Financial Management

Prepared by Fiscal Learning & Engagement
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Financial Management at Mason

George Mason University maintains an effective financial management system in order to provide accurate and reliable fiscal reporting and to protect university assets. A strong financial system is achieved by managing fiscal risk and maintaining accountability and effective controls.

Banner is the Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) software suite that integrates financial aid, payroll, general student and finance application modules for managing and automating Mason processes. The finance module, Banner Finance, is used to record financial transactions resulting from activity at the university. Banner Finance is organized by Hierarchy (Level 1 to Level 6) so that data can “roll up” and provide accurate reporting and financial statements for the university as a whole. For access to MicroStrategy and Banner please review the Request Access section of the Banner homepage.

Financial Transactions are recorded at the Level 6 (L6 Org or L6 Fund) in Banner Finance. This means that each transaction must be assigned a 6-digit Org or Fund in order to be recorded to the responsible unit. Most state funded financial transactions will be coded to an Org L6 element of the unit’s hierarchy. Financial transactions that are funded by sponsored or non-sponsored awards (indirects, institutional awards, start-ups) will be coded to a Fund L6. Additional information is available in the Chart of Accounts section below.

All Financial Transactions must be the result of official university business and/or agency transactions. Policy 2114 - Financial Management covers basic financial accountability and reconciliation practices. Units should follow these procedures to maintain consistent financial management practices, timely reconciliation, and certification of Financial Transactions.

Elements of Financial Responsibility

- All Financial Transactions including revenues generated by university activities and all business expenses must be recorded and accounted for within Banner Finance.
- All transactions shall include accurate descriptions and sufficient supporting documentation to allow for the preparation of financial statements.
- All Financial Transactions must be recorded timely and accurately, with the business nature of the transaction clearly identified. Specific guidance pertaining to the timely posting of transactions is available in the Reconciliation Procedures.
- No Financial Transaction whether recorded directly into Banner Finance or indirectly from a subsystem, nor any supporting documentation, shall be left incomplete or distorted. Payments made on behalf of the university must be for the purpose described on the supported documents.
- Reconciliations must be performed and documented on a regular basis throughout the fiscal year, pursuant to the Reconciliation Procedures. A Certification signed and dated by the reconciler performing the reconciliation as well as by the approver or PI responsible for its review must form part of the reconciliation documentation.

Timeline for Financial Review by Responsibility

1. On a monthly or bi-monthly basis (period), the Department Reconciler follows the Reconciliation Procedures, available in the Appendix, to review and verify Financial Transactions and prepare the budget comparison. Reconciling items shall be resolved not later than three months from the last day of the reconciled month/period. The Department Reconciler will complete the Reconciliation Certification and notify the Department Approver.

2. Within 15 days of receiving notification, the Department Approver reviews that the results of the reconciliation(s) are reasonable and accurate and then completes the Reconciliation Certification. The Department Approver should review the comparison of budget to actual and year-over-year actual results where applicable, and trends or areas of concern should be identified. For significant deviations from expected
results, variances shall be investigated and reasons documented, along with any necessary corrective action plan.

a. For Sponsored Programs, the **Principal Investigator (PI)** reviews financial activity and certifies that the results of the reconciliation(s) are reasonable and accurate and then completed the Reconciliation Certification. The review shall ensure that transactions are made for the intended purpose of the grant or contract, and in accordance with sponsor requirements as well as university policies and procedures for their sponsored funds. The PIs’ review shall include analysis of reconciling items and the appropriateness of the follow-up.

3. Quarterly, the **Financial Manager/Director** verifies that controls within their unit are operating effectively, and that processes and procedures are properly documented. Financial Managers/Directors shall assure that Financial Transactions are being reviewed and reconciliations completed, conducted timely, and certified by the reconciler and approver (Reconciliation Certification).

4. At least yearly or as changes occur, **Deans and heads of Administrative Units** verify that an effective internal control structure for their area is in place and that assets are safeguarded. Deans and heads of Administrative Units provide assurance over the recording of Financial Transactions, including compliance with Policy 2114 – Financial Management.

