

## Frequently Asked Questions Effort Reporting

**Note:** For the purpose of brevity, this FAQ uses the term “faculty” and “faculty member(s)” to encompass all Officers of Instruction and Officers of Research, exclusive of Postdoctoral Officers of Research.

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### General Information

#### 1. What is effort reporting?

**Answer:** Effort reporting is the process by which the salary charged to a sponsored project is documented as being reasonable in relation to the effort expended on that project.

**Discussion:** During the course of the year, the University charges salaries to sponsored projects and other projects based on allocation instructions (i.e., the percentage of salary to be charged to one or more sponsored projects or other projects based on committed effort) provided by academic department personnel acting upon instructions from Principal Investigators and others who oversee those sponsored projects. Federal regulations require that throughout the course of the year, these charges be monitored to ensure that any significant change in effort or workload results in a change of the salary distribution. At the close of the fiscal year, an after-the-fact review is required.

#### 2. How precise must my certification be?

**Answer:** Federal regulations clearly acknowledge that precise determinations are not expected, and that reasonable estimates are acceptable. To quote directly from the federal regulations, “... it is recognized that, in an academic setting, teaching, research, service and administration are often inextricably intermingled. A precise assessment of factors that contribute to costs is not always feasible, nor is it expected.” Consistent with the Federal regulations, you are obliged to use your best judgment in your certification, taking into consideration all of the activities that you were engaged in during the course of the fiscal year.

#### 3. Why can't a departmental administrator certify my effort for me?

**Answer:** University policy requires faculty to certify for themselves and their project staff. As noted above, Federal regulations require an after-the-fact review to confirm that the salary charged is reasonable in relation to the effort expended. This review is documented in the annual effort report and is signed by the principal investigator, responsible official or employee, using suitable means of verification. In the past, following the broad Federal requirement, the University has permitted a variety of individuals to certify effort, as long as they have the requisite knowledge to do so. The University has determined that best practices dictate that faculty self certify their effort. In addition, a Principal Investigator is now required to certify the effort of others charged to his/her sponsored project.

#### 4. Who is required to certify?

**Answer:** All faculty members who receive any portion of their salary from a sponsored project, or otherwise commit effort on a sponsored project, must self certify their effort. In addition, a Principal Investigator is required to certify the effort of students (including work-study), postdocs and staff (including casuals) who devote effort to his/her sponsored project.

#### 5. How often must I certify my effort?

**Answer:** You are required to certify annually, following the close of the University's fiscal year. There is a limited period of time during which the certification process may be done; each year, you will be notified when the certification period begins and the date by which the certification must be completed.

**6. Are there any other obligations related to Effort Reporting that I am obligated to fulfill in addition to certifying annually?**

**Answer:** Yes. As noted in the discussion in FAQ 1, there is also a monitoring requirement. You should monitor your salary allocation at least quarterly to ensure that adjustments are made timely. In addition, there is a training requirement. All individuals who certify effort must complete a one-time course in Rascal on the policies and process of effort reporting.

**7. What is ECRT, and what is its relationship to Effort Reporting?**

**Answer:** ECRT is an on-line tool that facilitates both the monitoring of effort distributions during the year and the required annual certification of effort, as described in FAQ's 5 and 6.

**8. Is training in effort reporting required, and if so, how will it be made available?**

**Answer:** There are two types of training: one in the policies and processes of effort reporting and the other in how to use the ECRT tool. For effort coordinators, both types of training are mandatory and are delivered in the form of classroom training. Effort Coordinators attend yearly refresher training on policy, processes, and the ECRT system. For faculty, an on-line effort reporting policy and process training is mandatory, and available through Rascal. In addition, faculty training resources about the ECRT tool also are available from the Training link on the Effort Reporting website. **FACULTY NEED COMPLETE TRAINING ONLY ONCE AND DO NOT NEED TO REPEAT THE TRAINING EACH YEAR.** A refresher FAQ for self-certifiers and PIs is available in the Reference Guide section of the Effort Reporting website.

**9. What happens if I don't complete the certification?**

**Answer:** All faculty members are required to certify, and to do so within the timeframe mandated by the University. Failure to satisfy this requirement may result in inactivation of current sponsored projects, the refusal to allow proposals to be submitted to sponsors and, if deemed necessary, removal of charges to sponsored projects for those individuals with uncertified effort. Disregard of the policy may also lead to other disciplinary actions in accordance with the School's faculty appointment and other policies.

