



NIH Traveler's Guide



PREFACE

This Traveler's Guide has been developed with the specific purpose of providing you, the traveler, with a condensed pocket version of the NIH Travel Policies and Procedures. Additional information about these policies and procedures can be referenced in the NIH Manual Issuance 1500 at the following Web Site:

<http://www3.od.nih.gov/oma/manualchapters/management/1500>

A copy of this Traveler's Guide can also be accessed electronically on the following OFM Web Site:

<http://www4.od.nih.gov/ofm/travel>

We hope you will find this Guide "user friendly". It provides you with the basic rules and regulations that apply when you travel on official Government business for the NIH.

This Guide has been developed by individuals representing the Extramural Administrative Officers Travel Committee, the OFM/Assistant Director for Finance, and the OD/Office of Human Resources Management.

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Acronyms

ACH.....	Automated Clearing House
AEA	Actual Expense Allowance
AO.....	Administrative Officer
ATM	Automated Teller Machine
CONUS.....	Continental United States
CLA	Conference Lodging Allowance
FTR.....	Federal Travel Regulations
GSA	General Services Administration
GTA	Government Transportation Account
JFTR	Joint Federal Travel Regulations
M&IE.....	Meals and Incidental Expenses
NIHITS	NIH Integrated Training System
NTE.....	Not to Exceed
OCONUS.....	Outside Continental United States
OMA	Office of Management Assessment
OMS.....	Occupational Medical Services
POV	Privately Owned Vehicle
TO.....	Travel Order
TDY	Temporary Duty
TMC.....	Travel Management Center

Introduction

This booklet represents a condensed version of the NIH Manual Issuance 1500, Travel Policies, and Procedures. It is intended for the use of individuals who travel on behalf of the Federal Government in the performance of their official duties. The information, guidance, and instructions highlighted in this booklet will assist the traveler by answering commonly asked questions pertaining to all facets of travel. (For further information, access the aforementioned NIH Manual Issuance on the OMA website.)

If there are any differences between this pocket guide and the Federal Travel Regulations (FTR) or the Joint Federal Travel Regulations (JFTR), the applicable regulations take precedent.

Prudent Person Rule

An individual traveling on official business is expected to exercise the same care in incurring expenses that a prudent person would exercise if traveling on personal business. Excessive cost, circuitous routes, delays, luxury accommodations, and services unnecessary or unjustified in the performance of official business are not acceptable under this standard. Travelers will be responsible for any additional expenses incurred for personal preference or convenience. (FTR 301-1.3)

General Policy

It is the policy of the NIH to reimburse travelers, within the limits prescribed by law and Government-wide regulations, for expenses necessarily incurred in carrying out official business. Expenses which exceed the maximum per diem rates should be justified and authorized **prior** to travel, or may be approved subsequent to the trip under unusual circumstances. This booklet basically covers TDY travel in the 48 contiguous States and the District of Columbia only. Travel to Alaska, Hawaii, US possessions, and foreign countries involve additional instructions, and should be discussed with travel support staff in your area.

Planning/Lead Time

All travel requests should be submitted by travelers to allow enough time for necessary clearances and for travel arrangements to be made. The following minimum lead times are recommended: Domestic (CONUS) Travel, two weeks; Foreign Travel, six weeks.

Foreign travel often requires obtaining passports, Visas, clearances at several levels within DHHS and NIH. You must allow sufficient time for these processes to occur.

Authority to Travel

A travel order (TO) must be issued and approved by the appropriate authorizing official and Administrative Officer (AO) before travel can be performed (except local travel). The TO identifies the purpose of travel, itinerary, transportation authorized, estimated per diem allowance, registration fee and authorized travel advance, as well as special restrictions that may be placed on you and special allowances, e.g. a rental car or annual leave in conjunction with travel.

Travel Funding

Travel advance

Travelers may be approved for an advance of funds to cover estimated out-of-pocket expenses. Advances may be obtained via the Government-issued travel charge card (ATM), or direct deposit through the ADB. Consult with your travel support staff or administrative office for further information regarding travel advances.

