

TRAVEL

In order to eliminate travel voucher errors and facilitate payment, following are general information and guidelines for temporary duty travel:

Employees should use form OK-FNM-1 Meeting Attendance Request to request approval to attend conferences and meetings. All state travel (including in-state meetings) and any national meetings or conferences must be approved by the State Conservationist. Approval to attend or hold a meeting does not constitute authority for attendees to travel. If travel authorization is necessary, attach a Travel Information Sheet to the OK-FNM-1 sent to your supervisor. If compensatory travel time is being requested, a request for Overtime/Compensatory Time should also be attached. **It remains the employee's responsibility to ensure a travel authorization is in place prior to travel.**

A government issued travel credit card is required to book all airline tickets and lodging, and should be used for other travel related expenses such as lodging and meals. Please refer to section on Travel Cards for further information.

Per FTR 301-10.8, if when mixing leisure travel with official travel, a traveler chooses to travel by an indirect route or interrupt travel by a direct route for personal convenience, reimbursement will be limited to the cost of travel by a direct route or on an interrupted basis. The government contract fare or, if unavailable, the airfare most advantageous to the Government is applicable only to the official travel portions. The traveler is ineligible for any per diem for personal days taken in conjunction with official travel. In most cases, a reconstructed travel voucher will need to be submitted. For more information on reconstructed travel please contact FNM.

The meeting attendance form, a travel information sheet, instruction sheets for completing travel vouchers for domestic travel, and SCS-FNM-72 Meeting Approval Request can be accessed on the internet at <http://www.ok.nrcs.usda.gov/intranet/fnm/forms.html>

Travelers are to travel the most prudent (cost effective) and efficient for the government, not necessarily for the traveler's convenience.

LODGING AND PER DIEM

Employees are responsible for ascertaining applicable per diem rates for travel locations prior to traveling. Per diem consists of lodging costs plus a fixed rate for meals and incidental expenses (M&IE) such as tips. GSA sets the per diem rate. The maximum lodging rate is the basic lodging charge before taxes. Zone Clerks, section secretaries, or financial management should be able to provide information on per diem rates or rates may be found at the following web site: www.gsa.gov click on Travel Resources, then under Travel Resources, click on Domestic Per Diem Rates. GSA may change rates at any time; therefore, all travelers are advised to always check rates prior to traveling.

When the Government furnishes meals at nominal or no cost, or meals are included in registration fees or lodging cost; the appropriate amount should be deducted from M&IE. Complimentary meals offered by hotels and airlines do not have to be deducted. These rates may be found at the following web site: www.gsa.gov click on Travel Resources, then under Travel Resources, click on Meals & Incidental Expenses Breakdown.

The Federal Travel Regulations (FTR) state that per diem will not be paid within the corporate limits of an employee's official duty station. Departmental Regulations and State policy further states: "Per diem may not be paid for travel of more than one calendar day when travel is performed within a 35 mile radius of either the employee's official duty station location or residence."

For example, if an employee whose duty station is in Pawnee is working on a EWP project 28 miles away in Stillwater, and stays overnight at the hotel in Stillwater, the employee is not eligible for per diem.

Another example, if an employee whose duty station is Pauls Valley and residence is Purcell, is working on a EWP project in Norman, the employee cannot claim per diem for an overnight stay in Norman. Even though the distance from the employee's duty station in Pauls Valley to Norman is 40 miles, the distance from the employee's residence in Purcell to Norman is only 22 miles. The employee can request temporary approval to park a GOV at his or her residence, or at the nearest field office, by submitting form AD-728 through supervisory channels for approval by the State Conservationist.

The Chief of NRCS must pre-approve any requests for a waiver to allow per diem for travel of more than one day within a 35 mile radius of an employee's duty station. Please send any requests for waivers through appropriate channels to the State Administrative Officer to be forwarded to NHQ.