**10. When I reviewed my effort information, not all my salary was there. Why not?**

**Answer:** With rare exceptions, only your "Institutional Base Salary" or IBS is reflected in ECRT. IBS is the annual compensation paid by Columbia for an individual's appointment(s), whether that individual's time is spent on research, instruction, administration, or other activities. Where summer salary, or, in rare cases, academic-year additional compensation is charged to sponsored projects, such compensation is also included in the Effort Report. The major exclusion from IBS relates to faculty at CUMC who are engaged in private practice activities. For those individuals, only the guaranteed portion of their private practice compensation is included in IBS; the portion of that compensation which is in excess of the guaranteed portion of private practice compensation, frequently referred to as "A2" distributions, is excluded. The salary reflected in effort reporting may be different from your actual salary if some portion of your salary is excluded from IBS. But you still must allocate your effort based on all activities that are part of "Total University Effort" (TUE). See Question 16.

**11. My effort on the various projects that I work on varies during the year. Is it necessary for me to change the way my salary is funded to reflect short-term fluctuations?**

**Answer:** No. The Federal regulations specifically acknowledge that this occurs, and state that short term fluctuations (such as one or two months) need not be considered as long as the distribution is reasonable over the longer term, such as an academic period.

**12. What if I can't certify my effort because I don't have enough specific knowledge about the funding projects I work on?**

**Answer:** You should consult with the principal investigators or others who direct your work to determine how your effort should be certified.

**13. I didn't know about these effort rules when I filled out my grant application. Is it too late to fix the problem now?**

**Answer:** No. If you have concerns about your grant application, contact Sponsored Projects Administration.

**14. Is there a maximum level of effort that can be charged to sponsored projects?**

**Answer:** The rules do not limit the percentage of effort that can be charged to sponsored projects; however, the effort charged to each project must be consistent with the level of effort to be devoted to that project. There is a **minimum** level of effort for PIs: PI effort on a sponsored project must be greater than 0%.

**15. Can administrative staff be directly charged to my sponsored project?**

**Answer:** Generally, administrative staff may not be charged to sponsored projects. Where, however, the administrative staff are integral to the sponsored project, such charges may be allowable. “Integral” means essential to the project’s goals and objectives, rather than necessary for the overall operation of the institution. The individuals involved must be specifically identified with the project or activity. Prior written approval of the awarding agency must be obtained.

For further guidance, refer to the University’s policy on charging administrative salaries to sponsored projects, which is accessible at:

[http://www.columbia.edu/cu/administration/policylibrary/policies/rest/29.html?base=az\\_index](http://www.columbia.edu/cu/administration/policylibrary/policies/rest/29.html?base=az_index)

**16. Is the time that I devote to writing grant proposals chargeable to sponsored projects?**

**Answer:** If the proposal writing relates to providing budget, technical and other materials on a continuing project (i.e., a non-competing renewal of an existing project), that time is part of the effort devoted to that project. For new proposals, if a portion of the proposal is a summary of work done on another sponsored project, that time may be charged to the other sponsored project. However, all other effort devoted to writing grant proposals for either new awards or competitive renewals of existing awards may not be charged to sponsored projects.

**Discussion:** This is a requirement set forth by Federal regulations. As a general rule, a portion of a faculty member’s time devoted to writing proposals should be charged to non-sponsored sources, as is the case for time devoted to teaching and administration.

**17. If I conclude that I need to reduce the effort on (and therefore the salary charged to) my sponsored project, where will the funding for that non-sponsored effort come from?**

**Answer:** Funding for non-sponsored activities such as teaching, administrative activities (including proposal writing as described above) and/or private practice work, as well as cost sharing on sponsored activities must be charged to non-sponsored sources (i.e., departmental funds). Under no circumstances may the costs associated with these activities be charged to sponsored projects; funding for these activities is a departmental and/or School issue and you should discuss this with your Chair.

**Effort and Funding:**  
**Total University Effort****18. In allocating my effort to the various activities in which I am engaged at Columbia, what activities do I need to consider?**

**Answer:** Effort allocations to the various activities must be based on Total University Effort. Total University Effort includes all professional activity for which an individual is compensated by Columbia University: sponsored activities, teaching, University administrative duties, private practice, and other activities. Total University Effort includes all of these activities, regardless of when (daytime, evening, weekends) or where (on campus, at home, while traveling, etc.) the activities take place. A reference guide listing a variety of activities that are included as part of Total University Effort (as well as those activities which are not considered part of Total University Effort) can be found within the “Reference Guide” section at [www.effortreporting.columbia.edu](http://www.effortreporting.columbia.edu).

**19. In assessing my effort, how do I treat vacation, sick leave or other time off provided by University policy?**

**Answer:** Generally, for purposes of allocating your effort, you should treat this time as if it was time worked on the projects which funded your salary during those periods. However, if you are receiving summer salary, you must complete the work you are funded to do during the summer months. That means that if you have three months of summer salary, you may not take vacation during the summer months.

**20. If I perform my Columbia activities outside of the normal work day (i.e., (nights/weekends/vacation), do I still have to account for that time as part of my Total University Effort?**

**Answer:** Yes. As indicated in the response to question 18, it makes no difference when or where those activities are performed.

