

A-87: Basic Guidelines @ Composition of Cost

11. "Cost objective" means a function, organizational subdivision, contract, grant, or other activity for which cost data are needed and for which costs are incurred.
12. "Federally recognized Indian tribal government" means the governing body or a governmental agency of any Indian tribe, band, nation, or other organized group or community (including any native village as defined in Section 3 of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, 85 Stat. 688) certified by the Secretary of the Interior as eligible for the special programs and services provided through the Bureau of Indian Affairs.
13. "Governmental unit" means the entire State, local, or federally-recognized Indian tribal government, including any component thereof. Components of governmental units may function independently of the governmental unit in accordance with the term of the award.
14. "Grantee department or agency" means the component of a State, local, or federally-recognized Indian tribal government which is responsible for the performance or administration of all or some part of a Federal award.
15. "Indirect cost rate proposal" means the documentation prepared by a governmental unit or component thereof to substantiate its request for the establishment of an indirect cost rate as described in Attachment E of this Circular.
16. "Local government" means a county, municipality, city, town, township, local public authority, school district, special district, intrastate district, council of governments (whether or not incorporated as a non-profit corporation under State law), any other regional or interstate government entity, or any agency or instrumentality of a local government.
17. "Public assistance cost allocation plan" means a narrative description of the procedures that will be used in identifying, measuring and allocating all administrative costs to all of the programs administered or supervised by State public assistance agencies as described in Attachment D of this Circular.
18. "State" means any of the several States of the United States, the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, any territory or possession of the United States, or any agency or instrumentality of a State exclusive of local governments.

C. Basic Guidelines

1. Factors affecting allowability of costs. To be allowable under Federal awards, costs must meet the following general criteria:
 - a. Be necessary and reasonable for proper and efficient performance and administration of Federal awards.
 - b. Be allocable to Federal awards under the provisions of this Circular.

- c. Be authorized or not prohibited under State or local laws or regulations.
 - d. Conform to any limitations or exclusions set forth in these principles, Federal laws, terms and conditions of the Federal award, or other governing regulations as to types or amounts of cost items.
 - e. Be consistent with policies, regulations, and procedures that apply uniformly to both Federal awards and other activities of the governmental unit.
 - f. Be accorded consistent treatment. A cost may not be assigned to a Federal award as a direct cost if any other cost incurred for the same purpose in like circumstances has been allocated to the Federal award as an indirect cost.
 - g. Except as otherwise provided for in this Circular, be determined in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles.
 - h. Not be included as a cost or used to meet cost sharing or matching requirements of any other Federal award in either the current or a prior period, except as specifically provided by Federal law or regulation.
 - i. Be the net of all applicable credits.
 - j. Be adequately documented.
2. Reasonable costs. A cost is reasonable if, in its nature and amount, it does not exceed that which would be incurred by a prudent person under the circumstances prevailing at the time the decision was made to incur the cost. The question of reasonableness is particularly important when governmental units or components are predominately federally- funded. In determining reasonableness of a given cost, consideration shall be given to:
- a. Whether the cost is of a type generally recognized as ordinary and necessary for the operation of the governmental unit or the performance of the Federal award.
 - b. The restraints or requirements imposed by such factors as: sound business practices; arms length bargaining; Federal, State and other laws and regulations; and, terms and conditions of the Federal award.
 - c. Market prices for comparable goods or services.
 - d. Whether the individuals concerned acted with prudence in the circumstances considering their responsibilities to the governmental unit, its employees, the public at large, and the Federal Government.
 - e. Significant deviations from the established practices of the governmental unit which may unjustifiably increase the Federal award's cost.

3. Allocable costs.

- a. A cost is allocable to a particular cost objective if the goods or services involved are chargeable or assignable to such cost objective in accordance with relative benefits received.
- b. All activities which benefit from the governmental unit's indirect cost, including unallowable activities and services donated to the governmental unit by third parties, will receive an appropriate allocation of indirect costs.
- c. Any cost allocable to a particular Federal award or cost objective under the principles provided for in this Circular may not be charged to other Federal awards to overcome fund deficiencies, to avoid restrictions imposed by law or terms of the Federal awards, or for other reasons.
- d. Where an accumulation of indirect costs will ultimately result in charges to a Federal award, a cost allocation plan will be required as described in Attachments C, D, and E.

4. Applicable credits.

- a. Applicable credits refer to those receipts or reduction of expenditure-type transactions that offset or reduce expense items allocable to Federal awards as direct or indirect costs. Examples of such transactions are: purchase discounts, rebates or allowances, recoveries or indemnities on losses, insurance refunds or rebates, and adjustments of overpayments or erroneous charges. To the extent that such credits accruing to or received by the governmental unit relate to allowable costs, they shall be credited to the Federal award either as a cost reduction or cash refund, as appropriate.
- b. In some instances, the amounts received from the Federal Government to finance activities or service operations of the governmental unit should be treated as applicable credits. Specifically, the concept of netting such credit items (including any amounts used to meet cost sharing or matching requirements) should be recognized in determining the rates or amounts to be charged to Federal awards. (See Attachment B, item 11, "Depreciation and use allowances," for areas of potential application in the matter of Federal financing of activities.)

D. Composition of Cost

1. Total cost. The total cost of Federal awards is comprised of the allowable direct cost of the program, plus its allocable portion of allowable indirect costs, less applicable credits.
2. Classification of costs. There is no universal rule for classifying certain costs as either direct or indirect under every accounting system. A cost may be direct with respect to some specific service or function, but indirect with respect to the Federal award or other final cost objective. Therefore, it is essential that each item of cost be treated consistently in like circumstances either as a direct or an indirect cost. Guidelines for determining direct and indirect costs charged to Federal awards are provided in the sections that follow.