

## Vanderbilt University NIH Salary Cap Guidelines

### **Purpose**

To provide guidance regarding the administration of the *NIH Salary Cap* that applies to grants, contracts and cooperative agreements from the Health and Human Services' agencies that adhere to NIH guidelines including the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

### **I. Background**

Since 1990, Congress has legislatively mandated a provision for the limitation of salary for grants, contracts and cooperative agreements awarded by the above mentioned agencies.

The salary cap applies to grants, contracts and cooperative agreements awards that Vanderbilt receives from the above mentioned agencies and awards from these agencies received via a subcontract from another entity. The salary cap also applies to Vanderbilt's subcontractees under these awards.

Direct salary for purposes of calculating the salary cap is exclusive of fringe benefits and facilities and administrative (F&A) expenses, also referred to as indirect costs.

Specifically, the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Appropriations Act restricts the amount of direct salary of an individual under an NIH grant, cooperative agreement or applicable contract to Executive Level 1 of the Federal Executive Pay Scale (since 2001). This pay scale changes each year in January.

Compensation for individuals under awards from these agencies cannot exceed a stipulated rate of pay (monthly, academic year (AY) or annually). The salary cap guidance is stated in terms of a 12 month appointment. Thus, the salary cap for an academic year appointment is 75% of the annual salary cap and 1/12 of the annual amount on a monthly basis. For faculty members who receive a salary that exceeds the applicable salary cap, the amount of salary requested/charged to an award must be limited to their effort percentage multiplied by the salary cap rate. Faculty and administrative staff in the respective benefiting departments are responsible for applying the appropriate salary cap in all applicable proposals and existing awards.

Summer salary charged to HHS projects (NIH, AHRQ, SAMHSA, etc) by faculty with academic appointments must also follow these guidelines.

The NIH will not provide additional funds for awards issued under the previous salary cap rate(s); however, they have stated that a Principal Investigator can rebudget funds to allow for the increase in rates. Upon issuance of a new federal salary cap, the University will

apply the cap in the next month. Exceptions to the application of the new cap must be approved by the Dean of the appropriate school.

## **II. Guidance**

All salary charged to HHS projects (NIH, AHRQ, SAMHSA, etc.) must comply with the salary cap on a monthly basis. The portion of salary over the capped amount should be tracked and accounted by cost sharing to a cost share project. **Note:** Nine-month appointed faculty working during the summer may have their compensation limited to the amount of the NIH salary cap (or an appropriate prorated portion) with the approval of the Dean and the Provost.

## **III. Questions and Answers (per NIH)**

1. If a grant award (competing or non-competing) has already been issued, will an adjustment be made?

No adjustments will be made. However, rebudgeting is allowable.

2. If an application/proposal fails to provide needed salary information, will an adjustment be made based on the new rates?

No adjustment will be made if an application fails to provide adequate information regarding the individual's actual salary level.

3. Does the NIH appropriation language link the salary cap to a Federal Executive Level or to a dollar level?

The link is to the Federal Executive Level pay scale.

4. As the cap is linked to Federal Executive Levels, can grantees/contractors with ongoing awards rebudget/charge up to the various salary caps, based on the fiscal year of the award and the time of the salary expense is incurred?

Yes, salary may be charged in accordance with the FY cap(s), as long as the levels are consistent with the individual's institutional base pay.

5. Will grantees be permitted to submit revised categorical budgets reflecting higher base salaries?

Not as a general rule. NIH policy for categorical budgets states that grantees should always reflect actual base salaries in the requested budgets or provide an explanation

indicating that actual institutional base salary exceeds the current salary limitation. As a general rule, NIH will use the information available in the existing application and make adjustments for the salary cap based on information available at the time of award.

#### **IV. Questions**

Questions regarding these guidelines should be submitted to:

##### **Proposals/Applications**

Sponsored Programs Administration

Phone: (615) 322-2631

Email: [spa@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:spa@vanderbilt.edu)

##### **Post Award**

Office of Contract and Grant Accounting

Phone: (615) 343-6655

Email: [ocga-postaward@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:ocga-postaward@vanderbilt.edu)