**Chart of Accounts**

The “Chart of Accounts” refers to the structure within our Banner (Mason Administrative) system that allows us to transact and report on financial data for the University. The Chart of Accounts is used to record all financial transactions. More specifically, the Chart designated as “Chart 1” refers to historical data (through FY22). In July 2022 (FY23), the university transitioned to a new Chart structure referred to as “Chart P.” All financial transactions for FY23 – forward will be recorded to Chart P.

The Chart of Accounts structure in Banner is composed of six elements: Fund, Organization, Account, Program, Activity, and Location. These elements make up the “FOAPAL” or complete accounting elements for financial transactions. Each chart element is explained below.

**Fund**

This is a required element for all transactions. The Fund segment of the FOAPAL represents the type of money that is being used. Different sources of funding have different rules for what can be done with the funds and how they are reported to the Commonwealth as part of the Financial Statements. To manage compliance with these rules, different Fund Types are used.

Fund Types include, but are not limited to:

- Education and General (E&G)
- Auxiliary Enterprises (AE)
-Externally Sponsored Research Grants & Contracts
- Financial Aid
- Indirect Cost Recovery
- Plant

Within a Fund Type, there can be multiple individual funds for specific purposes. Some funds are general and will be used by a broad range of departments. For instance, the E&G general fund is used by all academic units and most administrative units for their primary operational activities. Other Fund Types are subdivided with a hierarchy to categorize numerous project-specific unique fund codes. New funds will be established when the funding must be reported on separately and balances must be tracked without regard to the university’s fiscal year. For example, Grants...
and Contracts, and Capital Projects require reporting on each separate source of funds, and therefore each grant or project will have its own fund number. **Financial Transactions associated with these funding sources will be recorded at the Fund L6 level. This means that the user will allocate transactions to the Fund L6 in eVA, Bank of America Works, and other procurement activities.**

As a general rule, any funding source that needs to be tracked across multiple fiscal years should be a separate Fund. Banner’s functionality maintains separate fund balances (meaning the remaining balance from actual inflows and outflows carries forward from one fiscal year to the next) by Fund, but not by Organization. A common example would be grants/contracts where the lifecycle of the grant often does not align with the university’s fiscal year. **Financial Transactions associated with these funding sources will be recorded at the Fund L6 level. This means that the user will allocate transactions to the Fund L6 in eVA, Bank of America Works, and other procurement activities.**

**Organizations (Org)**

This is a required element for Revenue and Expense transactions (other transactions, optional). The Organization (“Org”) segment of the FOAPAL should reflect the financial organizational structure of the University and align with the operational academic structure. This means that cost centers (organizational units or departments) should be represented by a unique Org number and that the hierarchy for how Orgs are grouped for reporting should reflect the reporting structure of the institution (e.g., Departments roll up to a College/Division, which in turn roll up to the Provost/SVP, etc.) Transactions are recorded at a lower level in the hierarchy (L6 level), within the department or program responsible for managing their approved budget.

An Org may be funded by multiple sources (identified by different Funds) and be associated with multiple Programs, Activities, and Locations. The Organization can be used in reporting to display the financial status of the entire department, including all types of financial activity that the department is responsible for (E&G, Grants, Start-Ups, Indirects, etc.)

Organizations should be established for cost centers that have:

- Budgets
- Financial transactions (salaries/purchasing)
- A single individual responsible for the financial health and decision-making of the organization (even if there is a higher-level approver) – this person will be named as the Financial Manager for the organization in the system
- A tie to an administrative division or academic department or program that can be identified in the University hierarchy.

**Organization Hierarchy**

Level 1 (L1): Represents the consolidated institution and is used for reporting in the Financial Statements, to the BOV, and others on Mason’s complete financial operations.

Level 2 (L2): The three areas of executive responsibility include: the President, the Provost and the Senior Vice President for Finance and Administration.

Level 3 (L3): Within each of the three executive “verticals”, there are major subdivisions – either individual Colleges on the Academic side (e.g., CHSS, COS), or major operational units on the Administrative side (e.g., Facilities, ITS).

Level 4 (L4): Each College will have an L4 element to represent the roll-up for College Administration and Student Services (e.g., Dean’s Office, Student Advising, etc.) and a L4 for College-level Centers and Institutes, if applicable. On the Administrative side, some Major Divisions have distinct operational Sub-Divisions (e.g., Business Services and Operations includes Business Services, Mason Police, etc.). These sub-divisions will be represented at L4 of the hierarchy.

