

Virginia Commonwealth University Graduate Student Association Appropriations Committee

Section 1

A. Mission. The mission of the GSA Appropriations Committee is to disburse student activity funds in a fair and consistent manner to all student organizations with the majority of its members being graduate or professional students paying Monroe Park Campus student activities fees. These organizations must enhance the quality of the graduate student experience at Virginia Commonwealth University.

B. Purpose: The GSA Appropriations Committee was established by the Virginia Commonwealth University Student Government Association for the Monroe Park Campus for these purposes:

1. To allocate the Student Activity Fee on the Monroe Park Campus to graduate student organizations by the GSA Appropriations Committee. The allocations will be made with full consideration to the diverse needs of the members of the Graduate Student community. The Virginia Commonwealth University Student Government Association for the Monroe Park Campus maintains final approval power over these allocations.
2. To recommend changes in the amount of the Student Activity Fee allocated to the GSA Appropriations Committee.
3. To coordinate the activities of the Office of Student Organization Financial Service for Student Organizations regarding the disbursement of the Student Activity Fee and to receive regular reports from the Office of Student Organization Financial Service regarding collections and disbursements. The Office of Student Organization Financial Service will also ensure that Student Activity Fee funds are dispersed only for those purposes and amounts as approved by the GSA Appropriations Committee or other umbrella organization authorized to allocate funds.

Section 2- Composition. The Appropriations Committee shall consist of between 7 to 13 voting Committee members. Those members will include the Treasurer of the GSA, Appropriations Committee Chair, two representatives of the VCU Monroe Campus Student Government Association, and at least three representatives of the GSA Council. When possible, at least one member of the Committee should have previously served on the Committee. During the period between Spring elections and Fall Committee assignments, the committee shall, if necessary, be permitted to function with no less than 5 members. The GSA faculty advisor will provide oversight to the committee.

Section 3 - The Appropriations Committee Chair. The Chair of the Committee will be responsible for conducting all meetings and the record keeping duties of the Committee.

A. The Chair is responsible for assigning a Committee member to take the minutes during the Appropriations Committee meetings and posting the minutes in a timely manner.

B. The Chair will keep a record of each student organization and copies of all proposed and approved budgets.

C. The Chair will provide any training necessary for the Committee or student groups.

D. The Chair will serve as a liaison between the GSA, all graduate student organizations, and the Monroe Campus SGA.

E. Any decisions made by the Appropriations Committee and/or Finance Director (allocations, freezing of funds, return of funds, line item changes, etc.) must be communicated to the Fiscal Manager within 48 hours.

Section 4 - Appropriations Procedure.

A. The Chair shall train all new members of the Committee regarding their responsibilities as soon as possible after the Fall Committee Appointments.

B. Before the first Appropriations meeting, the Chair shall update the standardized forms for the Graduate Student Organizations (GSOs), which they shall use during the budgeting processes, and the training manual.

C. At the first appropriations meeting, the Chair should assign liaisons to act as intermediaries between the student organizations and the Appropriations Committee.

1. Members may act as liaison for more than one GSO.
2. The role of the liaison is to serve as a conduit between their assigned GSO and the Appropriations Committee. It is the responsibility of the liaison to advocate the budgeting interests of their assigned groups during the Appropriations procedures.
3. Before the budgeting process, the organizations applying for funding shall inform the liaison of outstanding or pending charges to the organization's account number.
4. At the conclusion of the budgeting process, the liaisons shall inform the leader(s) of their assigned organizations of all funding decisions regarding the organizations. The information provided should include a detailed breakdown of the funding allocated to the organization for each event listed in the organization's proposed budget.

D. Committee members must not be liaisons to student organizations of which they are on the executive board.

E. All GSO budgets will be approved and submitted as the GSA Appropriations Committee budget, along with a separate GSA budget, to the SGA by the assigned deadline.

