

NIH TRAVEL POLICY

1500-09-00 Relocation Allowances

A. Authority. This chapter is issued pursuant to Title 5 U.S.C. 5721 et seq, Title 20 U.S.C. 905 (a), and FTR 302-1 – 302-17 (For additional information, you can access the FTR at the OFM Travel Policy Home Page at: <http://ofm.od.nih.gov/travel/index.htm> Steps: 1) Click on GSA Federal Travel Regulation - 2) On the left, click on Federal Travel Regulation - 3) On the left, select the applicable chapter.

B. Delegations of Authority.

See NIH Manual Issuance 1130 - Delegations of Authority, Travel #6, 6B, and 6C.

1500-09-01 General Rules and Eligibility Conditions

A. New Appointees and Transferred Employees.

1) Persons covered. Except as otherwise stated in this chapter, the following persons are covered:

- a) Civilian officers and employees upon transfer from one official station or agency to another for permanent duty.
- b) Civilian officers and employees assigned to posts of duty outside the continental United States in connection with overseas tour renewal agreement travel and upon return to places of residence for the purpose of separation.
- c) New appointees assigned to any position in Government service.
- d) Student trainees assigned upon completion of college work to any position.
- e) Career appointees to the Senior Executive Service (SES), and prior SES appointees who have elected to retain SES retirement benefits, upon their retirement and return to their place of residence.
- f) Service Fellows appointed to duty under Section 207 (f) and (g) of the Public Health Service Act.
- g) Special Experts appointed to duty under 42 U.S.C. 282(d)(1), 285b-3(b)(1), and 285a-2(b)(5).

NOTE: For information on relocation allowances and benefits of non-FTE individuals i.e., IRTAs, CRTA's, etc. see NIH Manual 1500 Chapter 10.

2) Persons excluded. This policy shall not apply to:

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- a) Persons whose pay and allowances are prescribed under Title 37 U.S. Code, "Pay and Allowances of the Uniformed Services."

NOTE: Commissioned Officers coverage for relocation allowances can be referenced in the Joint Federal Travel Regulations web site as follows:
<https://secureapp2.hqda.pentagon.mil/perdiem/trvlregs.html>

B. Definitions.

1) Continental United States. (CONUS) means the 48 contiguous States and the District of Columbia.

2) Outside the Continental United States (OCONUS). Means any foreign area, Alaska, Hawaii, Guam, American Samoa, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, and any other territory under U.S. jurisdiction.

3) Employee. A civilian officer or employee of a Federal or executive agency.

4) New appointee. Any person newly appointed to Government service including an individual who has performed transition activities under Section 3 of the Presidential Transition Act of 1963 (3 U.S.C. 102 note) and student trainees as defined in FTR 302-3.1.

5) Agency. Means:

- a) An "Executive agency" (an executive department, an independent establishment, the General Accounting Office, or a wholly owned Government corporation);

- b) The District of Columbia.

6) Immediate family. Any of the following named members of the employee's household at the time the employee reports for duty:

- a) Spouse;
- b) Children (unmarried under 21 years, or physically or mentally incapable of self-support);
- c) Dependent parents; and
- d) Dependent brothers and sisters.

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7) Temporary storage. Storage of household goods for a limited period of time at the origin, destination, or en route in connection with transportation to, from, or between official stations or posts of duty or authorized alternate points.

8) Non-temporary storage. Storage of household goods while an employee is assigned to or is at an official station or post of duty to which the employee will not or cannot transport these household goods.

9) Mobile home. Any type of house trailer or mobile dwelling constructed for use as a residence and designed to be moved overland, either by self-propulsion or towing. Also, a boat when used as the employee's primary residence.

