

ADMINISTRATIVE PRACTICE LETTER

SUBJECT: DIRECT CHARGING OF EXPENSES

Section VIII - C
Issue 4
Page 1 of 12
Effective 08/21/2007

Index

- [Purpose of Guidelines](#)
- [Policy](#)
- [Who is Responsible](#)
- [Definitions and Terms](#)
- [Responsibilities and Procedures](#)
 - [Observance of Period of Availability of Funds](#)
 - [Consistent Allocation of Costs Incurred for the Same Purpose](#)
 - [What May be Charged to a Sponsored Agreement](#)
 - [Direct Costs and F&A Costs](#)
 - [Treating Costs that are Normally Considered F&A Costs as Direct Costs](#)
 - [Unallowable Costs](#)
- [Frequently Asked Questions](#)
- [History of Policy](#)
- [Related Documents](#)

Purpose of Guidelines

The University's ability to obtain federal grants and contracts depends on its performance in meeting federal requirements. Office of Management and Budget (OMB) [Circular A-21](#), "Cost Principles for Educational Institutions," presents Cost Accounting Standards and other requirements with which University personnel responsible for charging expenses to any University chartfield combination need to understand and comply. This document is intended specifically to provide guidance about what and when costs may or may not be charged to sponsored grants and contracts.

Policy

Direct charging of expenses through projects and programs financed in whole or in part with Federal funds shall be administered in accordance with standards set forth in OMB Circular A-21. Guidelines in this document are drawn largely, but not solely, from Section C. Basic considerations, Section D. Direct costs, Section E. F&A costs, and Section J. General provisions for selected items of cost.

Who is Responsible

Responsibility for following these guidelines lies primarily with Principal Investigators or Project Directors, their Department Chairs or other direct supervisors, and unit-level fiscal personnel with the general guidance and oversight of the colleges, schools and divisions.

Applicable University Sponsored Programs Office or other designated personnel are responsible for providing general guidance and technical assistance.

ADMINISTRATIVE PRACTICE LETTER

Section VIII - C

Issue 4

SUBJECT: DIRECT CHARGING OF EXPENSES

Page 2 of 12

Effective 08/21/2007

The University of Maine System administration is responsible for providing guidance through administrative practice letters and coordinating compliance monitoring through periodic internal and external audits.

Failure to follow these guidelines may have serious consequences, including disallowed costs, which would require reimbursement to the sponsor from unrestricted departmental funds; increased federal oversight, monitoring, and audits; and loss of future federal funding.

Definitions and Terms

Direct Costs: Direct costs are those costs that can be identified specifically with a particular sponsored project, an instructional activity, or any other institutional activity, or that can be directly assigned to such activities relatively easily with a high degree of accuracy. Costs incurred for the same purpose in like circumstances must be treated consistently as either direct or F&A (facilities and administrative) costs. Where an institution treats a particular type of cost as a direct cost of all non-sponsored activities of the institution, all costs incurred for the same purpose in like circumstances shall be treated as direct costs of sponsored agreements.

Facilities and Administrative Costs: F&A costs (formerly known as indirect costs) are those costs that are incurred for common or joint objectives and, therefore, cannot be identified readily and specifically with a particular sponsored project, an instructional activity, or any other institutional activity. F&A costs are allocated to the major functions of the University in proportion to the use of the University's resources. Where the University treats a particular type of cost as an F&A cost of sponsored agreements, all costs incurred for the same purpose in like circumstances must be treated as F&A costs.

F&A costs are broad categories of costs. "Facilities" is defined as depreciation and use allowances, interest on debt associated with certain buildings, equipment and capital improvements, operation and maintenance expenses, and library expenses. "Administration" is defined as general administration and general expenses, departmental administration, sponsored projects administration, student administration and services, and all other types of expenditures not listed specifically under one of the subcategories of Facilities (including cross allocations from other pools).

Sponsored Agreement: A sponsored agreement means any grant, contract, or similar agreement between the University and an extramural sponsor in which the University agrees to carry out a specific scope of work and the sponsor agrees to pay part or all of the costs of the work. Such scope of work may be carried out directly by the University or subcontracted, in whole or in part, as appropriate.

Funding Period: Funding period means the period of time when Federal funding is available for obligation by the recipient.

