

## **1500-02-00 - Traveler Responsibilities**

### **A. General**

This manual chapter provides information and guidance regarding the traveler's responsibilities inclusive of travel arrangements that require specific authorization or advance approval, the preparation of a Travel Authorization, determining the purpose of the trip and the corresponding sub-object class to be applied, Travel Voucher requirements, and the mandatory use of a Travel Management System, e.g., a Travel Management Center (TMC) for procuring all official travel services.

### **B. Documentation - Travel Authorizations**

**1. Travel Authorizations (Orders):** A Travel Authorization must be prepared via the automated travel system in place at the NIH and must include all appropriate electronic signatures based on the purpose of the trip and any specific delegations of authority, and all applicable accompanying documentation. The Travel Authorization must be properly completed and approved in the automated travel system, prior to the trip. Post-approval on a Travel Authorization is permissible, only under emergency circumstances. (See No. 3 below "Emergency situations").

**2. Authorization for travel, transportation, and other expenses – permanent change of station.** The HHS-1 ( Manual Travel Order) is the form used to obligate funds and to authorize payment or repayment of expenses in connection with a permanent change of station, either an appointment to a first duty station or a transfer to a new duty station. The employee will receive the original of this form. After such approval is received, the employee may make arrangements and other commitments as authorized and necessary for the transportation cost of self, immediate family, and household goods; and for the incurrence of other related expenses. For the preparation and authorization of travel documents, refer to NIH Manual Issuance 1500, Chapter 09.

**3. Emergency situations.** Travel may be performed without prior authorization only in case of emergency. In such instances, travel shall be "approved" (post-trip). However, it is the traveler's responsibility to include in his/her claim for reimbursement a justification statement acceptable to the supervisor and the approving official ratifying the travel. When travel is not properly authorized, the traveler will be required to absorb the cost of transportation and other expenses incurred.

**4. Emergency while in Temporary Duty Travel status.** If an employee has to interrupt or discontinue his/her temporary duty travel due to an emergency situation, you should reference FTR 301-30. This would include emergency travel resulting from:

- a. Employee becomes incapacitated by illness or injury not due to his/her own conduct;
- b. The death or serious illness of a member of the employee's immediate family; or

- c. A catastrophic occurrence or impending disaster, such as fire, flood, or act of God which directly affects the employee's home.

## 5. Types of travel authorizations:

a. **A trip-by-trip authorization** is the preferred means for authorizing travel. It specifies the time period in which the travel is to be performed, the purpose, the itinerary, and the estimated cost.

b. **A limited open authorization** permits an individual to travel without further authorization under certain specified conditions. This type of authorization should be expressly discouraged and should only be issued to individuals who are expected, as part of their work assignment, to conduct frequent, specific and repetitive travel within a designated geographic area. Usually, the frequency of such trips is such that the individual does not always have enough time to obtain a Travel Authorization that specifies the purpose of the travel and its expected time frame. Orders must state realistic limitations covering the specific purpose of such travel (use of language, e.g., "to conduct official business", is not acceptable), geographic area, travel duration, and cost. This type of order is valid only for trips taken within the authorized specific geographical area for the stated purpose. An employee must use a trip-by-trip order for any assignment that takes place outside the specified geographic area of the limited open authorization. The conditions for issuing a limited open authorization are as follows: A limited open authorization, 1) may not be issued to cover more than one fiscal year; 2) must be re-validated on a quarterly basis by the appropriate delegated official; and 3) must be terminated if travel is no longer required.

c. **An unlimited open authorization** permits an individual to travel for any purpose without further authorization. This type of authorization is reserved for the Secretary and designated DHHS officials only.

**NOTE:** For additional information on limited and unlimited open authorizations, you can reference HHS Travel Manual Chapter 3-10.

6. **No Expense to the Government Travel (NETG) Authorization** permits an individual to be in a TDY location while performing official government business that is related to the employee's position and the mission of the NIH. NIH involvement is limited and there are no financial transactions effected. In accordance with GSA regulations, an employee cannot be authorized nor is he or she allowed to use contract city-pair fares for the travel. Further, an employee is neither permitted to use the Government contractor-issued charge card nor is the NIH to pay for the trip with Government funds and then have the employee reimburse the NIH.

NOTE: Under certain circumstances, NIH policy permits the payment

of a registration fee for e.g., a training course, when the employee agrees to pay for the remainder of the costs associated with the trip.

