

U.S. Department of the Interior



Travel Primer
For
Political Appointees

TRAVEL PRIMER FOR POLITICAL APPOINTEES

This primer has been prepared to help guide you through the maze of Federal travel regulations and help keep you in compliance. It is not an exhaustive or detailed exposition, but it covers the essential points. Moreover, if you need additional information on particulars, this primer provides you resources on where to find it.

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GENERAL RESPONSIBILITIES AND AUTHORIZATION

There are four fundamentals you need to know about Federal travel:

One - Travel must be conducted in the most effective and efficient manner and only when necessary to accomplish the purposes of the Government. This usually means traveling by a direct route on a common carrier in coach or tourist class.

Two - Employees traveling on official business are expected to exercise the same care when incurring expenses that a prudent person would exercise if traveling on personal business. Travelers may not use premium accommodations or obtain unnecessary service at the Government's expense.

Three - Except in emergencies, travel must be authorized in advance of travel by an official at least one level above the traveler. The authorization must be completed in the E-Gov Travel System (ConcurGov) and include the purposes, places, dates, conditions, limitations, and estimated costs of the travel, as well as accounting information.

Four - Use of the Government sponsored, contractor-issued charge card is mandatory for all official travel related charges, unless there has been an exemption granted for non-use of the card. However, it may not be used for any personal travel expenses.

Do I have to have a separate authorization for each trip?

No. Depending on your position, the frequency of your travel and the type of trip, authorizations may cover: (1) all travel for the entire fiscal year; (2) all travel within a geographic area or for travel during a set period of time (e.g., 90 days); or (3) a specific trip. Certain kinds of travel have to be authorized trip-by-trip, such as travel to training, conferences, and foreign countries. Payment of travel by non-federal sources must be approved for each trip on a Report of Payment Accepted from a Non-Federal Source (DI-2000).

EXPENSES AND ADVANCES

What expenses will the Government pay for official travel?

The Government will pay for:

- Transportation expenses such as contract city-pair airline fares, common carrier commercial fares, local transit, taxi fares (plus tips), rental cars, and mileage allowances for privately owned vehicles, parking, and tolls while in travel status.
- Lodging, up to a fixed per diem amount per night for each location.
- Meals and incidental expenses at a fixed per diem amount set for each location. Incidental expenses include such things as tips for food and baggage service.

- Lodging and occupancy taxes when not exempted by the local taxing authority.
- Laundry expenses incurred at the temporary duty location for travel requiring four or more consecutive nights lodging within Continental United States (CONUS) only.
- Official phone calls.
- Necessary miscellaneous travel related expenses.

Am I expected to use my own funds for official travel?

No. You must obtain a Government travel charge card to pay for travel expenses such as transportation, hotel, and car rental costs. Departmental policy requires employees to use the Government travel charge card for the purchase of transportation tickets, lodging, and car rental expenses necessary on official travel. The card should also be used whenever practicable for any other official travel expenses such as meals, taxis, parking, etc. The card may only be used for expenses related to your official travel. The use of the travel charge card for items that are centrally billed (such as transportation tickets and rental cars) should be limited to expenses reimbursable under the Federal Travel Regulation. You will receive a monthly statement from the contracted bank requesting full payment of your individually billed items (such as meals and cash withdrawals). This amount must be paid by the due date on the statement, even if you have not received your meals and incidentals reimbursement.

Can I get a cash advance for expenses that cannot be charged to my Government travel charge card?

Yes, cash advances may be secured from an ATM honoring your Government travel charge card. Repayment of these advances will occur when you pay your monthly charge card bill.

Can I use a commercial travel agency to make travel arrangements?

No, you must use ConcurGov, when making travel arrangements, or you may use the existing DOI Travel Management Center (TMC) to make your travel arrangements. The current TMCs are Duluth Travel Inc. for travel arranged from the CONUS, and El Sol Travel for trips made in Alaska, Hawaii and the Pacific Islands.

REIMBURSEMENT

How do I get reimbursed for my travel expenses?

