

Finance Commission

**Guide to Your SAFC Budget Application**

**Fall 2012**

**Note from the SA and SAFC**

Dear student leaders,

Cornell University has long prided itself on the campus involvement of its students and the part it takes in empowering that leadership. At the helm of that ideology lays the Student Assembly (SA), the university’s undergraduate student government, and the Student Assembly Finance Commission (SAFC), the SA Committee charged with allocating money to more than 800 undergraduate student organizations.

It is our job to ensure that your student organizations have access to a fair funding process so that you may each receive the money necessary for your student groups to contribute to campus life. Over the past year, the SA and SAFC have worked in tandem to create a new process which we feel will improve the efficiency of allocations, reduce the work that all parties will need to go through, and most importantly optimize the funding groups receive that is necessary to the running of their operations.

Inside this guide you will find a breakdown of the application process, line items that can be applied for, and where your organizations can find the help they need to ensure that no stone goes unturned. You will also find information dissecting two of the most important changes to the SAFC system which have occurred over the past year: changes to the hearing process and the creation of a tiered system. While completing your budget, it is not necessary for you to read this guide in its entirety; rather it is meant to be a tool and reference which you may use as is needed to ensure that your groups do not fall victim to administrative processes and receive the funding that they deserve.

Regards,

*The Student Assembly and the Student Assembly Finance Commission*

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# Introduction and Summary

**What is the Student Assembly Finance Commission?**

The Student Assembly Finance Commission is an independent organization chartered by the Student Assembly to allocate money to registered student organizations on campus. The Commission receives over $1,000,000 every year directly from students via the Student Activity Fee, which it then distributes among eligible student organizations through its allocation process. The Commission is headed by two co-chairs, and currently consists of approximately 30 commissioners.

**What is the Student Assembly?**

The Student Assembly is Cornell’s undergraduate student government, and is chartered by the university to improve student life and voice student concerns to the administration. Made up of 27 student representatives, the SA has legislative oversight over the Office of the Dean of Students and directs the allocation of the undergraduate Student Activity Fee. Student representatives communicate directly with senior administrators on a regular basis to advocate for the changes students want to see at the University.

The SA and SAFC work hand-in-hand, with the SAFC handling the actual allocation process while the SA exercises legislative oversight to ensure strategic leadership and, through an appeals process, the fair treatment of all groups. The SA’s committee with jurisdiction over student finances, the Appropriations Committee, is the primary reviewer of SAFC appeals, and the voting members of the Student Assembly must by majority vote approve all appeals and may overturn a recommendation of the Appropriations Committee by a 2/3 vote.

To learn more about the Student Assembly or to get involved with it on campus, please visit its website at [http://cornellsa.com](http://cornellsa.com/).

# Tier System

In the past, all groups applying for SAFC funding were eligible for the same level of funding and thus subjected to the same semester caps. In order to account for the fact that some organizations serve a greater portion of the Cornell undergraduate population due to their size or nature and thus require a higher level of funding, the SAFC has created a new tiered system. Under this system, groups will be placed in one of six tiers based on their historical spending record. (All new groups after the 2011-12 academic year will automatically begin in Tier 6.) The higher a group’s tier, the greater their cap will be for that semester. Each group will then be evaluated at the end of every academic year, resulting in the group moving down, moving up, or remaining in the same tier.

|  |
| --- |
| Sample Tier Cap System |
| Tier | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| Semester Cap | $4000 | $3000 | $2500 | $2000 | $1500 | $1000 |

**Mechanics for Changing Tiers**

At the end of each academic year, each group will be analyzed on two objective metrics:

* *Credit Score:* the percentage of funds that a group spends as a percent of the total funds they were allocated (eg. a group that was allocated $1000 in a semester and spent $800 would receive a credit score of 80%)
* *Tier Score:* the percentage of funds that a group spends as a percent of their tier cap (eg. a group that spent $800 in a semester and had a semester cap of $1600 would receive a tier score of 50%)

The group’s tier for the next year will be decided based on the following analysis:

* Credit score below X% in either semester: **group moves down one tier.**
* Credit score above X% in both semesters:
	+ Tier score below Y% in both semesters: **group remains in same tier.**
	+ Tier score above Y% in either semester: **group eligible to move up one tier.**

**Tier 6 Accelerated Movement Exception**

In an effort to help any Tier 6 groups (including new groups) advance tiers quickly, any group that is in Tier 6 and is then eligible to move up a tier for three consecutive years will automatically move an extra tier after the third year—thus placing them in Tier 2 (and eligible for Tier 1 the following year) after only three years.