A special travel authorization is required to authorize the higher lodging rates exceeding the CONUS rate. The authority to authorize the higher rate is not delegated below the state budget officer. Approval must be obtained in advance and will be on a case-by-case basis. Please submit written requests, justification, and documentation that the traveler has tried at least three other hotels, with a statement of overwhelming need to stay at that particular hotel to your office assistant or state office secretary for forwarding to financial management. Just because a block of rooms has been reserved for a conference or meeting, the traveler is not obligated to stay at that hotel especially if the lodging is not within the allowable CONUS rate. The need for networking does not constitute an overwhelming need; however, a management conference that has been arranged where lodging must be procured at a prearranged place and ALL participants are REQUIRED to stay there does. Your travel arranger can assist you in obtaining a list of hotels for your travel location.

Employees are also reminded that **when a federal employee rents a lodging room directly from the proprietor, he or she becomes liable for the amount of the room rental, including tax.** There is no valid Federal tax exempt certificate for this purpose. Several states, cities, and local municipalities (as the taxing jurisdiction) do offer their own tax-exempt lodging to Federal employees while in travel status. For example, Texas offers this type of tax exemption. Oklahoma City offers a tax exemption for hotel tax only. This

form must be presented at check-in and can be accessed under www.gsa.gov It remains the hotel's option whether or not to honor this tax exemption.

Lodging taxes should be vouchered separately from lodging costs. Actual costs for lodging taxes are to be claimed as a miscellaneous expense in the "Supplies" line on the back of the voucher. If the employee elects to stay at a hotel that exceeds the maximum lodging costs authorized, the taxes are to be prorated to the maximum lodging rate. An itemized receipt showing lodging expenses is to be included with the travel voucher.

Employees accompanied by family members sharing the same hotel room are limited to reimbursement for a single room.

GovTrip

Employees are required to use our travel management center, **GovTrip** for booking common carrier transportation, out of state hotel/motel accommodations and rental cars **except** in the following situations:

- Any travel for which advance reservations are impractical, e.g., when a traveler is on the road and does not know where lodging will be available (most in-state travel will fall under this exception).
- For travel situations where only a rental car is needed, travelers may deal directly with the appropriate company.
- Hotel accommodations for a conference, seminar, etc., where the sponsoring organization has arranged for special rate and ensured that the facility complies with the Hotel and Motel Fire Safety Act's (HMFSa) standards.

Employees are **not** to book their own travel through GovTrip, they are to contact their travel arranger to book their travel through GovTrip.

AIRLINE TRAVEL

GSA negotiates a contract with airlines for travel on frequently used flights between certain cities. These are called contract city-pairs. Government travelers are required to use a contract city-pair fare if available. City pairs can be access at www.gsa.gov under Travel Resources.

Use of non-refundable airline tickets must be pre-approved by Financial Management.

Approval will be considered on a case by case basis only. Please contact Financial Management for approval procedures prior to booking non-refundable airfare.

Promotional items, including frequent flyer miles earned on official travel may be retained for personal use if such items are obtained under the same conditions offered to the general public at no additional cost to the government. Each traveler is responsible for handling personal frequent flyer mileage accounts. **Travelers may not select airlines or other travel services based upon frequent flyer programs or other promotional items.**

Travelers are still expected to select the method and the time of travel most advantageous to the government. For example, travelers should travel within their tour of duty as much as possible. When flying, GovTrip should be queried to ascertain the most cost effective travel. For example, since Stillwater is centrally located between OKC and Tulsa, the cost of traveling from either airport is determined. The traveler should be prudent and fly on the most cost advantage flight. If the traveler chooses the more expensive flight, then the traveler should not be reimbursed for the difference in cost.

TRAVEL VOUCHERS

General

Travelers are required to submit travel voucher AD 616 within 5 days of completion of trip, or every 30 days if employee is in continuous travel status. All travel vouchers must be typed or prepared LEGIBLY in ink (pencil is not acceptable). Travelers and approving officials must make sure to include the date that they signed the travel voucher. Signatures must be original and in ink. There can be only one purpose code and one travel authorization number per voucher.

Approving officials should review expenses claimed on employee travel vouchers to ensure agency guidelines are followed by employees.

Employees should review vouchers. When the employee signs the voucher, they are certifying that all expenses are legitimate and meet agency regulations and guidelines.

Laundry, cleaning and pressing of clothing may be charged as a reimbursable miscellaneous expense. A minimum of four consecutive nights lodging is required to qualify for reimbursement.

POV mileage rates are 0.50 cents per mile government advantage rate and 28.5 cents per mile personal preference.