Government-issued travel charge card

Any employee who travels, or anticipates traveling on official business more than one trip per year must obtain a Government charge card. This card is to be used for **official travel expenses incurred by the cardholder only**. Examples of appropriate uses of the card are as follows:

- hotel/motel accommodations
- restaurant bills
- automobile rental
- common carrier passenger tickets
- travel advances, using the ATM

Your Travel Coordinator can assist you by processing applications, answering questions, and providing you with information on related features of the card. Your Coordinator is

(name)_____ (phone)_____.

Travel expense reimbursement

Within **five workdays** after your trip, a travel voucher should be prepared and submitted through your administrative office. The voucher is used to document the expenses you incurred during your travel. The following receipts are required:

- airline ticket
- lodging
- registration fees
- all other receipts for expenses in excess of \$75

Once your travel support staff has received the necessary information detailing your expenses, they will prepare an electronic travel voucher. If you are due monies, a direct deposit reimbursement will be made to your financial institution. If you owe NIH, write a check payable to “National Institutes of Health” with the travel order number cited, and attach to the voucher.

Note: If your spouse or family accompanies you on TDY travel for personal benefit, any additional cost incurred must be paid by you. You may only claim the single room occupancy rate for lodging, which should be stated on the receipt. The traveler is responsible for making any travel or transportation arrangements on behalf of a spouse or family member.

Local Travel

Definition

Local travel is defined as travel expenses incurred within a 35-mile radius of the employee’s official duty station or residence. Washington DC, Baltimore City, Frederick MD, and Alexandria VA are considered local travel areas. In rare and justifiable circumstances, per diem may be authorized for travel within the local commuting area via a travel order.

Requirements for local travel

Travel orders are not required for local travel; however, prior written or verbal approval by your authorizing official may be necessary. Expenses may be reimbursed via a local travel voucher for the following:

- government-related meetings or functions
- non-government meetings or conferences in the local area (requires a Form HHS-99)
- training attendance

NOTE: You cannot obtain an advance for local travel. You must use personal funds, and submit applicable receipts to be reimbursed on a local travel voucher.

Per Diem Allowance

Definition

Per diem is a daily allowance you receive for lodging, meals, and incidental expenses. The per diem allowance includes tips to waiters, porters, baggage carriers, bellhops, hotel maids, transportation between lodging or business and places where meals are taken and telephone access fees. Specific locality rates are available on the Internet at www.gsa.gov. **You must secure your lodging accommodations through the TMC in place at the NIH.**

Actual Expense Allowance (AEA)

In very limited and well-justified circumstances, you may be reimbursed for actual expenses. AEA is a special increased per diem rate applicable for specific travel situations where unusual circumstances would cause the traveler to incur substantial expenses above the normal maximum per diem rate. The FTR allows up to 300% of per diem for special circumstances, if properly authorized.

Conference Lodging Allowance (CLA)

When attending a Government or non-Government sponsored conference, in some situations, you may not always find a lodging facility within the chosen locality per diem rate. The CLA is a special increased per diem rate established which, if properly authorized, would allow you to exceed the lodging portion of the per diem rate by up to 25%.

Miscellaneous Expenses

When authorized, the following miscellaneous expenses will be allowed:

- official telephone calls
- lodging taxes (CONUS only)
- laundry, cleaning and pressing of clothing (CONUS only for trips of four consecutive nights or longer)
- baggage expenses for official business materials
- services of typists, data processors, or stenographers
- services of guides, interpreters, and drivers of vehicles
- use of computers, printers, fax machines and scanners
- use of conference center rooms or hotel rooms for official business
- faxes, telegrams, cablegrams or radiograms
- travelers' checks or ATM services

- conversion of currency
- trip insurance on non-contract rental cars (only when contract vehicle unavailable)
- travel document costs (as specified by NIH)
- charges for inoculations (as specified for foreign trips, non-availability of NIH/OMS)
- other miscellaneous expenses necessarily incurred to conduct official NIH business

All official calls should be claimed separately as a miscellaneous expense and should be noted on the travel voucher as calls made for official business.

When in travel status for two or more nights, you are allowed \$5 per day for brief telephone calls of a personal nature. This allowance may be cumulative, and can be applied to a single call, or multiple calls. Example: If you are in travel status for five days, you may be reimbursed for expenses up to \$25 for one or more phone calls.