**The Top Tier**

Tier 1, the tier with the highest cap, will be reserved for those organizations which the SAFC feels provide a necessary component to the student experience at Cornell. Thus, if a group is in Tier 2 and is eligible to move up one tier, it must submit an Organization Review Report to the SAFC. The SAFC will then subjectively decide whether the group should move up a tier based on the following criteria:

 ● membership ● awards and honors

 ● event attendance ● unique contribution to campus

 ● accessibility of events ● environmental conservation

**Appealing Tier Changes**

Since groups will be originally placed in tiers based on the objective criteria of past spending, appeals will not be taken for original tier placement. Similarly, groups not entering Tier 1 will be judged purely on the two objective metrics outlined above, and thus will not be able to appeal their end of year tier assessment.

However, if a group is eligible to enter Tier 1 and is not approved by the SAFC, they may appeal that decision to the Student Assembly Appropriations Committee which, after a hearing, will make a decision by majority vote. If the group disagrees with the ruling of the Appropriations Committee, they may appeal directly to the Student Assembly, who may overturn an Appropriations Committee decision by a 2/3 vote.

# The Application Process

The application process for each semester is as follows:

1. Groups will be placed into tiers, ranging from 1 to 6 (with 1 being the highest tier) and will be given an estimate of the maximum amount of funding any group within their tier will be eligible to receive that semester.[[1]](#footnote-1)
2. An [online application](https://assembly.cornell.edu/charon) is made available by the SAFC around the first day of classes.
3. Organizations submit their budgets with all line-item requests online, and then must submit any required supporting documentation in person by the supporting documents deadline specified by the commission.
4. The SAFC will review all submitted budgets and release preliminary results. The SAFC will notify groups of any documentation missing in their application which is required for them to receive funding. The SAFC will also notify groups if it has a question regarding an item that was requested. In either of the aforementioned cases, groups will be allowed the chance to schedule a hearing with the SAFC.
5. If the group chooses to attend a hearing, it will have the opportunity to submit additional supporting documentation or answer any questions the Commission has regarding an item the group requested funding for.
6. The SAFC will reconsider all preliminary determinations in light of new documentation presented by the group and mistakes on behalf of the SAFC substantiated in the hearing and incorporate any revised determinations into the organization’s final allocation.
7. Final allocations to all groups will be released. The SAFC will cap organization budgets at the maximum amount available to their tier in order to assure allocations do not exceed the funds which are available to be disbursed.
8. If an organization perceives that SAFC has erred in its allocation decision with respect to its Funding Guidelines, the organization may appeal to the Student Assembly, which will schedule a hearing with its Appropriations Committee.
9. All appeals will be approved or rejected by the Student Assembly at a general meeting.

**Help Sessions**

At the beginning of every academic year, the SAFC will alert a group of its tier placement for that year, and will provide an estimate as to what the cap for groups within that tier will be for each semester. Every August and January, the SAFC will then release the [online budget](https://assembly.cornell.edu/charon) applications for the upcoming semester. After the budget application is released online, the SAFC will hold a series of budget workshop presentations and answer organizations’ questions about SAFC policies and procedures, which will also be accompanied by help sessions during which organization officers may meet with commissioners to discuss questions specific to their own applications.

**Application**

Organizations must submit their completed budgets online before the scheduled date. When completing its budget online, organizations may also attach any required supporting documentation. If the group wishes, it may also submit a paper copy of any supporting documentation to the Office of Assemblies by 4:00 PM.