**21. I work many more than 40 hours a week. Isn't effort reporting limited to what I do in the 40 hour work week?**

**Answer:** No. Effort reporting is not based on a fixed number of hours, but rather on the percentage of effort devoted to a single project or activity as it relates to Total University Effort.

**Discussion:** A common misconception is that the effort percentage can be uniformly based on a preconceived number of hours set by a faculty member or other employee, without regard to the actual time worked.

If you are paid for working a fixed number of hours, then this determination is simple. For example, if your work week is 35 hours and you devote 7 hours to a particular activity, then 7 hours constitutes 20% effort.

This simplistic approach, unfortunately, does not apply to faculty and the majority of other University employees, whose compensation is not based on a fixed number of hours. For faculty and such other employees, the determination is based on the relative proportion of time spent on that project, as described in the following examples:

(a) Although his hours vary from week to week, over the long term, Prof. A works 50 hours per week, devoting his time to teaching, administrative responsibilities and research. Of those 50 hours, on average, 10 hours is spent on his research activities. This represents 20% of Prof. A's effort.

(b) Dr. B works 60 hours per week, including 15 hours devoted to her private practice. Since private practice is a part of her compensation from the University, those 15 hours are part of her overall effort. Dr. B also devotes 15 hours per week to her research activity, which represents 25% of Dr. B's effort.

**22. I have a 9-month appointment. How do I account for my effort?**

**Answer:** Your effort is based on whatever activities you engage in during the period for which the University compensates you. For those who hold appointments that are for less than 12 months and engage in and are paid additional compensation for summer work, your effort is then based on the total number of months you work, inclusive of summer months.

**22A. I am an officer of instruction and have a 9-month appointment. If I do work on a sponsored project during the academic year, can I charge a portion of my IBS to the sponsored project and receive additional compensation from my school during the summer for non-sponsored University activities?**

**Answer:** Yes, provided that such a charge is consistent with the sponsor's regulations and is approved by the department and/or school. See the University Policy on Charging Compensation to Sponsored Projects for Officers of Instruction, at

[http://www.effortreporting.columbia.edu/downloads/Policy\\_Summer\\_Salary\\_Additional\\_Compensation.5.4\\_09.pdf](http://www.effortreporting.columbia.edu/downloads/Policy_Summer_Salary_Additional_Compensation.5.4_09.pdf)

**23. I consult for other organizations one day a week. Do I have to include that in my effort reporting?**

**Answer:** Generally no. Total University Effort does not include consulting activities which are performed for entities other than Columbia, as long as the compensation for those activities is paid directly to you. However, if that compensation flows through Columbia (a highly unusual scenario), then that effort must be considered part of your Total University Effort.

**24. How do I determine the percentage of my effort which is assignable to a sponsored project?**

**Answer:** Whether you are determining this percentage for the purpose of submitting a proposal, for charging your salary to the project itself, monitoring your effort during the course of the year or certifying to the reasonableness of that effort, the answer is the same. The percentage of effort devoted to any individual project or activity is calculated by estimating the portion of the time you devote to that activity as

a percentage of Total University Effort (see the response to question 18 for the definition of Total University Effort).

**25. If I voluntarily agree to work more hours to fulfill a specific non-sponsored task (e.g., I agree to participate on a University committee and add an additional 2 hours to my regular work week for an extended period of time), does that mean that my effort percentage devoted to my sponsored project(s) must change?**

**Answer:** Yes.

**Discussion:** While this may appear to be unfair from the perspective of the faculty member, as it relates to the sponsored project itself, the proportion of time devoted to that project, as a percentage of total institutional effort has in fact been reduced. Federal regulations require that the charge to the sponsored project be limited to that percentage.

**26. My Department Chair asked me to take on significant new administrative responsibilities and I fulfill my new administrative responsibilities by working more hours per week. I did not reduce the number of hours per week I spend on my sponsored projects. Do I nevertheless have to reduce my effort on all my sponsored projects?**

**Answer:** Yes. See the discussion in Question 25.

**27. Can any work which is part of my Total University Effort be said to be done “on my own time”?**

**Answer:** No.

**28. How do I deal with the effort I devote to industry-sponsored clinical trials, for which I am compensated on a per patient basis?**

**Answer:** Like effort devoted to any other activity, the effort devoted to these clinical trials is based on the relative amount of time devoted to this work. It may be the case, however, that the salary charged to the clinical trial may exceed the percentage of effort devoted to the project (for example, you may have charged 40% of your salary to the clinical trial, but only devoted 30% of your effort to that project); in such cases, your effort certification should reflect the actual effort (in this case, 30%) devoted to the clinical trial, accounting for the remaining 70% among the other activities in which you were engaged. Note, however, that you may only do so where the sponsor of the clinical trial does not specifically require you to limit salary charges to the trial to be consistent with the actual effort devoted to the trial.

