

SEA GRANT POLICY FOR APPROVAL OF RESEARCH PROJECT TRAVEL REQUESTS

The NOAA Grants Management Division has recently mandated that we submit a Narrative Budget Justification for each Sea Grant project proposal, and has provided a Budget Justification Review Checklist [see below] to aid applicants in proposal preparation. For travel, detailed information is requested about each planned trip and its relation to the successful completion of the project including such information as the number of travelers for each trip, destinations to be visited, trip durations, purposes, and estimated cost breakdowns. Although project implementation may necessitate minor deviations in such items as conference destinations, airline fares, and other costs, the narrative justification is intended to be a definitive statement of what the P.I. considers necessary to accomplish the project. Accordingly, if the project is funded, it is expected that project travel will be accomplished substantially as indicated in this plan. Therefore, the Narrative Budget Justification, when accepted as part of a sponsored agreement, becomes the approval standard for determining whether individual travel authorization requests submitted to our office meet the criteria established for necessary travel in connection with the project in question.

Who is eligible to travel on Sea Grant project funds? A necessary, but not sufficient, condition is that the individual must have substantive participation-- preferably with time charged or cost-shared-- in the project. As a general rule, persons who do not have a formal time commitment through time charged or cost-shared to the project should not travel on funds of that project. Any exceptions to this rule should be discussed with the Sea Grant Director well in advance of the actual travel dates [see **What If Things Change?** below].

When is conference travel deemed necessary? To carry out a purpose stipulated in the Narrative Budget Justification. The most common justification for conference travel is to present research results from the current or immediately preceding Sea Grant project. In this regard, even though a paper may have multiple authors, usually only one individual is needed to present a single paper. If the P.I. finds it necessary for any individual to attend a conference for some other purpose, provision for such attendance should be anticipated and made in the budget justification.

Can surplus project funds be used for travel? Barring a significant change in the project objectives, P.I.s may overspend the conference travel category by 10 percent. This should be adequate in most instances to provide for inflationary changes in travel costs.

What if things change? Contact the Sea Grant Director immediately to discuss budgetary impacts of changing circumstances, including travel allocations and any other affected cost categories. Several types of situations come to mind in this regard: (a) Certain categories of graduate students such as Regents Fellows may participate in research projects and have access to data and results of those projects without having a funding relationship to the project. Accordingly, benefits may accrue to the project through participation of these talented individuals, so it is appropriate to support their travel to the extent permitted by budgetary limitations. Unfortunately, these individuals cannot be cost-shared on the project, although they draw on project resources. When this situation occurs, the P.I. should notify the Sea Grant Director to negotiate possible rebudgeting changes to accommodate the needs of such individuals. (b) Response to external factors (e.g., hurricanes) and various other circumstances may necessitate changes in plans of work and redirection of budgetary resources. These should be addressed deliberately with the Sea Grant Director, and made a matter of record so that changes will be reflected in project records and accomplishment reports.

Budget Justification Review Checklist

The following is a checklist provide by the NOAA Grants Management Division. Please use this checklist to ensure that the Budget Justification section of your proposal complies with the mandates issued by NOAA. The National Sea Grant Office will use these same guidelines when reviewing the omnibus proposal at the end of the year.

Salaries and Wages

1. Is each individual identified by name and position?
2. Are time commitments such as hours and percent of time stated for each positions?
3. Are the total charges for each person listed along with an explanation of how the costs were calculated?
4. Do the combined charges for any individual exceed 100% of their time?
5. Do the time commitments and charges appear to be reasonable?
6. For support or executive personnel, are costs charged to salaries excluded from the indirect cost category?
7. Are all individuals employees of the applicant organization? (If not, explain.)
8. Is a cost of living increase built into the budget?
9. Are salary increases justified for the grant period?
10. Are any salary/personnel costs unallowable? (i.e. federal employees or legislative personnel.)

Fringe Benefits

The budget narrative should provide a description of the benefits received by personnel when rates are 25% or higher.

1. Are fringe benefits identified as a separate item?
2. Are the types of fringe benefits indicated?
3. Do the fringe benefits and charges appear reasonable?
4. Are the total charges for each person listed along with an explanation?
5. Are fringe benefits charged to federal and matching categories in the same proportion as salaries?

Travel

1. For foreign, domestic, and local travel is each trip listed along with the destination, estimated milage, method of travel, cost per mile and duration, number of travelers, and per diem rate for meals and lodging?
2. If actual trip details are unknown, what is the basis for the proposed travel charges?
3. Is the requested travel directly relevant to the successful completion of the project?
4. Are the travel charges reasonable?
5. Contingency or miscellaneous charges must be excluded!

Supplies

1. Are supplies itemized by type of material or nature of expense?
2. For general office or business supplies, is the total charge listed along with the basis for the charge (i.e. historical use rates)?
3. For other specific supply categories, is the number of units, cost per unit, and total cost specified?
4. Are the charges necessary for the successful completion of the project?
5. Are the charges reasonable?
6. Are disallowed costs (e.g. liquor, entertainment) excluded?
7. Contingency and miscellaneous charges must be excluded!

Equipment

1. Is each item of equipment listed?
2. Is there are description of how it will be used in the project?
3. If over \$5,000 has a lease vs. analysis been completed?
4. For each item of equipment, is the number of units, cost per unit, and total cost specified?
5. Is each item of equipment necessary for the successful completion of the project?
6. Are the charges for each item reasonable?

Other

1. Are items listed by type of material or nature of expense?
2. For each charge, is the number of units, cost per unit, and total cost specified?
3. Are the charges necessary for the successful completion of the project?
4. Are the charges reasonable?
5. Are charges which duplicate indirect cost items excluded?
6. Contingency or miscellaneous charges must be excluded!

Indirect Costs

1. Are indirect costs requested?
2. Is a copy of the current approved rate from the cognizant agency included?
3. Is the correct rate being used?
4. Is the rate applied to the correct base?
5. Are the charges which duplicate direct costs excluded? (If no, explain/revise.)

Matching

1. Is a match (nonfederal share) required for this program?
2. If yes, does the application meet the matching requirements?
3. Are the sources of match clearly identified (i.e. cash or in-kind)?
4. Does the application provide adequate documentation to support in-kind contributions?
5. Does the application exclude matching contributions, cash or in-kind, used for other programs?
6. Does the application exclude federal funds used as match?
7. Are all matching contributions necessary for accomplishing the project?
8. Are the matching contributions in compliance with federal cost principals?