

## **CHARGING TRAVEL COSTS TO FEDERAL GRANT AWARDS**

These guidelines are for PIs in charge of federal grant awards and those approving charges to such awards. They draw on the *Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards*; the guidelines of federal agencies such as the National Institutes of Health and the National Science Foundation; and DePaul policy.

### **General Considerations**

The following general considerations apply whenever travel costs are being charged to a federal grant award:

- ✓ The travel costs should appear in the project budget that was approved by the awarding agency. If this is not the case, PIs and approvers should consult with the Office of Research Services before initiating or signing off on travel expenses.
- ✓ Costs involved in traveling to and from work, including parking while at work, cannot be claimed as travel costs.
- ✓ The costs must clearly and directly benefit the particular project to which they are being charged.
- ✓ For this reason, all travel costs must be soundly documented in a manner that makes it possible for a third party to easily determine how the costs benefitted the project.
- ✓ The costs must be reasonable. Obtaining multiple price quotes for larger purchases, such as airline tickets, will help to ensure this.
- ✓ The costs must be allowable for federal standards. For example, the cost of a first-class airline ticket is typically not allowable
- ✓ The costs must be consistent with DePaul policy.

### **Some Specific Types of Travel Costs**

#### ***Conference Attendance***

A professional conference is a formal meeting, typically hosted by a professional organization, in which many people gather, usually for several days, in order to discuss ideas or problems related to a particular topic. A conference is typically organized around a published program of presentations, key-note addresses, panel discussions, and other such events.

The cost of attending a conference, including the conference registration and associated travel costs, is allowable if:

- The PI and/or project team are presenting project related research results or other project outcomes.  
OR
- If the PI can document that the focus of the conference, or the conference presentations the PI will be attending, is directly related to the award being charged. The conference program may be useful for this purpose.

The cost of attending a conference to gain a general understanding of the topics presented, rather than to receive or present specific information related to a sponsored award, may not be charged to a federal award.

### ***Travel for Planning Meetings, Research Collaborations, and other Non-Conference Purposes***

Travel to attend meetings that do not qualify as “conferences” (see definition above) is sometimes necessary in order to manage complex, dispersed projects, to enable a team of two or more researchers to work together for limited periods of time, or for other such project-related purposes. Such travel may be charged to a federal grant award only if:

- It is specifically included in the project budget approved by the funding agency.
- The meeting involves those identified in the proposal narrative and/or the project budget as working on the project—for example, a Co-PI from another university. (The cost of traveling to meet with colleagues who are not formally identified as part of the grant project, or the cost of bringing them to campus, may not be charged to a federal grant award.)

### ***Travel Costs for Project Consultants***

The travel costs for a consultant who is serving a federal grant project may be charged to the grant if:

- ✓ The cost of the consultant is specifically included in the project budget approved by the federal agency.
- ✓ The consultant is under contract to carry out a scope of work for the federal grant project. (There should be a contract on file, with an accompanying purchase order if the amount exceeds \$2,500.)
- ✓ The travel is necessary to achieve the project goals and objectives. (In many cases, an out-of-town consultant can carry out his/her scope of work without traveling to DePaul.)

When contracting for a consultant’s services, the best approach is to include the necessary travel costs in the agreement and for the consultant to incur the costs and then request reimbursement for them when submitting his/her invoice(s) for services. The general federal standards discussed above, including reasonableness and allowability, apply to the consultant’s travel costs.

## ***Air Travel***

Federal regulations require travelers to charge no more than the lowest possible air fare to the federal award. In most circumstances, this is a non-refundable (restricted) economy class airfare.

Airfare costs in excess of the lowest economy fare are permitted when such a fare would:

- Require circuitous routing.
- Require travel during unreasonable hours.
- Excessively prolong travel.
- Result in additional costs that would offset the transportation savings.
- Offer accommodations not adequate for the traveler's medical needs.

The traveler is responsible for documenting these exceptions.

The "Fly America Act" requires travelers whose international transportation costs are covered by federal grants to use United States air carrier service. As a general rule, compliance involves using an airline based in the United States or a flight operated by a foreign airline that is code-shared by a US air carrier (e.g., *American Airlines (AA) 1234 operated by Quantas Airways (QF) 4321*). See the ORS website for the limited [exceptions to this requirement](#).

## ***Lodging Costs***

Costs for lodging should be reasonable, of clear benefit to the project, and in keeping with DePaul's travel policies. The costs of mini-bar charges, in-room movies, and of hotel stays that exceed the inclusive dates for a conference should be paid by the traveler and not charged to the federal award.

## ***Ground Transportation***

Reasonable travel-related ground transportation costs in keeping with DePaul's travel policies are also allowable. The use of a rental car should be limited to situations where it is the most economical form of transportation available. Documentation of this should be provided. Rental car costs incurred for personal use, such as sightseeing, are not allowable.

***Please consult with ORS if you are unsure whether travel-related costs may be charged to a particular federal grant award. Contact Doug Petcher, Director, Grants Compliance & Award Management ([dpetcher@depaul.edu](mailto:dpetcher@depaul.edu)) or Bob McCarthy, Associate Director, Award Management ([RMCCART1@depaul.edu](mailto:RMCCART1@depaul.edu)).***