**Hearings and Final Allocations**

The SAFC will review each budget individually and determine whether or not to fund each line item based on its Funding Guidelines.

After all funding requests have been reviewed the SAFC will notify all groups of the results of the initial review of their applications without the application of tiered caps (note: this is not guaranteed to be the amount groups will receive; see “Caps” below).

The commission will also identify any errors that prevented full funding of requested items. These errors may fall into one of three categories:

a) failure to provide the necessary supporting documentation (eg. did not submit a Letter of Intent for a speaker engagement fee);

b) documentation that does not meet the SAFC requirements (eg. submitted an unverifiable word document to represent an email); or

c) an item that the SAFC does not fund (eg. video games).

After being notified of errors in their application, all groups which did not receive full funding will be offered the opportunity to attend a hearing with SAFC commissioners.
During this hearing, groups will be allowed to submit additional supporting documentation that had not previously been included in its original application. These additional submissions may correct errors (a) and (b) described above. The SAFC may also ask any questions it may have about a specific line item that was requested.

It is critical to note that while an organization may add supporting documentation to its application during a hearing to fix mistakes it has made, it **MAY NOT** add line items to its original application. Once the original online budget submission deadline has passed, a group may only request funding for a new line item via a special projects request.

After all groups have completed their hearings, the SAFC will re-review all budgets and decide upon final allocations. All groups will then be notified of their final allocations and the final amount they will receive after the cap for their tier has been applied.

**Caps**

In deciding original allocations the SAFC will first approve all eligible items which have sufficient supporting documentation. Thus if a group applies for 40 eligible items that cost $1,000 each and provides the appropriate documentation for each item, the total eligible expenses would be $40,000; however, this does not mean the group will receive $40,000.

After these “review amounts” are calculated, the SAFC will set a cap for how much funding organizations in each tier may receive and all groups that received amounts totaling more than the cap amount will be allocated up to the cap amount. Thus, if the semester cap is set at $2,500, a group that was allocated $9,500 will only receive $2,500 but a group that was allocated $2,000 will receive the full $2,000.

These caps are set by the SAFC on a semester-to-semester basis, and thus may vary from fall to spring or from year to year. Each semester, the cap set by the SAFC depends on two factors: the amount of funds available for the Commission to distribute amongst the organizations applying for funding and the reviewer amounts approved for each organization. Although the precise amount of the cap may vary somewhat between the fall and spring semester, the SAFC strives to minimize this variation.

# Budget

This section will go through each of the five funding categories a group may apply for. When completing your budget, you are encouraged to find the line item you are requesting and ensure that you are applying under the correct funding category.

**Supporting Documentation**

In an attempt to alleviate the difficulty of the funding process, the SAFC has significantly reduced the supporting documentation requirements for groups. There are only three remaining types of supporting documentation:

1. letter of intent for speakers, performers, or coaches;
2. proof of travel event and breakdown of associated costs; and
3. past publication copy or outline of new publication.

Please note that groups will no longer be required to submit price quotes, and thus may request any amount they wish for a line item. Since groups will only be reimbursed for the receipts they have, it is the group’s responsibility to request the appropriate level of funding. It is important to note that if a group requests more than they need and does not spend the money, it will hurt their credit score under the new tier system.

**Administrative Expenses**

The first category of SAFC funds is generally the smallest category funded—it consists of a maximum of $400 a year. In general these funds are intended to be used for supporting the basic functioning cost for meetings and operations.

*Common Line Items*

1. Copies and buckets of chalk for recruitment (maximum of $55 per semester)
2. Cornell Daily Sun ads for recruitment (max two 1/8th page ads per semester)
3. Willard Straight Hall mailbox

*Common Mistakes*

1. Applying for Daily Sun ads for a specific event under Administrative Expenses—any ads for specific events fall under the “Local Events” category
2. Using rates from the Daily Sun website for ads instead of the [*Negotiated Rates*](http://assembly.cornell.edu/SAFC/Guidelines?from=SAFCGuidelines.Home#NegotiatedRates)

**Local Events**
Local Events consist of funding for any costs related to events in the Ithaca area that a multitude of students can attend. All local events must meet the following requirements:

1. occur between the first and last day of classes;
2. occur on a weekday when classes are in session or a weekend that is not part of a university holiday (eg. Fall Break); and
3. NOT have a substantive purpose of:
	1. Conversion/worship;
	2. Influencing legislation;
	3. Partisan political activity;
	4. Raising funds for profit;
	5. Raising funds solely for charity; or
	6. Social activity.