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Level 5 (L5): The organization structure of both Academic and Administrative Divisions contain multiple operating units or Departments. These operating units may have one or more operational sub-units within. For those with multiple units, L5 will serve as a roll-up of those units (which are represented at Level 6A).

**Level 6A (L6A): This is the level at which most transactions are recorded for both Academic and Administrative units.**

As noted above, Departments that have multiple operational units (e.g., Fiscal Services L5) may have multiple L6A Orgs (Accounts Payable, Student Accounts, General Accounting, etc.). Other Departments may have only one transactional L6A Org value. For Academic Departments, generally there will be one L6A Org, but additional L6A orgs may exist for departmental research centers or major facilities that have their own operating structure.

Level 6B: Some units may have a need for even more granular tracking. For example, Global Education Office runs programs for study abroad. The individuals responsible for those programs manage the funds associated with them. We envision these individual programs existing at Level 6B in the hierarchy and rolling-up to a Level 6A “predecessor” or ‘parent’ org. (Note: The level retains “6B” rather than “7” to indicate that it is a 6-character value.)

**Account**

This is a required element for all transactions. On operating reports (revenues and expenses), the Account segment of the FOAPAL represents what the money originated as (e.g., tuition, appropriation, fees) or what the money is being spent on (salaries, supplies, travel). On the balance sheet, the Account segment identifies what the asset is made up of (e.g., cash, equipment, land) or what the obligation is for (e.g., trade accounts payable, accrued interest, debt).

Accounts are organized into the following Account Types:

- Assets
- Liabilities
- Control
- Net Assets
- Revenue
- Expense
- Transfers

Accounts also have a hierarchy to facilitate grouping like accounts into summarized information for reporting (e.g., salaries, fringe, contract services, travel). An Account can be established when there is a University-wide need to track or establish rules for a particular type of transaction that cannot be identified by other attributes of the transaction. For example, if there is a reporting requirement to track foreign travel separate from domestic travel, this would necessitate a separate Account being created. Similar requirements exist for grant expenses that have indirect costs applied versus those that do not.

**Program**

This is a required element for Revenue and Expense transactions (other transactions, optional). The Program segment of the FOAPAL represents the function of the University that the transaction supports. Why expenses are incurred relates direction to the mission of the university and programs are used for Financial Reporting. “Programs” in the context of the COA are not equivalent to “academic programs” such as degree programs or specific academic disciplines. These are also referred to “functional” expense categories for financial reporting.

Programs include:

- Instruction
- Academic Support
- Institutional Support
- Net Assets
- Various types of Research

Program codes directly support financial reporting requirements and therefore programs will not be created unless there is a regulatory need. Where possible, default Program codes will be assigned to Fund or Organization values to support consistent and meaningful reporting.
Activity
This is not a required element. The Activity segment (the second A) in FOAPAL is an optional segment that can be used fairly flexibly to track work within or across the organization(s). In our earlier example of what would not require an organization, our “Fall Festival” would be a good example of an activity. If multiple organizations participate in the Fall Festival, they could use an Activity code to track all activity related to the Fall Festival to understand all the costs associated with it across the university. Individual departments may also establish activity codes for groups of expenses unique to their operation which they cannot track in other ways.

When a new Activity code is requested, Fiscal Services will determine if the expenses could be grouped using any other attributes available in the system. If the grouping is truly unique, the request will be approved.

Note that the use of an Activity code requires all responsible departments to remember to use the Activity code on all appropriate transactions, so it should be well-communicated and there should be a shared understanding of when to use it. Usage of Activity codes are the responsibility of the department or group requesting the code, and will not be administered by Fiscal Services.

Location
This is not a required element. The Location segment of the FOAPAL represents the place the transactions are happening. This is also an optional segment, meaning that the system will not require it to be populated on transactions. In some circumstances, it may be helpful to know which campus or off-campus facility is related to the transaction. This can enable reporting of the expenses related to a specific campus or building and can also help understand the growth of different areas of the University.