10) Household goods. All personal property associated with the home and all personal effects belonging to an employee and the immediate family when shipment begins, and which can be legally accepted and transported as household goods by an authorized commercial carrier in accordance with the rules and regulations established or approved by an appropriate Federal or State regulatory authority, except the items excluded in this paragraph. Snowmobiles and vehicles with two or three wheels may be shipped as household goods. The following are **excluded**:

- a) Automobiles, trucks, vans and similar motor vehicles; airplanes; mobile homes; camper trailers; and farming vehicles;
- b) Live animals, birds, fowls, and reptiles;
- c) Cordwood and building materials;
- d) Property held for resale, disposal, or commercial use rather than for personal use by the employee or the employee's immediate family; and
- e) Any property or items which carriers' tariffs prohibit carriers from accepting for shipment e.g., perishable food, flammable items, plants, and similar material.

NOTE: Items that are irreplaceable or of extreme value or sentiment are not provided special security even if extra insurance is purchased. Employees and their families are advised to personally transport these articles.

11) Official station or post of duty. The building or other place where the civilian officer or employee regularly reports for duty. With respect to relocation entitlements related to the residence and household goods and personal effects of the employee, official station also means the residence or other quarters from which the employee regularly commutes to and from work.

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12) Effective date of transfer or appointment. The effective date of the SF 50 “Notification of Personnel Action.” (For a copy of the form, reference the following website):

<http://contacts.gsa.gov/webforms.nsf>

C. Policy.

Relocation allowances generally fall into one of two categories: mandatory or discretionary allowances. Dollar limitations for mandatory allowances may not be set lower than that prescribed by the applicable Federal Travel Regulations. Funding for these allowances must come from the current fiscal year at the time the SF 50 “Notification of Personnel Action” or other appointment document is signed. Each IC is responsible for fully funding all allowable and authorized relocation actions and for providing related documentation to the OD/Office of Financial Management.

1) First Official Station Travel (New Appointees).

a) **Discretionary Coverage.** Under FTR 302-1.1, the head of an agency, or the head’s designated official, **may** authorize the payment of travel and transportation expenses and applicable allowances in the case of new appointees, as defined in FTR 302-3.1, relocating to their first official station.

b) **Mandatory Allowances.** New appointees to any position are eligible for payment only of those travel and transportation expenses listed in Table A (within CONUS) or Table B (OCONUS) accordingly, of the FTR 302-3.2 in relocating to their first official station. Provided an employee meets the eligibility conditions governing the allowance in question, once an agency authorizes payment of such expenses, it **must** pay **all** of the allowable relocation expenses. Those expenses are as follows:

- 1) Travel expenses including per diem for the appointee;
- 2) Transportation for immediate family;
- 3) Mileage if POV is used in travel;
- 4) Transportation and temporary storage of household goods;
- 5) Nontemporary storage of household goods if appointed to an isolated location; and
- 6) Transportation of a mobile home.

c) **Discretionary Allowances.** A new appointee **may** also be eligible for shipment of a private owned vehicle (See FTR 302-9).

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NOTE: For a complete summary on types of appointments to a first official station and the corresponding relocation allowances, see **NIH Manual 1500 Appendix 9, Table 1 “Travel Benefits for Federal Employees”**.

2) Change of Official Station Travel (Transfers – Including Promotions and Reassignments).

a) **Mandatory Coverage.** Under FTR 302-1.1, when change of official duty station or other similar action is authorized or approved, travel and transportation expenses and applicable allowances as described in this chapter **shall** be paid in the case of:

1) An employee transferring from one official duty station to another permanent duty station, **provided the transfer is in the best interest of the Government;** and

a) the transfer to the new duty station must be at least 50 miles distance from the old duty station; and

b) in the case of a short distance (at least 50 miles), a determination of eligibility is made under FTR 302-2.6. When the change of official station involves a distance of less than 50 miles, the IC Delegated Official may authorize relocation allowances if, 1) the one way commuting pattern from the residence to the old duty station when compared to the pattern from the residence to the new duty station increases by at least 10 miles but no more than 50 miles; or 2) there is an increase in commuting time to the new duty station; or 3) a financial hardship is created due to an increase in commuter costs. or

2) eligible employees outside the continental U.S. traveling in connection with overseas tour renewal travel as provided in FTR 302-3.101; or

3) eligible employees returning from posts of duty outside the continental U.S. to places of actual residence for separation as provided in FTR 302-3.101; or

4) eligible individuals qualifying for “last move home” benefits upon separation from Government service as provided in FTR 302-3.101.

a) **Discretionary Coverage.** Under FTR 302-3.400, travel allowances may be paid for an employee authorized a temporary change of station in connection with the employee’s long-term assignment to a temporary official station.

