



# United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY  
Washington, DC 20240

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PERSONNEL BULLETIN NO. 99-6 (500)

SUBJECT: Travel, Transportation, and Relocation Expenses

The purpose of this Personnel Bulletin is to establish Departmental policy regarding payment of travel, transportation, and relocation expenses for new appointees and for employees transferred in the interest of the government or primarily for the convenience or benefit of the employee or at his/her request. This policy covers Departmental employees in the Competitive Service, Excepted Service and Senior Executive Service.

## **Authority:**

5 U.S.C. 5723-5724a (1994)

5 C.F.R. Parts 572, 575 (1996)

41 C.F.R. Chapters 301, 302 (1998)

## **Background:**

5 U.S.C. 5724a provides that an agency must pay "the travel expenses of an employee transferred in the interest of the Government from one official station or agency to another for permanent duty..." The Federal Travel Regulations at 41 C.F.R. 302-1.3(a)(i) provide that a transfer is "in the interest of the Government" if it is "not primarily for the convenience or benefit of the employee or at his/her request..." In interpreting this law and regulation, the Comptroller General has held that transfers will usually be regarded as "in the Government's interest" unless an agency has established a policy for determining which transfers are primarily for the convenience or benefit of the employee or at his/her request.

## **Definitions:**

The term "Bureaus and Offices" means the bureaus of the Department, Other Departmental Offices (including the Office of the Solicitor, the Office of the Inspector General, and the Office of the Special Trustee for American Indians), the Secretarial Offices, and the Secretariat.

The term "new appointee" means any person hired by the Department who meets the definition of new appointee found in 41 C.F.R. 302-1.4(d).

The term "transfer" means the transfer, reassignment, promotion or change-to-lower-grade of an employee from one commuting area in the Department or any other agency of the Federal Government to another commuting area in the Department.

The term "commuting area" means the geographic area that normally is considered one area for employment purposes. It includes any population center (or two or more neighboring ones) and the surrounding localities in which people live and reasonably can be expected to travel back and forth daily to work. See 5 C.F.R. 575.103.

The term "involuntary transfer" means any management-directed transfer which is not predicated on employee acceptance. This includes employees relocated under a management-directed reassignment; employees who receive a notice of Reduction-In-Force (RIF) indicating that they may be separated or subject to mandatory relocation; employees who receive some type of notification which indicates a clear intent on the part of the Department to reassign the employee to a different duty station at which possible involuntary separations due to RIF are anticipated; and, employees of the Department or of any other Federal agency involuntarily separated by RIF and reemployed within one year in a different commuting area (when placement on the Department's Reemployment Priority List at the time of reemployment can be verified).

The term "voluntary transfer" means a transfer where management has selected an employee who has volunteered for the assignment. Voluntary assignments are either "primarily for the convenience and benefit of the employee or at his/her request" or "in the interest of the government."

The term "primarily for the convenience or benefit of the employee or at his/her request" means a voluntary transfer that has resulted from either of the following:

1. Selection of an employee for transfer whose primary interest is in relocation, rather than in placement in a specific position, and who has signed the following statement:  
"I voluntarily request consideration for assignment to a position in another commuting area (or describe the particular position). I am making this request primarily for my personal convenience or benefit. I understand that, if selected, I will be responsible for all travel, transportation and relocation expenses associated with reporting for duty in that position."

Bureaus and Offices may require an individual to sign this statement when the individual submits an unsolicited application for placement consideration. An application in response to a vacancy announcement is not unsolicited.

2. Selection of an employee for transfer who has responded to a vacancy announcement that contains the following statement:

"Travel, transportation, and relocation expenses will not be paid by the Department. Any travel, transportation and relocation expenses associated with reporting for duty in this position will be the responsibility of the selected employee."

The term "in the interest of the government" means any transfer that does not meet the definition of a transfer "primarily for the convenience or benefit of the employee or at his/her request."

**Departmental Policy:**

*New Appointee.* Travel and transportation expenses may be allowed in accordance with 41 C.F.R. 302-1.10.

*Involuntary Transfers:* An involuntary transfer is always regarded as "in the interest of the Government" and payment of travel, transportation and relocation expenses is required.

*Voluntary transfers:* If the voluntary transfer is "primarily for the convenience or benefit of the employee or at his/her request" payment of travel, transportation and relocation expenses is not permitted. If the voluntary transfer is not "primarily for the convenience or benefit of the employee or at his/her request" it is regarded as "in the interest of the Government" and payment of travel, transportation, and relocation expenses must be authorized .

*Vacancy Announcements:* Before a vacancy announcement containing statement 2 (above) concerning the non-payment of travel, transportation, and relocation expenses can be issued, the requesting management official must determine that it is not in the Government's interest to pay such expenses. In making this determination, the official must evaluate the impact that non-payment may have on identifying the best qualified person to place in the position. Factors to be considered include: 1) the number of well qualified employees in the local commuting area; 2) the diversity of the local candidate pool; 3) how quickly the position must be filled; 4) hiring "freeze" constraints; 5) alternative considerations for meeting the human resource needs, such as details, training, automation, etc.; 6) the availability of funds for payment of these expenses; 7) the existence of direct hire authority for the position; 8) the need to provide incentives to prospective candidates due to labor shortages, working conditions, or other factors; 9) and the possibility of offering other financial incentives such as a relocation bonus, recruitment bonus, advance pay, etc. The unavailability of funds to pay for these expenses may not be the determining factor. A record of this determination must be placed in the merit placement file. A determination to pay relocation allowances may not be made after a vacancy announcement has been issued unless a new determination is made, the original announcement is rescinded, and a new announcement is issued following the new determination. Attached is a sample form that may be used to document such determinations.

Managers may not select an employee for an involuntary transfer or a voluntary transfer "in the interest of the government" and subsequently ask the selectee to waive his/her right to reimbursement of travel, transportation, and relocation expenses.

*-signed by-*

Carolyn Cohen  
Director, Office of Personnel Policy

Attachment: Relocation Expense Worksheet