

# Government Travel & Reimbursement SOP

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### ***Procedures:***

Listed below are the standard steps for securing authorized government travel and reimbursement for USDA / ARS / NPARL. Travelers must have written or electronic authorization prior to incurring any travel expense.

- Travel greater than a 35 mile radius, exceeds 12 hours, and extends more than one consecutive day away from the location, requires a travel authorization.
  - A group authorization for Local Travel will be prepared on an annual basis by the travel arrangers for employees that frequently travel inside a 35 mile radius (from duty station or home), in one calendar day, is less than 12 hours and no per diem is paid.
  - New employees will be added to the group authorization within a week of their entry on duty date.
  - Individuals planning overnight travel must submit a [Travel Request](#) for each trip prior to departure. They shall be signed by the fund-holder.
    - Submit a [Travel Request](#), signed by your supervisor to your travel coordinator (Nikki or Jill). Prior knowledge of ALL reimbursable travel, especially lodging costs, is a requirement for your travel coordinator to ensure travel is within maximum per diem.
    - **Exception:** Frequent field trips during the field season-Obtain a [Limited-Open Travel Request](#) signed by your Research Leader. It cannot cross fiscal years (October 1-September 30).
- 1. Know your spending limits before you go. You may request a copy of your travel authorization or get per diem rates for your lodging city/area on the Web at [www.gsa.gov](http://www.gsa.gov).
  - i) You must request actual reimbursement for higher lodging costs that exceed the normal per diem rates. Actual costs require headquarters approval. Submit an [Actual Subsistence Request letter](#)\* with your travel request justifying why actual subsistence is being requested and whether or not government rate lodging is available in the area. If it is available, you need to explain reasons why it is beneficial to stay at the requested hotel. Your travel coordinator will upload the request to GovTrip and you cannot travel until headquarters approves the authorization.
  - ii) If you are requesting actual subsistence for travel reimbursement when actual subsistence was not authorized on the authorization for travel (Post Approval): Submit an [Actual Subsistence Request letter](#)\* stating the justification for why actual subsistence is being requested and whether or not government rate lodging is available in the area. If it is available, you need to explain why it is beneficial to stay at the requested hotel. Your travel coordinator will upload the request to GovTrip. Your voucher will not be released for payment until it is approved by headquarters.

\*-Word document download available on NPARL's Employee Resources web page.

2. Reservations: Your travel coordinator must make airline/rental car/lodging reservations according to government regulations, using ARS's contracted travel management center (TMC).

When traveling to rural areas, it may not be possible to use the TMC because hotels do not show up the computer system. Ask your travel arranger for assistance. Your government travel card (if you have one) is mandatory for airline/hotel/rental car purchases. You will only be reimbursed up to allowable per diem amounts unless you have been approved for actual rates prior to travel.

i) Hotel (Listed below in order of priority)

(1) GovTrip – your travel arranger can reserve lodging for you. There is no charge if it is combined with an air or train ticket. If the hotel is the only reservation, there will be a self-service fee of \$4.00; asking assistance from the TMC will initiate a minimum fee of \$17.75. DO NOT use other sources to reserve a hotel room, such as Orbitz, Expedia, Hotels.com, etc. As federal ARS employees, we are mandated to use the contracted travel management center (TMC).

(2) [www.fedrooms.com](http://www.fedrooms.com) or 800-225-1741

(3) [FEMA certified hotel list](#), [GSA for Travel Industry](#) or [FEMA's Hotel/Motel Fire-Safe List](#)

(4) Call the hotel chain direct if other options can not apply due to location.

ii) Airlines: You are responsible to make and pay for any changes to tickets for personal travel. Please contact the airlines direct as you cannot use the government contract for personal travel. Calls to travel management center may incur a fee.

(1) SATO: 866/569-5334

(2) Weekends/After Hours: 866-569-5334

(3) Call collect for international needs, when necessary: 210/877-3219

iii) Rental Cars (make sure the rental agreement includes GARS fee—this reflects government contract)

(1) SATO: 866/569-5334 (calling will incur a fee)

3. Keep all receipts while in official travel status (transportation, lodging, rental car and any additional expense of \$35 or more).

i) MEAL RECEIPTS ARE NOT NECESSARY unless you are requesting actual reimbursement costs instead of the allotted per diem.

4. Submit receipts to your travel coordinator with a travel voucher sheet within 5 days of travel. The cover sheet is available in hardcopy at the front desk or electronically on the P drive or Employee Resources web page. ([Travel Cover Sheet](#))

i) Small receipts should be taped to 8 ½ x 11 sheet of paper.

ii) All travel reimbursement will be paid directly to you by direct deposit to the same account as your payroll salary.

5. Sign your voucher. A voucher will be issued for you and your supervisor to review and sign. Review the paper work for submitted documents and to make sure all reimbursable items are listed. Return the voucher to your travel coordinator with signatures.

6. You will be notified via email through GovTrip of all disbursements made to you. Payment is direct deposited to your salary account in 3-5 business days-be sure to check your account.

7. If you have a government travel card you will receive a monthly bill whenever there is activity on the card. It is your responsibility to pay the balance of charges using your reimbursement to

do so. GovTrip will automatically pay transportation and lodging costs directly to your travel card account.