ADMINISTRATIVE PRACTICE LETTER

SUBJECT: DIRECT CHARGING OF EXPENSES

Section VIII - C
Issue 4
Page 3 of 12
Effective 08/21/2007

Obligations: Obligations means the amounts of orders placed, contracts and grants awarded, services received and similar transactions during a given period that require payment by the recipient during the same or a future period.

Responsibilities and Procedures

Observance of Period of Availability of Funds:

The University must ensure obligations incurred are timely. OMB Circular A-110, SUBPART C - Post-Award Requirements, Financial and Program Management, Section 28 indicates, "Where a [funding period](#) is specified, a recipient may charge to the grant only allowable costs resulting from [obligations](#) incurred during the funding period and any pre-award costs authorized by the Federal awarding agency."

Consistent Allocation of Costs Incurred for the Same Purpose:

The University must ensure that each type of cost is allocated only once and on only one basis to any sponsored agreement or other cost objective. The criteria for determining the allocation of costs to a sponsored agreement or other cost objective should be the same for all similar objectives. Adherence to these cost accounting concepts is necessary to guard against the overcharging of some cost objectives and to prevent double counting.

Consistency in allocating costs incurred for the same purpose requires that all costs incurred for the same purpose, in like circumstances, are either direct costs only or F&A costs only with respect to final cost objectives.

What may be Charged to a Sponsored Agreement:

The University may directly charge costs that are reasonable, allocable, and not limited or excluded by OMB Circular A-21 or the specific terms of the sponsored agreement. The University must consistently treat certain kinds of costs as F&A; therefore, such costs may not be directly charged. The cost of a sponsored agreement is comprised of **allowable** direct costs, plus the allocable portion of the **allowable** F&A costs of the University.

To be an **allowable** cost, the cost must be:

- 1) **Reasonable** - A prudent person would have purchased the item and paid the given price. Major considerations involved in the determination of the reasonableness of a cost are:
 - Whether or not the cost is of a type generally recognized as necessary for the operation of the University or the performance of the sponsored project,

ADMINISTRATIVE PRACTICE LETTER

SUBJECT: DIRECT CHARGING OF EXPENSES

Section VIII - C
Issue 4
Page 4 of 12
Effective 08/21/2007

- The restraints or requirements imposed by such factors as arm's-length bargaining, Federal and State laws and regulations, sponsored agreement terms and conditions, or agency guidelines,
 - Whether or not the individuals concerned acted with due prudence in the circumstances, considering their responsibilities to the institution, its employees, its students, the Government, and the public at large; and,
 - The extent to which the actions taken with respect to the incurrence of the cost are consistent with established institutional policies and practices applicable to the work of the University generally, including sponsored projects.
- 2) **Allocable** - Expenses are chargeable or assignable to a sponsored agreement according to relative benefits received or other equitable relationship. Therefore, a cost is allocable to a sponsored agreement if:
- It is incurred solely to advance the work under the sponsored agreement, or
 - It benefits both the sponsored agreement and other work of the institution, in proportions that can be approximated using reasonable methods, or
 - It is necessary to the overall operation of the institution, and is assignable (under the principles of OMB Circular A-21) in part to sponsored projects.

When the purchase of equipment or other capital items is specifically authorized under a sponsored project, the amounts authorized for such purchases are assignable to the sponsored project regardless of the use that may subsequently be made of the equipment or other capital items involved.

Any costs allocable to a particular sponsored agreement may not be shifted to other sponsored agreements in order to meet fund deficiencies, to avoid restrictions imposed by law or by terms of the sponsored agreement, or to meet other reasons of convenience.

- 3) **Not unallowable** - The nature and amount of the cost must not be limited or excluded by OMB Circular A-21 or the sponsored agreement.

Direct Costs and F&A Costs:

Direct Costs

Costs which are generally charged directly to sponsored programs include, but are not limited to:

- salaries and wages of technical staff (i.e., those who directly contribute to the project's technical purpose; generally do not include clerical support),
- fringe benefits,
- graduate student assistantships and tuition,
- equipment (i.e., items costing \$5,000 or more),

ADMINISTRATIVE PRACTICE LETTER

Section VIII - C

Issue 4

Page 5 of 12

Effective 08/21/2007

SUBJECT: DIRECT CHARGING OF EXPENSES

- long distance phone charges,
- travel costs, and
- materials and supplies (e.g., project specific supplies and materials; laboratory supplies; data processing supplies, books, periodicals, and other reference material; equipment costing less than \$5,000; and software).

