Guidelines on Uses of Grant Funds

Background: The Organization for Autism Research (OAR) awards funds for research studies through an annual, open grants competition. 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 as defined in this paper.

OAR's experience through 15 years of research competitions is that the rules and definitions for administrative or indirect costs vary. The purpose of this document is to provide researchers preparing budgets to support full research proposals with guidelines for what OAR will and will not consider as budget items for 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:

- Time and salary for the Principal Investigator (PI), Co-PI, or other research team members, prorated by time allocated to the project
- Consumable materials and resources directly used to conduct or support the study
- Fees related to support of the study: data collection, statistical analysis, and compilation.
- 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?"

Studies designed to evaluate potentially commercial products are permitted, but must include a strategic marketing plan for the product(s) and an acknowledgment that OAR will be reimbursed from the profits based upon a mutually agreed reimbursement plan.

What OAR Considers "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. We include the cost of fringe benefits for members of the research team within this definition.   Some other examples of administrative costs are: transcription, blank CDs or DVDs, and food and refreshments for research participants.
To reiterate, the combined expense of administrative costs, including fringe benefits, cannot exceed 20 percent of the total project budget. This means that the administrative costs for a one-year $50,000 grant cannot exceed $10,000; direct research costs must be at least $40,000.

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What OAR Will Not Fund: The following list describes 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, OAR will not approve using OAR funds for items along these lines.

1) *Flat Allowance for "Administrative" or "Indirect" 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. specific items that support but are not directly related to the research itself, including fringe benefits). All administrative costs/fringe benefits items must be identified as specific line items in the budget and may not reflected as an across the board percentage.

2) *Plant and equipment*: 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, DVD players, cameras, etc. are available within the sponsoring research center or university. 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 these items will need to obtain funding from another source.

3) *Emerging Technology.* New technology is rightfully drawing interest in the autism research arena. OAR's policy on this is consistent with the policy above regarding Plant and Equipment. As a rule, we will not allows funds to be used to purchase technology items such as iPads. OAR will, however, consider such items on a case by case basis when essential to the study.*

4) *Conference presentations and manuscripts*: While OAR appreciates the importance of disseminating the findings of any study at conferences and other professional forums, OAR does not fund expenses such as manuscript preparation and design, conference presentation materials, and related travel.

5) *Tuition reimbursement*: Some researchers have also requested a portion of their grant funding be used to support the tuition of graduate assistants. Under OAR guidelines, this is not a fundable expense.

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Supporting Detail and Exceptions: Researchers submitting budgets that include supporting items/reinforcers such as toys and books, or requesting an exception to funding policy related to the purchase of technology items must provide supporting detail or rationale as follows:

a. **Supporting items/reinforcers**. Studies that utilize non-consumable items such as toys, books, and other merchandise that have value beyond the study should include a plan for using, gifting, or otherwise disposing of the property upon completion of the study. Allowing research participants to retain items and donating to a local school or nonprofit organization are two alternatives OAR has approved.

b. ***Emerging Technology**. If a researcher is requesting the purchase of technology devices to examine the efficacy of a technology application or a device to support a study, the PI needs to provide a clear and substantive explanation for (1) why the equipment cannot be provided locally or purchased through other funds, (2) why purchasing it with OAR funds is essential to success of the proposed research study, and (3) describe plans for relinquishing the property upon completion of the study. As stated above, allowing research participants to retain items and donating to a local school or nonprofit organization are two alternatives OAR has approved.