You are expected to submit an electronic travel voucher in ConcurGov within five working days after completion of the trip. The voucher must accurately show each component of the travel, and must be signed by you and approved by your supervisor. Your voucher, if proper, will be reimbursed within 30 days after you submit it to your supervisor or you will be paid a late payment fee, if the late payment fee equals \$1 or more.

What receipts are required?

Receipts are required to be attached to your travel voucher for the following:

- A copy of the commercial transportation ticket or copy of your ticketed itinerary if you used an electronic ticket.
- Lodging, rental cars, excess baggage, ATM fees, laundry and dry cleaning performed at a commercial business, currency conversion fees and clerical assistance regardless of amount.
- Other allowable expenses in excess of \$75.

Receipts for meals and incidental expenses are not required, unless you are authorized to be reimbursed for actual expenses and then only if they exceed \$75 per meal or expense.

What if I am traveling to a high cost area and the established per diem rate is inadequate?

In these circumstances you must request approval for reimbursement of per diem on an actual expense basis on your travel authorization prior to the trip. Actual expense may be approved for lodging, meals and incidentals, or both. You must justify your request, and your reimbursement will be limited to no more than 300 percent of the specified per diem rate for the temporary duty (TDY) location. If your request is for more than 125 per cent of the applicable per diem rate it must be approved by your Program Assistant Secretary or his/her deputy. In rare instances, it may be necessary to request and receive approval on an after-the-fact basis on your travel voucher, however you will be required to justify why prior approval was not obtained. Your open or limited open travel authorization may not be issued to provide a blanket approval of actual expenses. Also, you must itemize on your voucher the actual expenses.

Where are travel vouchers submitted?

Vouchers must be submitted in the ConcurGov system. Vouchers for senior officials are approved by their supervisor or other designated official. The reviewing official must have full knowledge of the employee’s activities and ensure:

- The claim is properly prepared in accordance with the pertinent regulations and agency procedures.
- The types of expenses claimed are authorized and allowable.
- The amounts claimed are accurate.
- The required receipts, statements, and justifications are attached to the travel claim.

The Department prohibits approving officials from authorizing their own travel documents or having the approval done by subordinates.

ACCEPTANCE OF DISCOUNTS, BONUSSES, AND CREDITS

May I use frequent flyer benefits accrued from official travel, for personal travel?

Yes. Any benefits earned with points or time from a trip involving official travel now belong to the employee. Any costs incurred for program membership will be the employee’s responsibility.

May I voluntarily give up my seat on an oversold flight?

Yes, as long as your official duties are not adversely affected and there is no increase in cost to the Government. You may keep any resulting gift or compensation under the following conditions:

- (1) You may not claim additional travel expenses including per diem, as a result of giving up your seat.
- (2) You must take annual leave if your travel is delayed during duty hours, and you must pay for any expenses you accrue while on leave.

May I keep a penalty payment provided by an airline if I am denied boarding on an oversold General Services Administration contract city pair flight?

No. A penalty payment belongs to the Government. You should have the airline make the check payable to the “Treasurer of the United States”. The check must be submitted to your servicing Finance Office for proper processing.

COMBINED PERSONAL AND OFFICIAL TRAVEL

May I take annual leave while on official travel?

Yes, but it must be authorized in advance of travel and documented on travel authorization. The authorizing official must ensure that the travel is essential and the leave is only incidental to the travel. You may not claim per diem for any day that you take more than four hours of leave. You also may not claim per diem for non-duty days (e.g., weekends) that precede or follow official business when the stay is for the convenience of the traveler. Care must be taken to avoid the appearance of using Federal funds for personal benefit.

Can non-Presidential Appointed Service (PAS) appointees attend political functions while on official travel?

Yes, but only during non-duty hours and provided that there is no real or apparent use of Government travel for political purposes. Attendance at a political function during normal duty hours while on travel may only take place if you are in an annual leave status and have received prior written approval from your supervisor, or if you are performing official duties for a PAS appointee attending the function.

May I arrange personal travel in conjunction with an official trip?