Note: Time and effort reports document that salaries and wages charged to sponsored agreements are reasonable in relation to work performed. Such reports are generated at the System Office and sent to Sponsored Programs, or other responsible department, for distribution to the applicable departments. To confirm that the distribution of activity represents a reasonable estimate of the work performed by the employee during the period stated, the reports are signed by the employee, the applicable principal investigator with first-hand knowledge of the work performed, or a responsible official using suitable means of verification that the work was performed.

The following practices for charging direct costs are prohibited:

- Purchasing items simply to use unobligated balances
- Rotating charges among grants
- Assigning cost to grants based upon remaining budgets
- Charging the budget amount rather than basing the charge on actual project usage
- Assigning a "departmental tax" to projects for clerical/administrative costs
- Charging expenses to grants when the expense supported other activities

F&A Costs

The University must treat certain costs as F&A costs. Such costs include depreciation and interest on buildings, equipment and capital improvements; operation and maintenance of plant; general administration; sponsored programs administration; library; student administration and services; and departmental administration.

Consistent with Federal regulations, the University typically treats the following departmental administrative expenses as F&A costs:

- Routine office supplies, postage, and local telephone charges,
- Memberships, and
- Salaries and wages of administrative and clerical staff.

ADMINISTRATIVE PRACTICE LETTER

SUBJECT: DIRECT CHARGING OF EXPENSES

Section VIII - C
Issue 4
Page 6 of 12
Effective 08/21/2007

The University of Maine System's F&A Rate Agreement with the Department of Health and Human Services outlines the rates that may be calculated against project direct costs to determine F&A charges. Rates vary based on the type of activity performed (research, instruction, or other sponsored activity) and whether the work will be done on or off campus. Per the contract, "The use of the off-campus rate is determined by agreement between the University and individual grantor agencies. If projects are principally conducted on-campus with occasional trips off-campus, the project is assumed to be utilizing campus facilities and the on-campus rate is used. If projects are principally conducted off-campus with occasional trips on-campus, the off-campus rates are used."

For terms and conditions of the rate agreement and a list of the University of Maine System's federally negotiated rates, click [F&A Rate Agreement](#). Prior year rates and a delineation of the specific type base applicable to each type of sponsored agreement activity are available at [Facilities and Administrative Cost Rates](#).

Treating Costs that are Normally Considered F&A Costs as Direct Costs:

The University follows the general guidelines in OMB Circular A-21 Sections D. and E. in determining the treatment of costs as direct or F&A. Costs normally considered as F&A costs can be charged directly in only very unusual/special, unlike circumstances. As noted above, the University requires that care be taken to ensure that costs incurred for the same purpose in like circumstances are treated consistently as either direct or F&A costs.

Exceptional circumstances for charging as direct costs those items that are normally charged only as F&A costs include:

- Facility alterations. If a program requires the creation of new specialized facilities, including the purchase of security equipment, special construction, or other project-specific facilities costs, such costs may be charged directly.
- Postage and office supplies. If a program requires substantial mailing expenses (e.g., bulk mailing) in the performance of the project, postage and office supplies may be charged directly.
- If a project requires significant amounts of staff support, well beyond the routine requirements of sponsored projects, appropriate costs of staff compensation may be charged. Examples of such major projects include:
 - 1) Large, complex programs or centers which entail assembling and managing teams of investigators from multiple institutions.

ADMINISTRATIVE PRACTICE LETTER

SUBJECT: DIRECT CHARGING OF EXPENSES

Section VIII - C
Issue 4
Page 7 of 12
Effective 08/21/2007

- 2) Projects that involve extensive data collection, analysis and entry, surveying, tabulation, cataloging, searching literature, and reporting (e.g., clinical trials).
- 3) Projects that require making travel and meeting arrangements for large numbers of people (e.g., seminars and conferences).
- 4) A project where the primary focus is the preparation and production of manuals and large reports, books, and monographs (excluding routine progress and technical reports.)
- 5) Projects that are geographically inaccessible to normal departmental administrative services (e.g., such as research vessels).
- 6) Projects requiring project-specific database management; individualized graphics or manuscript preparation; human or animal protocols; and multiple project-related investigator coordination and communication.

