



Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What is effort?

Effort is the proportion of time spent on any activity and expressed as a percentage of the total professional activity *for which an individual is employed by the institution.*

Q: What is effort reporting and why do we certify?

Effort reporting is the federally mandated process by which the salary charged to a sponsored project is commensurate in relation to the effort expended on that project. The federal government requires effort reporting requires certification of effort spent by all employees whose salaries are charged directly to federal and federal flow-through funds, as well as for reporting committed cost sharing.

Effort Reporting Requirements:

- After-the-fact activity reports must reflect the distribution of activity expended by employees, *as a percentage.*
- Report must reasonably reflect the activities for which employees are *compensated by the institution.*
- Must confirm that the distribution of activity represents *a reasonable estimate* of the work performed by the employee during the period.
- Reports must be signed by the employee, principal investigator, or responsible official using *suitable means of verification* that the work was performed.
- Confirmation of personnel costs charged to *sponsored agreements.*
- Certification of all employee activities on an integrated basis (i.e., *100% effort*).

Q: What is Institutional Based Salary?

Institutional based salary or IBS is annual compensation paid by the University for an employee's appointment (9 or 12 months), whether that individual's time is spent on research, teaching, or other activities. IBS does not include bonuses, one-time payments, overtime or incentive pay. Additionally, IBS does not include payments from other organizations or income that individuals are permitted to earn outside of their University responsibilities, such as consulting. IBS must be used as the base salary on all grant proposals.

For effort reporting purposes, total institutional effort is 100% effort, regardless of the employee's appointment (e.g., 0.5 FTE, 0.625 FTE, 1.0 FTE). No individual may commit more than 100% institutional or summer effort or be compensated at a rate that would exceed their annualized institutional base salary.

Q: What is a commitment?

Committed effort is that proportion of an individual's institutional effort that will be devoted to a sponsored activity. Effort proposed in a grant application, typically in the budget and/or budget narrative, becomes a commitment (or obligation) the university must fulfill. The cost associated with committed effort may be borne by the sponsor (charged to the grant or contract) or by the institution (documented as cost-sharing). Sponsor award terms may require prior sponsor approval for a reduction in effort commitment (e.g., 25% reduction of PI effort). Therefore, it is important to refer to the sponsor rules on committed effort.

Q: What is cost sharing?

Cost sharing or matching means that project costs are not reimbursed by the sponsor to support the scope of work defined by the sponsored award. It includes *all* contributions, including cash and in-kind, that a recipient makes to an award. If the award is federal, only acceptable non-federal costs qualify as cost sharing and must conform to



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other necessary and reasonable provisions to accomplish the program objectives. Cost sharing effort is included in the calculation of total committed effort. Any committed cost sharing (i.e. included in the award proposal, must be documented and tracked.

An example of cost sharing is any personnel listed on the project budget (showing % effort) for whom no salary is requested in the budget, or if salary is requested, it is less than what is needed to pay for the entire % effort. In this instance, the individual's portion of salary equivalent to that % effort not in the budget, in addition to the fringe benefits and indirect costs associated with those costs, would be considered cost sharing.

Q: What is the difference between effort reporting and payroll distribution?

Payroll distributions and effort reports are not the same thing. Payroll distributions are the distribution of an individual's salary, while effort reports describe the allocation of an individual's actual time and effort spent for specific projects, whether or not reimbursed by the sponsor. Payroll can be expressed as an estimate of actual time worked and is the basis for generating the effort statement.

Q. What is considered a 'reasonable estimate' with regards to effort reporting?

Sponsors recognize that the activities that constitute effort are often difficult to separate. Per OMB Uniform Guidance effort certification must often rely on a reasonable estimate of effort, and when estimating, a degree of tolerance is appropriate.