Yes, with the following caveats:

- (1) The above guidance on annual leave applies, if you are subject to leave accounting.
- (2) You may not use the government travel charge card to pay for any personal travel.
- (3) The official portion of the trip must be scheduled and routed as the most direct and advantageous to the Government. You may not take circuitous or indirect routes at Government expense to benefit yourself.

- (4) You may not use contracted Government rates, discounts or services unless the vendor extends the same privilege to all Federal employees on personal travel. For example, many hotels allow Government rates for personal travel.
- (5) You may not use Government contract airfares (City-Pair contracts) for personal travel. You should obtain the contract fare airline ticket for the official travel, exchange it for a ticket that will cover the complete trip, and pay the difference to the carrier. Also, don't forget that you cannot charge the difference on your Government travel charge card.
- (6) The cost of personal travel in conjunction with official travel cannot exceed what the Government would have paid for official travel cost had the personal travel never taken place.

ACCEPTANCE OF DONATED EXPENSES

Can I solicit donations from non-Federal sources to help defray my travel costs?

No. Federal employees are prohibited from soliciting donations from non-Federal sources unless there is specific statutory authority to do so.

Can my travel expenses be paid by a non-Federal entity?

The Department may accept reimbursement of travel expenses, but only under three limited circumstances:

- (1) Expenses for meetings and similar functions may be accepted by the Department from non-Federal sources provided that:
 - i. Travel relates to your official duties;
 - ii. The travel event is not required to carry out Departmental statutory or regulatory functions like investigations, audits, site visits, or evaluations; and
 - iii. The acceptance does not result in an actual or apparent conflict of interest. Although this authority may provide for spousal travel under limited circumstances, the Department rarely uses it and then only when travel of the spouse is justified and approved. This is the preferred authority for use of non-Federal money for travel, and may be used for both foreign and domestic travel.
- (2) Expenses for training or conferences may be accepted by the Department from sponsoring non-profit organizations granted tax-exempt status under Section 501(c) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code. The organization may contribute any amount that is reasonable and normal to defray your expenses, except when the acceptance creates an actual or apparent conflict of interest with your official duties.
- (3) Expenses for travel performed entirely outside the United States may be accepted by the Department from foreign governments.

What procedures do I follow if a non-Federal source offers to pay for my travel?

First, if you think the circumstances qualify for non-Federal funding as described above, get the approval of your superior.

Second, in-kind donations are preferred over cash/monetary donations. If monetary donations are involved, the donor must make advance payment to the Department by check. **You may not accept cash, checks, or other negotiable instruments made payable to you.**

Third, prepare your travel authorization, stating in the trip details section, the authority being used to accept non-Federal payment, and that the travel complies with ethics requirements. Subsequently, complete the “Report of Payment from Non-Federal Source” form (DI-2000) to request approval for accepting payments from a non-Federal source and submit them through your ethics office to your superior for approval before you travel.

Can I use private company aircraft and accommodations?

If the Secretary appointed you, the above procedures for acceptance of donated expenses apply.

If you are a full-time Presidential appointee, you may not travel on aircraft or stay in overnight accommodations owned, chartered, or maintained by a company if the company is regulated by, or doing business with, the Department. This policy applies without regard to whether your use is related to personal, political, or official purposes or whether you or the Department intends to reimburse the company.

However, there are two exceptions:

- (1) Where no other travel arrangements or accommodations are practically available.
- (2) Where the company offer results from the business or employment activities of your spouse and it is clear that such benefits have not been offered or enhanced because of your official position.

Reliance on either exception must be approved in advance by the Department’s Ethics Office and reliance on any exception which authorizes the use of company aircraft must also be approved in advance by the White House Counsel’s Office. Before authorizing acceptance of an offer without reimbursement, the Department must carefully apply conflict of interest factors when a company is regulated by, or does business with, the Department.

POLITICAL AND MIXED POLITICAL-OFFICIAL TRAVEL

What is considered political travel?

Travel is considered “political” if its primary purpose is to engage in activities based on your position as a leader in your political party.

