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## **Introduction**

This handbook is intended to serve as a pocket guide for NIH employees/staff who conduct official Government business travel. It provides a summary of regulatory guidance as contained in the Federal Travel Regulation (FTR), and corresponding basic policies and procedures as referenced in both the NIH and HHS Travel Manuals. For additional information, these manuals respectively, can be accessed at the following web sites:

<http://www1.od.nih.gov/oma/manualchapters>

<http://www.knownet.hhs.gov/travel>

NOTE: Whereas much of the policy guidance in this handbook applies to PHS Commissioned Officers (COs), because COs are not governed by the FTR, they should refer to the Joint Federal Travel Regulations (JFTR) for additional information. The JFTR can be accessed at the following web site:

<https://secureapp2.hqda.pentagon.mil/perdiem/trvlregs.html>

Throughout this handbook, the traveler is referred to as “you.”

## **Prudent Person Rule**

When traveling on official business you **must** exercise the same care in incurring expenses that a prudent person would if traveling on personal business. Excessive costs, circuitous routes, delays for personal reasons, luxury accommodations, and services unnecessary or unjustified in the performance of official business are not acceptable. You will be held liable for any additional expenses incurred for personal preference or convenience.

## **General Policy**

You will be reimbursed for necessary expenses incurred in carrying out official business within the limits prescribed by law and Government-wide regulations. Your TDY travel **must** be authorized by the appropriate delegated official prior to the trip in the form of a Travel Authorization or at a minimum, in extenuating circumstances, at least some other form of written approval. This requirement confirms official Government business and is necessary to fully protect your rights as a traveler. Unauthorized TDY travel places you at risk of not being reimbursed for expenses incurred.

## **Planning/Lead Time**

You **must** submit your travel request (including HHS-348 sponsored travel) through the appropriate channels, allowing enough time for necessary clearances and for travel arrangements to be made. Domestic and non-foreign travel requests should reach the authorizing official by a minimum of five working days prior to the trip start date. HHS

requires that all requests for international travel be submitted via the Office of Global Health Affairs (OGHA) automated Notification of Foreign Travel (NFT) system by a minimum of 30 days prior to the trip start date. International travel often requires obtaining passports, visas, and cable clearances at several levels. For all categories of travel, refer to your Institute/Center (IC) Travel Support Staff for lead-time procedures specific to your organization.

### **Mandatory Use of the Travel Management System (TMS)**

You **must** make reservations through the TMS for all TDY travel, including common carrier transportation (*e.g.*, airplane, train, bus), lodging, and rental car services. Generally, a TMS will consist of a contracted Travel Management Center (TMC). OMEGA World Travel is the current TMC for the entire HHS. For exceptions to the rule for making your reservations through the TMS, you can reference NIH Manual Chapter 1500-02-01.

### **Mandatory Use of Contract City-Pair Airfares**

You **must** use contract city-pair airfares (Government contract airfares) unless the use of non-contract airfares is properly justified in accordance with FTR 301-10.107 and corresponding NIH policy contained in Chapter 1500-03.

### **Government-Issued Travel Charge Card**

If you expect to take 6 or more trips per fiscal year, you are considered a “frequent traveler” and **must** apply for and use a Government-issued travel charge card.

The Government-issued travel charge card is only to be used when you are in TDY travel status and should be used to pay for and/or obtain:

- lodging accommodations
- meals (if applicable)
- rental car services
- travel advances from either ATM machines or financial institutions

Check with your IC Travel Support Staff for requirements regarding common carrier transportation.

You **must not** use the travel charge card for personal purchases, non-official travel related services, or purchases/services for other individuals.

### **Travel Advances**

If you are ineligible for a Government-issued travel charge card, in most circumstances, a travel advance may be authorized to cover anticipated out-of-pocket expenses. (Exceptions to travel advance procedures applicable to employees who refuse to apply for and/or use the travel charge card, and those whose card is cancelled due to misuse/abuse,

are discussed in NIH Travel Manual Chapter 1500-05.) The advanced amount will generally apply to expenses associated with lodging, meals, incidental expenses, and miscellaneous costs, *e.g.*, ground transportation. You should check with your respective IC Travel Support Staff for applicable procedures.