Banner Finance Self Service
Banner Finance Self Service is a web-based interface that allows users to view information from Banner, Masons Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) software. The data is posted in real time. Detailed information on transactions, such as Invoices and Purchase Orders, is obtained through the View Document Feature. Banner Finance Self Service may be used to provide a quick look at current financial positioning; however, reconciliation and analysis of budget, revenues, and expenditures should be completed using the MicroStrategy Reports. A quick guide for Banner Finance Self Service – View Document is available in the Appendix of this manual.

MicroStrategy
MicroStrategy is the business intelligence tool used by the University to analyze Banner financial data. MicroStrategy reports are developed from Banner data and refreshed twice daily. These reports allow for summary drilling for direct expenditures and provide department users with detailed labor information that is not available in Banner Finance Self Service. MicroStrategy reports may be exported to Excel for further analysis. Several quick guides for Organization Reconciliation Reports are available in the Appendix of this manual. Additional training and knowledge base for MicroStrategy users is available on the Business Intelligence webpage.
Banner Finance Self Services – View Document

Banner Finance Self Service is a web-based interface that allows users to view information from Banner, Mason’s Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) software. For access to MicroStrategy and Banner please review the Request Access section of the Banner homepage.

**Step by Step**

1. **Got to** [https://patriotweb.gmu.edu/](https://patriotweb.gmu.edu/) and select Login. Enter your Mason Net ID and Password. **Authentication with DUO is required.**

2. After login, click on the financial information tab to view options. While there may be many options available to you, this guide focuses on **View Document** only. **It is recommended that all budget, revenue and expense inquiries utilize the MicroStrategy reports instead of Self Service.**

3. Click on **View Document** to open the search parameters.

4. Select the **Type of document** you are searching for – typically a Purchase Order (from eVA) or Account Payable Invoice.

5. Enter the **Document Number**:
   
   a. Purchase order (EP# or PO#): Numbers only
   
   b. Accounts Payable Invoice: “I” Document number
   
   
   d. Electronic feed: “F” Document Number (Interdepartmental recharges)

6. Then, click **View Document**. The document type will then display. For you to review the desired information.

7. At the bottom of the displayed document, there is a section called “Related Documents.”

8. Related Documents of a Purchase Order will show Invoices that have been paid. Related Documents of an Invoice will show the Purchase Order. A Document Code that a user can open/view will be underlined in green. Check disbursements are not viewable.
Reconciliation Procedures

All Financial Transactions must be the result of official university business and/or agency transactions. Policy 2114 - Financial Management covers basic financial accountability and reconciliation practices. Units should follow these procedures to maintain consistent financial management practices, timely reconciliation, and certification of Financial Transactions.

**Department Reconciler**
Reconcilers verify and certify that entries in Banner Finance are properly recorded and supported by documentation. Any discrepancies/reconciling items encountered shall be documented and adjustments prepared if necessary. In the case of restricted accounts, reconcilers also verify that transactions comply with sponsor or donor-imposed restrictions on the use of funds.

**Reconciler Steps (L6 Org)**
1. Retrieve *MicroStrategy Reconciliation Reports*.
2. Review the activity to ensure accuracy of accounting record, appropriateness of charges, and sufficient supporting documentation (including Banner Finance).
3. Identify significant or questionable transactions and review source documents. Source documents such as receipts, invoices, and other documentation may be saved in a central file within the unit’s shared drive or MS Teams. Some financial transaction records may be viewed in the following locations:
   a. Accounts Payable Invoice shared files: fsvc.Invoice(year). For access please email llucas4@gmu.edu.
   c. Print Services monthly statements shared drives: psvc.statements. For access please email SPande3@gmu.edu.
4. Perform fluctuation analysis compared to budget and/or prior year noting significant variances and reasons.
5. Identify and make note of any necessary corrections and expected transactions that have not yet posted.
6. Save the completed reconciliation using a central electronic filing system (such as One Drive/SharePoint) with your name and date to signify that the reconciliation is complete.
7. Email the Approver that the reconciliation is ready for their review, noting the reconciliation file location.
8. On a monthly or bi-monthly basis, the designated individuals for the unit, at the L5 Org level, will verify that all L6 Org activity has been reconciled and approved. These individuals will then sign and date the Reconciliation Certification in Smartsheet.