**7. Travel Authorizations When Combining Outside Activity with Official Duty Activity in a Single Trip.** Employees are to reference OFM Transmittal No. 135 (pending release) for the applicable question and answer policy guidance at the following web site address:

[http://www4.od.nih.gov/ofm/travel/transmittals/ofm\\_transmittals.htm](http://www4.od.nih.gov/ofm/travel/transmittals/ofm_transmittals.htm)

**8. Purposes of travel.** The Travel Authorization(s) and the associated Travel Voucher(s) will clearly specify the purpose(s) of the trip. To establish uniformity in the way that travel purposes are identified on the Travel Authorization and Travel Voucher, the NIH, in line with HHS Accounting Standards, Chapter 4-50, has established its own descriptor codes for travel purposes within the Continental United States (CONUS) and outside the Continental United States (OCONUS). These codes are contained in OFM Transmittals No. 82 and No. 82A and can be referenced at the web site address listed above.

**9. Cost estimates.** Trip-by-trip authorizations shall include estimates of the cost of the travel. Limited open authorizations shall also include an estimate of the travel costs to be incurred over the period covered by the authorization. Agencies shall use these estimates to obligate the funds necessary to carry out the particular travel and to improve travel budgetary controls.

**10. Request for Travel Authorization.** Travelers must prepare, or have prepared, the electronic version of the Travel Authorization (Order) prior to the date official travel is to begin. This is the official document that can be considered as written authorization for an employee to take a trip and it should include the following data:

- a. Itinerary,
- b. Approximate inclusive dates,
- c. Official purpose,
- d. Mode of transportation,
- e. Allowable per diem, and
- f. Estimated miscellaneous expenses.

**NOTE:** Excess costs, circuitous routes, delays, or luxury accommodations and services unnecessary or unjustified in the performance of official business are not acceptable. Employees will be held responsible for excess costs and any additional expenses solely incurred for personal preference or convenience.

**11. Travel Arrangements.** In line with the FTR 301-2.5, the following travel arrangements require specific authorization or prior approval:

- a. Use of premium-class service on common carrier transportation (See NIH Manual 1500, Chapter 13);

- b. Use of a foreign air carrier (See NIH Manual 1500, Chapter 03);
- c. Use of reduced fares for group or charter arrangements (See NIH Manual 1500, Chapter 03);
- d. Use of cash to pay for emergency or non-emergency common carrier transportation services in excess of \$100 (See NIH Manual 1500, Chapter 03);
- e. Use of extra-fare train service (See NIH Manual 1500, Chapter 03);
- f. Use of a rental car (See NIH Manual 1500, Chapter 03);
- g. Payment of a reduced per diem rate (See NIH Manual 1500, [Chapter 04](#));
- h. Payment of actual expense (See NIH Manual 1500, Chapter 04);
- i. Travel expenses related to emergency travel (See NIH Manual 1500 [Chapter 02](#));
- j. Travel to a foreign area (See NIH Manual 1500, Chapter 07);
- k. Acceptance of payment from a non-Federal source for travel expenses (See NIH Manual, 1500 Chapter 08 and Chapter 10);
- l. Travel expenses related to attendance at a conference, meeting, or similar function (See NIH Manual 1500, Chapter 04); and
- m. Approval of per diem in the NIH local area (See NIH Manual 1500, [Chapter 06](#)).

**NOTE:** All corresponding travel delegations of authority can be referenced in NIH Manual 1130 at the following web site address:

<http://www3.od.nih.gov/oma/manualchapters/scripts/doa/browse.asp>

## **12. Distribution of Travel Authorization (TA)**

- a. Traveler receives copy of approved TA prior to departure.
- b. One copy to be emailed or faxed to the Travel Management Center for issuance of the transportation ticket.
- c. Authorizing Official will retain original of the approved TA and other applicable documentation, as required.

**13. Amending the Travel Authorization.** Travelers are responsible for corrections to their orders if travel arrangements change after the original order is submitted. The preparing office can amend the Travel Order in the automated travel system and re-submit it to the authorizing official. In some instances, re-authorization (another set of electronic signatures) will be required. Common situations requiring an amendment:

- a. Changing original date of departure or return when it exceeds by more than 5 days what was originally authorized;
- b. Adding another duty station;
- c. Changing mode of transportation;

- d. Payment of a registration fee; premium class ticket, cash ticket, etc.
- e. Adding a rental car;
- f. Acceptance of payments from non-Federal sources when all, after the fact payment conditions are met (See HHS Travel Manual Chapter 1-70, pending release);
- g. Errors in demographic information such as, name, address, official duty station, EIN/SSN, etc.;
- h. Errors in accounting data such as Project numbers, OC Codes, etc.; and
- i. When the airfare ticket cost increases by more than \$50.