### **Effort and Funding: Career Development, Training, and Similar Grants**

**29. Some or all of my salary is funded by a Career Development (“K”) or similar award, but some of my effort is devoted to other sponsored projects as well. How do I certify my effort?**

**Answer:** Your effort on activities that are within the scope of the career development plan for your K award should be allocated to your K award. Your effort on sponsored projects that are not within the scope of the K award should be allocated to those projects.

**Discussion:** K awards have special requirements with respect to minimum total effort commitments, as well as restrictions with respect to work on other sponsored projects. Whenever you are engaged in any activity other than activity that is within the scope of your K award, you must ensure that you are complying with these special K award requirements and restrictions as well.

**30. My salary is funded by a career development (“K”) or similar award which requires that I devote a significant (often 75%) portion of my effort to research activities. If private practice is considered as part of my overall activities, then how can I satisfy this requirement?**

**Answer:** If the private practice work directly relates to the work required under the terms of the specific award, then there should be no issue. However, if the private practice work is essentially supplemental income but does not relate to the work required under the K award, then this would necessitate a curtailment in the private practice efforts in order not to violate the requirements of the K award.

**31. I'm the Project Director of a training grant, or the mentor of the recipient of a Career Development Award. How should I treat the time I devote to this activity for effort reporting purposes?**

**Answer:** The sponsors of these awards do not generally provide funding to cover your effort, so it must be treated as a non-sponsored activity (and therefore cannot be charged to your research or other grant). In some cases, however, the time devoted to these activities may be insignificant, and therefore can be ignored. If the time devoted is more than incidental, then you must treat it as non-sponsored effort.

**32. If I am listed as a mentor on a student's/postdoc's fellowship grant or a junior colleague's career development award, what is the level of effort required for this responsibility? The fellowship/career development award does not provide any compensation for me.**

**Answer:** There is no University-prescribed level of effort associated with this or any other activity. As with any other activity within the definition of Total University Effort (which includes this particular activity), the effort devoted to mentoring must be considered in allocating overall effort. To the extent that this effort is sufficient to warrant documenting, it must be reflected on the effort report as a non-sponsored activity.

**33. My postdoc just received an individual fellowship to support her research in my lab. She is thus no longer being paid from my grant, though she continues to work on the same project. How do I certify her effort?**

**Answer:** The effort certification requirement only covers *employees* of the University (i.e., individuals receiving salary); it does not include fellows or their stipends. Accordingly, only the effort which she devoted to the research project is to be included in the effort report.

## Effort and Funding: NIH Cap and other Cost Sharing Issues

**34. How do I report and fund cost sharing (i.e., effort which I promise to provide to an award sponsor at either no cost or at a cost that represents less than the percentage of time I have committed to provide on a project)?**

**Answer:** If you have committed to cost share some or all of your effort on a sponsored project, you may only charge to the sponsored project that portion of your salary that represents effort beyond that which has been committed for free. The cost-shared portion of your effort must be charged to a non-sponsored project. In order to keep track of this cost sharing, the University strongly recommends that the funding of cost sharing be done in a way that it is identifiable to the sponsor, so that you can demonstrate not only that the grant was not charged for this effort, but that the effort was devoted to this project and funded from other resources. Whether separately identified in the accounting system or not, you must insure that the cost shared effort is in fact funded from non-sponsored sources, and certified at year end as effort devoted to the sponsored project.

*Example 1:* As part of the requirements of the project, the sponsor requires that you provide 25% of your time at no charge to the project, and that is the amount of time that you expect to, and actually do devote to the project. The portion of your Institutional Base Salary that is represented by this 25% must be charged to a non-sponsored project. In certifying your effort, you must ensure that the cost shared effort on that project is included in your certification.

*Example 2:* You agree to provide 25% effort on the project, but only charge the project for 10% of your effort, and you devote 25% of your time to the project. You may only charge 10% of your Institutional Base Salary to the project, with the other 15% charged to a non-sponsored project, and account for it as cost sharing in your certification.

**Discussion:** The University strongly discourages voluntarily committed cost sharing. Under the Uniform Guidance, voluntary committed cost sharing may not be considered in the merit review process. Moreover, since commitments to cost share result in the need to provide funding from non-sponsored sources, it is strongly recommended that unless the sponsor requires you to provide cost sharing, you do not offer to provide effort beyond that which is to be funded from the project.

**35. What if my proposal reflected a cost sharing commitment that I satisfied, but the cost sharing information is missing from my certification form, is incorrect, or the grant itself is not even listed?**

**Answer:** Faculty should contact their Effort Coordinators with cost sharing information. The Effort Coordinators should enter any cost sharing commitments into the ECRT system.

