Effort Allocation and Certification

**Effort:**   
Faculty and staff at the University of Northern Iowa are hired or appointed to perform a set of professional duties that generally include instruction, research, administration, committee work, and service work. Some of these duties, namely research, instruction and service, may also be performed through externally sponsored support from federal or other external sources and include salary support for the effort (time) spent on the projects. Key personnel are to propose at least one percent effort on all projects. For the principal investigator this percentage of time should reflect the effort required to complete the project as well as manage the fiscal and programmatic aspects of it.

*Committed Effort:* When preparing proposals, the amount of salary written into the grant budget is *committed* effort; this is expressed as a percentage of time.

Effort on a sponsored project is the amount of work contributed to that sponsored project regardless of whether the sponsor pays for the work.

**Effort Allocation:**

Effort allocation is the percentage of effort/time proposed for sponsored projects, compared to total amount of effort for all activities at UNI. Effort allocation is important because in the proposal stage the PI/PD committed a certain percentage of his/her time to a project. If funded, both the university and the sponsor expect the PI/PD will honor the proposed effort.

UNI effort is allocated to various projects via the PAF (personnel action form). Faculty and staff have various duties that often preclude them from charging 100% of their time to sponsored projects.

There are certain activities that cannot be charged as effort to sponsored projects. These unallowable activities include writing grant proposals or time spent doing committee work, such as IRB or departmental/service projects. Other unallowable effort that cannot be charged to a sponsored project includes instruction, administration (department head or dean duties) and work on other sponsored projects.

To calculate effort, faculty and staff must have a clear accounting of their total effort of all the activities performed for the university. Faculty and staff do this by calculating how much time they devote to each of their major activities, (teaching, administration, research, etc.) averaged over approximately six months; to allow for fluctuations. This will be different for each person.

**Effort Periods:**  
At UNI effort is recorded in three effort periods: spring, summer and fall.

**Effort Certification and Certification Guidelines:**Effort certification is required by the federal government. The effort certification reports are generated after the end of each effort period and are sent to each department head for distribution to faculty and staff. The Office of Research and Sponsored Programs (RSP) generates effort reports from UNI’s human resource/payroll distribution system. Each faculty and staff certifies 100% of his or her effort as allocated between sponsored programs and other university activities. Both the employee and his or her supervisor sign the effort certification report and return the report to RSP.

Certifying effort is not the same thing as certifying payroll. Certifying payroll is confirming how much someone was paid. Certifying effort is confirming the salary charges to sponsored programs are reasonable in relation to the work performed on the sponsored program, and effort provided is as great as the effort promised in the proposal and on the PAF.

Regardless of the number of hours worked, 100% effort is 100% effort. There are no nights and weekends where faculty and salaried staff allocate their time and there are no fixed hours per week that people are supposed to work. It is important to include all university activities when calculating what 100% of your effort is, even if that effort is not allowable effort to be charged to a sponsored project.

To certify effort, faculty and staff must confirm the percentages listed on the effort report are reasonable representations of the actual time and effort contributed to the project or projects. It is acceptable to average effort for all months in the effort reporting period. If corrections need to be made, contact Michele Mullings-Shand as a retroactive PAF may be required to correct allocated effort. For more detailed instructions on completing effort certification reports go to: <http://www.uni.edu/rsp/effort-certification>.

**Cost Transfers after Effort is Certified:**Once effort has been certified subsequent changes to that certified effort must be considered carefully. Retroactive PAFs must stay in line with UNI’s policy on cost transfers. PAFs older than 90 days will need justification. Changes to effort can be requested prior to receiving the semi-annual effort report from RSP. Correcting effort may help alleviate the number of retroactive PAFs older than 90 days.

To reduce the chances of retroactive PAFs and the recertification of effort, PI/PDs, and support staff should review sponsored budgets and the GCAFS reports monthly. PAF preparers should regularly ask faculty and staff what projects they are working on and if they believe their PAF needs to be revised.

**Recertification of Effort:**Recertification of effort is a change to the effort distribution on an effort report that occurs after an individual has certified the statement. A retroactive PAF results in the need to change the effort distribution on an effort report. Both the original and the recertified effort reports are filed.

**Certification for People Who Leave UNI:**If an individual does not certify his or her effort prior to leaving the university, the individual’s PI or department head must certify effort. If the PI or department head is not able to certify effort, they must identify another person who has suitable means of verifying work was performed. When students or hourly employees leave, the PI can continue to certify their effort.

**Changes to the Level of Effort:**A reduction of 25% or more of the level of effort expended on a project constitutes a significant change in work activity. According to OMB Circular A-21, any significant change in work activity for the PI/PD or key personnel listed on the grant award must be approved prior to the change and in writing. This must be completed through the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs. A reduction of effort of less than 25% should be documented but not reported to the sponsor. If a staff person who is not key personnel or a PI/PD reduces his or her time by more than 25%, no documentation, approval or notification is necessary.

There is generally some flexibility in re-budgeting for staff or student time, such as reduce one person’s time and increase another’s, as long as there is no significant change in the scope of work. It is generally OK to reduce the salary charged to a sponsored program without reducing the amount of effort. The portion of effort expended on the project but not paid by the grant is considered cost sharing.

**Responsible Units:**Key administrative units responsible for activities that most commonly involve effort allocation and certification are:

*The Office of Research and Sponsored Programs:* The RSP is responsible for reasonable proposed effort, ensuring effort certification submission and effort system is effective and in compliance with federal regulations.

*Human Resources and Office of Business Operations:* The HR and OBO are responsible for processing personnel action forms and processing and maintaining effort distribution records.

*Principal Investigators/Project Directors:* The PI/PDs are responsible for working with RSP to commit effort on proposals that adequately reflects the appropriate amount of effort needed to successfully complete projects. Once funded, PI/PDs are responsible for communicating budget and salary information to the appropriate UNI personnel for timely and accurate submission of Personnel Action Forms (PAF). PI/PDs are also responsible for tracking their actual effort on sponsored projects and must be able to provide supporting documentation regarding how effort was tracked.

*College and departments:* These administrators are responsible for reviewing proposed effort to ensure it is allowable, appropriate, reasonable and ensuring key personnel are not overcommitted. Departmental administrators are also responsible for certifying the personnel activity reports for the personnel in their respective departments.

**Effort Reporting Documentation:**   
Faculty and staff need to use a consistent and reliable way of tracking their effort.