



# ACM\$ Frequently Asked Questions for Research Organizations

## Why Transition to ACM\$?

- NSF is placing an increased focus on transparency and accountability in the stewardship of Federal funds
- Congress, the Office of Management and Budget, and other stakeholders are requiring more up-to-date information on how tax dollars are being spent
- NSF must comply with new standardized financial reporting requirements

## 1. Why is the National Science Foundation (NSF) changing the current cash request process?

NSF is changing its approach to payment processes to comply with the new transparency and accountability standards established for the stewardship of Federal funds. Additionally, NSF must comply with requests from Congress and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) for up-to-date information on how tax dollars are being spent, and standardized reporting requirements.

## 2. How will NSF transition from FastLane payments to ACM\$ payments?

NSF will use the Federal Financial Report (FFR) as a reconciliation tool to ensure award balances are correct prior to converting awardee institutions to ACM\$. No awardee is allowed to use ACM\$ until the reconciliation process is complete. The FFR ending award balances will be used to generate the beginning balances in ACM\$. As the FFRs are processed:

- Awardees with \$0 cash on hand (COH) for their FFR-ending balance will be immediately transitioned to ACM\$.
- Awardees with negative COH for their FFR-ending balance will be issued a final cash pooling payment to make their total expenses equal with their total revenue. After that payment is processed they will be transitioned to ACM\$.
- Awardees with a positive COH for their FFR-ending balance will have to return the balance to NSF. Upon receipt and processing of that payment, their total expenses will equal their total revenue, and the awardees will be transitioned to ACM\$.

In effect, we are placing the timing of the transition to ACM\$ on the awardee FFR submission. The earlier NSF receives and validates the FFR, the earlier institutions will be transitioned to ACM\$. Once an institution is transitioned to ACM\$, each payment request will generate a payment to the awardee and an expense recorded for the award.

### **3. What can I do now to prepare for the transition to ACM\$?**

NSF recommends that awardees take the following steps in preparation for the transition to ACM\$:

- Submit your organization's FFRs as early as possible before the due date;
- Validate the award number, amount of Federal funds authorized, and cumulative expenditures for all open awards.
- Reconcile the COH balance on the FFR to the COH balance on your financial records.
- Submit cash requests on a regular basis to reduce the negative COH balances and send NSF any excess funds if there are positive COH balances.
- Identify any items that create differences between your financial records and NSF records.

### **4. Will there be new user permissions for ACM\$ and when will awardees be able to assign users these permissions?**

Yes, there will be new user permissions for ACM\$ called Awardee Preparer, Awardee Certifier and Awardee Financial Representative. Prior to the transition to ACM\$, Awardee Financial Administrators will update their user's permissions in FastLane's Research Administration module. For instructions on how to do this please see the ACM\$ Permissions Guide found on the ACM\$ Informational Page. To get to the ACM\$ Information page please go to Research.gov and click on the Award Cash Management \$ervice link under the Our Services section of the website.

### **5. It usually takes our institution 3-4 weeks to close the books and file our FFR. How can we avoid an extended cash shutdown period where we'll be without the ability to request cash?**

NSF encourages you to submit your final FFR as early as possible before the due date. The earlier the FFR is submitted, the sooner your organization will be transitioned to ACM\$, thereby reducing the cash shutdown period. If your organization is unable to close the quarterly books before the FFR due date, you can submit your FFR using the best available expenditure information you have at that time. If, after you close your books, you find additional expenditures or credits which should have been included in your final FFR, you can report them as an adjustment through ACM\$.

### **6. Will NSF make any payments during the cash shutdown period?**

NSF will not make any awardee-initiated payments during the cash shutdown period. However, if your final reconciliation FFR submission reflects a negative COH balance, NSF will initiate a payment equal to the negative COH balance to your institution.

## **7. What is meant by \$0 COH for the purposes of the reconciliation and transition to ACM\$?**

For the purpose of the reconciliation, \$0 COH means that all the expenditures that have been reported on the FFR have had an equal amount of cash (revenue) requested. Your organization should reconcile the COH balance on the FFR to the COH balance on your financial records. Any differences between the two figures should be investigated and corrected as soon as possible. Two examples of differences are overages and refunds made on canceled appropriations. Your organization's goal should be to come to \$0 COH at the award level and at the institution level.

## **8. Will awardees be required to complete an FFR each time they submit a cash request in ACM\$?**

No, FFRs will no longer be required with ACM\$. NSF will monitor awardee expenses at the time a cash request is processed. Many awardees used the FFR process to perform additional reviews of their NSF awards. NSF encourages awardees to continue these reviews; however, because many organizations complete cash requests more frequently than the current quarterly FFR process, this may be a good time to develop award expense reconciliation processes that are separate from the compilation of information for the completion of future cash requests. Awardees can perform simple expenditure reconciliations to validate the correctness of individual cash requests, and can conduct more comprehensive reviews at regular intervals (quarterly or otherwise).

NSF recommends that awardees develop a new periodic reconciliation process using the financial information available through ACM\$. All awardees can access award financial information on line through preconfigured ACM\$ queries and data screens. When viewing the ACM\$ Organization Summary page, users can click on the "View Open Awards" link to generate a list of all open awards and their financial balances as of that day.