### **Per Diem Allowance**

You are entitled to a per diem allowance when conducting official business in TDY travel status for over 12 hours. The four types of allowances are as follows:

- Lodgings-plus: This is the most commonly used method of per diem. It consists of a system for computing the allowance for each travel day based on a fixed rate the traveler pays for lodging, plus an allowance for meals and incidental expenses (M&IE), for the specific geographic location concerned. (NOTE: Rates are established by: General Services Administration – domestic sites; Department of Defense – non-foreign sites; and Department of State – international sites.)
- Conference Lodging (CLA): Prior to the trip, when certain criteria are met, you may be authorized up to a 25% increase of the Government lodging rate (under the lodgings-plus allowance) for the geographic area.
- Actual Expense (AEA): Prior to the trip, in limited and well-justified circumstances, you may be authorized up to 300% of the per diem rate for the geographic area.
- Reduced per diem: In some extended travel scenarios, *e.g.*, over 30 days at a single location, you may be authorized a reduced per diem allowance.

For additional information on per diem allowances, see NIH Travel Manual, Chapter 1500-04.

### **Miscellaneous Expenses**

When authorized or approved, you may be reimbursed for miscellaneous expenses. Examples of such expenses include, but are not limited to, the following items:

- Official business telephone calls
- Limited personal call(s)
- Lodging taxes (domestic and non-foreign)
- Laundry, cleaning, pressing of clothing (domestic travel only; minimum of four consecutive nights required)
- 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 service fees

- Energy surcharge and lodging service fees (when fees are not optional)
- Conversion of currency

## **Taxis**

Taxis should be used only when other modes of transportation (*e.g.*, public transportation, airport shuttle services, Government-sponsored vans, etc.) are not reasonably available.

Taxis may be used:

- to and from carrier terminals
- to get to meeting sites as necessary
- to obtain suitable meals only when the meals cannot be obtained at or near the TDY site.

Reimbursement is allowable for the taxi fare plus a tip of up to 15% of the fare amount.

## **Rental Cars**

When advantageous to the Government, use of a rental car is permitted. You **must** provide justification and obtain approval on the Travel Authorization prior to the trip. You should make every effort to share a rental car when traveling at or to the same TDY meeting site. You may use the rental car for official travel purposes at the TDY site including travel to and from restaurants near the work site or hotel. You are required to obtain your rental car services via the Travel Management Center. There is **no** justification to purchase insurance coverage for domestic rental vehicles that are obtained from companies under Government contract. Check with your IC Travel Support Staff for special policies and procedures regarding use of rental vehicles in foreign countries.

## **Use of Privately-Owned Vehicles (POV)**

You may be authorized use of a POV when it is determined to be most advantageous to the Government. When a POV is used in lieu of a common carrier, reimbursement will be based on a constructive cost comparison of travel by common carrier versus POV, including transportation, per diem, etc. You may be reimbursed for POV transportation to/from a carrier terminal (*e.g.*, mileage, parking, tolls, etc.) not to exceed the cost of a taxi fare. If another individual drives you to the carrier terminal, the round trip mileage is reimbursable up to the cost of a taxi fare. When several travelers share a POV, only one traveler will be reimbursed for mileage.

## **Frequent Traveler Programs and Promotional Materials**

You are permitted to retain frequent flyer miles or promotional materials received in connection with official travel, as long as they were obtained under the same conditions as those offered to the general public and at no additional cost to the Government. The miles may be applied toward future official business trips, for upgrades at no additional

cost to the Government, or for personal use. (See NIH Travel Manual Chapter 1500-01, for additional information.)

### **Premium Class Common Carrier Accommodations**

You **must** use Coach Class accommodations for travel by air, rail, etc. unless you are specifically authorized to upgrade to Premium Class accommodations. Such authorization must be obtained from the appropriate delegated official prior to the trip, and the circumstances under which it may be authorized are very limited. For additional regulatory guidance, see FTR 301-10. (For additional policy, refer to NIH Manual Chapter 1500-13.)