**Department Approver (L6 Org)**
Approvers review and certify that financial activity recorded in Banner Finance and results of the reconciliation(s) are reasonable and accurate. The review shall include a comparison of budget to actual and year-over-year actual results where applicable, and trends or areas of concern should be identified. For significant deviations from expected results, variances shall be investigated and reasons documented, along with any necessary corrective action plan.
Approver Steps

1. Review the work of the Department Reconciler paying close attention to significant or questionable, and ensure that previously noted corrections have been resolved.
2. Analyze the comparison of budget to actual and year-over-year actual results and identify trends or areas of concern.
3. Identify significant deviations from expected results, investigate variances, document reasons, and note any necessary corrective action plan.
4. Save the reconciliation file, with note and your name and date to signify approval and review complete.
5. On a monthly or bi-monthly basis, the designated individuals for the unit, at the L5 Org level, will verify that all L6 Org activity has been reconciled and approved. These individuals will then sign and date the Reconciliation Certification in Smartsheet.

Unit Confirmation of Reconciliation and Approval (L5 Org)
Each unit has designated individuals to report on reconciliation and approval completion on a university shared Smartsheet. This reporting occurs at the Level 5 Org (example: FA4AA) and includes all Level 6 Orgs (example: M19631) that roll up to the L5. Once verified, the Dept. Reconciler will sign and date the Smartsheet and notify the Dept. Approver. The Dept. Approver will verify that all approvals have been captured and then sign and date the Smartsheet. Instructions for the L5 Org reconciler and approver are available on the Smartsheet Guide.

Principal Investigator (PI)
PIs shall review the financial activity for sponsored projects and certify that the results of the reconciliation(s) are reasonable and accurate. The review shall ensure that transactions are made for the intended purpose of the grant or contract, and in accordance with sponsor requirements as well as university policies and procedures for their sponsored funds. The PIs’ review shall include analysis of reconciling items and the appropriateness of the follow-up.

Principal investigator (PI) Steps

1. Review the work of the Department Reconciler ensuring that transactions are made for the intended purpose of the grant or contract, and in accordance with sponsor requirements as well as university policies and procedures for their sponsored funds.
2. Analyze the completeness and accuracy of Financial Transactions, reconciling items, and the appropriateness of the follow-up.
Organization Reconciliation Reports (MSTR)

New reports have been developed for reconciliation in MicroStrategy (MSTR). The Reconciliation Summary is a starting point and contains a summary by Org and Fund along with a breakdown of Revenue and Expense grouped by department. From this report you can easily link to the following documents:

Reconciliation Organization Summary for Department
- From the Reconciliation Summary document, click on an item in the Org L5 Dept column to open this report.
- Data: List of Orgs in the Department.
- Org Summary: View one “page” per Org (or tab if exported in Excel), select the Org using the drop down at the top.

Reconciliation Organization and Fund Labor and DE Detail
- From the Reconciliation Summary document, click on an item in the Org or Fund column to open this report.
- Data: Detail view of Revenue, Labor Encumbrances, Labor and DE.
- Org Summary: View one Org with multiple “pages” (or tabs if exported in Excel).

All three reports are listed in the Organization Reconciliation folder and can be accessed separately. Users can open the Reconciliation Summary and link to the other two report or access the Reconciliation Organization and Fund Labor and DE Detail and Reconciliation Organization Summary for Department documents directly.

Step by Step: Reconciliation Summary
1. Login to MicroStrategy using your Net ID and Patriot password. Additional information, including the login link for MicroStrategy is available at https://its.gmu.edu/service/microstrategy/.
2. Select Patriot Reporting > Shared Reports > Reconciliation > Organization Reconciliation.
3. And then Reconciliation Summary select. From this report you can also link to the other two documents – instructions are provided later on in this guide.
3. Enter the report parameters:
   a. Fiscal Year – the fiscal year you want to be included in the report. Note: 
      *Patriot Reporting* contains details for FY23 - forward. Use the 
      *Administrative Project* for FY22 and prior years.
   b. Start Fiscal Month Name – the beginning month for the transactions you 
      want to review. You can Search for the month or use the drop-down 
      arrow to select the desired month.
   c. End Fiscal Month Name – the ending month for the transactions you 
      want to review. These values may be the same if you are only viewing one 
      month. For example, to review the transaction for May only, select “May” 
      as the Start Fiscal Month Name and “May” as the End Fiscal Month Name.

   d. Click the “Save the answer when report is run” check box and Name give 
      the parameter a Name. This will allow you select the parameter the next 
      time you run the report.
   e. Click the “Set as Default” box if you would like this parameter to 
      automatically populate every time you run the report.