## ***Travel Tips***

- **All travel shall be approved** by the head of the agency or official whom such authority has been delegated.
- Travel is authorized only to accomplish the purpose of the government effectively & economically. Submit a **Travel Request** to your supervisor.
- **Authorization** must be approved before expenses occur.
- All travelers must complete a **profile** prior to any travel.
- **Reimbursable expenses** are those essential to the transaction of official business.
- Employees traveling are expected to exercise **prudent care in incurring expenses**. Unnecessary or unjustified expenses are not acceptable.
- Travel shall be by the most **expeditious means of transportation** practicable to accomplish the nature and purpose of duties requiring travel, using the most advantageous method of transportation.
- Employees are responsible for excess costs and additional expenses incurred for **personal preference or convenience**.
- Travelers shall stay at a **fire-safe approved accommodation**. The Hotel and Motel Fire Safety Act of 1990 mandates that federal employees on travel must stay in public accommodations that adhere to the life safety requirements in the legislation guidelines.
- **Present receipts for reimbursement with the travel cover sheet** to your travel coordinator. Tape small receipts on 8½x11 paper. Meal receipts are not necessary unless you request actual reimbursement.
- You must acknowledge **meals provided** by the conference, included in the registration fee or supplied by the government on your travel cover sheet. Per Diem is reduced by any meals provided in the cost of the conference or training, etc.
- **Per Diem** on the day you leave and the day you return is  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the daily per diem.
- **Taking spouse and/or children** in a government vehicle: Refer to employee manual on “Use of a Government Vehicle”.
- If you have a **government calling card**, you should not request reimbursement for phone calls. Request reimbursement for phone should be known in advance and on the authorization.
- If you **purchase supplies or fuel** with your personal credit card or cash, request reimbursement with form [1164](#). Receipts are required. Submit to AO. These items should not be reimbursed through a travel voucher.
- **Registrations fees** will be paid by a government purchase card (it is not allowed to be paid by your travel card). If it is training or a workshop, complete a SF-182 Training Request. Use of Personal vehicle for government travel may be authorized.
- You will be reimbursed **mileage** up to the cost of the appropriate common carrier including per diem by that method of transportation. Example: You are traveling to Denver, CO for a conference that begins on Tuesday and ends on Thursday. The cost of the airline ticket is \$550.00 round trip. Your travel days are Monday and Friday. You have authorization from your

RL to drive your personal vehicle. You leave on Sunday and return the following Sunday, total mileage driven is 1,620 miles x .445 = \$720.90. You would only be reimbursed \$550.00. You would not receive per diem for Sunday, Saturday or Sunday. (Mileage rates for personal vehicles vary)

- **Travel for Training:**

- An SF-182 request for training must be approved in AgLearn prior to travel. A training number is required on the travel request and on the SF-182. The training number is available from the Administrative Officer. ([See SOP on Training](#))

- **Leisure travel in conjunction with official travel:**

- Travelers must reserve and ticket their official travel using GovTrip. The tickets should be for transportation directly to and from their official duty station to their temporary duty station.
- To arrange leisure travel, the traveler must exchange the tickets issued for official travel directly with the airline and the airlines reissue the tickets to add any non-official destinations. The traveler must pay any difference in cost with a personal credit card. The difference in cost is the responsibility of the traveler and may not be reimbursed. Any credit due should be credited to the form of payment used to purchase the official transportation tickets.
- Travelers may not use government contract airfare or rental car for leisure travel.
- Travelers are ineligible for per diem for personal days taken in conjunction with official travel.
- Travelers must have specific authorization for leave taken with official travel
- Be sure to check [www.tsa.gov](http://www.tsa.gov) for transportation security requirements at checkin.

- **Domestic Travel**

- Required Lead Time: 3 weeks before departure

- **Foreign Travel**

- Required Lead Time: 60 days prior to departure for passport re-validation
- 90 days prior to departure for passport issuance
- A Through Letter of Request, stating justification for travel, is required. Addressed to Dr. Blackburn through your Research Leader
- After approval, notification will be sent to the location from the travel desk stating approval of trip and what needs to be submitted for the foreign travel. The approval is for the foreign trip only, and does not automatically include approval of contributed funds or annual leave that may have been mentioned in the Letter of Request.
- The location will send a complete package to the Area Office. To include
  - Flight/or Travel Itinerary
  - Visa information (if applicable)
  - Contact Information
  - Any other information requested for specific country
- Upon receipt of the approval, the location will enter the trip into ARIS/FTIS. This must be done before Headquarters will release official passports

- **Contributed Funds**

- Required Lead Time: 30 days
- Only funding in excess of \$250 should be considered for acceptance.
- Must be approved by the Designated Area Ethics Advisor in advance of travel. To obtain approval send a Through Letter of Request (stating mutual benefits derived), letter of offer, Conflict of Interest Form (original signature) and “Receipt of Funds from Non Federal Source” form (original signature) in one package to the Area Transportation Assistant, Linda Sundstrum.
- Letter of Offer must state items being paid, form of payment, contact name, and return mailing address. Preferred form of payment is by check made payable to the USDA-ARS. **DO NOT ACCEPT CHECKS PAYABLE TO YOU.** We are able to receive a wire transfer if a check cannot be issued. We are not able to accept direct deposit of funds. If the form of payment changes during the trip, you must have a letter of explanation and back-up information to include copy of payment received and disposition of payment.
- AD-202 must state who is paying for which items, address of payee, how are they paying on the face of the AD-202.
- Filers of Financial Disclosure Forms must report all contributed travel on the form.
- **Technicians and CAT III Scientists Traveling to Meetings**
  - It is NPA policy to not approve travel costs for technicians and Cat III scientist to attend scientific meetings. Exceptions to this policy will be made when travel is for the purpose of obtaining formalized training (SF-182 training request required) or for certain extenuating circumstances. Authorship will not be accepted as justification for travel.