Appearing at party functions, fund raising events, and campaigning for specific candidates are examples of travel that is considered political.

Can I make political trips on official time?

Only if you are appointed by the President with the advice and consent of the Senate (PAS). The Inspector General is excluded from political travel. Assumption of an “acting” status does not allow political travel either.

How is political travel paid for?

All the costs of political travel must be paid for by the political sponsor. The political organization may not use Government travel fares, lodging or car rental discounts. On the other hand, you are not restricted to coach travel or other limitations, such as per diem. The sponsor should provide travel arrangements in-kind with a pre-paid ticket and hotel room. You should claim other expenses from the sponsor. Because political travel is wholly non-official, there is no need for the Department to have records of it, unless it is mixed political-official travel discussed below.

May I use Government vehicles for political travel?

No. Only the Secretary may use a Government-owned car for travel to or from a political event, and then only on regular workdays and if the political sponsor pays the market value cost of using the Government vehicle in advance. The Secretary may also use an official vehicle for security reasons. Other employees who accompany the Secretary as part of their official responsibilities may also ride in an official vehicle.

May non-PAS Federal employees accompany me?

Yes, but only to carry out official duties of the Department such as security, communications, scheduling, etc. These employees are subject to all Federal requirements for expenses and accounting.

While they may attend a political function with you, they may not participate in political activities while on official time.

How do I handle paying for political and official business combined on the same trip?

The primary principle is that the political sponsor and the United States are each to pay their proper share. Neither should subsidize the other, nor be subsidized by the other’s discounts. There are three ways to handle this travel:

- (1) The easiest and recommended way is for the political sponsor to purchase the ticket at commercial rates and provide the accommodations in-kind. Once the trip is over, the other expenses and the Department’s share can be calculated and reimbursement made.
- (2) A second way is for the Department to provide its share of a pre-trip allocation of the costs for the travel and the sponsor pay for its share. The Department is obliged to pay only the United States’ share at the Government rate, while the political sponsor must pay its share at a commercial rate.
- (3) The third way is for you to pay the cost yourself with personal funds and seek reimbursement from the political sponsor and separately from the Government for their respective shares.

The method used in calculating the relative shares is called the “hard-event” formula, which is based on the actual time spent at political and official events. The calculations can be complex and you should have a specialist do them to be sure they are done correctly.

What procedures do I follow to reimburse or bill political sponsors for combined political and official business trips?

The Secretary has established separate and detailed procedures for his combined travel. Other PAS appointees should:

- (1) Prepare a detailed itinerary before traveling and revise it, if necessary, after traveling to reflect actual political and official event times.
- (2) After travel is completed, prepare a voucher that itemizes the official travel expenses that must be paid by the Government to you and/or the political sponsor, as well as any official expenses that must be billed to the sponsor. The Deputy Associate Solicitor, General Law, is available to assist you in these calculations.
- (3) Submit the itinerary, the cost breakdown, and the voucher with receipts to the Department’s Deputy Chief of Staff for approval and forwarding to the Interior Business Center fiscal office for review. The fiscal office will consult with the Solicitor’s office, and handle the payment or billing for those PASs assigned to the Office of the Secretary or forward the vouchers for PASs in bureaus to the proper finance center for payment or billing.

TRAVEL IN GOVERNMENT AIRCRAFT

May I travel in Government aircraft?

Yes, however, three considerations are necessary:

- (1) No limitations exist if the trip is considered a mission requirement or required use travel.
- (2) If the trip is not a mission requirement or required use, a cost savings must be documented in comparison with other means of travel unless there are special circumstances warranting government aircraft use nevertheless.
- (3) Further, if the trip is not a mission requirement, and you are an employee above grade GS-15, your use, including required use, of Government aircraft must be authorized by the Solicitor or his or her deputy.

What is considered travel for a mission requirement or required use?

As a general rule, mission travel uses the aircraft to carry out official duties, and usually returns to the point of departure. Mission travel does not include official travel to give speeches, attend conferences or meetings, or make routine site visits. Required use travel is limited to certain specific communications, security and exceptional scheduling requirements.