Users can also click on the "View Recently Closed Awards" link to see the same type of information for awards closed during the previous two quarters. The information on those two data displays is consistent with the information that had been available on the FFR. The advantage for ACM\$ is that the information is updated each night as opposed to each quarter with the FFR. One added feature in ACM\$ is that users can apply filters when viewing the Open Awards or Closed Awards data screens by clicking on the filter name just above the page column heading. Filters can be cleared by clicking on the words "Clear Filter."

## **9. In ACM\$, will awardees be required to change the frequency of their cash requests?**

No, awardees may continue to request cash as often as needed. With each cash request, awardees will be required to certify that the funds they are requesting are for disbursements that have already been made or that will be made within three days of receipt of the funds.

## 10. How do I know if my computer is compatible with the new ACM\$?

NSF has tested ACM\$ for compatibility with Mac, Windows 7 and Windows XP operating systems. Additionally we tested ACM\$ with Internet Explorer 8, Firefox and Safari browsers. If you have problems accessing ACM\$, please contact the Research.gov Help Desk 7 AM - 9 PM Eastern Time, Monday through Friday (except for federal holidays):

- Email at: [rgov@nsf.gov](mailto:rgov@nsf.gov)
- Call at 1-800-381-1532

## 11. Can awardees make ACM\$ cash requests if the award has already been closed?

Awardees cannot make cash requests on a closed award. However, awardees can enter upward adjustments to closed awards within a maximum of 15 months after the award financial close date and can enter downward adjustments until the appropriations funding the award cancel. All adjustments must be at least +/- \$1.00.

## 12. Who may I contact at NSF if I am unable to complete the ACM\$ process?

After you have confirmed that you are unable to complete the process, please notify your financial administrator to verify that the assigned ACM\$ permission is correct. If you continue to experience problems once you have verified the permission is correct, please contact the Research.gov Help Desk 7 AM - 9 PM Eastern Time, Monday through Friday (except for federal holidays):

- Email at: [rgov@nsf.gov](mailto:rgov@nsf.gov)
- Call at 1-800-381-1532

## 13. Once I submit a payment transaction, when will it be processed?

Transactions submitted before 10:29 PM EST will be processed that night and the status as well as award balance will be updated in ACM\$ the next day. Payment transactions can be entered seven days per week, but the payment request date must be a week day.

## 14. Can I use a file upload to submit my payment transaction?

Yes, you can download an Excel template within ACM\$ to allow for easy payment requests on multiple awards. You can also utilize an XML format for uploading payment requests. For more information, please go to the ACM\$ Informational Page on Research.gov, and see the ACM\$ XML File Upload Process Frequently Asked Questions, Data Dictionary and Instruction Guide. Note: Excel and XML upload options are only available for payment requests on open awards but not adjustment requests on closed awards. Instructions for accessing the ACM\$ Informational page are under question 4.

The most common causes of failures with the MS Excel upload process is that users unprotect the Excel download worksheet, make their updates and then try to upload the worksheet to ACM\$. The second most common cause of an upload failure is that users inadvertently paste formulas into the worksheet.

Users should download a working copy of the Excel file which they can unprotect, resort and use as necessary in order to populate their award payment request amounts. When finished, the user should download a final copy of the Excel worksheet and then paste the values from the working file Payment Amount Requested and the Recipient Account Number (if used) columns into the corresponding column(s) in the final Excel file. The final Excel file can then be uploaded to ACM\$. Additionally, the Recipient Account Number Field is a “text format” field in the ACM\$ Excel worksheet. When pasting values into the Recipient Account Number column, users should use the “Paste Values” function as opposed to pasting formulas, formatting or numbers. Pasting values insures that the Recipient Account Number field retains its original cell formatting and reduces the risk of worksheet upload errors.

### **15. In ACM\$, will awardees report program income?**

No, NSF will not collect data on program income through ACM\$. Awardees will be notified when a final decision has been made on the mechanism which will be used to capture this data.

### **16. Will awardees be able to warehouse payments using ACM\$?**

Yes, ACM\$ does provide this feature by changing the requested payment date to a future date. Transactions submitted for future dates (Monday-Friday) will be placed in a warehoused financial status until the payment date requested is reached. After that, it will follow the traditional transaction processing.

### **17. My Recipient Account Numbers are not being saved, what’s wrong?**

Changes made to the recipient account number field on the “Payment” screen are only saved for use on subsequent transactions when the award has a payment amount requested and the payment transaction is certified and submitted to NSF. If the award payment amount is \$0.00, any change to that recipient account number will not be saved even if the overall payment transaction is saved and submitted to NSF. Changes made to Recipient Account Numbers on payment transactions that are saved to draft status are only saved for that draft. It is recommended to develop an internal process for updating the recipient account numbers taking into consideration the issues above. Remember the ACM\$ database is only permanently updated upon certification and submission of a payment transaction to NSF.

### **18. What do I do if I receive a warning message during my payment request?**

If a payment transaction has items that generate warning messages at the top of the ACM\$ payment transactions screens, the user is not able to complete the payment transaction. Warning messages will not prevent the submission of the payment transaction, but the ACM\$ preparer must click on the “Ignore & Continue” located directly beneath the ACM\$ warning message. This button is easily overlooked, but is required to continue with the payment process. Users should be aware that error messages will stop a payment transaction.