**36. I understand that NIH has a cap on salary that may be charged to an NIH project. If a portion of my salary is funded by an NIH grant and my salary is above the NIH cap, how do I report it?**

**Answer:** For a number of years now, NIH has limited the amount of Institutional Base Salary that may be charged to NIH grants. Since the government's fiscal year 2001, the cap has been set at the Executive Level I. The cap establishes a maximum annual rate of pay at which an individual can be compensated for full time effort over a twelve-month period. Salary charges to a grant, contract, or cooperative agreement from these agencies cannot be paid at a monthly rate that exceeds 1/12th of the maximum annual rate of pay then in effect (1/9 for those who hold 9-month appointments). If your salary exceeds the NIH cap, you may only charge to NIH grants that portion of your Institutional Base Salary that represents the effort provided to those projects multiplied by the NIH cap. The excess must be charged to a non-sponsored project. This same rule holds true for summer salary as well: to the extent that your salary exceeds the NIH cap (computed monthly if necessary for those with an appointment less than 12 months), the excess must be funded from a non-sponsored source.

For those individuals whose salary exceeds the cap, your effort certification report will automatically reflect that cost sharing in the "cost sharing" column.

*Example:* Assuming an NIH cap of \$186,600 (the cap as of 1/1/07), if your 12 month Institutional Base Salary is \$200,000 and you devote 40% of your time to an NIH grant, then the salary charge to that grant is limited to \$74,640 (i.e., \$186,600 times 40%). However, since 40% of your Institutional Base Salary equates to \$80,000 (i.e., \$200,000 times 40%), the difference of \$5,360 may NOT be charged to this or any other sponsored project, and must be funded from departmental resources.

**Discussion:** Since the salary over the NIH cap is typically not separately identified in the charge to departmental resources, it is vital that both faculty and administrative staff take care to ensure that sufficient funds are charged to those departmental funds to cover ALL of the salary over the cap related to any and all NIH grants that the individual is working on.

**Effort and Funding:  
Effort Certification Process****37. Am I required to certify my effort if none of it is related to a sponsored project?**

**Answer:** No. You are only required to certify your effort if some portion of it is related to a sponsored project (irrespective of whether that sponsor is a government or non-government sponsor). Note, however, that even if none of your salary is funded by a sponsored project, you must nevertheless certify if you committed to and devoted effort to a sponsored project.

**38. If none of my salary is supported by sponsored projects, will ECRT automatically provide an effort certification form for me?**

**Answer.** ECRT will produce an effort report if a portion of your salary is funded by a sponsored project. It will also produce an effort report for you even if you don't meet these criteria, but you have committed to cost sharing on a proposal, and that cost sharing has been recorded in ECRT by your effort coordinator.. If ECRT does not provide an effort certification form for you (because you don't meet the above criteria), but you have, in fact, committed to and devoted effort to a sponsored project, you must advise your Effort Coordinator so that a certification can be produced for you.

**39. A non-government award included funding for my salary. It did not request a percent effort for my involvement. Do I nevertheless have to certify my effort?**

**Answer:** You are required to certify any effort which you commit to provide in a grant application. If you did not commit to provide effort, and did not charge any salary to the project, then you do not need to certify to that effort on the sponsored project.

**40. How do faculty who have left the University certify, since certification is done only once at the end of the fiscal year?**

**Answer:** Electronic certification through ECRT can only be done during the University's Certification Period, following the end of the fiscal year. If an individual leaves the University before the Certification Period commences, the Effort Coordinator should print out a year-to-date ECRT report for that individual, and have him/her manually certify the effort on the printed report.

If an individual leaves before certifying and the effort coordinator is unable to reach him/her for manual certification, the chair or someone with sufficient knowledge of the work performed may manually sign the effort card and the signed certification can be uploaded by the effort coordinator.

All manual certifications must be submitted to [effort-reporting@columbia.edu](mailto:effort-reporting@columbia.edu) for review and entry to ECRT.

See reference guide on "Certifying for Individuals who have left the University" for detailed instructions.

**41. How does a PI determine the appropriate level of non-sponsored effort for non-self certifiers?**

**Answer:** Often a non-self certifier (NSC) will receive salary to participate in non-sponsored activities. For example, a GRA may be funded on a grant, but may also receive non-sponsored salary for being a teaching assistant. While the PI may not supervise the NSC in such non-sponsored activities, the PI is nonetheless responsible for certifying that effort as a part of the individual's overall (100%) effort. When certifying, it is not necessary for the PI to know exactly what the NSC has done during the time that the individual was engaged in non-sponsored effort, only that a certain proportion of the individual's effort was devoted to such non-grant activities. For example, if the PI knows that the NSC worked on the PI's grant 75% of the time and was not on any other grants, then the PI can confidently certify 75% effort on the grant and 25% on the non-sponsored line.