What is considered a Government aircraft?

Government aircraft means any aircraft owned, leased, chartered, or rented and operated by an executive agency.

Can family or non-Federal passengers travel with me?

Yes, under certain limited circumstances. You will need to discuss the situation with the Associate Solicitor for General Law.

If I need the Solicitor's authorization, how do I get it?

You must prepare a travel authorization and then work with the Office of Aviation Services to accomplish the following steps:

- (1) The travel initiator or arranger will contact the Office of Aircraft Services, in Boise, ID, and speak with their respective account holder based on their office.
- (2) The initiator will work with that individual to prepare the justification form which includes the required travel cost analysis (OAS 110).
- (3) A quote is prepared by the Office of Aircraft Services.
- (4) General Law is contacted during the process, so that all three individuals can collaborate.
- (5) General Law will forward the package to the Solicitor for approval.
- (6) Once the package is approved, the signed justification form is returned to General Law and subsequently General Law will forward the approved justification to the requestor.

WHERE TO GO FOR MORE INFORMATION

General Responsibilities, Authorization, Expenses, Advances and Reimbursement

Start with your administrative officer, then your travel specialist (who usually is in your finance office). If further assistance is needed, consult the travel specialist in the Department's Office of Financial Management for technical interpretations. The following are policy references:

- Federal Travel Regulations (FTR), 41 CFR 301 and 304, published by the GSA.
- Department Travel Guidance, (347 DM), *Travel and Transportation of Employees*.
- Financial Management Memorandums.

Acceptance of Discounts, Bonuses, and Credits

If you still have concerns about accepting a discount, bonus or credit, you should talk to the ethics officer in your organization. If further assistance is needed, consult the Department Ethics Office.

The following are policy references:

- FTR, 41 CFR 301-10.116 and 10.117
- 63 Comp. Gen. 229 (1984)
- Comp. Gen. B-257525, November 30, 1994
- 59 Comp. Gen. 203 (re: voluntary and involuntary denied boarding)

Combined Personal and Official Travel

If you have additional questions concerning combined personal and official travel contact your office or Bureau travel lead. The following are policy references:

- 41 CFR 301-11.21
- 41 CFR 301-73.202 (re: personal travel on contract airlines)

Acceptance of Donated Expenses

See your ethics officer! References include:

- 31 U.S.C. 1353 (re: meetings and similar functions)
- 5 U.S.C. 4111 (re: training by non-profits)
- 5 U.S.C. 7342 (re: wholly foreign travel)
- FTR, 41 CFR 304

Political and Mixed Travel

In addition to your ethics officer, contact the Deputy Associate Solicitor for General Law. The following are policy references:

- Memorandum for the Cabinet from the Counsel to the President, February 17, 1994, Subject: Guidelines for Allocating Travel Expenses of Senior Administration Officials.
- Memorandum for the Cabinet from the Counsel to the President, January 31, 2000, Subject: Payment of Expenses Associated with Travel by Senior Administration Officials during the Presidential Campaign.
- Memorandum for Heads of Executive Agencies and Departments from the Counsel to the President, October 21, 1994, Subject: Use of Government Cars for Political Activity.

Travel in Government Aircraft

If your usual administrative or travel contacts can't help you, contact your aviation manager. If all else fails, contact the Deputy Associate Solicitor for General Law. The following are references:

- OMB Circular A-126, May 22, 1992; and OMB Bulletin 93-11, April 19, 1993.
- FPMR, 41 CFR 101-37.400-408(1993)
- Memo to All Employees Above GS-15 Including SES from the Solicitor, March 28, 1994, Subject: Use of Government Aircraft.

Other Electronic File Sources

General Services Administration - FTR

<http://www.gsa.gov>

Electronic Library of Interior Policies (ELIPS)

<http://elips.doi.gov/>

Office of Financial Management website:

<http://www.doi.gov/pfm/travel>

For more information about this travel primer or the Federal Travel Regulations, please contact Robert Smith at 202-208-5684 or Robert_Smith@ios.doi.gov.