

ORGANIZATION FOR AUTISM RESEARCH

Supplemental Guidelines on Uses of Grant Funds

Background: The Organization for Autism Research (OAR) awards funds for research studies through an annual, open grants competition. In a perfect world, OAR's intent would be that every grant dollar be spent directly on research. The world is not perfect. OAR realizes that there are some necessary costs that come with research studies that are categorized as "administrative." Thus, OAR will allow up to 20 percent of a grant to be used for administrative costs to include fringe benefit costs for members of the research team.

OAR's experience through more than seven research competitions is that the rules and definitions for administrative or indirect costs vary widely. The purpose of this paper is to provide researchers preparing budgets to support full research proposals in OAR's annual Applied Research Competition with guidelines for what OAR will and will not consider as budget items for OAR-funded studies.

What OAR Will Fund: The majority of OAR's funds must be applied directly to the proposed research study. These costs may include but are not limited to:

- The Principal Investigator's, co-investigator's or research team members' time and salary prorated by time allocated to the project;
- Materials and resources directly used to conduct or support the study;
- Fees related to support of the study: data collection, analysis, compilation and presentation. This may include graduate student researchers but OAR funding may not be used to replace existing university funds.
- Stipends, reimbursements and rewards for research participants
- Travel related to the conduct of the research.

The rule of thumb to apply in considering other items not listed is, "Does this item or activity directly support the research project?"

What OAR Considers under Administrative Costs: OAR allows administrative costs, i.e., expenses for items that support but are not directly related to the research project, to be included as long as they do not exceed 20 percent of the total budget. In this vein, we think of administrative support costs like administrative staff and supplies, paper, copies, blank CDs and computer disks, preparation of materials, like and in some instances mailing costs, video tapes, etc. We have expanded this definition and allowance to include the cost of fringe benefits for members of the research team. To reiterate, the combined expense of administrative costs and fringe benefits cannot exceed 20 percent of the total project budget, and it is inclusive. i.e. administrative costs for a one-year \$30,000 grant cannot exceed \$6,000; \$24,000 would be for direct research costs.

What OAR Will Not Fund: The following list describes items that OAR has seen in previous budgets and not allowed. It is not all-inclusive, nor is it meant to be absolute. As a general rule, however, OAR will not approve using OAR funds for items along these lines.

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Plant and equipment: In consideration that OAR is funding what amount to pilot studies that are in many instances being conducted in university or institutional centers, OAR has an expectation that certain plant and equipment items such as office furniture, file cabinets, electronics, computers (including laptops), computer monitors, standard computer hardware and software, televisions, VCR's, cameras, etc. are available. Even if they are not, OAR does not see the purchase of such items as an acceptable use of its limited research funds. Researchers who need items such as this will need to obtain funding locally or from another source for these types of items.

OAR will consider items on a case by case basis, but the PI needs to clearly explain why the equipment cannot be provided locally or purchased through other funds and why purchasing it with OAR's funds is essential to the proposed research study's success.

Flat Allowance for Indirect Costs/Facilities and Administrative Costs. Many universities and centers often apply organizational overhead expenses as "Indirect costs" to external grants as a percentage allowance. OAR does not allow its funds to be applied in that manner. OAR allows for up to 20 percent of a proposed budget to be used for administrative costs, i.e. for specific items supportive but not directly related to the research itself. This includes fringe benefits. All administrative costs/fringe benefits items must be identified within line items in the budget and may not reflected as an across the board percentage.

Conference Presentations. In the past, some researchers have requested funds to support post-study travel to present findings at conferences and other professional forums. OAR appreciates the importance of disseminating the findings of any study with meaningful outcomes, we do not see it as a necessary extension of our funded study. OAR does consider support of that nature on a case by case basis after reviewing the results of the research study. In any case, travel for this purpose should not be part of the research budget.

Tuition Reimbursement. In the past, some researchers have requested a portion of their grant funding be used to support the tuition of graduate assistants. Under current OAR guidelines, this is not a fundable expense.