If the PI has any questions about the NSC's effort allocation, the PI should contact the non-self certifier directly to confirm the allocation of effort prior to certifying.

**41A. I understand that, as a Principal Investigator, I must certify the effort of the non-self certifiers who devoted effort to my project(s). What if one or more of those individuals is supported by more than one Principal Investigator?**

**Answer:** In this case, there must be collaboration between the Principal Investigators so that there is agreement among the parties as to the overall effort of the individual. This may require discussion with other parties as well, to ascertain the level of effort associated with the individual's non-sponsored effort. In cases where a NSC works for more than one PI, one of the PIs must certify the non-sponsored effort. Ideally, this should be the PI who supports the largest share of the individual's sponsored effort; however, any PI who has knowledge of the activities of the individual may perform this function. If there is uncertainty as to the amount of effort devoted to non-sponsored activities, the PI certifying the non-sponsored effort should communicate with the non-self certifier. Effort coordinators can also be helpful in this process.

**41B. How do I handle effort reporting for casual employees or work study students?**

**Answer:** Casuals and work study students, like other non-self certifiers, are certified by the PI in ECRT.

**42. I am the principal investigator of a large multi-project NIH award (e.g., program project). Other faculty members at the University are project directors of sections of this award. Who is responsible for certifying non-faculty personnel on their projects?**

**Answer:** While there is only one individual who is the Principal Investigator for such awards, the overall award is typically divided into separate activities within ARC, the University's accounting system. In such cases, each separate ARC activity reflects the PI or SCOPE I responsible for overseeing that component of the overall project. It is that faculty member who is responsible for certifying the effort of non-faculty personnel working on that segment of the project.

**43. I was listed on the grant as "as needed" with no percent effort specified and no salary requested. How do I certify this level of involvement?**

**Answer:** If you are listed on the grant as providing effort, then you are required to reflect the effort which was devoted to that project in the effort certification.



**Effort and Funding:****Dealing with Changes in an Individual's Status During the Fiscal Year**

During the course of a typical year, it is sometimes the case that an individual's status changes. The most common examples of such changes relate to students (whose status may change between teaching assistants or trainees receiving stipends and employees receiving salary), and employees whose salary significantly changes during the course of the fiscal year due to a mid-year change in their responsibilities. The salary percentages reflected in ECRT, which reflect an average over the entire year, may not be reflective of the actual effort distribution. The following examples describe how to handle such situations:

**44. I am the PI on a research grant which is funding a Graduate Research Assistant for 2 summer months at the rate of \$2,200 per month, for a total of \$4,400 charged to my grant. The individual is a first year graduate student who also serves as a Teaching Assistant during the 9 month academic year. For her TA work, she is paid a total \$5,600; she also receives financial aid in the form of a stipend during the academic year. How should I complete her effort certification?**

**Answer:** Since only compensation (i.e., amounts received in the form of salary) is covered by effort reporting, the ECRT system will reflect a salary distribution of 44% (\$4,400 of the total compensation of \$10,000 paid to the student) to the grant and 56% to non-sponsored activities. Because of the wide disparity in compensation due to the change in her responsibilities *during* the course of the year, these percentages do not reasonably reflect the student's true effort during the year. For this individual, who worked 11 months (9 of which were devoted to her duties as a Teaching Assistant, and 2 months of which were devoted to her duties as a GRA), her effort should be reflected as approximately 20%(2/11) to the grant, and 80% (9/11) to non-sponsored activities. Ordinarily, where the certified effort (in this case, 20%) is lower than the percentage of salary charged to the grant (in this case, 44%), a cost transfer is required to reduce the salary charged to the sponsored project. However, if the variance is *solely* due to a mid-year change in responsibilities and a related significant variance in salary, no salary adjustment is necessary. It will still be necessary for the Effort Coordinator to communicate this situation to the ECRT System Administrator, who would otherwise expect a salary cost transfer to be processed.

**45. I am the PI on a research grant which is funding an individual who was formerly a post-doc fellow receiving a stipend from a training grant. In certifying her effort, do I consider all of her activities during the course of the year, or only those activities for which she is receiving compensation as an employee?**

**Answer:** As explained in FAQ 44, effort reporting is based only on activities performed by individuals as employees of the University. Accordingly, you should only consider the effort related to services for which compensation in the form of salary has been provided.

