



Symposium for Research Administrators

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Indirect Cost and Proposal Deadlines: How to Handle the Most Common but Difficult Pre-award Questions

Presenters:

Jenny Hackel, Assistant Director-Administration, SSEC
Nick Novak, Assistant Vice Chancellor for Research Services, OVCRGE



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Indirect Costs: How do I get around this?

- What are indirect costs (F&A)?
- What do your researchers think indirect costs are?
- "How can I get around these costs?"
 - Best Practices and Resources
- Danger!
- Case studies



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Indirect Costs: How do I get around this?

What are indirect costs (F&A)?

Indirect costs are the partial recovery of facilities and administrative costs to support the research enterprise that is difficult to allocate to projects.

It is a budgetary shortcut to help us do less work trying to allocate these costs piecemeal.

Indirect Costs: How do I get around this?

What do PIs and Researchers think Indirect cost is?



Indirect Costs: How do I get around this?

What do many non-administrators think Indirect cost is?

- Campus markup/profit
- Tax
- Wasteful bureaucracy



These misconceptions usually lead to the common question, "How do I get around paying for this?"

Indirect Costs: How do I get around this?

Why all the negativity?

- Pls looking to maximizing project benefit. Direct costs reap more tangible, sponsor praised project benefits
 - (ie, The project needs an instrument to make the project successful. Publications are a major project success metric)
 - 2017 proposed federal budget cap of 10% F&A for NIH, UW Chancellor responded
- Competition for external funding is fierce. Pls want every advantage possible.
- This award will "launch" my career
- Successful awards contribute to tenure/permanent PI status

Indirect Costs: How do I get around this?

The use of the campus federally negotiated indirect cost rate is required campus policy. In truth, you can't "get around" it.

Indirect Costs: How do I get around this?

Best Practices and Resources

It is expected this question will be handled at the departmental level with support from the division if needed.

1. Listen
 - Try to understand where the comments/questions are coming from.
2. Collect Information
 - Check the solicitation and sponsor requirements
 - Rates prescribed by formal written non-profit sponsor policy uniformly applied to all university grant recipients do not require F&A waivers under UW-Madison policy.
 - Best Practice: Use Control + F to search the solicitation document
 - Resource: <https://www.rsp.wisc.edu/forms/calculateUnusualIndirectCosts.cfm>
 - Review the scope of work to ensure the correct rate is applied
 - Try to get a layperson understanding of the SOW to check if an alternate rate is appropriate.



Indirect Costs: How do I get around this?

Best Practices and Resources (continued)

2. Collect Information (continued)

- Review budget to ensure costs are correctly categorized
- Check past similar submissions
- Check with colleagues or division office representatives
- Check the RSP website for approved non-federal F&A exceptions list
 - RSP: <https://www.rsp.wisc.edu/rates/>

3. Respond Carefully

- Keep responses factual, kind, and pleasant
- Get support if needed

Indirect Costs: How do I get around this?

DANGER!

- Try not to get mad or take it personal
- Choose your words carefully
 - If you are less experienced, saying less is more
 - Do not imply or agree to cost share on behalf of your department
 - Do not promise successful F&A waiver
 - Do not argue with the PI
 - If you are more experienced and have rapport with the PI, you may have some success with a detailed discussion
- Ask questions with requests to reduce the rates
 - I.e. Use of "outreach" and "off campus" rate, for-profit sponsors
- F&A Waiver requests
 - These are exceptions and rarely approved



Indirect Costs: How do I get around this?

Case Studies

1. PI grumbling about the "high markup" and "administrative waste"
2. PI insisting the use of a different or even zero rate

Indirect Costs: How do I get around this?

Discussion/Questions?



When is the latest I can get this proposal to you?

- Policies
- PI Perspective
- Danger!
- Variables
- Case Studies
- Best Practices

When is the latest I can get this proposal to you?
Policies

Campus policy/Division policy

- RSP requests 5 days: <https://www.rsp.wisc.edu/proposalprep/>
- Divisions/Departments – varies
- Does your Department/Center have a policy?

When is the latest I can get this proposal to you?

PI Perspective

What do researchers think deadlines are?

- "But the RFP says 11:59PM!"
- "Can't I just submit it myself?"
- "What do you mean you're working on other proposals?"

When is the latest I can get this proposal to you?



When is the latest I can get this proposal to you?

DANGER!

- Build in some time.
- Noon can mean 2PM; 2PM can mean 4PM; 4 PM can mean problems.
- Ask questions.
- Does this late proposal jeopardize another that was turned in on-time?
- Don't shortchange yourself, don't feel bad.
- RSP workload.
- Sponsors don't give second chances.



When is the latest I can get this proposal to you?

Variables

- How far in advance do you know?
- Grad students, post docs, early career investigators, and those new to UW.
- Complexity of application – budget, review of terms, multiple signature pages.
- Representations and Certifications (Reps and Certs)
- What is real deadline? (subs-in or out)
- Cost sharing
- Cross department/division resources
- Indirect cost questions (waiver, calculations, off-campus/service)

When is the latest I can get this proposal to you?

Case Studies

Examples/Real-life scenarios

- “It’s gonna be late and gigantic.”
- The chronic late submitter
- “Someone will be available to submit this around midnight, right?”
- “We’ll submit at 4:50 PM.....it’s just an RO1.”
- Everyone is submitting for this deadline! (March 5, July 5, Nov. 5)
- The F&A waiver scramble
- You’ve got to tell someone this is coming! And don’t leave your desk!

When is the latest I can get this proposal to you?

Best Practices

- Establish a department policy/guidelines that your chair supports.
- Ask for help – both of colleagues and PIs.
- Proposal checklist with milestones.
- If later in the day on deadline, contact Divisional office and RSP proposal team.
 - Allows for heads-up and pre-review.
- Keep Divisional office posted on progress and have a conversation if you’re concerned. They can/should be instrumental in assisting.
 - “Magic Email”
- Educate new researchers on process. Possibly via onboarding.
 - Set expectations at outset of each proposal based on variables.

When is the latest I can get this proposal to you?

Discussion/Questions?



Conclusions

- You do want to answer these questions
 - Leaving it open to interpretation rarely results in good outcomes
- You are not alone
 - Help Resources
 - RSP F&A Rate policies: <https://www.rsp.wisc.edu/rates/>
 - RSP F&A Rate Exceptions: <https://www.rsp.wisc.edu/rates/fnaexcept.cfm>
 - RSP F&A Waiver: <https://www.rsp.wisc.edu/rates/ldcexcept.html>
 - RSP proposal preparation guidance: <https://www.rsp.wisc.edu/proposalprep/>
 - Contact your school/college/division office

Thank you for participating!

Jenny Hackel, SSEC
jenny.hackel@ssec.wisc.edu

Nick Novak, OVCRGE
nick.novak@wisc.edu