5. Once all parameters are set click “Run Report” at the bottom of the screen.

6. The report details are displayed. Users can edit the report by opening the Data tab, at the top of the document, 
   and selecting an option from the menu. A few items are 
   highlighted below.
   a. Add View Filter Condition – allows you to apply a Filter.
   b. Re-prompt – allows you to change the report 
      parameters (Fiscal year, Start/End Month).
   c. Swap Rows and Columns – will change the report view 
      so that the columns are displayed as rows.

7. Click on the Report Home tab to perform the following actions.
   a. Save – to save a static copy of the report.
   b. Share – to share a link to the report with other MSTR 
      users (login/access required).
   c. Export – to download the report using a specific file 
      type. Recommended Excel or PDF.
   d. Print – to print the report.
Reconciliation Organization Summary for Department

1. To open the Organization Summary for Department, click on an item in the Org L5 Dept column. (Example: FA4AA)
2. The report will open in a browser tab. The report includes a Data tab and a Summary tab. The Summary tab contains rollup information for the Org, Fund, and Account codes.

3. Users can toggle between various Orgs by using the Org dropdown at the top of the Summary page.
4. To Share, Print, Export, Save or Re-prompt the document, click on the top right menu to display options. Users should Export the document in order to add details for reconciliation.
5. Once Exported (Excel recommended, All Sheets, Expand Page-by), each Org will display on a separate tab. The Reconciler and/or Approver should add dollar amounts in the Adjustments field and comments in the Notes field to document any pending transaction or other adjustments not reflected.
6. As part of the reconciliation process the Reconciler and/or Approver should analyze the information presented in the Previous FY YTD Actual Amt column and the YTD Variances to Prior Year YTD.
7. After analysis, the Reconciler/Approver should add notes to explain any expected or unexpected results. Further analysis of Financial Transactions is available on the Reconciliation Organization and Fund Labor and DE Detail, detailed in the next section.
Reconciliation Organization and Fund Labor and DE Detail

1. To open the **Reconciliation Organization and Fund Labor and DE Detail**, click on an item in the **Org** column. (Example: M13263)

2. The report will open in a new browser tab. The results are displayed in a series of Tabs located at the top of the report.

3. The **Orgs List** is a summary of the selected Org(s). You can select which Orgs, Funds to view by clicking on the dropdown box next to the appropriate field.

4. The **Org Summary** is a breakdown of the total expenses for the Org. This includes a summary of Labor and Direct Expenses. You can remove columns by clicking on the top of the column and then selecting “Remove.”

5. The **Org Summary** also contains columns for user comments including: Adjustments, Notes, and Variance Explanation.

8. The **Revenue Detail** tab will display revenue transaction data for the selected Org. If there are no revenue transactions for the Org you will not see any data.

9. The **Labor Encumbrances** tab will display the labor encumbrance detail for the selected period and the selected Org.

10. The **Labor Detail** tab will display the labor details for the selected period and selected Orgs.

11. The **Direct Exp Detail** tab will display the direct expenditures for the selected period and the selected Org. You can select which Orgs, Funds to view by clicking on the dropdown box next to the appropriate field.
12. To download the report, select Export and then choose Excel, PDF, or HTML. We recommend downloading to Excel in order to record adjustments, make notes, and review variances and explain the variance in your analysis.

13. Click on Create Personal View, to add this report to your “My Subscriptions.”
   
   f. To access the report in the future, you can select the report from the My Subscriptions” folder by clicking on the report name.
   
   g. When the report is opened, you can then “Re-prompt” to the current fiscal year/month that you wish to reconcile.

14. To change the selected date range, go to the page menu and select “Re-prompt.” You will then be taken to the report parameters where you can change the Fiscal Year, Start Fiscal Month and End Fiscal Month. Once all changes have been made, click the “Run Report” button at the bottom of the page to run the new report parameters.