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COVID-19 Update

CARES Act—FAQs about SBA's PPP Loans; Impact on UMC Organizations

April 28, 2020

The following frequently asked questions relate to *Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loans* from the Small Business Administration (SBA) under the federal **Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act** (CARES Act).

Q1: Our local church/annual conference/general agency/organization received PPP loan proceeds from our bank. Can the loan be forgiven?

A1: Yes. According to the [regulations from the SBA](#) (SBA Rule), the amount of loan forgiveness can be up to the full principal amount of the loan and any accrued interest, *if the borrower uses all of the loan proceeds for “forgivable purposes” and employee and compensation levels are maintained.*

Q2: What are “forgivable purposes”? Which costs qualify for forgiveness?

A2: The following costs incurred during the eight-week period following the date of the loan (the date the lender approved the loan) will qualify for loan forgiveness:

- Total amount of payroll costs (Payroll Costs)
- Payments of *interest* on mortgage obligations that were incurred **before February 15, 2020**
- Rent payments on leases dated **before February 15, 2020**
- Utility payments under service agreements dated **before February 15, 2020**

However, no more than 25% of the loan forgiveness amount can be non-Payroll Costs. The SBA determined that the non-payroll portion of forgiven loans should be limited to preserve employment.

NOTE: The SBA has stated it will issue additional guidance on PPP loan forgiveness. We expect such guidance soon. We hope that this guidance also will include more information about what it means to maintain employee and compensation levels, as this is not addressed currently. We will review and analyze this guidance as soon as it is published, and will update this document.

Q3: What constitutes Payroll Costs that are eligible for PPP loan forgiveness?

A3: Employers' Payroll Costs eligible for loan forgiveness *include*:

- *Compensation* (salary, wages, commissions or similar compensation) to employees whose principal place of residence is the United States
- *Cash tips or the equivalent*
- *Vacation, parental, family, medical or sick leave payments*
- *Severance or separation pay*
- *Payments for employee benefits* consisting of:
 - Group health care coverage, including insurance premiums
 - Retirement benefits
- *Payment of state and local taxes* assessed on compensation of employees

Payroll Costs **do not include**:

- *Employer's share of Social Security taxes* (FICA)
- *Compensation in excess of an annual salary of \$100,000* paid to any employee
- *Compensation of any employee whose principal residence is outside the U.S.*
- *Qualified sick and family leave wages covered by tax credits under the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA)*

Q4: Are clergy housing allowance costs included in Payroll Costs (i.e., eligible for loan forgiveness)?

A4: Yes, we believe so. The Department of Treasury (Treasury) has been regularly updating its published [frequently asked questions](#) (Treasury FAQs), to clarify certain aspects of the PPP. The following Q&A (#32) is now included in the Treasury FAQs:

Question: *Does the cost of a housing stipend or allowance provided to an employee as part of compensation count toward payroll costs?*

Answer: *Yes. Payroll costs include all cash compensation paid to employees, subject to the \$100,000 annual compensation per employee limitation.*

Before that answer was added to the Treasury FAQs, there was anecdotal evidence that some lenders had taken the position that a housing allowance should *not* be included, as it is not expressly described in the CARES Act or in the SBA Rule. How this is treated may vary from bank to bank, and some may still argue that a housing allowance provided to clergy cannot be included, even though the Treasury FAQs do not include such a limitation.

Q5: Are the following employer expenses included in Payroll Costs (i.e., eligible for loan forgiveness):

- **Comprehensive Protection Plan (CPP) premiums?**
- **Employer-paid premiums for other welfare benefits, such as life insurance or disability income insurance (i.e., through a plan like UMLifeOptions or from a commercial insurer)?**

A5: Probably not. At this time, it looks like these costs will not be eligible for loan forgiveness. The CARES Act and SBA Rule describe only *group health plan costs/premiums* and *retirement plan contributions* as employee benefits costs that are considered Payroll Costs for PPP loan forgiveness. Premiums for welfare plan benefits, like CPP or UMLifeOptions, are neither retirement nor group health benefits. Unless further guidance from the SBA clarifies that welfare plan costs are Payroll Costs, it is safer to assume they are not eligible.

Q6: Can you include Payroll Costs that are incurred “with respect to” the eight-week forgiveness period but not yet paid? For example, would accrued costs for employee benefits (such as retirement plan contributions) be eligible Payroll Costs if they are accrued during the eight-week forgiveness period but not remitted until later in the year, after the eight-week forgiveness period ends (e.g., at the end of a month, quarter or year)?

A6: The answer is unclear at this time. We would encourage you to wait for additional guidance on forgiveness from the SBA, as such guidance may clarify this question. We expect additional guidance to be published soon.

Q7: Can our annual conference choose to delay the HealthFlex premium deferral that Wespath is allowing to a later time (e.g., after our eight-week period) to maximize the loan forgiveness amount?

A7: No. Under the deferral opportunity for HealthFlex premiums, normal May premium payments will be deferred until August, and June premium payments will be deferred until September.

Q8: In order to maximize the loan forgiveness amount, can our annual conference pay HealthFlex premiums during the eight-week forgiveness period despite the deferral of those premiums offered by Wespath?