Section 5 - Meetings. All meetings shall follow Robert's Rule of Order. The Chair shall schedule appropriations committee and GSO budgeting trainings shortly after Fall Committee appointments. The Chair shall schedule a formal appropriations committee meeting no later than two weeks after Winter Break. The committee will assign budget hearing dates and times to each GSO. Funding hearings shall not take place on Friday afternoons while the Monroe Park Campus Student Government Association Appropriations Committee is in session.

Section 6 - Provisional Student Organizations.

A. All new and inactive student organizations shall be considered provisional student organizations for one semester and will be notified as such by the Chair.

B. *“New” student organizations.*

1. A “new” student organization is one that the SOFS and the GSA Appropriations Committee has recognized and that has not previously existed.
2. New organizations should begin the process of registering with the SOFS and GSA Appropriations Committee in the Fall semester. Registration process will take at least 90 days.
3. Registrations will not be considered after the first meeting of the appropriations committee in the Spring semester.
4. Those GSO’s who wish to register in the Spring with the SOFS may do so. However, they must then apply for start-up funding with the SGA in the Fall of the coming school year, and then in the Spring apply for GSA funds for the following school year. When applying for start-up funding with the SGA, new GSO’s must abide by SGA bylaws.

C. *“Inactive” student organizations.*

1. Any GSO that has previously been recognized by the appropriations committee but has failed to host at least one “significant event” during the Fall semester, shall be considered “inactive” for appropriations committee purposes.
2. What constitutes a “significant” event will be determined at the discretion of the appropriations committee. A significant event must be adequately advertised to the student body as a whole.
3. The committee shall take into consideration demonstrated planning of a “significant event” for the following semester in determining whether a student organization shall be classified as “inactive.”
4. Student groups deemed inactive will be notified of their status as an inactive group, by the Chair, prior to the beginning of the next academic semester.
5. If a student organization is classified as “inactive” but has received a year-long allocation, all remaining funds shall revert to the committee’s supplemental funding pot (ref. Sec. 12 A.).

D. At the last Appropriations Committee meeting prior to the budget hearings, the provisional status of all such organizations shall be reevaluated. If a provisional organization fails to complete a significant event then it will remain provisional and ineligible to submit a budget for funding for the following semester.

Section 7 - The Appropriations Cycle. The appropriations committee provides the following schedule to ensure that the appropriations process is fair, thorough, and expeditious.

A. The Spring Appropriations cycle for Fall, Spring, and year-long budgets shall begin two weeks after Winter Break.

B. *Notification.*

1. At the beginning of Spring semester, the Chair will notify by e-mail, posters, notices, etc. all student GSO leaders of their requirement to submit a budget.

2. In all initial communications, the Appropriations liaisons should notify all organizations of the consequences of a late submission. Organizations submitting late budgets waive the right to appeal decisions of the committee absent extenuating circumstances.

C. Budget Deadlines.

1. The Chair will announce a budget submission deadline to each GSO leader at least two weeks after the original submission announcement.
2. The Chair, after the submission deadline, shall distribute a preliminary budget reflecting the full funding requests of each student organization budget submission.
3. The Chair shall provide a list of all the organizations that have submitted, and those that have failed to submit, a budget on time.
4. As soon as is possible after the deadline for budget submissions, the Chair shall notify the GSO leaders of those organizations that have not yet submitted a budget that the deadline for budget submissions has past and they may suffer a penalty for late submissions.

D. The Liaisons.

1. Prior to the submission deadline, appropriations committee liaisons should encourage and advise their assigned GSOs submitting a budget.
2. The liaisons shall meet with their organization leaders prior to the submission of the budget. The goal of this conference is to negotiate a reasonable budget request that allows the organization to fulfill its goals for the year or the semester, but does not request more money from the GSA than is absolutely necessary.

