

GSD Student Forum Student Group Spending Guidelines September 2010

Questions regarding this document should be directed to the Student Forum Treasurer

Purpose: *This document serves to establish for GSD student groups guidelines on appropriate expenditures when using funding provided by Student Forum. These guidelines have been set-up with several years' worth of perspective and feedback from student groups. However it will inevitably evolve through further feedback and discussion. If you are a student group member and feel that this document deserves revision, please contact the Student Forum.*

Background:

Each semester, every GSD student makes a contribution of \$50 to the general GSD student body through the term bill in the form of an Activity Fee. That annual amount of \$100 - which amounts to a total of approximately \$60,000 - is pooled and managed by the elected officers of Student Forum, primarily the Treasurer. Approximately two-thirds of that money is used directly by Student Forum for events, meetings, and expenses related to pursuing its overall mission. The remaining one-third is awarded to GSD student groups who request support by submitting a funding request form at the beginning of each year.

Funding Levels:

The number of GSD student groups requesting funding each year has ranged between 20-30 with total budgets of 100-300% greater than the total Student Forum budget. The groups represent a diverse population of participants with equally diverse interests and missions all enriching the extracurricular and social lives of the GSD student population. Recognizing this, Student Forum has set as a fiscal objective to assist all groups to some extent understanding that, in exchange, no one group will likely receive levels of assistance that match their total stated need.

Increasing & Stretching the Dollars:

Student Forum has taken measures over the past years to increase the actual and the apparent levels of funding in several ways. In the past, Student Forum negotiated with CRG to establish a discounted rate on all student group related printing and plotting. Similar negotiations have been held and are currently open with vendors that are commonly frequented by a number of student groups. ZipCar, for example has a special offer to all GSD students. In addition, Student Forum has strived to put in contact with one another student groups with similar missions both within the GSD and in the surrounding schools of the University in attempt to help groups collaborate and pool resources. Lastly, one of the primary responsibilities of the Treasurer is to assist student groups in planning fiscal strategies, enabling them to find and generate additional sources of funding. One potential source is in-house through GSD administrative offices, such as Career Services, Student Services, and the academic program departments. These offices are often willing to cosponsor events when appropriate as they may often assist their own initiatives and co-sponsored events generate higher levels of attendance.

Criteria for Awards:

Student Forum uses the following questions as a means of evaluating student group funding requests:

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- Has the student group proposed an organized and detailed schedule for spending?
- Does the mission of the group enrich the social and extracurricular lives of the GSD student body?

- Does the mission of the group overlap with or aim to subsidize a fiscal need that previously was or logically ought to be maintained by a GSD academic department or administrative body?
- Do the group's proposed activities reach a broad number of GSD students across a broad period of time?
- Is the group proposing to spend efficiently or are they interested in making capital expenditures (hard goods) that cannot be regularly utilized across years?
- Has this group proven to be successful and responsible in the past? How did they spend last year's budget?

Awards and Reimbursement Procedure:

Funds awarded to student group are announced at the beginning of each Fall term, shortly after funding request forms are submitted. All monies are held by Student Forum and distributed in the form of reimbursements. Reimbursements are requested by submitting a completed reimbursement form (see resources below) along with receipts of all purchases. Reimbursements are generally paid-out within 4-6 weeks from the time they are submitted. Checks must be sent to a U.S. mailing address and come directly from Student Forum's commercial bank. No reimbursements can be made without a reimbursement form and proper receipts. Requests for reimbursement must be made within 60 days of purchase and before the end of each semester. Reimbursements are made only when expenses are consistent with a student group's overall mission and within the limit of the awarded funds. Expenses that exceed the allotted budget are the responsibility of the student group officers, not Student Forum. It is the responsibility of each student group to track their expenses and ensure that they stay within budget. Detail on expenses to date may be requested at any time from Student Forum via the Treasurer.

On occasion, students may not wish to cover an expense for their student group. In those circumstances, Student Forum is able to pay for the expense directly upfront. Simply contact the Treasurer to arrange this. The student group will be required to obtain an invoice from the vendor ahead of time.

Appropriate Expenditures and Value Guidelines:

Note that these are guidelines and should not be viewed as an exhaustive set of rules. It should also be noted that while these expenses are labeled as appropriate, only those expenses agreed upon through the funding request process will be merited. Lastly, reimbursements are only made for those expenses totaling less than each student group's allotted budget.