It is NIH policy that travelers should use their government calling card. Travelers are expected to incur expenses in the same manner as a prudent person would. Authorizing officials are expected to review claims for the reasonableness and propriety of telephone calls.

Transportation Expenses

The traveler shall use the method of transportation administratively authorized or approved on the TO by the appropriate authorizing official as most advantageous to the Government (FTR 301-2.1).

Contracted air carriers

The Federal Government enters into contracts with a number of airlines to provide discounted airfares between specific city pairs. These contract fares are “first choice” selections (per the FTR). Contract airline tickets are unrestricted, penalty-free, completely changeable, and average 60% less than other unrestricted fares. Non-contract air tickets may be justified in certain situations (consult with AO).

Acceptable transportation and required routing

The most direct or usually traveled route should be used. Any additional transportation costs for travel for personal reasons is at the expense of the traveler. Any portion of travel that is for personal use will not be allowed the discounted government fare. If any personal routing is planned during official travel, a ticket should be priced for the most direct routing to accomplish official business. The government will only pay airfare not to exceed (NTE) this amount. The traveler may then make arrangements with regard to personal travel and pay any additional airfare with personal funds. Personal travel is entirely the responsibility of the traveler, not that of the travel support staff. When

personal travel is combined with official travel, prior approval must be obtained from the appropriate authorizing official.

Airline tickets

Airline tickets should not be purchased until the TO is approved by the appropriate authorizing official. Your respective travel support staff will be responsible for handling your official travel arrangements, and you must procure your transportation ticket through the TMC in place at the NIH. If, due to unusual circumstances, you are required to take last minute travel and cannot make arrangements through the TMC, airline tickets may be purchased directly from the contract carrier at Government rates with a Government-issued travel charge card. An approved TO is still required.

Canceled reservations or unused tickets

When a trip is canceled, contact the TMC immediately to cancel your airline reservation, and notify appropriate administrative and support staff. Unused airline tickets should be returned to the TMC, so that proper reimbursement can be made. Furthermore, any hotel reservations or registration payments must also be canceled immediately.

Class accommodations allowed

Generally, coach class air and/or rail accommodations must be used for all domestic government travel. Premium class fares may be justified only in extreme circumstances, and require advance approval by the appropriate authorizing official. Contact appropriate administrative staff in your area for additional information prior to using other than coach class accommodations.

Taxis and Rental Cars

Taxis

Reimbursement is allowable for taxi fare, plus a tip NTE 15%. Taxis may be used to and from carrier terminals, and to get to meeting sites as necessary. (FTR 301-10.420). Alternative modes of transportation should be considered when available, i.e. courtesy airport or hotel/motel shuttle service, or public transportation. Taxi fare is reimbursable to obtain suitable meals only when such cannot be obtained at or near the TDY site.

Rental cars

Use of a rental car, when advantageous to the Government, must be justified and authorized prior to the trip. Approval and reimbursement of rental car expenses will be based on total constructive cost, i.e. parking, tolls, etc. Government-contracted rental agencies should be utilized for official Government business. You must make your car rental arrangements through the TMC in place at the NIH.

Rental vehicle insurance

It is not necessary to purchase insurance coverage for rental vehicles when obtained from companies who are under Government contract. Under the negotiated contract, full comprehensive and collision damage is provided at no additional charge. If the traveler purchases additional insurance, it is at his/her expense and is not reimbursable. The TMC will be able to tell you which rental car companies have agreements with the Government.

Use of Privately Owned Vehicles (POV)

Allowable POV usage

When authorized on your travel order as advantageous to the Government, a POV may be used for official travel. You will receive a standard rate per mile for operating expenses, with additional reimbursement for parking, toll and ferry fees.

When using a POV in lieu of common carrier transportation, due to personal preference, reimbursement is limited to the total constructive cost of the applicable common carrier including constructive per diem and ground transportation. Reimbursement will be based on the lesser of the two.

A traveler may be reimbursed for POV transportation to/from the terminal, (mileage, parking, tolls), NTE the cost of taking a taxi. If another individual drives the traveler to the airport, his/her round trip mileage is allowable. When several travelers share a POV, only the owner will be reimbursed mileage.