**14. Canceling a Travel Authorization.** Travelers must notify their agency as soon as possible when a planned trip is canceled to avoid potential liability for costs that have already been incurred (e.g. tickets, registration fee payments, etc.). Travelers are accountable for all transportation tickets issued in their name and any other transportation documents received by them in connection with their official travel. If the traveler does not notify the appropriate official accordingly, and the NIH incurs expenses, the traveler will be required to absorb the cost.

- a. The preparing office must cancel the obligation that was set up in the accounting system via the automated travel module. In some instances, (e.g, when the travel is being canceled after the departure date) the Travel Voucher will have to be submitted if the ticket was issued. The voucher would include the ticket and the service fee charge. The transportation ticket must be returned to the Travel Management Center for proper credit to the Government.
- b. Travelers bear the responsibility for clearing travel advances. Advances issued from an ATM must be repaid to the credit card contractor by the traveler at bill-paying time. Government advances issued by direct deposit to the traveler's designated financial institution must be reimbursed by personal check or money order made payable to the "National Institutes of Health", if applicable.

## **C. Documentation - Travel Vouchers**

**1. Vouchering for travel reimbursement.** It is the traveler's responsibility to submit all receipts and claims for travel expenses **within 5 working days after the conclusion of a trip.** (See FTR 301-52.7)

**2. Receipt requirements.** FTR 301-11.25, 301-52.2, and 301-52.4 set forth the requirements for documentation supporting all travel (including travel incident to a permanent change of duty station) expense claims. They are listed as follows:

- a. Mandatory receipts
  - Lodging
  - Common carrier transportation (receipts, passenger coupons, or other appropriate documentation to support claim)

- Any single authorized expense incurred costing over \$75

It is either HHS or NIH policy that receipts will be required for these items:

- Registration fees
  - Shipments or freight expenses
  - All laundry/dry cleaning purchases (except coin operated machine usage where receipts are not available)
- b. Claims without a supporting receipt unless the individual expenses exceeds the \$75 threshold
- Hire of special conveyances, including rental cars and taxis
  - Excess baggage
  - Fees relating to travel outside Continental United States (CONUS) (i.e., currency exchange fees, traveler's check fees, etc.)
  - Operating expenses of a privately owned vehicle
  - Rental of rooms for official business
  - Long-distance telephone calls
  - Personal services (interpreters, guides, drivers, etc.)
  - Clerical assistance (typists, data processors, stenographers, etc.)
  - Use of computers, printers, copiers, fax machines, etc.
  - Other reasonable expenses deemed warranted by authorizing official to conduct official business.

**3. Certification by traveler.** The electronic signature of the traveler on the Travel Voucher certifies the accuracy of all items being claimed, and that each claim was used in conducting official business. The validity of a signed voucher, or any part thereof, is the responsibility of the traveler.

**4. Penalty.** The falsification of any single claim may warrant the disallowance of the voucher and additional disciplinary action including: reprimand; suspension; or other appropriate actions. The penalty prescribed by law for presenting a false claim is a fine of not more than \$10,000 or imprisonment for not more than five years, or both. Accordingly, care should be exercised in the preparation and review, prior to signature, to insure that the voucher is correct in its entirety and does not include items of personal expense.

### **1500-02-01 - Travel Management System**

**A. General.** General Services Administration (GSA) regulations require NIH staff to use the Travel Management System (TMS), e.g., Travel Management Center (TMC), selected by NIH for all common carrier, lodging, and rental car services.

**NOTE:** This includes electronic travel management services and commercial travel agents under contract to GSA or another Federal agency.

**B. Authority.** FTR 301-73.102 provides that you must use the TMS selected by NIH for all travel management services, commercial passenger transportation services e.g., airlines, rental cars, trains, etc. and travel payment system services i.e., Government contractor-issued individually billed cards or a centrally billed account. In line with HHS Travel Manual Chapter 3-30-10 "Mandatory Use of Government Travel Management Services for Reservations" **if you use an unauthorized travel agent or unauthorized travel management system, you will be responsible for any additional costs that are the direct result of the unauthorized use and assuming such costs would not have been incurred if the NIH TMS had been used.**

**C. Policy.** Transportation, lodging, and rental car services should be obtained at or below the Government rate. If circumstances prevent obtaining Government rates, you should have specific authorization or prior approval for payment of an actual expense allowance or a conference lodging allowance (See FTR 301-2.5). All travelers must procure their transportation tickets, lodging, and rental car services through the TMC at the NIH, unless you meet one of the following exceptions.