**46. I am a PI certifying to the effort of an employee who was promoted during the course of the year, and his salary was substantially increased. Prior to his promotion, he was working on project A; upon being promoted, he ceased working on project A and has since been working on project B. When I view his effort certification form, the percentages that are listed in the first column of the effort form don't coincide with his actual effort. What should I do?**

**Answer:** The pre-printed percentage data shown on the effort certification reflects percentages based on the employee's salary distribution for the entire year. As a result of his change in salary and work assignment, those percentages will not be reflective of his actual effort distribution between the multiple projects. The pre-printed information is intended only as a starting point for assisting you in assessing the level of effort devoted to each activity. The effort that you certify to should reflect the actual effort distribution of the individual.

**ECRT and its Functionality****47. Exactly what is ECRT?**

**Answer:** ECRT is the University's on-line effort reporting tool that is used by faculty and PI's to facilitate the annual effort certification, as well as to provide information during the course of the year to assist faculty and others in monitoring effort, so that appropriate adjustments to salary distributions are made on a timely basis. Salary distribution throughout the fiscal year can be viewed month-by-month and year-to-date in order to allow for monitoring of charges and salary allocation modifications as necessary. ECRT

training and resources are available for Effort Coordinators and faculty. Click [here](#) for additional information.

#### 48. How do I access ECRT?

**Answer:** ECRT is accessible directly at <https://ecrt.columbia.edu> or through the Effort Reporting website at [www.effortreporting.columbia.edu](http://www.effortreporting.columbia.edu) by clicking on the icon on the home page.

#### 49. What is an Effort Card?

**Answer:** The effort card is an ECRT screen that shows all of the effort information for each individual, including the sponsored project(s) funding an individual's salary during the year, the percentage of salary funded from each such project, cost sharing information and much more. When it is time to certify, the effort card becomes the Effort Certification Form itself.

#### 50. What is my Username?

**Answer:** Your Username is your UNI. Please visit <http://uni.columbia.edu> for all UNI issues or contact the following CUIT offices for immediate assistance:

**Morningside (212) 854-1919**  
**CUMC (212) 305-4357**

#### 51. What is my UNI Password?

**Answer:** Please visit <http://uni.columbia.edu> for all UNI issues or contact the following CUIT offices for immediate assistance:

**Morningside (212) 854-1919**  
**CUMC (212) 305-4357**

#### 52. When I log into ECRT I am seeing the following message: "Forbidden, you don't have permission to access/on this server." What is wrong?

**Answer:** Please ensure that the web address is correct (and in particular, that the "s" following "http" is entered). ECRT can be accessed through <https://ecrt.columbia.edu>.

#### 53. Why can't I get into ECRT?

**Answer:** Please ensure that the web address is correct. ECRT can be accessed through <https://ecrt.columbia.edu>. If this does not resolve the problem, please send an email to [effort-reporting@columbia.edu](mailto:effort-reporting@columbia.edu) and the Effort Reporting Team will review your access privileges. Please note that only active Columbia University employees can access the ECRT system. Certifiers who are no longer employed at CU will not be able to log in and certify online. Their certifications must be completed manually.

#### 54. Why are images and data in ECRT not displaying properly?

**Answer:** There are known glitches that occur when ECRT is run on versions of Internet Explorer lower than 7.0. To ensure you are able to complete certifications without any issues, you should use IE 7.0 or higher, Mozilla Firefox or Safari. Please also check your browser security, which is often the case for display and pop up issues in the ECRT system. You may need to work with your departmental IT group to resolve.

#### 55. I am typing data and pressing enter, why is nothing happening?

**Answer:** When entering data into certain fields, such a department or PI name, the system is equipped with "smart keys" which generate suggested values when at least 3 characters are entered. After typing in your search criteria, please allow a few seconds for the system to identify your data. Once the data box returns a value, select on the appropriate selection, and click the Submit or Go button.

#### 56. How are employees assigned to departments in ECRT?

**Answer:** Employees are assigned to departments in ECRT based upon their "home" or "admin" department assignment in PeopleSoft (PAC).

#### 57. How are accounts and awards assigned to departments in ECRT?

**Answer:** Projects are assigned to departments as they are assigned in InfoEd/ARC.

**58. How do I fix incorrect data, such as the PI on a particular sponsored project or an incorrect home department, in ECRT?**

**Answer:** Incorrect data must be corrected in the source system for it to be corrected in ECRT. For example, an incorrect home or admin department of an employee must be fixed in PeopleSoft. If a PI is incorrect in ECRT, please contact Sponsored Projects Administration. For any other errors please describe the problem in an email and send it to [effort-reporting@columbia.edu](mailto:effort-reporting@columbia.edu).

**59. Under the “Department Dashbord” menu, there is a section called “Child Department(s).” What is a child department?**

**Answer:** A child department is a sub-department that is related to a department. Our system terminology calls sub-departments that are related to a department ‘child departments’ (the relationship is called a ‘parent-child’ relationship). All child departments have parent departments to which they roll up in reporting.

**60. As the Effort Coordinator for my department, how do I check who has or has not certified?**

**Answer:** Use reporting tool to run reports on the status of effort cards in your department(s). The “Status by Certifier” report will list all effort cards with their status.

**61. As the Effort Coordinator, how can I tell who a PI has left to certify for?**

**Answer:** Effort coordinators can only see effort certifications and status for individuals assigned to their department. If PI’s have certifications for individuals outside of your department, they will not appear on your reports. If you’d like a list of open items for a particular PI, please send an email to [effort-reporting@columbia.edu](mailto:effort-reporting@columbia.edu).

**62. How do I handle situations when someone who worked on one or more of my projects also worked on projects directed by other Principal Investigators during the year.**

**Answer:** ECRT allows you to view the entire effort card for individuals who worked on your projects, but only permits you to certify for projects in which you are listed as the PI. Each PI is responsible for certifying the effort for their projects. In addition, one PI must certify the non-sponsored portion. A card will remain uncertified and all PI’s will continue to receive reminder messages until all lines are certified and the total effort is 100%. The Effort Coordinator of the individual’s home department is responsible for making sure each PI performs their certification.

**63. How can I view an individual’s effort card?**

**Answer:** You can access effort cards for individuals in your department two ways: through the lookup function or through the department dashboard. In the lookup box, you would enter the employees name in the lookup box. This will take you directly to their effort card. If you are in your department dashboard, you can select any icon under the statements column in the section “Covered Individuals Associated to this Department” to take you to the effort certification page to view their effort statement. From the effort statements page, you can run payroll or cost share reports as well as a PDF of the effort card.

**64. What is project “00000000-00”? Why is it showing up on my effort statement?**

**Answer:** The effort card encompasses both the sponsored (i.e., grants and contracts) and non-sponsored effort of an individual. The project number of each sponsored project is listed on the effort card; for non-sponsored activities, the individual projects that fund the non-sponsored portion of an individual’s salary are rolled up as a single percentage, and are labeled 00000000-00. The percentage displayed for project 00000000-00 represents in total the proportion of an individual’s Institutional Base Salary that was charged to non-sponsored sources (i.e. departmental funds, gifts, etc.) for that individual during the fiscal year. The non-sponsored effort of non-self certifiers must be completed by one of the PI’s. A card will remain uncertified and all PI’s will continue to receive reminder messages until all lines are certified and the total effort is 100%.

**65. I am the Effort Coordinator for my department. How do I process a cost transfer?**

**Answer:** Cost transfers are necessary when the certified effort on a sponsored project is lower than the percentage of salary charged to that project, as indicated in ECRT. ECRT does not process salary adjustments. All cost transfers must be processed in the labor accounting system. The threshold for required cost transfers is \$1,000 and 1% to be removed from a sponsored project.

**66. I am the Effort Coordinator, reviewing an Effort Card with a calculated cost transfer that is out of balance by a penny or two due to rounding. ECRT will not allow me to process the certification because it is out of balance. How do I get it to balance in ECRT?**

**Answer:** Simply change the non sponsored cost transfer column so the Grand Total is .00. You will then be able to process the certification.

**67. I am the Effort Coordinator for my Department and I am completing a cost transfer to reflect the required cost transfer resulting from the certification. What project number do I assign to cover the necessary transfer to non-sponsored funds?**

**Answer:** When completing a cost transfer, you cannot use 00000000-00 – Total Columbia Support. A valid departmental combocode must be used to transfer money to a Non-Sponsored source.

**68. Is there a way to tell who is responsible for certifying a person's effort?**

**Answer:** There are two types of certifiers in ECRT: self certifiers who certify their own effort and non-self certifiers who are certified by their PI(s). This designation is based on job code in Peoplesoft. For a list of job codes, see "resources" tab on the effort reporting website. Running the "Status by Certifier Report" will allow you to see the role of an individual. The "Certifier Detail Report" will break out each effort card by project, where you can determine which PI would need to certify for non-self certifiers

**69. What is the effort coordinators role in ECRT?**

**Answer:** Effort Coordinators serve as the liaison between the effort reporting team and the faculty who certify. The effort coordinator is a key resource to the faculty and department during the effort reporting process. Effort coordinators are responsible for ensuring that all certifications are completed by the deadline and assisting faculty in completing those certifications. Once certifications are completed by the certifiers, they must be processed (reviewed for necessary cost transfers) and finalized by the primary effort coordinator.

**70. Who should I contact if I have questions or concerns about effort and effort reporting that are not addressed in this Q&A?**

**Answer:** The University has created a separate website, <http://www.effortreporting.columbia.edu>, that contains a great deal of additional information about effort reporting and certification requirements. In addition, a dedicated email address, [effort-reporting@columbia.edu](mailto:effort-reporting@columbia.edu), has been created to expedite responses to any additional questions or concerns you may have. All questions will be promptly answered.