

Grant Clinic:

Obligated to Hire Consultant?

Reader Question: A grant proposal names a particular individual as "consultant" and lists their credentials to perform consulting work. The grant is awarded. To what extent is the PI obligated to hire that individual? Could another consultant be retained without repercussion? Does the proposal constitute a contract between the institution and the consultant? What if the would-be consultant becomes seriously ill, or has a "falling out" with the PI before the grant work starts?

Expert Comments:

The award of grant funds by a funding agency to a PI is essentially a contract between the funding agency and the PI to carry out the proposed research. Usually the answer to "change of consultant" is yes. The funding agency approved the PI's budget, which contained the consultancy position. The agency does not normally approve each individual listed in the budget, other than the PI. If the budgetary position had not been approved, the PI could not use any of those grant funds for hiring a consultant. The PI generally has options about which personnel are to be supported on the grant, including any necessary changes to accomplish the research.

The PI did not offer the reason for the change, but it would be well to consider at least two aspects.

- 1) Review all correspondence and conversations between the PI and the initial consultant to determine to what extent the consultant may have been "promised" the position. If there were obligations made or implied, to what extent would they be legally binding if brought to court?
- 2) Gather all pertinent material about the replacement consultant and then contact the Project Officer of the funding agency. Cite the reasons for the change, the expertise of the new consultant, and offer to send on further documentation. Assure the Project Officer that the research can/will be carried out under the terms of the award with the new consultant.

Comments by Charles F. Howard, Jr., Ph.D, established GrantsCrafter Consultancy, is a Trainer for The Grantsmanship Center, co-teaching a workshop on Writing Research Proposals, and is also a Senior Grantwriter for Campbell and Co.

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