

### **Purchase of Personal Computers and Laptops on Sponsored Project Accounts**

Over time, technology has consistently decreased the cost of personal computers and laptops to the point where most no longer meet the definition of equipment as shown in Circular A-21,

"...an article of nonexpendable, tangible personal property having a useful life of more than one year and an acquisition cost which equals or exceeds the lesser of the capitalization level established by the institution financial statement purposes, or \$5,000."

The federal government, through audit and information dissemination at professional meetings, has consistently apprised the research community that it does not consider a personal computer or laptop as an appropriate direct cost in most cases. Typically these are considered an infrastructure cost to be borne by the institution through institutional and/or departmental operating accounts. There are some cases where the government has entertained the inclusion of a laptop in a proposal, if thoroughly justified.

In order to minimize disallowed costs through audit findings, at Stevens, PCs and laptops will not be allowed as an approved expenditure of research funds, unless it has been included in the original proposal and completely justified as to the reason it is being included, the purpose and benefit to the project, and if the project will be negatively impacted by not purchasing the computer (see possible examples of justifications below).

**Scenario and example #1** – research is being done that includes the collection of seismic/geological/meteorological data in terrain-challenging desert/polar areas. Potential justification might be as follows:

"Budget includes the purchase of a Dell Latitude E6400 XFR Toughbook. Data will be collected at field sites located in the Gobi desert where extremes between heat and cold require hardware competent to handle such temperature variations and still remain operational."

**Scenario and example #2** – research is being done that includes a large amount of on-site data collection from or about human subjects (interviews/subject observations/specific archive research). Potential justification might be as follows:

"Budget includes the purchase of two laptops with embedded wireless cards that are necessary for on-site data collection. Because this data is collected in the field, subject identifiers must be initially included until it can be transcribed and identifiers separated from the data; therefore, separate computers (in addition to the available department resources) are needed in order to safeguard and control the data and subject confidentiality."

**NOTE: Personal computers and laptops purchased with sponsored project funds will be subject to the application of F&A and will be tagged and tracked in the Stevens inventory system and must be accounted for at the project's end.**