

From: [College of Education and Human Development Faculty](#) on behalf of [Martin E Ford](#)
To: CEHDFAC-L@LISTSERV.GMU.EDU
Subject: New and improved RTD (Research Time Distribution) policy for faculty who have a substantial part of their base salary covered by external funding
Date: Monday, February 28, 2022 5:25:06 PM

Colleagues,

The College Leadership Team, along with many current RTD recipients, have endorsed some significant changes with respect to how we reward “big” grant getters. This message serves as an announcement of this policy change, effective with the fiscal year that starts in July 2022 (FY23).

The first part of this message outlines the two major problems that this policy is intended to repair. The second part of this message summarizes our new RTD policy.

PROBLEM #1

The current “release time distribution” policy is based on a complex array of variables that makes the reward unnecessarily opaque. Faculty have no ability to figure out on their own what they will get when they cover a certain amount of their salary. The calculations themselves are difficult to compute, as they must take into account not only the exact AY salary percentage paid for by external sponsors, but also faculty role, faculty rank, number of course releases, and type of PI status.

PROBLEM #2

As a result of this complexity, and because delays are logistically hard to avoid (because nothing can be credited until the money is actually at Mason and fully authorized for spending with a finalized budget), the Dean’s Office has been reporting RTD awards to faculty far too late in each AY to make them optimally useful. The tardiness problem was temporarily minimized during COVID, as we allowed for carryover of RTD funds when normally they are “use it or lose it”

during the AY in which they are earned. But the current reporting timeline is not an effective pattern. The point of the reward is to motivate faculty to get and keep getting “big” grants (defined as AY salary coverage of 20% or more). Not being able to project what the reward is going to be, and then not getting access to the reward in a timely manner, is undermining the demonstrated power of this tried and true motivational incentive.

SOLUTION

1. “Keep it simple” - so simple that anyone can calculate in their head precisely what their reward is going to be. This will make the logistical timing of the “official” allocation far less important, as faculty can start spending against their RTD allocation based on a clear expectation of what they are going to receive in their allocation.
2. Get rid of the “use it or lose it” feature of the award (i.e., allow carryforward with no deadline). The deadline was essential when the university had a budget model that re-started everything at zero at the beginning of each FY. But with the current budget model allowing for carryforward of authorized funding into a College “fund balance,” there is no compelling reason to set a spending deadline.

NEW “RESEARCH TIME DISTRIBUTION” POLICY (new name, same acronym – was “release time distribution” policy)

1. [SAME] If you have external sources of funding (that are not a structural part of your contract) covering at least 20% of your AY salary (or the AY salary equivalent for faculty on 12-month contracts)...
2. [NEW] ... you will be given 20% of the salary savings in a professional spending account.
3. [NEW] The awarded RTD funding can be rolled over indefinitely (no

expiration date).

EXAMPLES

A faculty member with a \$100,000 base salary who has 20% of their salary covered with external funds would receive \$4000 in RTD, calculated as $\$100K \times 20\% = \$20,000$; $\$20,000 \times 20\% = \4000 RTD.

If 35% of the salary is covered then the RTD would be \$7000, calculated as $\$100K \times 35\% = \$35,000$; $\$35,000 \times 20\% = \7000 .

FYI, CEHD Finance Director Chris Chen has verified that the planned formula change will result in a very similar total award amount, with a modest but significant increase for those just above the 20% threshold (where most awardees are) and a modest but significant decrease for those in the super-high range (well above 50%, where the reward tends to increase exponentially rather than at a linear pace).

Please let me know if you have any comments or questions about this policy change.

Martin