Itemized receipts are required for lodging and for any expenses costing over \$75. Credit card receipts are not sufficient for vouchering.

Skycap charges (checking in baggage at sidewalk) are covered in per diem incidentals, therefore not reimbursable.

Travelers can be reimbursed for tip to courtesy transportation of \$1 each way.

Travelers may not be reimbursed for taxi service where there is suitable government or transportation service or courtesy shuttle.

Tipping is reimbursable when a taxi ride is necessary to perform Government Business only, considered maximum of 15%.

Telephone Calls

DR 2300-3 established policy on authorized telephone calls of a personal nature while in travel status. Reimbursement for telephone calls of a personal nature is authorized when an employee travels for more than one night, i.e., two or more nights on government business, to the employee's residence to speak to members of the immediate family. The total amount that may be approved for each travel period cannot exceed an amount equal to \$5.00 multiplied by the number of lodging nights. Reimbursement should be claimed ONLY if calls are made as outlined in DR2300-3. The \$5 phone call is not an automatic entitlement for employees on travel status. Travelers are to be prudent with government funds.

For the purpose of authorized telephone calls of a personal nature, immediate family includes spouse, minor children, and anyone sharing the same residence with the employee. The total amount that may be approved for each travel period cannot exceed an amount equal to \$5 multiplied by the number of lodging nights. For those without immediate family at the official duty station, a maximum of one telephone call per week is permitted to a non-family member within the employee's local duty station's immediate commuting area not to exceed \$5. The local duty station's immediate commuting area is defined as the area for which an employee regularly commutes.

If dependent minor children or dependent family members who are physically unable to stay alone are moved to a location away from the official duty station's immediate commuting area, authorized telephone calls of a personal nature may be made to this alternate location. The total amount cannot exceed an amount equal to \$5 multiplied by the number of lodging nights.

Rental Vehicles

Travelers can use a commercially leased vehicle at government expense only if the agency determines that use of the rental vehicle is advantageous to the government. The use of a rental vehicle must be requested on the Travel Information Sheet attached to the employee's OK-FNM-1 Meeting Attendance Request and must be accompanied by a written justification of need for a rental vehicle. Use of a rental vehicle must be specifically pre-authorized by the appropriate State Leadership Team member. Please see section on "Vehicle Use" for further information. Travelers should return cars with a full tank to the rental company. A prudent traveler would not expect the government to pay to fill the tank at \$6 a gallon by the car rental company.

GOVERNMENT SPONSORED MEETINGS, TRAINING, OR CONFERENCES

NRCS policy and procedures for sponsoring meetings, training, or conferences is contained in the General Manual, Title 250 Financial Management, Part 406. The following two paragraphs are from Part 406.0 Policy.

“All conferences, meetings and seminars called by NRCS will be held at the most cost-effective location (considering such factors as meals, lodging, transportation, and rental of conference rooms), all within the allotted Per Diem rate, unless programmatic considerations dictate otherwise.”

“If a meeting of seven or more employees requires the payment of transportation expenses, a cost-benefit analysis must be conducted and kept on file. At a minimum, this analysis shall contain the name and duty location of each employee, the estimated total travel costs for each employee, other expected expenses (meeting room rental, etc.), and a justification for choosing the meeting site over at least three other reasonable sites.”

Only the State Conservationist may approve conferences, meetings and seminars costing \$7,500 or less. Oklahoma employees responsible for planning a meeting of seven or more employees requiring the payment of transportation and travel expenses costing \$7,500 or less must submit a completed SCS-FNM-72 Meeting Approval Request through the appropriate SLT member to the State Conservationist for approval. Copies of approved requests will be returned to the originating office and the SLT member. The original approval and supporting documentation will be maintained by Financial Management.

Meetings, training, or conferences costing more than \$7,500 must be sent to the State Conservationist for concurrence and submission to NHQ. All requests for meetings, training, or conferences costing more than \$7,500 should be submitted to the State Conservationist at least 6 months in advance. Please contact Financial Management for assistance if estimated meeting costs exceed \$7,500.

All forms referenced can be accessed on the internet at <http://www.ok.nrcs.usda.gov/intranet/fnm/forms.html>.