As the University navigates the COVID-19 pandemic, the Office of Finance and Treasury has received a number of inquiries regarding how to handle certain business expenses during this unprecedented time. To assist departments, we have assembled guidance below for the most prevalent issues raised. Regardless of the scenario, there are three important considerations when determining whether an expense should be incurred:

- Take note of the recent messages shared by Provost Debbie Prentice and President Christopher Eisgruber highlighting the pandemic’s financial impact and actions taken in response to manage expenses. As stewards of Princeton’s resources, we urge you to help reduce the financial pressures the University is facing by eliminating all non-essential spending. Please exercise diligent stewardship when considering purchases necessary to continue University work and avoid those made on the basis of a departmental budget surplus.

- Princeton’s business expense policy has not changed and should be used as a guide when making purchases. It provides criteria to establish if an expense is reasonable, necessary, appropriate and allowable. If the expense did not meet these criteria before the pandemic, it likely still not does not. The criteria provide managers the discretion to address unique needs and facilitate an individual’s ability to work from home. For assistance in assessing unique or unusual circumstances, please contact the Financial Service Center (finance@princeton.edu or 609-258-3080). The University also provides resources to managers to aid in supporting individual hardships.

- If an expense is allowable under University policy, it is typically also reimbursable when incurred out of pocket, though we strongly encourage all purchases be made using a Prime requisition or a University credit card. In the interest of safety, security, or other overarching concern, certain items such as hazardous materials and personal computers are allowable only when purchased through specified University channels.

During this extended period of uncertainty it is important to keep our priorities in mind: taking appropriate measures to protect the health and well-being of our students, faculty and staff; restoring our teaching and research activities to normal operations, safely but as soon as possible; sustaining our commitments to access and affordability; and retaining and supporting our talented workforce. Exercising caution and restraint in our budgets now will provide some of the flexibility needed to support these priorities into the future.

This guidance is based on the best information available today. The University has formed a number of committees focused on maintaining current operations and planning for the eventual resumption of normal operations. Recommendations developed by those committees may require us to reevaluate various policies and processes in order to maintain our priorities. Any changes impacting current policies will be shared as part of Princeton’s overall COVID-19 communications.

Further clarification for many of the most common scenarios is provided below and applies to expenses using general University funds as well as Individual Faculty Research Accounts.

If you have any questions, please contact the Financial Service Center (x3080 or finance@princeton.edu). Most importantly, we understand that these extraordinary times have introduced difficult and previously unforeseen challenges that each of us must respond to. We thank you for your partnership in managing expectations and resources while ensuring that University work can continue.

- Cancellation fees – Fees assessed for cancelling contracts related to University travel and purchases are allowable. Given the extraordinary nature of the pandemic, there is the potential that cancellation fees may be waived or reduced through negotiation. Before agreeing to a cancellation or termination penalty please review the Procurement FAQs, which provide recommended steps for negotiating a contract cancellation.
Princeton’s standard contract templates contain provisions to minimize the potential for these fees and should be the first option when entering into a contract with a third party.

- **Equipment use at home** – Individual departments are responsible for securing all University property such as computer monitors, chairs, and scanners. Taking equipment home can be done at the discretion of the department. Before allowing individuals to remove University equipment, managers should evaluate the appropriateness of the request, establish a process to track equipment removed from campus in order to ensure its eventual return and inform the requestor that they should exercise reasonable care for equipment in their possession. Third party costs associated with shipping and setup are not allowable. Care should be taken to not remove items not suitable or safe for home use including leased equipment, larger office furniture, research materials and laboratory equipment, and hazardous materials.

- **Gift cards and charitable contributions** – The pandemic has placed tremendous strain on our community including many local businesses that have long served the University community. Among the actions taken in response, Princeton has established the Princeton University Relief Fund with an initial commitment of $1 million. The fund will provide direct support to community organizations that are working to alleviate economic distress related to COVID-19 among individuals and businesses. This fund will serve as the University’s primary means of local support and will help ensure a coordinated approach in lieu of departments individually providing other forms of support such as charitable contributions, gift card purchases, and advance deposits not associated with a specific event or activity, each of which are not allowable under current University policies.

- **Home office furnishings** – Purchases made to furnish or equip a home are not an allowable expense. Working from home may require individuals to adapt how/where we work but the University cannot serve as a funding source for home office furnishings and other personal workspace improvements. Managers should refer to the University’s policy on work from home arrangements when considering medical accommodation requests. Normal costs associated with operating a home such as electricity and heating/cooling are also not allowable.

- **Internet and phone expenses** – Internet access and home/mobile phone expenses are not an allowable expense, unless they are clearly linked solely to a faculty member’s research and approved by the department chair. As most service providers have moved to flat rate plans, use of these services while working from home does not incur any incremental expense. Individuals who must be readily accessible for required or essential business communication needs and for whom an alternate option is impractical may request a University issued device in accordance with the Mobile Communication Devices Policy.

- **Mail and other shipping needs** – For correspondence on behalf of the University that cannot be sent electronically, postage for University correspondence is reimbursable. For express services and parcel shipping, eShipGlobal, available in the Prime Marketplace should be utilized to purchase and print mailing labels. UPS and FedEx supplies can also be ordered through the application and can be shipped directly to the individual’s home. Larger mailings should continue to be directed to Print & Mail Services, who remain open to serve the campus community.

- **Meals** – The cost of food, meals, and associated delivery expenses incurred while working from home is not an allowable expense.

- **Mileage** – Academic and administrative departments remain operational and may require certain faculty and staff to report to their normal campus place of work. The cost of commuting to/from home and work is a commuting expense and not allowable. Consistent with current policy, reimbursement may be provided for...
mileage in excess of the commuting distance for any work related travel including the transport of supplies, materials, or other work products to colleagues working from home.

- **Office supplies** – Provision of general office supplies needed to perform ordinary work tasks are allowable and reimbursable. As such consumables are normally centrally ordered in bulk and distributed to individuals as needed, please use care to avoid over ordering supplies for each individual. Office supplies should be ordered from W.B. Mason, available in the Prime Marketplace. In response to the pandemic, W.B. Mason, now ships/delivers to home addresses and we have negotiated free/reduced rates for this service.

- **Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)** – The Office of Environmental Health and Safety (EHS) has published important information on the ordering of PPE by individual departments. Certain items can be ordered directly through the Prime Marketplace while some items must be obtained through EHS. Please review this information carefully to determine the appropriate method of obtaining various types of PPE.

- **Personal technology** – Individuals should work with their departmental SCAD/DCS to identify computing needs including laptops, tablets and related equipment. Equipment should be purchased through the Prime Marketplace or using a Prime requisition, and cannot be purchased by credit card (University or personal) and are not reimbursable. Purchase of a second computer for individuals who already have a University provided computer should be avoided whenever possible.

- **Shipping to non-campus addresses** – Departments have identified a need to make certain items such as office supplies available to faculty and staff at home. In support of this growing need we have opened the Prime Marketplace to allow for shipments to be sent to non-campus addresses. Non-campus addresses can be added by submitting a request to finance@princeton.edu. Similar to home use of equipment, leased equipment, research materials and laboratory equipment, chemicals, and hazardous materials should not be shipped to individual's homes. The shipping address is viewable on purchase requisitions and should be reviewed before approving. Purchasing reports can be found in the Prime Information Warehouse.