E. Organization Submissions.

1. Organizations will submit their budget requests to the appropriations committee based on the forms provided by the Chair.
2. The Chair shall update the budget request forms each year.
3. Included in the budget request form will be specific information, to the extent practicable, for each event that an organization is planning, including the following information: actual date, location, nature, number of people involved, and cost of the event.
4. Student organizations will also report the following information in their budget request:
 - a. The number of active students in the student organization during the previous year. This number should be based upon the reasonable belief of the organizations officers.
 - b. The number of general body meetings and special events available to both day and evening students in the previous year (particularly events scheduled after 8pm, or on weekends).

F. Drafting the Budget.

1. The appropriations committee should meet two weeks after Winter Break to start the process of drafting a budget for the SGA.

2. Drafting the budget entails balancing the needs of all organizations to create an overall GSA Appropriations budget that allocates limited funds fairly and effectively.
3. During this process, liaisons and GSO leaders shall be prepared to defend the budget they negotiated with the student organization before the rest of the Appropriations Committee during a scheduled budget hearing.
4. After completion of the draft budget, liaisons will contact the organization leaders to inform them of their initial allocation in the draft budget. Liaison's shall also inform leaders that allocations are only preliminary and may change as the budget is finalized by the SGA.

G. *Conflict of Interest.*

1. Committee members must abstain from voting on funding requests proposed on behalf of an organization of which a committee member is an executive board member.
2. Committee members who are executive board members of organizations seeking funds from the Association may answer any questions during debate on that organization's budget request.

H. *Factors in Allotting Funds.* The appropriations committee will consider the following factors in allocating funds to student organizations:

1. Timeliness of the student organization's budget submission.
2. The specificity of the student organization's funding request.
3. The student organization's management of past funding in allocating funds to student organizations.
4. Availability of events to both day and evening students.

I. *Appeals Meeting.* An Appeals Meeting should be scheduled for the week following the budgeting process, prior to SGA budget submissions. The purpose of the Appeals Meeting is to allow organization leaders to appeal their initial allocation in the draft budget by presenting compelling reasons for additional funding from the Association. The Appeals Meeting is optional for organizations.

J. *The Final Budget.* The Appropriations Committee should dedicate subsequent weeks to finalizing and cementing the final Association Appropriations Budget and presenting it to the SGA for approval in compliance with the VCU policies.

Section 8- Speaker Honoraria.

A. The Appropriations Committee shall have the discretionary authority to provide funding for speaker honorariums.

B. Student organizations should make every reasonable effort to obtain speakers at no cost to the Association.

C. Barring exceptional circumstances, the Committee should not approve more than two honorariums per student organization per semester.

Section 9 - Transportation.

A. Members of student organizations generally should plan to provide their own transportation for their events.

B. The Appropriations Committee shall consider funding and/or reimbursement of transportation costs based on the nature of the event, beneficiaries, impact on the VCU community, and budget of the organization sponsoring the event.

C. For speakers outside the VCU community, student organizations may not pay for airfare or include airfare in a speaker's fee, but student organizations may fund for reasonable ground transportation from a Richmond airport to an area hotel or VCU, from an area hotel to the local presentation location, and back.

Section 10 - Membership Dues & National Dues.

A. Student organizations will disclose to the Appropriations Committee any membership dues their members pay to that organization, as well as the membership dues the organization pays to national organizations.

B. Organizations that collect membership dues can use those dues as a non-GSA source of funding.

C. The Appropriations Committee may consider membership dues, as well as dues paid to national organizations, when deciding a group's budget, giving consideration to the group's spending history and its impact on the VCU community.

D. If an organization collects dues from its members, the Appropriations Committee shall consider it to have spent the dues funds before the Committee will consider it to have spent GSA allocations.

E. The GSA generally will pay national dues for student organizations in order for that student organization to remain in good standing with the national organization.

Section 11 - Conferences & Conference Attendance Off-Campus.

A. The Association may pay for conference dues and fees for up to four members per semester of a GSO that demonstrates a need for funding. The Committee will consider exceptions to this policy, taking into consideration such factors as the proximity of the conference to VCU, the involvement of the students in the conference, and the relationship of the student organization to the group putting on the conference.