These examples are not exhaustive nor are they intended to imply that direct charging of administrative or clerical salaries would always be appropriate for the situations illustrated in the examples. For instance, the examples would be appropriate when the costs of such activities are incurred in unlike circumstances, i.e., the actual activities charged direct are not the same as the actual activities normally included in the institution's facilities and administrative (F&A) cost pools or, if the same, the indirect activity costs are immaterial in amount. It would be inappropriate to charge the cost of such activities directly to specific sponsored agreements if, in similar circumstances, the costs of performing the same type of activity for other sponsored agreements were included as allocable costs in the institution's F&A cost pools.

Unallowable Costs:

Certain costs are unallowable as direct or as F&A costs. Costs which are unallowable shall be identified and excluded from any billing, claim, application, proposal, or chartfield combination applicable to a sponsored agreement. All unallowable costs should be identified and recorded in an unrestricted chartfield combination.

ADMINISTRATIVE PRACTICE LETTER

SUBJECT: DIRECT CHARGING OF EXPENSES

Section VIII - C
Issue 4
Page 8 of 12
Effective 08/21/2007

OMB Circular A-21, Section J provides principles to apply in establishing the allowability of charging certain costs to Sponsored Programs. Section J addresses charges that are allowable and those that are unallowable. A summary of the specifically identified unallowable costs from Section J follows. Sponsored programs should not be charged for:

- Certain advertising and public relations costs - includes advertising related to the general image of the University or events related to instruction or other institutional activities. (However, advertising costs are allowable when the purpose is to recruit personnel or to procure goods or services for specific sponsored programs, or to otherwise meet the requirements of a sponsored agreement.)
- Alcoholic beverages
- Alumni activities
- Bad debts
- Certain commencement and convocation costs
- The cost of institution-furnished automobiles that relate to personal use by employees
- Contingency provisions
- Certain defense, prosecution, and other costs related to criminal and civil proceedings, claims, appeals and patent infringements
- Donations or contributions made by the institution
- Entertainment costs - including amusement, diversion, and social activities and any costs directly associated with such costs
- Certain fines and penalties
- Costs of goods or services for personal use of the institution's employees
- Housing and personal living expenses for/of the institution's officers
- Certain insurance costs
- Certain interest, fund raising, and investment management costs

ADMINISTRATIVE PRACTICE LETTER

SUBJECT: DIRECT CHARGING OF EXPENSES

Section VIII - C
Issue 4
Page 9 of 12
Effective 08/21/2007

- Most lobbying costs
- Losses in other sponsored agreements or contracts
- Costs of membership in any civic or community organization, country club or social or dining club or organization
- Costs incurred prior to the effective date of the sponsored agreement, unless approved by sponsoring agency
- Certain recruiting costs
- Selling and marketing costs
- Student activity costs
- Unreasonable travel costs, including airfare costs in excess of the lowest available commercial discount airfare except where justified and documented
- Certain termination costs applicable to sponsored agreements

For a detailed description of these unallowable costs (or of certain allowable costs), click this link to [OMB Circular A-21 Section J](#) . Failure to mention a particular item of cost is not intended to imply that it is either allowable or unallowable; rather, determination as to allowability in each case should be based on the treatment provided for similar or related items of cost.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. When is it appropriate to directly charge a Sponsored Agreement for clerical support?

*You may charge a Sponsored Agreement for clerical support where a project requires extensive administrative or clerical assistance, such as working with large amounts of data or producing large reports or books. The support required must be **significantly** greater than the routine amount typically required of academic departments throughout the University. Such expenses must also be specifically identified with and benefit the project and be listed in the approved proposal budget. You can not charge sponsored agreements for those types of costs that are routine, such as costs for budget monitoring, recordkeeping, purchasing, personnel actions, etc. You can only charge those types of administrative costs that are specific to the project scope.*

ADMINISTRATIVE PRACTICE LETTER

SUBJECT: DIRECT CHARGING OF EXPENSES

Section VIII - C
Issue 4
Page 10 of 12
Effective 08/21/2007

2. If I know that the project is administratively intense and will need clerical support, what should I do?

When writing your proposal, include a budget justification for categories of administrative costs, tailored to the sponsor requirements and the specific project. Explain the function of the position or cost as it directly relates to and benefits the project. Be sure to include project specific details to highlight the activities that make the project administratively intensive. After-the-fact budget justifications are allowable when approved by the sponsor.