I. Marketing Expenses

Costs related to the publicity of an event or meeting, including poster printing, are valid expenses. However, given the increase investment in and awareness of the GSD digital venues such as the GSD online calendar and the MyGSD portal, printed materials are strongly discouraged. For all necessary prints, student groups must use the in-house resources through GSD CRG as Student Forum has secured a regular discounted rate for student groups. Only those printed materials deemed indispensable and those in a format not producible in-house may be contracted out to vendors like Gnomon, Kinko's, etc. Value guideline: \$20/event, if necessary.

II. Invited speakers and guests:

Costs related to travel of invited speakers and guests are valid expenses. However, Student Forum encourages student groups to spend in a manner that promotes more and frequent affordable events over fewer more expensive events. As a result, there is a limit of reimbursable travel costs. Student groups may, of course, apply other sources of funding to these expenses but Student Forum will only reimburse at a maximum of the following:

- One night lodging at the Faculty Club or equivalent cost at an alternative lodge if space at the Faculty Club is unavailable: \$249/night at the Faculty club (or the equivalent elsewhere for a total of \$249). For reservations contact the Faculty Club directly (617-495-5758).
- Metered taxi fare to and from airport or train station
- Train fare: not to exceed \$200 round trip
- Air fare: not to exceed \$500 round trip. For discounted rates call the Harvard Travel Office (617-496-8000).
- Three meals: not to exceed \$75/day
- Or the equivalent in honorarium. Student Forum recognizes that different guests are accustomed to different forms of remuneration. As a result, student groups may opt to provide their invited guests with an honorarium amounting to no more than an equivalent sum of the above travel expenses.

For any exception to these spending limits, please contact the Student Forum Treasurer.

III. Food and Drink:

Food and drink is a valid category of expense. However, for internal student group meetings (e.g. among a group's members for a planning meeting) they should be kept to a minimum, as this money comes from the student activity fees. Food and drink as part of a cultural event, a celebration, or at event receptions are considered to be more essential if only to increase attendance and stimulate conversation. And as all events should be open to the entire GSD student body, so should the corresponding food/beverage reception. Value guideline: \$3-4/ person. In addition, we highly discourage having food alone as an event (e.g. going out to dinner).

IV. Student Travel:

Local travel for students participating in a student group outing is a valid expense. This may include van rental, gas, public transportation fare. Some Zip car expenses are also valid but it should be noted that Student Forum has helped negotiate a special rate for GSD students.

V. Association Dues and Event Fees:

Student groups considering membership with an association or professional organization should first consult with Student Forum as such a relationship may already exist. Student Forum, for example, annually contributes the required registration fee to Habitat for Humanity, enabling all GSD student groups to participate in Habitat functions. Fees to limited engagement events (e.g. conferences) are valid expenses but when cost limits the number of participants, consideration must be given to the method by which the participants are chosen to ensure fairness.

VI. Equipment rental and Capital Expenditures:

Student Forum strongly discourages capital expenditures as they tend to consume a great volume of cash with limited return and often provide a challenge in storage during and between academic years. However, there are often appropriate expenses and they tend to be those that benefit a broad number of students across a long period of time. Resale is also a consideration. Regardless, any and all hard goods purchased by student groups with Student Forum funding is the property of Student Forum and all of the GSD student body.

VII. Services:

Contracted services are discouraged unless they can be shown to have long-standing benefits to a great number of students at the GSD. In addition, given the many talents of students in the GSD community, Student Forum often encourages student groups to seek assistance from colleagues before seeking to contract an outside vendor.

Inappropriate Expenditures:

Here is a list of expenses that are considered inappropriate and will not be reimbursed. This list is not exhaustive:

- Anything illegal
- Kegs at any function other than an outdoor picnic/BBQ
- Anything not congruous with the code of conduct of Harvard University or the GSD
- Limo's or non-metered taxis
- First or business class accommodations or travel arrangements
- Capital expenditures that do not benefit a large number of students across a long period of time
- Excessively expensive food/drink (either by item or by cost per person)
- Expenses from events not generally advertised or open to the greater GSD community
- Costs typically covered by another source including Harvard University, a GSD academic department or administrative office
- Any and all expenses without corresponding receipts
 - Any and all expenses that occurred earlier than 90 days prior to request for reimbursement

Resources:

Student Forum contact - sforum@gsd.harvard.edu

Student Forum Treasurer - sforum_finance@gsd.harvard.edu or refer to Student Forum website for the email contact of current Treasurer

Student Forum web page - http://www.gsd.harvard.edu/people/students/student_forum/

Student Group web page, including all forms –

http://www.gsd.harvard.edu/people/students/student_forum/groups.html