

STARS Guidelines

Supplementary Teaching and Research Support



September 2011

Purpose — STARS funds are provided to support and advance the School’s teaching and research missions. STARS funds are not intended as a form of in-kind compensation nor should they be used in such a way.

Allocations — Faculty members receive annual STARS allocations. Each academic department (including the Center for Management Communication, Greif Center, and Leventhal School) receives an aggregate STARS budget based on the number of students taught in the previous year and the research effort of its faculty. From the departmental pool, each chair allocates funds to individual faculty members in consultation with the Vice Dean for Faculty and Academic Affairs. Chairs may reserve some funds for departmental uses during the year.

Individual allocations are based on research and teaching responsibilities. The research component of individual allocations is largely based on productivity. However, chairs may also take into account research needs and opportunities. For example, faculty members whose research requires purchase of data sets, high speed computers, laboratory subjects, or on-site visits to companies should be allocated more funds than faculty members who conduct their research using only “pencil and paper.” Similarly, faculty members who frequently travel to present their research in high profile events should be allocated more funds than faculty members who do not travel to promote their research or who present their research at lower profile events. The teaching component of individual allocations should take into account number of students, teaching needs, and teaching opportunities.

In allocating STARS funds, chairs may take into account accumulated balances from previous years, and the impact of expenditures from previous years.

Carryovers and Deficits — In most cases, unused STARS funds in one fiscal year are carried over to the next fiscal year. Faculty members who experience an unusually large need for funds in a particular year may be allowed to run a deficit for that year. Deficit spending must be approved by the chair, and normally would not be allowed in consecutive years. Faculty may not loan funds to each other.

Approval — All expenditures must be approved by the chair. Expenditures that are paid directly by the School must be approved in advance. Expenditures that are paid from personal funds and then reimbursed are approved at the reimbursement stage. Before making a purchase using personal funds, faculty members may wish to consult with their chair if there is a question whether an expenditure is an appropriate use of funds. Departments may establish procedures allowing automatic pre-approval for routine expenditures involving modest amounts of money. Such procedures must be approved by Marshall’s Chief Financial Officer. The current practice is to grant pre-approval for routine expenditures below \$500.

Appropriate and Inappropriate Use of Funds — It is not be possible or desirable to list every conceivable appropriate and inappropriate use of funds. To a large extent, the School relies on the judgment of individual faculty members to determine which expenditures of Marshall funds in STARS accounts are consistent with the purpose of the funds. However, all expenditures must comply with University policies and procedures (described in the Expenditure Manual, available through the Faculty Portal). Faculty members should consult with their chair if they are uncertain whether a particular expenditure is consistent with the purpose of the funds. Some specific expenditures are discussed below, with key discriminating criteria indicated in italics:

- Common and generally appropriate expenses — Data purchases; journal submission and subscription fees; books for research or teaching; fees for professional organizations; compensation for research assistants, teaching assistants, and graders; computer equipment and software including monitors, printers, scanners, and fax machines (but not iPods); e-book readers; copying and mailing of research and teaching materials; letterhead and business cards; teaching materials; academic regalia.
- Home office — Faculty members are expected to maintain a regular presence on campus, but may find it helpful for research and teaching purposes to maintain a home office. It is appropriate to use STARS funds to purchase *computing and communications equipment* for home offices, including printers and associated supplies. It is generally not appropriate to use STARS funds to purchase home furniture, bookshelves, decorations, and so on. STARS funds may not be used to for home internet services.
- Travel — Attending and presenting research at scholarly conferences is an important part of a research faculty member’s professional responsibilities, and STARS funds are intended to support those activities. It is appropriate to use STARS funds to travel to quality scholarly conferences, including paying for registration, hotel, and air fare. STARS funds may be used for travel to work with coauthors. STARS funds may be used to pay for visas for work-related trips, but should not be used to pay for passports. STARS funds should not be used to pay for business or first class plane tickets, but faculty may use STARS funds to purchase a coach ticket and upgrade the ticket from their personal resources.
- Employment of students — It is appropriate to use STARS funds to employ students.
- Employment of other faculty members — Generally speaking, faculty members are expected to support their colleagues on the faculty without additional compensation. In rare instances, it may be appropriate to employ faculty members from another unit in USC. Because such arrangements raise administrative and potential conflict-of-interest issues, such a use of STARS funds must be approved in advance by the chair and Vice Dean for Faculty and Academic Affairs.
- Gifts — It may be appropriate to use STARS funds to provide modest gifts to outside speakers, such as a guest speaker in a class. STARS funds should not be used to purchase equipment, meals, or to provide gifts of any sort to USC faculty, staff, or student workers.

- Cell phones and PDAs — In most cases STARS funds may not be used to pay for cell phones, PDAs, or services related to such devices. STARS funds may be used to pay for cell phones, PDAs, and related services only upon documentation that 95 percent of the activity serves a business purpose that benefits the University. STARS funds may be used to reimburse specific itemized calls that serve a business purpose. Data plans for PDAs and e-book readers fall under the same guidelines, and generally are covered only on an itemized basis.
- Meals
 - Meals with outside faculty and external speakers — It is appropriate to use STARS funds to pay for meals with outside faculty and external speakers if the primary purpose of the meal is business related. University policy limits reimbursable expenses to \$75 per person.
 - Meals with other faculty — Because it is a normal activity independent of work for faculty members to dine together, it is generally inappropriate to use STARS funds to pay for meals involving only USC faculty. It may be appropriate to use STARS funds to purchase food for events involving faculty as long as the event is organized *specifically and exclusively for teaching or research purposes* and the *amount spent is modest*. For example, it would be appropriate for a group of faculty who organize an afternoon reading group to use STARS funds to purchase coffee and light snacks. Another appropriate use of STARS funds would be to pay for lunch between a mentor and mentee as part of a mentoring program.
 - Meals with students — It can be a valuable experience for a faculty member to meet with students outside the classroom for meals. Accordingly, it is appropriate to use STARS funds to pay for meals with *small groups* of students that take place *outside the classroom*. Unless there is a compelling educational purpose, it is generally inappropriate to use STARS funds to purchase food for students during a class or for large groups of students where individual students have minimal one-on-one interaction with the faculty member. (University funds are available for meals through the Breaking Bread program.)
 - Meals with staff — Meals with staff and other non-faculty university generally are not an appropriate use of STARS funds.
 - Meals, other — Because many faculty members take outside speakers to lunch at the University Club, it is appropriate to use STARS funds to pay for University Club memberships. It is appropriate to use STARS funds to pay for meals at the University Club if they meet the other conditions for meal expenditures.
- Transfer of funds — Faculty members may not transfer, gift, or loan funds to another faculty member. The chairs are responsible for allocating STARS funds to the faculty. If a faculty member finds that he or she has more funds than can be used effectively, the chair should be notified and the chair will reallocate the funds. Funds that are not spent by departing faculty may not be transferred to other faculty.

These guidelines are intended to help faculty members understand the purpose of STARS funds. Because there may be exceptions to these guidelines, faculty members are encouraged to consult their chairs if they have questions about specific expenditures. Please contact the Vice Dean for Faculty and Academic Affairs if you have suggestions for these guidelines.