Changing a Plane Ticket

Example:

A Principal Investigator traveled to London for a conference related to a sponsored project.

- The cancellation was due to a conference date change. The conference was budgeted in the NIH grant.
- The PI cancelled a non-refundable ticket with a major US Flag carrier in the amount of $1,200.
- The PI then changed/repurchased the ticket to accommodate the change in conference date. In sum, the re-issued ticket totaled $1573:
  - $1,207 for the ticket
  - $216 in taxes and fees
  - $150 change fee
- The PI paid the $373 difference for this trip ($1,573 - $1,200).
- In addition, the PI paid a $25 baggage fee each way ($50 total) at the ticket counter.
- The total cost of the trip, including all change, tax and baggage fees was $1673.
- In total, the PI paid $473 in additional charges.

Question:

Of these costs, what amount can be treated as airfare chargeable to the grant?
Answer:

Because the cancellation was sponsor related and the PI used a US Flag Carrier, all of the ticket costs $1,623 ($1,573 + $50) - including associated taxes, fees, change fee and baggage fees - may be charged to the NIH grant.

If the ticket was cancelled due to personal reasons, the $373 difference for the trip should be charged to a departmental project.

Fly America Act

Example:

A PI scheduled a trip to London for a conference related to their NIH grant. The PI found a bargain ticket from a foreign air carrier for $800 and is excited about the cost saving.

Question:

Should the PI be able to charge $800 to the NIH grant?

Answer:

The Fly America Act requires that US flag carriers be used to the maximum extent possible when commercial air transportation is the means of travel between the United States, its territories and possessions, and a foreign country OR between foreign countries. This requirement shall not be influenced by factors of cost, convenience, or personal travel preference. Without meeting any exceptions, the PI cannot charge $800 to the NIH grant. In addition, the $800 must not be charged to a cost share project since it is an Unallowable Cost according to the Fly America Act.
Exceptions:
The following exceptions are allowed on a grant in instances where the use of a U.S. flag carrier would:

- Require circuitous routing
- Require travel during unreasonable hours
- Excessively prolong travel

A lower priced ticket is not considered an exception.

Other exceptions include:

- When an Open Skies agreement (http://www.gsa.gov/portal/content/103191) is in place between the United States (U.S.) government and the government of a foreign country.

- Code-sharing agreements with foreign air carriers, whereby US flag carriers purchase or have the right to sell a block of tickets on a foreign carrier, that comply with the Fly America Act regulations. The ticket, or documentation for an electronic ticket, must identify the U.S. carrier’s designator code and flight number.

Under the Open Skies agreement, the use of a foreign carrier is allowable:

- When that airline is a member state carrier;
- When transportation is between the U.S. and any point in the member state;
- When travel is between two points outside the U.S. provided that:
  - No City-Pair fare exists. Review the fare finder at: http://apps.fas.gsa.gov/citypairs/search/
  - Funding is not provided by the Secretary of Defense or the Secretary of a military department.
First Class Fare

Example:

A Principal Investigator had a knee-replacement surgery in the winter and must travel to Munich in the upcoming spring. The PI has not fully regained mobility and has a problem sitting in a small confined space.

The PI purchased a first-class ticket with the approval of the department chair.

Question:

Can the cost of the ticket be charged to the PI’s NSF grant?

Answer:

Circular A-21, §J.53 allows airfare costs in excess of the coach airfare when such accommodation is not reasonably adequate for the traveler’s medical needs.

The PI should obtain a statement from his/her physician prior to travel and submit the supporting documentation with his/her travel reimbursement request.