Effort Reporting  
Principal Investigator Responsibility  
To Certify Effort for Project Staff

Policy
Columbia’s Effort Reporting Policy requires that all faculty (i.e., officers of instruction and officers of research, except for postdocs) who work on sponsored projects will certify their own effort. Graduate students, postdocs, and research staff (“Project Staff”) are not required to certify their own effort; instead, Principal Investigators will certify the effort of Project Staff who devote effort to their sponsored projects. This Reference Guide is intended to assist Principal Investigators in carrying out that responsibility.

Why is the PI Responsible?
Although it may sometimes be the case that Project Staff have the requisite knowledge to certify their effort on sponsored projects, in many cases Project Staff will not have sufficient knowledge of the funding sources supporting their work, particularly if they worked on multiple projects for more than one Principal Investigator. Based on internal discussions with faculty and administrative representatives, and following review of the policies of peer institutions, the University determined that the most appropriate certifier for Project Staff was the Principal Investigator. This Policy is also consistent with Columbia’s longstanding policy, and the policies of many external funders, that Principal Investigators have overall responsibility for their sponsored projects, including programmatic, compliance, and fiscal requirements.

What is the PI Certifying?
The PI is certifying that the salary a Project Staff Member received from any sponsored project reasonably reflects the percent effort the Project Staff Member actually expended on that project.

In determining what proportion of effort was devoted to a sponsored project, the PI must take into account all activities for which the University compensates the Project Staff Member. For example, if a graduate student receives compensation from Columbia for work on a sponsored project and also for grading, the PI must take into account both of those activities in determining what percent effort was devoted to the sponsored project. However, the PI should not take into account time the graduate student spends on course assignments, exam preparation, or other academic activities that are not compensated by Columbia.

How Will PIs Certify the Effort of Project Staff?
PIs will certify the effort of Project Staff in the same way that they certify their own effort: through ECRT, the University’s electronic effort reporting system. The PI will need to view the effort information for each staff member. Step-by-step instructions for how to use ECRT to certify for others is available on the Effort Reporting Website at http://www.effortreporting.columbia.edu/reference_guides.html. PIs may need to talk to Project Staff about their work to confirm the effort expended on their sponsored projects.

What about Casuals and Work Study Students?
Casuals and work study students, like other non-self certifiers, are certified by the PI in ECRT.

What about Project Staff Who Work for More than One PI?
Where an individual has received support from more than one PI’s sponsored projects, each PI will certify to the effort on that PI’s project(s). However, in order to establish the Total University Effort at issue, PIs will need to coordinate and share information. In some cases, this coordination will need to take place not only within departments, but across departments or schools. Effort coordinators can support this process.

Unlike last year, in the enhanced ECRT system each PI will be able to certify only those projects overseen by that PI. After all PIs have certified to the sponsored effort for the individual, the Effort Coordinator for the individual will do the final certification and processing.

Additional Information
For detailed instructions on using ECRT to certify for project staff, see the ECRT reference guides on the Effort Reporting Website at http://www.effortreporting.columbia.edu/reference_guides.html. For more information, see the Columbia University Policy on Effort Reporting and the University’s Policy Statement on Principal Investigator Responsibilities for Financial Oversight of Grants & Contracts (92-5), at http://www.effortreporting.columbia.edu/policy.html. If you have additional questions, please contact us at effort-reporting@columbia.edu.