Effort Reporting and Certification Policy
Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Q. Why has the University implemented this policy?
A. We are required to certify effort for direct salary charges (and committed cost share) for federally sourced projects. ISU has a long-standing process for this certification (i.e., the EASE forms), but did not have a formal policy until February 2011. The policy was necessary following an Internal Audit Report and recommendation. It is also due to several high-profile audits (by Federal OIG offices) and resulting fines levied against universities nationally. The policy helps with compliance, but effort reporting is not new to ISU.

Q. What is the risk for ISU due to these audits, and with recent changes in NSF regulations regarding federally sourced grants?
A. The biggest risk for ISU is in disallowance of costs for direct salary charged (and committed cost share) and for B-base faculty summer salary charged to federal projects.

Q. What does the term “effort” mean in relation to this policy?
A. Effort is defined as the amount of time spent on a particular activity. Individual effort is expressed as a percentage of the individual’s total activity for the University.

Q. What is 100% effort?
The total amount of effort expended to accomplish the professional activities of faculty and staff regardless of the actual number of hours expended on those activities. This normally includes all effort expended on compensated sponsored research, administration, teaching, unsponsored scholarly activity, and other activity. Effort always equals 100% regardless of the number of hours worked or the percentage of the appointment. Examples: (1) a full-time employee works 55 hours this week, the 55 hours represents 100% effort; (2) a half-time employee works 20 hours this week, the 20 hours represents 100% effort; (3) a B-base faculty member is on a half-time appointment (i.e., only paid for .5 FTE) in June or July, all hours worked for the summer month represents 100% university effort (as compensated, professional activities).

Q. Has the EASE form process changed with this policy?
A. There is no change to the EASE form requirement or the timing of EASE reporting.

Q. What is the impact of the policy to me (faculty or P&S staff)?
A. For faculty and staff with federally sourced projects, it remains important that the actual effort devoted to the project must equal or exceed the percentage of paid
effort charged to the project and the timing of pay must reasonably match when the
effort was expended on the project. For B-base faculty with funded projects, this
may require charging the sponsored program account during the academic
semester if that is when the actual effort is expended (involving a buy-out of salary
from the general fund, or even a buy-out of teaching). Likewise, summer salary
charged should reasonably reflect the percentage of effort expended during the
summer.

**Q. Will I be required to participate in training?**
A. Faculty and P&S staff identified as Principal Investigators (PIs) of federally
sourced sponsored program accounts (which may also include Co-PIs) are required
to complete training offered in WebCT. Retraining on effort reporting may be
required on a periodic basis.

**Q. What is the impact of the policy on departments and colleges?**
A. As was the case before the implementation of this policy, sponsored program
budgets include best estimates of expenditures and in some cases salary is
cumbered based on these estimates. To fully comply with the policy, departments
may need to process even more transfers to correct the payroll distribution to
reflect the effort actually expended. This is accomplished with a “Change in Funding
Source” electronic personnel action (EPA).

**Q. How does Effort Reporting relate to the source of my salary (i.e., payroll
distribution)?**
A. Payroll distribution and effort reporting are interrelated. Payroll distribution is
the distribution of an individual’s salary across funding sources (i.e., ISU fund
accounts). Effort reporting is the verification of an individual’s ISU compensated
activities (i.e., the effort on sponsored projects and various functions the employee
performs). The EASE form is preprinted with the salary percentages paid from
federal and state sponsored program accounts. The EASE form is used to verify the
actual percentage of effort spent on these sponsored program activities. The EASE
form also provides for the certification of effort in several functional categories (i.e.,
instruction, research and scholarship, outreach, etc.) and cost share committed to
sponsored projects during the respective EASE reporting period.

**Q. May I charge 100% of my salary to a federally sourced grant?**
A. Since faculty and P&S staff have multiple responsibilities, it is not advisable to
charge 100% of salary to any federally sourced project for extended periods, such as
a month or more. A best practice for full-time pay for a month or more is to charge
no more than 90% to a federally sourced grant while 10% is charged to a non-
sponsored fund account – allowing time for service on committees, teaching,
departmental meetings, and other university activities. Units should contact Ames
Lab Human Resources for information on appointments of more than 90% from
Ames Lab DOE funding, and colleges may have set specific guidelines for academic
departments as well.
Q. May I work on a sponsored project proposal while my salary is being charged solely to a federally sourced grant?
A. No, it is not allowable to charge salary to a federal sourced project for any proposal preparation activities since writing proposals for future grants does not benefit any existing award; federal regulation explicitly excludes this from allowable direct costs.

Q. May a Post Doc or NTER faculty be paid entirely from federally sourced grants?
A. Yes, if the Post Doc or NTER faculty member only works on the grant and has no other responsibilities.

Q. For A-base faculty, P&S staff, NTER faculty on A-base, or Post Docs, may vacation time taken be charged to the federally sourced grant?
A. Both the fringe benefits and salary paid for vacation/sick leave usage follow the direct salary charged to grants and is allowable. For example, if a Research Professor (NTER) earns vacation and takes a vacation day while paid 100% from a federally sourced grant, this is an allowable cost to the sponsored project.

Q. I am a B-base faculty member. May I take personal time off (e.g., one day away) while my salary is charged to the federally sourced grant?
A. B-base faculty do not accrue vacation, and only activities directly related to the project may be charged to the federal sourced project. Therefore, salary for any day off is not allowable as a charge to the sponsored project (since no effort on the project would be expended). B-base faculty should charge only non-sponsored funds for time away, in consultation with and approval by the department chair.