



Graduate Research Grant Competition Supplemental Guidelines on Uses of Grant Funds

Background: The Organization for Autism Research (OAR) awards funds for research studies conducted by individual graduate students through an annual, open grants competition. In a perfect world, OAR's intent would be that every grant dollar be spent directly on research. However, OAR realizes that there are some necessary costs that come with research studies. The purpose of this document is to provide graduate student researchers with guidelines for what OAR will and will not consider as budget items for studies funded through this program.

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

- Materials and resources directly used to conduct or support the study (e.g. measurement/assessment materials, recruitment costs, training)

Applicants must provide a detailed plan for post-study distribution for any materials that are requested under an exemption (e.g. children's toys, books). In most cases, OAR will require as part of its grant agreement that these materials be donated to a local autism or other relevant nonprofit organization.

- Fees for specialized support, such as data collection, analysis, and compilation

OAR's graduate grants are intended for an individual's research study, rather than that of a team. Studies must be conducted independently and not as part of a faculty advisor's ongoing research or a group project. Stipends for graduate assistants and student workers are prohibited.

- Stipends, reimbursements, and rewards for research participants

No more than 50 percent of funds may go toward rewards or reimbursements for participants. Rewards should be to the time and commitment required of participants, and researchers should include the justification for the rewards in the supporting budget rationale.

- Travel related to the conduct of the research

For travel by car, estimate the total cost using the mileage rate provided by the federal government of the country in which the study is to be conducted.

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

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OAR will allow expenses for items that **indirectly** support, but are not material to, the research project as long as they do not exceed **10 percent** of the total budget request. These items are considered “**administrative**” costs, and include supplies such as folders; blank CDs or DVDs; thumb drives; related consumable items; and food and refreshments for research participants. The combined expense of administrative costs cannot exceed 10 percent of the total project budget, and they must be identified as specific line items in the budget, not simply labeled Administrative with a corresponding amount applying the percentage. This means that the administrative costs for a one-year grant of \$2,000 cannot exceed \$200; direct research costs must be at least \$1,800.

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

1) Plant and equipment: Considering that OAR is funding small studies pursuant to a thesis, dissertation, or graduate degree in university or institutional centers, OAR has an expectation that plant and equipment items such as office furniture, file cabinets, electronics, computers (including laptops), computer monitors, standard computer hardware and software, televisions, DVD players, cameras, etc. are available. Even if they are not, OAR does not see the purchase of such items as an acceptable use of its research funds for studies on this limited scale.

OAR will consider exceptions on a case-by-case basis. In such instances, the student needs to **clearly explain in their budget** why the equipment cannot be provided locally or purchased through other funds and why the item is essential to the success of the proposed research study.

2) Flat Allowance for “Indirect” Costs: Many universities and centers often apply organizational overhead expenses as “indirect costs” to external grants as a percentage allowance to help pay for general costs like electricity, other utilities, and other distributed expenses. OAR does not allow its funds to be applied in that manner.

3) Retroactive Use of Funds: OAR’s grant funds are for use exclusively in the stated grant period, which begins July 1, annually. Thus, OAR does not allow its grant funding to be applied to expenses incurred before the stated grant period.

If any exceptions are sought, the applicant **must provide a clear rationale for the exception in their budget**. If you have additional questions about these guidelines, please contact Margaret Gorman at 703-243-3466 or research@researchautism.org.