

Computer Purchases Training Questions

Example 1

After a federal project started, there is a major malfunction of a computer used by a secretary that provides some support to the PI of the project. The computer is over 4 years old and it needs to be replaced. What would you do when the request to buy a new computer had the entire cost indicated to be charged to the federal project?

Was there a computer budgeted and justified in the proposal of the federal project? Since the computer is assigned to a secretary the computer is being used for general administrative and or instructional purposes also. Only in the case of a large complex project where the unlike circumstances have been documented would it be appropriate to allocate any portion to the grant. Otherwise, the computer used by the secretary would be an unallowable charge to the grant. Does the computer need sponsor approval?

Example 2

A three year project was recently funded for \$12m. There is a request for an initial purchase of 4 computers and a printer. The budget included \$100K for computers/printers. The justification included \$2500 per person for computers and \$25K for printers. What would you do?

Determine if these computers were the ones included in the original budget. If yes, OK to purchase. If they are additional computers not budgeted ask why the computers are necessary, will they be used 100% on the project and if so obtain supporting documentation of the specific need for the additional computers. Do additional computers not budgeted need sponsor approval?

Example 3

A 2 year project is within 3 months of ending and the PI needs to purchase a computer to present results at upcoming seminars and a conference. What questions would you ask? What would make this an allowable and allocable charge to the project?

Determine if computer was in original budget. If not, have it explained why the need wasn't identified in proposal and document the specific need. Will the computer be used on other activities? If so obtain documentation that supports the allocation. If the computer is to be used only on this project is it expected to be used beyond the project expiration date? The cost should not be allocated 100% to the expiring project unless continuation funding from the same sponsor is expected. Check the grant available balance to make sure not just using up unexpended funds. If the computer was not budgeted does it need sponsor approval?

Example 4

An NIH project just began 2 months ago and there is a request for a computer to be purchased entirely with project funds. The budget and budget justification did not include a computer. There were computer supplies mentioned. What would you do?

Because computer supplies were budgeted, there was intent for computers to be used on the project. Have it explained why a computer wasn't in original budget and obtain documentation of the specific need of the computer and how it will benefit project. Will the computer be used 100% on the project? If not obtain documentation that supports the cost allocation of the computer. Does the computer need sponsor approval?

Example 5

There is a request in late July 2012 for an Apple Mac Book Pro with an estimated cost of \$2200. The cost distribution is equally distributed to 3 different federal projects. Project A ends 3/31/2014, Project B ends 8/31/2012, and Project C ends 7/31/2013. What questions do you ask before processing the request?

Is there a computer budgeted on each of the 3 projects? If not budgeted obtain documentation that supports the specific need of the computer and the cost allocation on each project. Is sponsor approval required on any of the projects? Since Project B ends in less than 90 days why is it being charged the same amount of cost as the other two projects which run one or two years longer? Check available balance on grant B to ensure not just using up remaining unexpended funds.