keep track of EVERY mile driven;

Date Description

1/1 Home to work to Home.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



John Sorensen → John Sorensen • 4 hours ago

hit post too soon Start miles 23101

Date Description End Miles Total Miles Deduct

1/1 H to work to H 23125 24 n

1/2 H to work mtg to H 23149 24 W=Work

1/3 H to WOrk to H 173 24 n

1/4 H to Leader Sp Tx 275 102 S=Scout

1/5 H to Doctor Appt to H 376 101 M=Medical

It seems time consuming, but works: Medical mileage is deductible if you hit a total of 7.5% of AGI in medical bills (out of pocket) Premiums don't count unless they come out after taxes. My wife had both knees replaced a couple of years ago, between out of pocket for surgery and mileage and out pocket for therapy we hit almost 10% of our AGI. That year we had \$26,000 in deductions.

You better believe I keep track of everything.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



bessanna → q • 4 years ago

I keep an excel spreadsheet each year where I keep track of my scout related mileage. I do what q suggests... google map my destination and keep track of miles that way. I enter the mileage on my chart after the trip. This way I also have documentation should I ever be asked for it later.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Dennis • 4 years ago

I'm a SM for a small troop, the troop is not a 501(c)3 entity. And I know from working with the council, troops can't use the councils tax status. Does the troop have to have a tax status for travel to be deductible?

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



jeppedy → Dennis • 4 years ago

Your volunteering is to the BSA and thus covered under a contribution to them. Or, so I have been led to believe.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Dave → Dennis • 4 years ago

Dennis: Use your Chartered organization's tax status.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Tim H • 4 years ago

Drivers Journal is a free app on Google Play that lets you log your miles. At years end you can export a .csv file to give your tax preparer.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Brian Nielsen • 4 years ago

You state... "Some types of relevant contributions cannot be deducted:

Travel expenses..." You're being overly conservative. Yes, meals might be problematic (under the personal expenses exclusion), but IRS Pub 526 is very clear travel expenses CAN be deducted, stating "Generally, you can claim a charitable contribution deduction for travel expenses necessarily incurred while you are away from home performing services for a charitable organization only if there is no significant element of personal pleasure, recreation, or vacation in the travel." As Scoutmaster, my biggest such deduction has been in taking crews to Philmont. I deduct my costs for airfare, lodging on the way, and the Philmont fee. Yes I enjoy these trips immensely, but I, and any crew advisor, am in volunteer mode the entire time and as such

these costs are indeed deductible.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Maribel Myers • 4 years ago

I'd say the copies you make on your computer are probably deductible BUT the only way to keep track would be to log EVERY printout that you made. It would be the only accurate way to track your expenses if you wanted to deduct them. Because if not you'd be relying on your memory and don't think it's good enough for tax purposes It would almost would be easier to have a stand alone printer for your scout copies or just go to a printer/officer store. You'd save the wear and tear on your equipment AND you'd have receipts..

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Cindi • 4 years ago

One item I've never seen mentioned in these discussions over the years is the cost of making copies. We run a small Scout Reach pack of 1st and 2nd graders. We make tons of copies a year for coloring and crafts. I'm sure I could deduct all this if I

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