

Stipend for Business Use of Wireless Communication Devices Frequently Asked Questions

1. How does the new Policy benefit the University?

The Board of Visitors has tasked Executive Management to seek and report regularly on efficiencies and cost savings in light of tuition pressures and the debt burden on many students. Currently the university owns more than 850 cell phones and smart phones. While some are shared departmental phones, it is estimated that we can eliminate more than 600 phones by transitioning to the stipend program. Cost savings are projected at more than \$200,000 per year. Additionally, this policy reduces the University's audit risk when University provided devices are used in violation of the State's policy prohibiting personal use.

2. How does the new Policy benefit University employees?

The policy empowers employees to make their own choices relative to their combined business, individual and family wireless communication needs. Employees will no longer need to carry two wireless communication devices, one for personal and one for business, and could reduce out of pocket expenses on their personal plans.

Many employees have already converted to the stipend program. According to one employee who transitioned to the stipend program, *"Many in our department view the stipend policy as a win-win. I was able to eliminate the need to carry a second device and reduced my out-of-pocket expense on my personal phone."*

3. Why is the stipend only \$45?

Last year the IRS significantly reduced the administrative burden associated with stipends to both employees and employers. The State published a monthly stipend rate for smart phones of \$45 that is not subject to tax (no employer FICA cost and not a taxable benefit to the employee). The \$45 is intended to cover the business use of a personal cellular device.

4. I do not want my personal cell number to be broadly available to my business contacts. How can I limit its dissemination?

The university offers Enhanced Voicemail that is associated with a user's office phone. This is designed for the user who is near the office phone most of the time, but wants to be reached on a mobile (or other) device when not in the office. When someone calls and reaches voicemail, a menu prompts the calling party to press a number to try to reach the called party at another extension. If that call fails, the menu repeats and the caller can select another option to leave a voicemail message. Enhanced voicemail is \$2.50 per line per month, chargeable to the user's department. Enabling enhanced voicemail does not impact the \$45 stipend.

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Another option is to enter an id blocking pre-fix. Dial *67 on your phone before dialing the phone number. Or adjust the settings on your phone.

5. What if I don't want to use my personal phone for business?

The cellular phone industry is changing; it is becoming more competitive and prices are dropping. Consider the following examples:

- With both AT&T and Verizon, one can add a line to an existing plan for \$40/month. There are several phones provided free, including the iPhone 4 and Droid, with a two year plan.

For those who do not want to commit to a contract:

- Virgin Mobile offers 1200 minutes of talk and unlimited text and data for \$45/month.
- Consumer Cellular offers a plan with 200 minutes of talk and 2GB of data for \$45/month.

6. Since the device will be my personal device, is any information subject to the Virginia Freedom of Information Act?

University Counsel reviewed the draft policy and confirms that Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) rules are not changed. University business transactions are subject to FOIA regardless of equipment ownership. Personal transactions that use only personal equipment are not subject to FOIA; personal transactions that use any university equipment (University owned device, systems, servers, etc.) are subject to FOIA.

7. When the proposed Policy goes into effect, what do we do with University provided devices?

Those with a University owned phone may retain their existing equipment and plan, and costs continue to be billed to the department. When individuals need a new device, they will need to transition to the stipend policy.

8. When I transition to the stipend program, can I keep the phone number associated with my university owned phone?

Telecom Admin will work with faculty and staff who transition from a university owned cell phone to a personally owned device. Departmental approval is required. Retaining the existing phone number is not assured but is possible, and there are more steps involved when changing carriers. All requests need to be directed to Kathy Bonafede, Cell Phone Administrator (kbonafed, 3-3542).

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9. Can grant funds be used to pay for the stipend?

These rules are not changed. Charges associated with wireless communication devices are not allowed on federally sponsored funds, unless an exception is authorized due to the unique nature of the project.

10. Will ITU provide support for personal devices when they present problems doing university business?

Yes. ITU will assist with password changes and other connectivity issues common with smart phone connections to email and calendar, regardless of device ownership.

11. I telework one day a week and typically use my cell phone to call into meetings. How will I be compensated for this additional use?

The stipend is intended to cover this type of use. Employees should factor in their telework needs when determining the most appropriate plan. The flexibility provided by voluntary teleworking or remote working is viewed as having a personal work/life benefit to the employee.

12. Has the university leveraged its buying power to gain any discounts for employees from commercial carriers?

AT&T Mobility, Sprint and Verizon offer discounts to George Mason University employees for personal phones. For details, go to http://telecomadmin.gmu.edu/facstaff/cellphones.cfm#CP_JUMP_1602

13. My personal cell phone service does not include international calls. Are there any options for international call service in the event that I need to travel out of the country?

Employees who have business needs to travel internationally should purchase an international plan for their phone for the period of the trip. This cost should be included on the Travel Reimbursement form.

14. How will I receive the stipend?

Supervisor and departmental approval is required; stipend availability is subject to departmental budget constraints. After completing the Wireless Communication Device Stipend Agreement, the stipend amount will be included in your paycheck as a benefit not subject to tax.

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15. Who is responsible for termination fees associated with my university phone when I turn it in and transition to the stipend program?

Termination fees are not assessed when cell phone service is terminated on university owned equipment.

16. Does the policy cover iPads and other tablets?

No. The policy only covers cellular phones.

17. What is the supervisor's responsibility under the new policy?

Stipends are issued on an annual basis. Prior to authorizing an annual stipend, the supervisor is responsible for reviewing a recent copy of the employee's monthly cell phone bill. Detailed review of business versus personal use is not appropriate. The stipend amount will be the amount of the monthly charges for voice services, text and/or data if needed for business, taxes and may include equipment/access charges that are itemized on the bill, up to \$45. If line access charges are a single line-item for multiple lines; the amount that may be included in the stipend will be pro-rated by the number of lines. Supervisors are not required to keep employee phone records and may retain them only if all personal information except the last four digits of personal lines is redacted.