B. In general, the Appropriations Committee will not fund complete travel and accommodations to GSOs.

Section 12 - Supplemental Funding and Line Item Changes.

A. The purposes of supplemental funding are: (1) to provide funds to student organizations for unforeseen circumstances or unique opportunities; and (2) to provide funds to new and inactive student groups classified by the committee as provisional groups.

B. A majority of the Committee quorum shall be required to approve any funding decision or line item change over \$500.00.

Section 13 - Organization Spending. All GSOs will process their spending through the Student Organization Finance Office.

A. The GSA expects GSOs to spend their budget funds in good faith, in accordance with the budget submitted to the Appropriations Committee, and in compliance with the Office of Student Organization Financial Service (SOFS) rules.

1. Purchases must be made with approved requisition forms obtained from the Office of Student Organization Financial Service. Organizations and committees must check with the Office of Student Organization Financial Service to learn which specific items require a requisition form. When invoices are received, they should be submitted to the Office of Student Organization Financial Service. Organizations or committees which do not follow these procedures will be liable for all expenditures.
2. All payments are made by the University Accounting Office directly to vendors, and no payments will be made without supporting documentation in the form of receipts, invoices, etc. No cash payments may be made.
3. The president and/or treasurer of each organization are required to provide the Office of Student Organization Financial Service with a signature specimen card as a means of authenticating all requests. All individuals authorized to spend against an account must receive training at scheduled workshops from the Office of Student Organization Financial Service on all current policies and procedures for usage before they are eligible to access funds. If training has not been received, no expenditures will be permitted. Training workshops for spending funds are scheduled primarily in September but also throughout the academic year. See the Business Office for Student Organizations for a complete schedule.
4. Timelines that are required for various types of financial processing must be adhered to or processing may not occur.
5. State regulations require that all procurements for goods and all procurements for services in excess of \$5,000 must be competitively bid and documentation must be submitted with the request for purchase.

B. Any spending abuse or misappropriation of funds by an organization may result in a freezing of funding designated by the Appropriations Committee.

C. All organizations having surplus/deficit balances at the end of the fiscal year will have the amount of their surplus/deficit counted against new allocations for the following year and will be notified in writing by the Appropriations Committee.

Section 14 - Student Organization Advertising.

A. All organizations that receive supplemental funding shall include a by-line on advertising (posters, e-mails, etc.) that the event was made possible in part by funding from the GSA.

B. All organizations funded by the GSA Appropriations Committee must state on all printed materials and advertisements, that the event was “Partially or fully funded by the Student Activity Fee.”

Section 15 - Suggested Student Pricing Index.

A. For certain products, foodstuffs, and beverages, the Appropriations Committee shall produce and maintain a Suggested Student Pricing Index. The Index should include the pricing for common products, foodstuffs, and beverages that student organizations commonly order.

B. The Association generally will not fund more than the price indicated in the Suggested Student Pricing Index for any funding requests, except if the student organization is able to demonstrate extraordinary need to go outside the general guidelines of the Index.

C. It shall be the responsibility of the Chair to maintain and update the Suggested Student Pricing Index and distribute a copy to all student organizations.

D. It shall be the responsibility of the Appropriations Committee to seek out the lowest prices possible for commonly purchased goods and to make every effort to negotiate deals with frequent vendors on behalf of GSOs.

1. The Chair shall have the final authority on all negotiated deals.

E. It shall be the responsibility of the student organization president and/or treasurer to ensure that all funding requests comply with the Suggested Student Pricing Index.

Section 16 - Amendments to the Bylaws.

A. Changes to the appropriations bylaws require approval by a majority of the GSA Council, provided that a majority of Appropriations Committee quorum has previously approved the changes.

B. Absent approval from a majority of Appropriations Committee quorum, changes to the appropriations bylaws require approval by two-thirds of the GSA Council.

C. Final amendments are approved by the Student Government Association.