### **Fly America Act**

If your travel is financed by Government funds, you **must** use U.S. flag air carrier service for all air travel unless an exception for such use can be applied in accordance with FTR 301-10.136 – 139. In cases where a U.S. carrier has a code share agreement with a foreign flag carrier, service is considered to meet the Fly America Act requirements.

### **Canceled Reservations or Unused Tickets**

You **must** notify your IC Travel Support Staff and contact the TMC immediately to cancel your common carrier reservations. Any unused tickets **must** be hand-carried or mailed to the TMC for proper credit. In addition, any hotel reservations and registration fees for conferences must be canceled immediately to prevent any unnecessary cost liabilities.

### **Exemption from State or Local Tax on Hotel/Lodging Accommodations**

You **must** make every effort to take advantage of hotel discounts and tax exemptions for Federal official business travel in both domestic and non-foreign sites. Some states and localities offer tax exemptions and some specify a particular form on which to claim it. The TMC should be able to assist you in identifying locations and/or hotels that offer a tax exemption and/or discounts. It is extremely important for you to carry your Government-issued travel charge card, your Government ID card and a copy of your approved Travel Authorization, to demonstrate your eligibility for those exemptions/discounts.

### **Travel Expense Reimbursement (Travel Voucher)**

You **must** submit your claim for reimbursement within 5 working days following completion of a trip. You should document all expenses incurred during your travel and provide the following receipts to your IC Travel Support Staff:

- Common carrier transportation ticket
- Lodging bill

- Registration fees
- Personal calls home (see NIH Manual Chapter 1500-04)
- Laundry, dry cleaning (see NIH Manual Chapter 1500-04)
- Other single item expenses greater than \$75

You are responsible for reviewing your travel voucher for accuracy before signing it. Falsification of an item on an expense voucher may result in forfeiture of your claim.

### **Personal Phone Calls Home**

- 1) Domestic and non-foreign travel: Reimbursement for personal telephone calls is limited to actual expenses not to exceed five dollars times the number of consecutive nights on official business.
- 2) Foreign travel: Calls home from a foreign country must be approved in advance on the Travel Authorization.

You may be reimbursed for personal phone calls home when the following criteria are met:

- You **must** incur a minimum of one night's lodging, either domestic, non-foreign or foreign; and
- The call **must** be placed to your residence, the caretaker of your residence, a person with whom you share the residence, or a location where a dependent family member lives; and
- No other options were available such that a commercial toll service had to be used.

Receipts are required to demonstrate the cost of personal calls. Reimbursement will not be permitted for use of a personal cell phone for phone calls home.

### **International Travel Requirements**

- A Notification for Foreign Travel (NFT) **must** be entered in the OGHA automated system not later than 30 days prior to the trip start date. Check with your IC Travel Support Staff for lead time procedures specific to your organization.
- If you are serving in a consultation/expert capacity, meeting with staff of a multilateral organization, *e.g.*, World Health Organization, you **must** obtain proper security clearance from OGHA prior to travel.
- If you are authorized long-term TDY travel over 30 days at an international site, you **must** participate in a personal security training class, *i.e.*, "Serving Abroad for Families and Employees (S.A.F.E.)", prior to commencing the travel.

- Travel to countries designated as “sensitive” by OGHA requires an explanation of the mission critical nature of the travel.

### **Travel Financed by a Non-Federal Source (HHS-348 Sponsored Travel)**

Acceptance of payment for travel and related expenses from a non-Federal source must be authorized by the appropriate delegated official prior to the trip. The request must be supported by a written invitation from the non-Federal source that indicates the travel services to be paid. Such travel must not create an actual or apparent conflict of interest and must be reviewed by your IC Ethics Counselor. When attending a meeting, conference, or similar function, you are prohibited from accepting any form of cash, or a check or similar instrument made out directly to you. Since this area of travel consists of specific parameters and restrictions, the applicable regulations and corresponding policies and procedures outlined in NIH Travel Manual Chapter 1500-08, **must** be followed.