**D. Exceptions.**

**1. Transportation tickets.**

- a. When an organization, association, society, etc., in connection with your attendance at a conference has negotiated airline tickets with another travel agency and you are instructed to contact either the entity or the travel agency to obtain your tickets. This exception may be applied in scenarios where either appropriated funds are being used or where a nonfederal source is providing the tickets "In Cash" or "In Kind" (HHS-348 Sponsored Travel). In the case of HHS-348 sponsored travel, when the ticket provided represents an upgrade, i.e., premium class accommodations, you must meet the conditions for acceptance as contained in FTR 304 and HHS Travel Manual Chapter 1-70 (pending release). In the case of appropriated funds, when the ticket provided represents an upgrade, you must meet the conditions for authorization as contained in NIH Manual 1500, Chapter 13.
- b. When you arrive at the airport and an "E" Ticket reservation has not been recorded in the system.
- c. When you are required to travel on official Government business on an emergency basis or because of another exigency.
- d. When the Travel Management Center does not have access to a specific contract carrier or non-contract carrier fare due to unusual circumstances. Example: The geographic location may not have a city pair fare for the market and a non-contract carrier offers a lower costing combined air and land package fare. In this case, Use of Cash in Excess of \$100 must be authorized.

**NOTE:** Internet airfares are not to be authorized under any circumstances and no

exception will be permitted for such airfares.

e. When you are unable to reach the Travel Management Center staff due to, for example, a natural disaster or other happenstance i.e., power failure.

## 2. Lodging.

a. When you are attending a conference and a local Housing Bureau, subsidiary company, etc. has pre-arranged all of the lodging accommodations and you are instructed to contact the entity to obtain your lodging. This exception may be applied in scenarios where either appropriated funds are being used or where a nonfederal source is providing the accommodations "In Cash" or "In Kind" (HHS-348 Sponsored Travel). **NOTE:** If the local Housing Bureau or other entity has reserved the rooms such that the rate exceeds the lodging per diem allowance for the area by *over 25%*, Actual Expense Allowance (AEA) requirements must be adhered to (see NIH Manual 1500, Chapter 04-06), before you bypass the TMC. (A Conference Lodging Allowance should be applied when the rate is *up to 25%* over the lodging portion of the per diem allowance for the area.) If there are hotels in the area at the government rate, you should not automatically accept the organization's offer. With appropriated funds, it's an issue of higher costs. With sponsored monies, it's a matter of perception and possibly ethical considerations. In either scenario, ICs should look for alternative lodging at the government rate.

b. When you are attending a conference where it is necessary for you to stay in non-Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) approved accommodations. Should this occur, the appropriate delegated official must annotate that such accommodations are necessary on a copy of the Travel Order and sign accordingly. See NIH Manual 1130 Delegations of Authority Travel No. 17 at the following web site address:

<http://www3.od.nih.gov/oma/manualchapters/delegations/travel/t17>

c. When you are required to travel on official Government business on an emergency basis or because of another exigency.

d. When you are unable to reach the TMC staff due to, for example, a natural disaster or other happenstance i.e., power failure.

e. When employees travel by privately owned vehicle to attend long-term training and do not know precisely where they will be staying overnight both, on the way to the training site and on the return trip from the training site.

**NOTE:** Federal Advisory Committee members are exempt from mandatory use of the TMC for procurement of lodging services.

**NOTE:** Travel arrangement requirements for Commissioned Officers

may be accessed in the Joint Federal Travel Regulations in Chapter 3 U3120 at the following web site:

<http://www.dtic.mil/perdiem/jftr.html>

### **3. Rental Cars.**

- a. When you are required to travel on official Government business on an emergency basis or because of another exigency.
- b. When you are unable to reach the TMC due to, for example, a natural disaster or other happenstance i.e., power failure.

**NOTE:** Federal Advisory Committee members are exempt from mandatory use of the TMC for procurement of rental car services.

**E. Management Information Requirements.** The Travel Management System should provide the following information upon request by NIH management or other Government sources:

1. Number of reservations by type of service (common carrier, lodging, and car rental);
2. Policy compliance and reasons for exceptions;
3. Origin and destination points of common carrier use;
4. Destination points for lodging accommodations (including name of lodging place;
5. Number of lodging nights in approved accommodations;
6. City or location where car rentals are obtained (including name of rental car company; and
7. Other tasks, e.g., reconciliation of charges on centrally billed accounts, processing ticket refunds, etc.