Restrictive Travel Situations

Travel financed by a non-Federal source

Travel that is financed by a non-Federal source (Sponsored Travel) may be accepted in limited situations, and must be approved in advance. The acceptance of this type of travel must not create an actual or apparent conflict of interest and requires additional ethics/EO approvals. There is a recommended four-week lead-time on domestic Sponsored Travel and a six-week lead-time for international Sponsored Travel. Due to certain restrictions involved with Sponsored Travel, it is essential that you contact travel support staff in your area for specific information and instructions before accepting any non-Federal financing for travel.

Meals included in a conference or registration fee

For travel where per diem is claimed, a fixed amount will be deducted for each meal included in the cost of a registration fee.

Annual leave while in official travel status

You may take annual leave (AL) in conjunction with official travel if approved in advance and noted on your TO. Per diem entitlement like other expenses claimed on the Travel Voucher will be based on days attributable to Government business only. The traveler is responsible for informing the supervisor and timekeeper of AL to be taken.

Frequent flyer programs

All frequent flyer benefits and other promotional materials derived from Government travel are the property of the Government. They are to be used for official Government travel only.

Travel Tips

Discounts and tax exemption certificates

Many hotels and motels offer discounts and/or tax exempt status for Federal travelers. Travelers or support staff should inquire about discounts when making reservations AND at check-in to take maximum advantage of these benefits. The TMC can assist travelers in identifying hotels/motels that offer government discounts. Tax exemption certificates are available from your travel support staff, or from the GSA website www.gsa.gov

Fraudulent claims

You are responsible for reviewing your travel voucher for accuracy before signing it. "Fraudulent statements for any expense taints the entire claim for that day...thus the entire claim for that day must be denied." (Comptroller General (CG) Decision B-232858.)

Glossary of Common Travel Terms

ACH Enrollment – Mandatory for electronic payment of travel reimbursements, consistent with the Debt Collection Act of 1996.

Actual Expense Allowance (AEA) - A method of reimbursing travelers for their actual per diem costs (Not to exceed (NTE) 300% of the General Services Administration (GSA) rate for the area) when actual expenses are unusually high due to special or unusual circumstances. Subsistence generally includes items such as lodging and meals.

Common (Commercial) Carrier - Any firm furnishing commercial transportation. This includes airplanes, trains, ships, and buses.

Conference Lodging Allowance (CLA) – A pre-determined maximum allowance of up to 25% greater than the applicable locality-lodging portion of the per diem rate.

Government-Issued Travel Charge Card – Payment mechanism, which is mandatory for all official travel-related expenses. This card is issued to travelers who make more than one trip per year to perform Government business, unless the traveler is granted an exemption. For additional information, consult with your travel support staff.

Lodging – Refers to overnight sleeping facilities; this is part of the per diem allowance.

Meals and Incidental Expenses (M&IE) – The meals portion covers expenses for breakfast, lunch, and dinner (**specifically excluded are alcoholic beverages and entertainment expenses, and any expenses incurred for other persons**). Incidental expenses (IE) include fees and tips to wait staff, porters, baggage carriers, hotel staff, and transportation between places of lodging/business and places where meals are taken, only if suitable meals cannot be obtained at the TDY site. IE also covers mailing costs associated with filing travel vouchers and payment of government-sponsored charge card billings.

Mileage Allowances - Fixed rates per mile are allowed for operating privately owned conveyances (automobile, motorcycle, or airplane) when such use is authorized or approved as advantageous to the government.

Miscellaneous Expenses—Other expenses in addition to per diem such as laundry, cleaning and pressing of clothes, hotel taxes, ATM and cash advance fees, car rental,

taxis for transportation to business locations, airport parking fees, official phone calls, and other necessary business expenses approved by your IC.

Per Diem - A fixed allowance for daily payment of lodging, meals, and related incidental expenses. Reimbursement is based on actual cost not to exceed the prescribed fixed rate.

Temporary Duty (TDY) - Authorized temporary assignment away from your official permanent duty station to which you will return upon completion of assignment.

Travel Management Center (TMC) - A travel agency, under contract with GSA, that is responsible for making arrangements for official government travel. All such travel should be made through a TMC and travelers should have the 800 numbers for the TMC in the event a problem or emergency arises. The current main NIH TMC is World Travel Service (WTS) and the customer service number is 1-800-331-6237.