A8: Yes. You can forgo the HealthFlex premium deferral and make payments in May and June.

Q9: Could our annual conference pay a portion of the HealthFlex premiums during our eight-week forgiveness period, for example for the conference office staff to whom our PPP loan relates, while benefiting from the HealthFlex deferral period for our other covered lives (e.g., clergy and staff at local churches)?

A9: Yes. The annual conference could split the premium payment as described in this question.

Q10: Are moving expense reimbursements considered eligible Payroll Costs? If we pay moving expense reimbursements during the eight-week forgiveness period, is that amount forgivable?

A10: The answer is unclear at this time. Moving expense reimbursements do not seem to fall within the CARES Act’s or SBA Rule’s definitions of Payroll Costs.

However, [new guidance from the SBA about calculating maximum loan amounts](#) indicates in question 7 that nonprofits can use the amount of Payroll Costs in line 5c—column 1 of *Form 941*. For other nonprofits, this line of *Form 941* would include moving expense reimbursements. It would follow that if these reimbursements can be included in calculation of the total loan amount, and the total PPP loan amount can be “fully forgiven,” then moving expense reimbursements should also be included in the loan forgiveness amount. Moreover, Treasury’s answer to the housing allowance question (Q&A #4 above) seems to support treating moving expense reimbursements as Payroll Costs (i.e., eligible for loan forgiveness), as that answer indicates that Payroll Costs includes “all cash compensation paid to employees, subject to the \$100,000 annual compensation per employee limitation.”

Q11: Could a PPP recipient employer *increase* salaries, employer retirement plan contributions, or the employer share of health plan premiums for the period of the PPP loan in order to increase what it spends on Payroll Costs (and, as a result, maximize the forgivable amount)?

A11: The answer is unclear at this time. There does not appear to be a prohibition on these actions in the text of the CARES Act or the SBA Rule published to date. However, there are numerous references and applicants' certifications in the CARES Act and the SBA Rule to "maintaining" Payroll Costs, which might be read to limit a loan recipient's ability to include increased Payroll Costs when calculating the forgivable amount.

We encourage you to wait for additional guidance on forgiveness from the SBA, as such guidance may clarify this question. We expect additional guidance to be published soon,

Q12: If a PPP recipient employer sequesters the PPP loan proceeds in a separate bank account (for tracking purposes), would it be reasonable to continue to have Payroll Cost EFTs and disbursements run through the employer's usual bank account (because, for example, vendors' contracts, account links and checks are already set up for that account), but then use the account with the PPP loan funds to reimburse the regular payroll bank account periodically?

A12: Generally speaking, cash is fungible. The account in which the dollars are kept and which dollars are used to fulfill payroll is less relevant than the accounting process to demonstrate that the PPP funds ultimately are used predominantly for Payroll Costs. In any case, PPP loan recipients should maintain meticulous records of how the loan proceeds are used to support the recipient's request for forgiveness. The setup described in the question may not be necessary for the loan funds, but may be helpful in documenting how the loan proceeds are used.

Q13: Can the government audit a UMC annual conference, local church or other organization that receives PPP loan funds?

A13: Possibly. In the SBA's [FAQs for faith-based organizations](#), the SBA states: "[r]eceipt of a loan through any SBA program constitutes *Federal financial assistance* and carries with it the application of certain nondiscrimination obligations." The SBA also states: "[a]ny legal obligations that you incur through your receipt of this loan are not permanent, and once the loan is paid or forgiven, those nondiscrimination obligations will no longer apply." Additionally, the SBA Rules state: "All loans guaranteed by the SBA pursuant to the CARES Act will be made consistent with constitutional, statutory, and regulatory protections for religious liberty, including the First Amendment to the Constitution, the Religious Freedom Restoration Act..."

But, when a nonprofit receives "Federal financial assistance" and expends more than \$750,000 in federal dollars in a year, the organization is most likely required to have an independent financial audit referred to as a "Single Audit." The [Single Audit Act of 1984, as amended in 1996](#), seeks to ensure organizations receiving federal grants use the funds in compliance with the federal government's requirements. The SBA's PPP guidance so far has been silent about the question of audits; and mainly has allowed lenders to rely on certification by, and financial information from, borrowers, without requiring the lenders to do significant examination or independent underwriting or verification. Recently, the PPP has drawn negative attention from lawmakers and media related to loan recipients that were not necessarily intended to be beneficiaries of the program (e.g., some large national restaurant chains and some publicly traded companies). This pushback may lead to additional scrutiny of the program in the future.

MORE INFORMATION

Earlier information about PPP loans for local churches and other UMC organizations is available online:

- [Application form and guidance](#)
- [CARES Act summary](#) (see pp. 11-13 for PPP info)

Wespath and GCFA continue to closely monitor developments related to COVID-19. Please check these webpages for periodic updates:

- [General Council on Finance and Administration](#)
- [Wespath Benefits and Investments](#)

The information above should not be considered legal or tax advice. Plan participants, annual conferences, local churches, or other employers or parties affiliated with The United Methodist Church (UMC) should consult with counsel in considering the application of the CARES Act to their circumstances.

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