Charging Travel to Sponsored Projects

Objectives & Key Roles

- **Objectives**
  - Define travel on sponsored projects
  - Special requirements
  - Common issues

- **Key Roles**
  - Grant Accounting Office (GAO)
  - Principal Investigator (PI)
  - Department Administrator

Charging travel to sponsored projects

- Travel costs must be reasonable, follow the University travel policy, sponsor guidelines, and provide a **direct benefit** to the project.
- Travel should be clearly outlined in the sponsor budget. Additional prior approvals may be required.
- Costs charged to federally funded awards are also subject to Uniform Guidance and any sponsor-specific terms.
- Departments should retain documentation showing the valid business purpose and project connection.

Whose travel can be charged

- Faculty and staff must actively contribute to the project. Effort is verified by having an active HR appointment on the award.
- Students should also have an active HR appointment on the award, unless the sponsor explicitly requires or funds student travel as part of the project.
- For students not appointed to the project, documentation must show their contribution to the project and how the travel supports and benefits project goals.

Timing and Budget

- Travel must occur within the period of performance.
- Prepaid costs such as airfare or registration should not be charged if the actual travel will occur after the award end date.
- If travel was not budgeted, sponsor prior approval may be required.
  - The department should document how the trip directly benefits the project.

Special requirements

- International travel must follow the Fly America Act and, when applicable, Open Skies rules.
- Some sponsors require prior approval for domestic or foreign travel, award terms and agency rules must be reviewed before booking travel.
- Sponsor restrictions may be stricter than University policy, and excess costs must be paid from other non-sponsor funds.

Common problematic areas

- Business meals while traveling
  - Are only allowable when aligned with University policy and when a non-university employee is present and necessary to the discussion.
  - This meeting should specifically benefit the project.
- Economy upgrades, extra legroom, and advance seat selection are not allowed unless clearly justified and documented.
- Late registration and other price increases related to late registration or last-minute travel may be disallowed by sponsors.
- Cancelled travel costs and change fees may be allowable only in extenuating circumstances and should be reviewed with GAO first.

Common Mistakes and Takeaways

- Travelers are not to be reimbursed for purchasing pre-paid refueling options for rental cars. Therefore, travelers should refuel prior to returning the rental vehicle to the drop-off location.
- Travel for collaboration is generally unallowable unless the collaborator is a subcontractor on the award.
- Travel to collaborate on proposals is unallowable on sponsored projects.
  - This includes proposals that are for continued funding.
- Best practice: document purpose, benefit to the project, traveler eligibility, sponsor rules, and any approvals before charging the award.

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References and additional information

- **GAO website**
  - gao.fo.uiowa.edu
    - Travel on Sponsored Projects
    - University's travel policy
    - University Travel website

- **Contact us**
  - gao.fo.uiowa.edu/contact-us

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