*Common Line Items*

1. Venue fees for a program or performance
2. Venue fees to reserve a practice vicinity for athletic organizations
3. Engagement Fee for speakers, performers, or coaches (requires Letter of Intent)
4. Transportation expenses for speakers, performers, or coaches
5. Lodging and meals for speakers or performers
6. Material and supply expenses essential for the event
7. Quarter cards/copies and/or chalk for local events (max $20)
8. Media rental or copyright fees

*Common Mistakes*

1. Using documentation that is not sufficient for a Proof of Contact
2. Requesting funds for event materials that are not reusable (including food)
3. Applying for funds to purchase items for a performance instead of renting them

**Travel Events**

The third category of funding consists of all expenses related to student travel to conferences and tournaments.

All travel events must meet the following requirements:

1. be located outside the municipal limits of Tompkins Country, New York;
2. occur between the first day of classes and the last day of exams for the semester in which it occurs;
3. be organized and hosted by another institution; and
4. not be a retreat in which group members partake in team building, training activities, and other activities which do not further the purpose of the group.

In addition no money will be funded for food or social activities if the expenses can be separated from the eligible expenses (eg. a hotel fee including a complimentary breakfast can be covered but breakfast can be ordered at additional charge).

All line items pertaining to a travel event will require the submission of supporting documentation which both:

1. confirms the existence of the event and includes dates, location, and the host; and
2. includes a breakdown of costs associated with the event.

*Common Line Items*

1. Transportation costs ($0.063 per person per mile)
2. Lodging costs (max $15/night)
3. Participation or registration fees
4. Material and supply expenses essential to participate in the event

*Common Mistakes*

1. Forgetting to include documentation confirming the existence of the event
2. Not including a breakdown of costs for the event
3. Requesting funding for an executive board retreat or social event

**Durable Goods**

Durable goods are items that support activities of a group that could not be funded as local events, travel events, or publications and have an expected useful life of at least one year.

The following items are prohibited and will not be funded by the commission under any circumstances:

1. any item purchased for personal use; including items intended as giveaways;
2. any item which duplicates functionality or service already provided on campus;
3. any item used to produce publicity items;
4. office goods;
5. media for physical copying or production of music or video;
6. hardware, software, or video games;
7. refrigerators; or
8. flash drives and hard-drives.

*Common Line Items*

1. Equipment
2. Books, periodicals, magazines, videos, CDs, and DVDs
3. Repairs to previously purchased durable goods

*Common Mistakes*

1. Not providing a location to store the good that is on-campus
2. Applying for items that have a useful life of less than one year

**Publications**

The final category of funding is for the production of publications for distribution to the entire campus community. In total, the commission will fund a maximum of $2500 per semester for the production of a publication.

All line items pertaining to a publication request will be require supporting documentation of either a past copy of the publication or, in instances of a new publication, an outline of the first issue.

*Common Line Items*

1. Publications

*Common Mistakes:*

1. Forgetting to include a past copy of the publication or an outline for a new one
2. Requesting money for publicity materials under publications (should fall under Administrative Expenses for recruitment or Local Events if for a specific event)

# Appeals

**Appropriations Committee**

After final allocations have been released by the SAFC, if an organization perceives an adverse and arbitrary or unfair determination with respect to its Funding Guidelines it may appeal to the Student Assembly (SA). First, the organization will present its case to the Appropriations Committee of the SA. The organization will be required to make a quick opening statement presenting its case and all relevant facts to the situation, and members of the committee will ask officers from the organization questions. After the hearing, the committee will decide whether or not the SAFC erred with respect to the Funding Guidelines and if the original decision should be overturned.