For faculty and all annual certifiers, variances of up to 5% of total salary for each award listed are allowable and do not require an adjustment or recertification. Variances over 5% for each award should be corrected, in compliance with the Cost Transfer Policy, prior to final approval of the certification

For all quarterly individuals, variances of up to 3% of the individual's total salary, for the period being certified, are allowable and do not require an adjustment. Variances over 3% should be corrected, in compliance with the Cost Transfer Policy, prior to final approval of the certification.

Q: How, when, and from where does the data get loaded into ecrt?

Ecrt data is populated through automated feeds from other Harvard University systems; person profiles, including HUID, name, job information and email, comes from PeopleSoft, salary journals from the Financial Data Warehouse and PI, and sponsor and award information from GMAS. Any inaccuracies identified will need to be corrected in those source systems. Please note that there is a two day lag between the time a journal is posted to the G/L and the time it becomes available in ecrt. In addition, new people, including grant managers, effort coordinators and certifiers, are added to ecrt either when their first payroll transaction is posted to the G/L or when they become a PI on a project in GMAS. If there is someone who needs to be added to ecrt who fits neither of these categories, please contact ecrt Help Desk as they will need to be manually added.

Q: Why are there no statements on my homepage when I log into ecrt?

The homepage tabs are only meant to display those people assigned to your portfolio. The "My Certifier Portfolio" tab will not display any annual statements until the status changes from 'in progress' to 'available for certification'. The My Account Portfolio tab however, will display quarterly project statements with both the 'in progress' and 'available for certification' status.



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At any point, regardless of status, annual statements can be accessed through the department dashboard (Manage>Department Dashboard). Additionally, quarterly project statements can always be accessed by navigating to the Account Summary Page for the specific account (Manage>Lookup>[Search fund # and select account]) or (Manage>Department Dashboard>Fund/Account tab>[click on account hyperlink]).

Q: *Can the total effort be less than or greater than 100% ?*

Yes, because we are certifying in whole numbers, the system will round up to 1% if the computed effort (salary + cost share) is greater than 0%, but less than 0.5%. Often this will result in total effort of 99%-101%. Due to rounding, the system allows certifiers to certify effort from 99%-101%. If a certifier refuses to certify anything but 100% effort, please contact the ecrt Help Desk and copy your tub effort coordinator.

Q: *What if the total effort is over 101%?*

Always run the payroll report for the individual and review the charges first to ensure that the allocations are correct. If the allocations are incorrect, a salary journal will need to be processed to correct the charges. If the total effort is greater than 101% due to rounding or salary journals incorrectly coded, please contact the ecrt Help Desk.

Q: *Why do I not have access to an account that belongs in my org?*

By default, all accounts for a specific PI will be routed to that PI's primary department. However, if a particular account belongs to another department, it may be appropriate for the PEC of the owning department of the account to process a GM override in order to gain access to the account for management purposes.

Always run the Project Status Report to ensure that all grant managers are assigned appropriately for the project statements in your department. Assign grant manager overrides as needed to route quarterly project statements to the appropriate grant manager. If the PI Department is different than the Grant Department on the Project Status Report, you may want to setup a GM override.

Q: *What if there are faculty or other academic appointees who belong to my department and have sponsored charges, but do not appear on my Department Dashboard?*

If a faculty member or other academic appointee does not appear in your department, the individual was either not assigned to a department or may have been assigned to another department. If you know that your department is responsible for the annual effort certification for this individual, please contact the ecrt Help desk until the formal security process is finalized.

Q: *Why does ecrt not match my detail listing?*

The amount in ecrt is based on the object codes that require certification and do not take into account such things as vacation pay, which the detail listing includes. Assuming the correct object code was used, there are two scenarios where a detail listing may not match an ecrt payroll report or other views in the system:

- A salary adjustment was performed that was missing the Period of Work Performed (PWP)
- Effective July 1st 2016, the decision was made to stop bringing in the University year-end accruals on sponsored accounts into ecrt to reduce the volume of negative effort as well as risk of inaccurate



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certification. Accrual transactions should be filtered out of any Detailed Listings containing salary covering the last pay period of the fiscal year in order to align with ecrt.

Q: Why do I see negative effort on a statement?

In many cases, negative effort is a result of journals being incorrectly coded, usually regarding the period of performance. These journals are usually processed based on the G/L transaction date rather than what was actually earned during the quarter. As we cannot certify negative effort, if the charges that appear on a statement are incorrect, a journal should be processed to make the appropriate adjustment.

Q: When would it be appropriate to manually certify a statement?

The primary reason "Manual Certification" would be used is in the event that the certifier left or is leaving the University and cannot login to the system to certify his/her effort. Please direct these requests to your Tub Effort Coordinator as he/she is responsible for approving these requests and taking the necessary action within the system.

Q: When would it be appropriate to void statements and mark them as "No Certification Required"?

There are two main scenarios in which it may be appropriate to void a statement.

- The statement is \$0 and 0% (Usually the result of miscoded salary that hit a statement that was subsequently removed)
- The salary for each individual on the statement is < = \$250 or < = 3% of their salary

Please direct voiding requests to your Tub Effort Coordinator as he/she is responsible for approving these requests and taking the necessary action within the system.

Q: What do I do when I receive an email stating I have an effort task or I see the effort tasks tab on my homepage?

There are two scenarios in which an effort task will be created and an action must take place by either the GM or the PEC. The task(s) will appear on the homepage (Effort Task tab) for both the PEC and assigned GM; however only one individual will need to process the task.

- An attachment was added prior to a statement being certified

When an attachment is added prior to a statement being certified the statement status will show "Certified, Pending GM Review" to indicate that a review tasks must be processed. For any statement in this status, either the GM or PEC only needs to hit "Process" for these effort tasks to be completed.

- A salary transaction has loaded to the statement after the statement has been certified, manually certified, or marked as no certification required.

When salary has been loaded to a statement that has been certified or does not require certification, the statement status can show "Certified, Pending Review of Salary Adjustment", "Certified Manually, Pending Review of Salary Adjustment" or "No certification required, Pending Review of Salary Adjustment". Anytime you have an effort task related to payroll, the system will give you the appropriate action to take, whether it is to 'post without reopening' or 'post and reopen'. If the salary adjustment creates a variance above the allowed threshold (3% for quarterly



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individuals, 5% for annual individuals) will get the "post and re-open" button. Once you click it, the statement will go back to a status where the PI will need to certify again.

Q: Will certifiers be notified and reminded that they need to certify?

Every certifier in the system will receive an initial email to let them know the certification process is open and ready. In addition, 3 reminder emails will be sent to each certifier when there are 14, 7, and 3 days remaining if the certifications are still outstanding.

Q: What is the plan to train faculty and provide them with the training materials?

Currently, we do not have a formal training session geared towards the certifiers, proxies and designees. Because we are relying more on the PEC's and GM's to work one-on-one with certifiers, we train these individuals on the system screens unique to certifiers and the specific actions certifiers must take to complete the certification.

Q: What policies should I be aware that relate to effort reporting?

In addition to any local school or departmental policies relating effort thresholds, it is important to be aware of the University-wide Cost Transfer Policy as it relates to salary adjustments and the University-wide Cost Sharing Policy. Details of each of these policies can be found on the OSP website through the following url:

<http://osp.finance.harvard.edu/policies>

Q: How can I see all salary transactions for an individual during a given period of time?

The payroll report provides this information and is accessible in three different ways:

- From the Payroll/Cost Share section of the reporting menu. Accessing the report this way enables a user to directly apply the desired person, department, account, and date parameters.
- From the reports icon of a statement. Running the report from here will default to the date parameters of the statement. You can expand on the results but adjusting the settings in the parameters tab.
- From the \$ icon on the individual line of a statement. Running the report here will default to the date and person or account parameters from where it was selected. You can expand on the results but adjusting the settings in the parameters tab.

Please note that report results are restricted based on security. A user can only view results for individuals and accounts that are assigned to departments within a user's access.