Best Practices for Using the Effort Reporting System (ERS)

A. Establish and maintain good communication and clear roles.

1. Good communication is essential between Effort Reporting Coordinator and Reviewers:

- Mark calendar with ERS deadlines to reserve appropriate time to review and assist departmental personnel. Understand departmental deadlines that may affect timeliness of Department staff's review and certification process (e.g., grant proposal deadlines, semester breaks).

- Document department's business practice for certification, maintain on file, and have available to auditors upon request.

- Maintain list of Co-PIs that have <u>independent</u> financial responsibility and certification authority for staff paid from a federally funded grant. Provide this list to CGA to establish appropriate access for Co-PIs.

- Develop email list serve for ERC to send notifications to Reviewers and Certifiers

- Develop checklist of items for ERC to review on Effort Reports prior to distributing notices to Reviewers. Checklist may include:
    - ✓ Does the number of reports generated agree with expected number for the current period?
    - ✓ Sample reports to verify that all expected payroll periods and cycle end dates are reflected.
    - ✓ Spot check payroll titles to verify that Academic and/or Non-Academic appear as expected.
    - ✓ Check any PIs without salary (WOS) to confirm that staff effort reports were processed as expected.

- Notify Reviewers when effort reports are available and when they are due.

- Follow up with Reviewers on open reports to make sure they are certified within 60 days of report issue date.

- Ensure that employees leaving the department have their effort properly recorded, if applicable.

2. Department Reviewers and department Payroll personnel should communicate regularly and correct out-of-balance situations between payroll records and certified effort within 60 days of report issue date.

3. Good communication *between* departments can ensure that effort reporting is complete and accurate.

- Department responsible for an award should notify the other departments if the award involves effort for their PIs.

- Department responsible for an award should activate multiple certification as needed.

- For an employee who can't self-certify, discuss with other department to verify employee's total effort.

B. Reviewer Responsibilities –

The Reviewer reviews and modifies Effort Reports to enable the PI to more easily certify Effort for his/her employees utilizing the following steps:

- Review the Payroll distribution to ensure that it matches the expected amount, given the information provided by the PI during the Effort Reporting period

- Review the information available to you such as Other Support, proposal budgets and justifications, awards, letters to the sponsor about effort, pending payroll transfers, etc.

- Identify any commitments for cost sharing made by the employee for sponsored projects requiring certification.

- Update the Adjusted Payroll % and Cost Sharing Columns if needed.

- If changes were made to the report, enter an auditable comment explaining the change, then save the report.

- Determine if multiple certifications are needed. If required, enable multiple certifications and save.

- Meet with the PI, Self-Certifier(s), and/or Other Designated Certifier(s) to explain any changes that have been made to the Effort Reports to enable the certification process to begin.

- Ensure certification of the report within 30 days of report issue date (must be done by someone with direct, first-hand knowledge of the research work performed).

- The Certifier holds ultimate responsibility for the accuracy of the report.

C. Multiple Certifications

- When an Effort Report contains multiple projects where each is owned by a different PI, that report also appears on other PIs' My Projects lists. Effort Reports like this may require certifications by multiple PIs if no single PI has first hand knowledge of ALL the work performed by the individual.
- ERS has a Multiple Certification feature that allows each sponsored project line of an Effort Report to be certified <u>individually</u>. Either the Reviewer or the PI can activate this feature
- If an Effort Report has the Multiple Certification feature activated AND at least one of the lines is already certified by another PI, <u>do not deactivate</u> Multiple Certifications as this will eliminate the certifications already captured for that Effort Report.

D. Certification

- Principal Investigators are required to certify their own Effort Reports.
- Effort Reports for non-faculty staff must be certified by a person who has first hand knowledge of the work performed and the benefiting federally sponsored project(s).
- Certification of Effort Reports must adhere to a preciseness tolerance of +/- 5 percentage points per activity.
- The actual Effort should be reflected in the Adjusted Payroll % column, although it is initially pre-populated with the same numbers as the Payroll % column.

E. Recertification of an Effort Report

- Recertification of previously certified reports is NOT recommended as a common practice.
- Recertification is necessary in the following two situations:
  - ✓ The certifier who previously certified the Effort Report re-opens it
  - ✓ ERS re-opens it based on new payroll information (payroll expense transfer, late pay, etc.)
- The process of recertification is the same as that of certification: review, modify, certify.
- A comment with an appropriate level of detail is required upon re-opening an Effort Report for recertification.

F. Avoid payroll transfers by indicating correct percentages the <u>first</u> time.

- Certify the report "as is" if the effort shown is within +/- 5% of the actual effort expended.
- Cuts in funding do not automatically reduce effort. Reduction of effort must be negotiated with the sponsor, or else the original effort commitment must be met with cost sharing.
- Periodically compare the effort commitments to the UC Path disbursement percentages.

G. Certify Report after making payroll expense transfers in Online Payroll Time Reporting System (OPTRS).

- Prepare the payroll expense transfer prior to certification for ERS to incorporate the changes automatically and reissue the report.
- If changes have been made to the **Adjusted Payroll %** column on the effort report for timely certification, be sure to submit the necessary changes in OPTRS as soon as possible *after* certifying the effort report. ERS will verify that the payroll and effort are in sync after the adjustments.

H. Certify cost shared transactions appropriately.

- Certify all **committed** cost sharing, whether voluntary *or* involuntary
- Do not certify uncommitted cost sharing. It should not appear on any effort reports.
- If appropriate, add cost sharing percentage to the **Adjusted Cost Sharing %** field on the effort report before certification.
- When adding a Cost Sharing % to a Sponsored Project requiring certification, an equal amount must be subtracted from "Other Sponsored Projects" or "Non-Sponsored Activities" so the result will be an Effort Report that shows 100% effort.
- It is the responsibility of the Reviewer and Certifier to know what commitments were made to sponsors and to update the Effort Report(s) accordingly.

I. Creating Searches in ERS

1. **Use custom saved searches to reduce workload:**
   - Subscribe to all of your PI's lists of Effort Reports ("My Projects") from the Manage Searches page in order to see the same list of Effort Reports that the PI sees.
   - When creating a saved search by using the **Depts/Orgs** tab and a Fund Department (L4/L5) code, the effort reports for any employees within the department code will be included. If a new employee joins the department (in the same L4/L5 code), the employee's information will automatically be added to this search.

2. **Communicate electronically with other individuals who need ERS information:**
   - Use the built-in e-mail functionality to e-mail effort reports to other staff.
   - Share a saved search with another ERS user who may benefit.

3. **If you wish to sort or otherwise reorganize the data available on an effort report, you can transfer the data to a spreadsheet.**

4. **Become familiar with the various ERS report status codes in order to ensure that the appropriate action is taken.**

J. Comments in ERS

- ERS <u>requires</u> an explanation in the Comment field when any of the following modifications are made to the Effort Report:
  - ✓ A change is made to the **Adjusted Payroll %** column
  - ✓ A change is made to the **Cost Sharing %** column
  - ✓ The **Multiple Certifications** functionality is activated
  - ✓ The **Cost Sharing from Other Sponsored Projects** functionality is activated
- Comments are permanent, auditable records, so it is important that comments clearly explain **WHAT you changed** and **WHY you changed it**. Do not use the comments section as a communication tool.