Guidance on the Appropriate Use of Research Funds

Office of the Provost

Vice Provost for Research

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Georgetown University research funds are intended to support a broad range of faculty research activities, according to the guidelines outlined below.

1. Definitions

For the purposes of this policy, the term “research funds” refers to:

(i) any grant funds received from an external sponsor to support budgeted research activities, and

(ii) other research funds typically held in a faculty member’s research account, including:

- Proceeds from Indirect Cost (IDC) charged on external grants that accrue to a faculty member’s research account;
- Proceeds from internal grants from the Provost’s Office, or the faculty member’s School or Department, or other sources within Georgetown University;
- Other funds, for example from unrestricted gifts, specified for research.

2. Principles

(i) University policies apply to the use of all university funds, including research funds, and should be beneficial to the university.

(ii) Research funds should be used for costs directly related to research and should not be used for personal or other non-research expenses.

(iii) External research funds must be used in a manner consistent with the requirements of the sponsor, and be “reasonable, allocable, and allowable.” For example,

- Federal regulations specify what types of carriers are allowable on federal grants, in compliance with the Fly America Act.
- Federal funds cannot be used to purchase alcohol under any circumstances.

(iv) Financial prudence should be exercised, and extravagance or the appearance thereof should be avoided.

- In the case of non-Federal grants, where permitted by the sponsor, the prudent purchase of alcohol is permitted under the category of “catering,” “meals,” or
similar. No special authorization is required, but as with any other expenditure, costs should be contained to reasonable levels.

(v) All assets purchased with research funds remain the property of the university, including equipment, supplies, etc.

(vi) Apart from course buy-outs and certain dependent care expenses (see next point), expenses that simply provide additional time to faculty are generally not allowed.

(vii) Dependent-care expenses that facilitate conference attendance and other short-term research travel are allowable, in accordance with the sponsor's policies and approval processes, if any.

(viii) Research funds cannot be used to pay for services that are otherwise provided free of charge by the university (e.g., document shredding)

3. Examples

Generally allowable expenditures include, for example:

- Books of a scholarly nature
- Computer hardware and software, including cell phones, tablets, laptops, etc. (All purchases should be made via University purchasing.)
- Clerical and administrative help in the execution of research, in accordance with the sponsor's policies and processes, if any
- Conference registration fees
- Hotel, travel, and subsistence costs associated with the conduct of research
- Various library fees, not including late fees and fines
- Membership in professional organizations (not allowable on federal grants)
- Page charges for articles in scholarly journals; subventions
- Scholarly journal subscriptions
- Research assistants

Generally not allowable expenditures include, for example:

- First-class travel (see University travel policy for additional guidance)
- Clothing (or care/maintenance thereof)

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1 The Uniform Guidance, Article 200.474(c)(1)(ii) says that this is allowable “provided that it is consistent with the non-Federal entity’s documented travel policy for all entity travel.” So for Federal grants, this will be an allowable expense once the University's travel policy is revised.

2 Clerical help is allowable on Federal awards with the Agency’s prior written approval. There are strict criteria for what information must be included in the proposal or the post-award request for approval.
- Club memberships
- Costs of commuting between home and campus
- Gifts
- Home or office furniture or décor not related to the conduct of research
- Network connectivity costs
- Newspapers and magazines
- Personal digital subscriptions to journals already available via the University library
- Salary paid to any faculty member (unless specifically authorized)
- Spousal, partner, or other family member travel

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3 Research centers and initiatives that are wholly or partly funded by external sources may use their share of the IDC, or direct costs as allowed by the sponsor, to cover items such as furniture and other office expenses. Furniture for individual faculty offices is the responsibility of the relevant department or school.