3. If we can't charge clerical assistance to this grant, can we provide, for example, 10 hours a week of a clerical person's time as University cost-share?

No. You can only provide clerical assistance as cost-share in the exceptional circumstances that would permit charging such assistance as a direct cost to the sponsor.

4. Is it ever appropriate to direct charge postage to a Sponsored Agreement?

Yes, when the scope of the project demands exceptional expenditures for postage and the cost of postage is included in the grant budget.

5. The PI on this award is going to a meeting in another state. While there, he will report on results of two separately funded research projects. He will also meet with a collaborator to plan a joint application for renewal funding of a third project. To which projects are his travel costs properly allocable?

The travel costs should be reasonably determined for the three projects that benefited. One way to calculate such costs would be to determine the percentage of time spent on each task and prorate the costs accordingly. The cost that related to the renewal funding on the third project is, however, a departmental cost, and should not be charged to a sponsored project chartfield combination.

6. We have a federal grant for an eight-week summer seminar for high school teachers, drawn from around the country. The grant provides stipends to the participants to cover their travel, housing, meals, and other seminar-related expenses. We plan a reception for them on the evening of their arrival date and a banquet on their final day. Can we charge the costs of food, honorariums, and a band or disc jockey for these two events to the grant, or are they considered "entertainment?" And where shall we charge the costs of the beer and wine we'll serve?

ADMINISTRATIVE PRACTICE LETTER

SUBJECT: DIRECT CHARGING OF EXPENSES

Section VIII - C
Issue 4
Page 11 of 12
Effective 08/21/2007

If the reception and the banquet have been justified in the proposal as beneficial to the project, and if their costs have been explicitly requested of and approved by the sponsor, then those costs may be charged. The initial reception, for example, might be justified as a particularly appropriate means for seminar participants to first become acquainted with each other and/or to begin to develop important contacts. A band or DJ might be difficult to justify as something other than entertainment, therefore, unless such justification can be found, such costs may not be charged to the grant. The alcohol costs may not be charged to the grant.

7. I am purchasing a piece of equipment through my department's budget but I need more money and I have some left over in a sponsored project. Can I charge the sponsored project?

No. You may charge to the sponsored project only those costs that benefited the sponsored project. .

8. What type of membership costs may I charge to a project funded by a grant?

Each membership cost needs to be looked at on a case by case basis. Memberships may only be charged to a sponsored project in those instances where the membership purpose fits the scope of the project and is included in the budget. The membership period also needs to coincide with the period of the project. Costs of membership in any civic or community organization or any country, social or dining club may not be charged to a grant-funded project.

9. Is insurance for research equipment an allowable cost?

Generally speaking, insurance should not be direct charged to a grant. Insurance for the grant period could be charged if it were 100% allocable to the grant, otherwise, directly charging such expense to the grant would not be appropriate.

10. I haven't used all of my budgeted labor funds. May I use them for other grant-related purchases?

Whether you can use these dollars for other grant-related purposes depends on the specific terms and conditions of the grant and sponsor. Contact your Sponsored Programs Office, or other designated personnel for guidance in this area.

ADMINISTRATIVE PRACTICE LETTER

SUBJECT: DIRECT CHARGING OF EXPENSES

Section VIII - C
Issue 4
Page 12 of 12
Effective 08/21/2007

History of Policy

Issue 2: Effective 06/28/2006 (replaces FAST terms with PeopleSoft terms)

Issue 3: Effective 04/02/2007 (incorporates Compliance/Risk Assessment recommendations, expands “reasonable” cost” definition, expands “allocable” cost definition, adds “Policy” section and “History of Policy” section)

Related Documents

[Accounting for Grants and Contracts](#) - business process document

[APL VIII-B Restricted Expendable Funds Guidelines](#)

[APL VIII-E Effort Certification](#)

[APL VIII-K Cost Transfers](#)

[F&A Rate Agreement](#) - link to negotiated rate agreements for current and recent years.

[F&A Cost Rates](#) - link to F&A rates for current and recent years.

APPROVED:

Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer