Navigating the Gray Area — Tricky Approval Scenarios

SCENARIO #1 – AIRLINE CREDIT
An expense reimbursement has come into your queue for approval. A faculty member attended a conference in Denver from 12/1/15 - 12/5/15 to present research results from their NSF sponsored project. The roundtrip airfare charge was $255, but an airline credit of $50 was applied to the cost of the airfare, resulting in the total out-of-pocket cost to the faculty of $205. In the justification, the faculty member explains that the credit is the result of the cancellation by the airline of a flight for a personal trip and that the credit was due to expire if it wasn’t used by 12/31/2015. The faculty member is requesting the full $255 airfare to be reimbursed from the NSF sponsored project.

How much of the airfare should be reimbursed?

SCENARIO #2 – INTERNET FEES
An expense reimbursement has come into your queue for approval. The PI traveled to Europe to attend a conference to present research results for their NIH sponsored project. Included in the reimbursement are charges for Internet Access during the international flight. The justification stated by the PI is that the internet access was necessary to conduct University business while traveling.

Would you allow the internet access to be charged 100% to the sponsored project?
SCENARIO #3 – EQUIPMENT PURCHASE
A requisition has come into your queue for approval. A faculty member is requesting the purchase of a component that was “missed” on a previous capital equipment purchase (that you also approved). The previous capital equipment purchase was for a total of $48,000 and charged to a sponsored project. The equipment is available from multiple suppliers; per policy, a price comparison was done and the least expensive supplier was selected. The equipment was included in the budget description for the faculty’s sponsored project. Unfortunately, a key component was missing from the quote and needs to be purchased. This component has an individual price of $3,000 from the selected vendor. If the component had been included in the original requisition, the total cost of the capital equipment would have been $51,000.

Is this purchase allowable as capital equipment on the sponsored project? What other considerations need to be addressed regarding this purchase?

SCENARIO #4 – EQUIPMENT REPAIR
A requisition has come into your queue for approval. Two department PIs are requesting a repair on a piece of equipment that they are sharing. This equipment was not purchased with project funds but is being utilized on both NSF projects. No money was budgeted for equipment repairs, but work cannot proceed on either project without the equipment being fixed. There are no rebudgeting restrictions on either of the projects.

Is this repair allowable on one or both of the sponsored projects and if so, how would you allocate the cost?
SCENARIO #5 – TRAVEL ORIGINATING FROM A FOREIGN LOCATION
An expense reimbursement has come into your queue for approval. The PI is requesting reimbursement of airfare and other travel expenses related to attending a conference in Pittsburgh, PA to discuss the research results of his sponsored project. The airfare receipt totaling $1,800 shows that the PI traveled from Tokyo, Japan to Pittsburgh and then back to Tokyo. There is no mention in the justification as to why the PI began the travel from this location and you have no information indicating that that PI is on sabbatical or previously traveled to Japan on University business.

Is the airfare allowable on the sponsored project?

Thank you to our Subject Matter Experts:
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