### **Per Diem in the Local Travel Area**

The local travel area is defined as a minimum 50-mile direct driving distance from your permanent office site to a temporary duty site. In addition, lodging and M&IE may not be authorized if the temporary duty site is within 50 miles of your usual residence. Although per diem, *i.e.*, lodging and M&IE, is usually not permitted in the local area, in rare and justifiable circumstances, you may be allowed per diem when official business is being conducted. (See NIH Travel Manual Chapter 1500-06)

### **Attendance at Local Non-Governmental Meetings**

You **must** obtain advance authorization via an HHS-99 when attending a local meeting sponsored by a non-governmental organization.

### **Annual Leave While in TDY Travel Status**

You may take limited annual leave in conjunction with official business travel if authorized in advance and noted on the Travel Authorization. You are responsible for informing your supervisor and timekeeper of any scheduled annual leave. IC delegated officials must use discretion when authorizing annual leave, especially when the travel is to a site considered as a resort spot, recreationally attractive area, or a sightseeing attraction. Check with your IC Travel Support Staff for current rules governing annual leave for domestic, non-foreign, foreign, and HHS-348 sponsored travel.

### **Travel Management Center Contact Information**

OMEGA World Travel’s customer service number is 301-984-1850 or toll free, 1-866-264-8280, Monday – Friday, 8:00 a.m. – 5:30 p.m.

Should you experience a problem or emergency before or after the above stated hours, which affects your travel itinerary, contact OMEGA World Travel on 1-800-285-6342.

## **Travel Emergencies**

While in TDY travel status, should you become incapacitated by illness or injury not due to your own misconduct, you should immediately contact a member of your IC Administrative Office. You are strongly encouraged to take the name and phone number of a contact person with you on your trip.

## **Glossary of Common Travel Terms**

**Actual Expense Allowance (AEA)** – A method of reimbursing travelers for their actual costs (not to exceed (NTE) 300% of the per diem rate for the geographical location) when costs have uniformly escalated in the location due to special events or unusual circumstances.

**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.

**Contract City-Pair Airfare** – The General Services Administration (GSA) makes awards to U.S. certificated air carriers in order to furnish Federal employees with passenger transportation service at reduced fares between selected U.S. cities/airports and between selected U.S. and international cities/airports. These airfares represent coach class seating accommodations.

**Domestic Travel** – Travel to the 48 contiguous states and the District of Columbia.

**International Travel** – Travel outside the 50 United States and other defined non-foreign sites. Travel to the former U.S. Trust Territories in the Pacific (the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of Palau, and the Marshall Islands), now independent, is considered international travel.

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

**Meals and Incidental Expenses (M&IE)** – The meals portion of the per diem allowance covers expenses for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Incidental expenses include: (1) fees and tips given to porters, baggage carriers, bellhops, hotel maids, stewards or stewardesses and others on ships, and hotel servants in foreign countries; and (2) transportation between places of lodging or business and places where meals are taken, if suitable meals can be obtained at the TDY site.

**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.

**Non-Foreign Travel** – Travel to Alaska, Hawaii, Guam, American Samoa, Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico, U.S. Virgin Islands, and any other territory under U.S. jurisdiction.

**Notification of Foreign Travel (NFT)** – All NIH staff planning to travel abroad on official Government business must submit a notification through the web-based HHS NFT System. An NFT is required for all official international travel regardless of the source of funding for the trip. The NFT alerts HHS of the travel and is used to prepare a cable requesting country clearance from the U.S. Embassy of the country to be visited.

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

**Privately-Owned Vehicle (POV)** – 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.

**Temporary Duty (TDY)** – Authorized temporary assignment away from your official permanent duty station for the purpose of conducting official Government business.

**Travel Management Center (TMC)** - A travel agency under contract with the Government, that is responsible for making all arrangements for official Government travel. OMEGA World Travel is the TMC selected for the entire HHS.