**Student Assembly**

If the group still disagrees with the decision of the Appropriations Committee, they may appeal directly to the SA. During a general meeting a collection of all decisions made by the committee will be presented to the Student Assembly in the form of a single resolution at the end of the appeals process, and the SA will have the opportunity to overturn any decision by a 2/3 vote. Groups wishing to voice their opinion about a decision made by the Appropriations Committee may be given speaking time at that meeting. Once the Student Assembly passes the resolution, all SAFC allocations for that semester will be finalized.

# Changes to Your Budget

**Special Projects**

Special projects are intended to allow organizations to request funds for new and special circumstances. This includes either additional funding for expenses in the original budget or for completely new items.

After the commission allocates to all groups for a given semester, it takes all leftover money along with a small percentage that was set aside at the beginning of the allocation process and creates the fund that students can pull from for special projects. Special projects are intended to support students who had unforeseen costs during the original allocation period, or had line items which they could not (at the time) provide full documentation for.

In order to be eligible for a special projects request, groups must provide proof that the line item they are applying for could not have been applied for a the beginning of the semester due to circumstances which were not at the time known (along will all normal requirements for that line item).[[2]](#footnote-2)

**Unused Funds/Transfer Requests**

If you do receive funding for a line-item but you no longer wish to spend money on that line-item, wish to spend more money on another line-item which is more important to your organization and covered by a different category of SAFC-supported expenses, or are no longer able to spend money on that line-item, you can use a [transfer request](http://assembly.cornell.edu/SAFC/CosponsorshipForm) to move money from one category to another. This must be done before money can be spent on that item.

# What to Do If You Don’t Receive Funding

**Special Projects Request**

While special projects are normally intended to provide groups with funding for items that were unforeseen during the original allocation period[[3]](#footnote-3), the SA and SAFC passed a clause in the Spring of 2010 which allows groups to use the special projects clause as a last resort if they were not able to receive SAFC funding for errors such as forgetting to submit the original online application.

In order to be eligible for this special clause of special projects, groups must meet either of the following requirements:

1. received $0 in funding from the SAFC this semester; or
2. only received funding in the “Administrative Expenses” category this semester.

If a group meets either of these requirements, they will be allowed to use a special projects request for one line item in one category for the semester. This was a process to ensure that groups which completely missed the deadline were not completely left without funding and would at least be able to fund their most important expense for the semester.

It is important to note a critical distinction: this rule cannot be used by groups who applied for funding for a line item which the SAFC rejected because it does not fund that item (eg. a group that gets rejected for video games in their original application will not get funded if they apply for the same video games in a special projects).

**Other Sources of Funding On-Campus**

Even a group does not receive funding from the SAFC, there are still a multiplicity of funding options available on campus. Depending on the type of event you are holding and the mission statement of your organization, there are a host of by-line funded and university supported outlets from which students can receive funding. The full list of these options can be found [here](http://assembly.cornell.edu/SAFC/OtherSources).

# Contact Information

**Student Assembly Finance Commission**

Brandon Coulter ???

SAFC Co-Chair SAFC Co-Chair

bgc35@cornell.edu abc123@cornell.edu

Please direct all general SAFC inquiries about budgets, spending funds, application status, or allocations to safc@cornell.edu, which assures a response within one business day.

**Student Assembly**

Adam Gitlin ???

SA President SA VP Finance

sa-president@assembly.cornell.edu sa-vpfinance@assembly.cornell.edu

Questions regarding appeals after they have been processed should be directed towards SA Vice President of Finance \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

**Administration**

Resource Center

Main Lobby, Willard Straight Hall

(607) 255- 9610

All supporting document submissions, forms, and other material transactions occur at the Willard Straight Hall Resource Center.

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1. To learn more about the SAFC’s new tier system, please see page X. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. There does in fact exist another use for special projects that is meant for groups which were not able to apply for any funding at all due to missing the deadline for the original online application; this is discussed under ***What to Do If You Don’t Receive Funding***. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Please see *Changes to Your Application, Special Projects* on page X. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)