



October 2, 2020

Director of the Strategic Collections and Clearance
 Governance and Strategy Division
 U.S. Department of Education
 400 Maryland Ave SW
 LBJ, Room 6W208D
 Washington, DC 20202-8240

Docket No.: ED-2020-SCC-0154

The National Association of College and University Business Officers (NACUBO) appreciates the opportunity to respond to the Department of Education’s emergency processing and approval request for the Quarterly Budget and Expenditure Reporting under CARES Act Sections 18004(a)(1) Institutional Portion, 18004(a)(2), and 18004(a)(3). Our comments focus on collection burden and clarity of the information requested.

NACUBO is a nonprofit professional organization representing chief administrative and financial officers at more than 1,600 colleges and universities across the country. NACUBO works to advance the economic vitality, business practices, and support of higher education institutions in pursuit of their missions. The vast majority of college and university members of NACUBO received HEER Fund allocations under Section 18004 (a)(1) of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act.

Relationship between quarterly and annual reporting instruments

It is completely logical for the quarterly and annual reporting instruments, on the use of the institutional portion of HEER funds, to contain duplicative information. In fact, to enhance transparency and consistency, we suggest that the annual report include the quarterly amounts for each “use of funds” line, and strike a total. For example:

Description	QTR 1	QTR 2	QTR 3	QTR 4	Annual Total
xxx	\$ aa	\$ bb	\$ cc	\$ dd	\$ ee

Clarity of Requested Information

Business officers charged with fulfilling reporting requirements have informed NACUBO that lack of clear definitions and unclear communication from the Department of Education have already contributed to burden. Additional hours have already been spent in discussions between those receiving the form and the controller’s office. There is grave concern about ambiguity and unintended noncompliance. Although some of the use of information requested for the institutional portion of HEER funds aligns with information provided by the Department on its [Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund](#) webpage, the items discussed below have incomplete or conflicting guidance from the Department.

Report Template use of funds under Section 18004 (1)(a):

The following items need additional interpretation and explanation; some do not appear to be an allowable use of funds. NACUBO's concerns:

Other uses of funds. Please describe

A significant allowable use of institutional portion funds—those used to provide refunds to students for room and board, tuition, and other fees incurred as a result of campus closures in March 2020—does not have a unique reporting line. This is the only available line to report such information. Since these amounts were significant for many institutions, we strongly recommend that such a line be added to enhance reporting consistency, clarity, and transparency.

Replacing lost tuition revenue due to reduced enrollments

The CARES Act clearly allows this use for Section 18004(a)(2) and (a)(3) funds. However, there is no documentation or Department guidance that supports this use of funds for Section 18004(a)(1) funds. This continues to be an ongoing area of confusion on college and university campuses; the Department should take steps to ensure clarity both on the reporting form and in its guidance concerning whether or not this is an acceptable use of Section 18004(a)(1) funds.

Replacing lost revenue from non-tuition sources (i.e., cancelled ancillary events; disruption of food service, dorms, childcare or other facilities; cancellation of use of campus venues by other organizations, lost parking revenue, etc.)

This line is “grayed” in the 18004 (a)(1) column on the proposed quarterly information template. We assume this means that this use of funds is not allowable / applicable. However, the proposed annual reporting form, as shared in information request 6239 (ED-2020-SCC-0122), did not indicate this use of funds as unallowable / not applicable under Section 18004 (a)(1). This needs clarification, there should be consistency between quarterly and annual reporting requirements.

Providing tuition discounts

This line is “grayed” in the 18004 (a)(1) column on the proposed quarterly information template. We assume this means that this use of funds is not allowable / applicable. However, the proposed annual reporting form did not indicate that the provision of tuition discounts was unallowable / not applicable under Section 18004 (1)(1). This needs clarification, there should be consistency between quarterly and annual reporting requirements.

Purchasing additional instructional equipment and supplies (such as laboratory equipment or computers) to reduce the number of students sharing equipment or supplies during a single class period and to provide time for disinfection between uses

We seek clarification that in addition to purchasing equipment, the rental of equipment is allowable.

Purchasing faculty and staff training for online instruction

It is possible for institutions to redeploy staff who otherwise would have been furloughed or released for these functions. Clarification is needed because such expenses would be related to the coronavirus disruption.

Purchasing additional equipment or software to enable distance learning, or upgrading campus wi-fi access or making wi-fi access available to the public by extending open networks to parking lots or public spaces, etc.

We seek clarification that rental expense for additional equipment, software, technology services, or licensing would also qualify.

In closing, we wish to express our appreciation for the opportunity to comment. Please direct any questions on these comments to the undersigned.

Sincerely,

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