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b) **Mandatory Allowances.** When all of the eligibility conditions in 2(a) above are met, the following allowances are mandatory:

- (1) Transportation and per diem of the employee and his or her family members to the new location, including travel by a privately-owned automobile (See FTR 302-4.200.
- (2) Miscellaneous expenses (See FTR 302-16);
- (3) Expenses in connection with residence transactions (See FTR 302-11);
- (4) Transportation of mobile homes (See FTR 302-10);
- (5) Transportation and temporary storage of household goods, professional books, papers, equipment (See FTR 302-7); and
- (6) Nontemporary storage of household goods when posted to an isolated location within the CONUS (See FTR 302-8).

c) **Discretionary Allowances.** When all of the eligibility conditions in 2(a) above are met, the following allowances are discretionary:

- (1) Temporary quarters subsistence expenses (See FTR 302-6);
- (2) Expenses in connection with a house hunting trip (See FTR 302-5);
- (3) Transportation or emergency storage of a privately owned vehicle (See FTR 302-9);
- (4) Use of a relocation services company (See FTR 302-12);
- (5) Home marketing incentives (See FTR 302-14); and
- (6) Property management services for individuals stationed abroad (See FTR 302-15).

For the allowance that provides a relocation income tax allowance, the discretion rests only with the traveler. If claimed, the NIH **must** provide the full tax related reimbursements (See FTR 302-17).

3. Return Travel from Appointment.

a) **Mandatory Allowances for Title 42 Special Experts.** In line with Section 402 of the PHS Act and Title 5 of the United States Code, Full time and Part-time Special Experts shall be reimbursed for their expenses associated with traveling from their place of service to their place of residence, upon completion of their appointment. **NOTE:** Intermittent Special Experts are not entitled to these allowances (See NIH Manual 2300-304-1).

b) **Discretionary Allowances for Title 42 Service Fellows.** In line with 42 CFR 61.37 and at the discretion of the IC Scientific Director, an individual appointed as a fellow

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may be authorized the following allowances in line with travel from the last duty station to the place of residence which he/she left to accept the fellowship, or to some other place at no greater cost to the Government:

- 1) personal travel or transportation and per diem;
- 2) travel allowances or transportation for his/her immediate family, and;
- 3) transportation of household goods and personal effects

NOTE: For a complete summary on types of appointments engaging in transfers from one official station to another and the corresponding relocation allowances, see **NIH Manual 1500 Appendix 9, Table 2 “Travel Benefits for Federal Employees”**.

The coverages and allowances contained in this section are predicated upon proper authorization of the corresponding expenses (see NIH Manual Chapter 2300-335-1 “NIH Merit Promotion Plan”, Section E, “Vacancy Announcement” - Title 5 appointments and transfers).

For information about Title 42 new appointments and transfers, you can reference the following manual chapters/regulations:

- **NIH Staff Fellowship Program – 2300-320-1;**
- **42 U.S.C. 209(f) and (g) Appointments for Scientists – 2300-320-2 (pending revision). Current information can be accessed at the following web site address:**
<http://hr.od.nih.gov/Title42/320-2.PDF>
- **Employment of Special Experts – 2300-304-1;**
- **Senior Biomedical Research Service (SBRS) – 42 CFR 24.**

D. General Provisions

1) Travel authorization. A written Travel Authorization (manual version) shall be issued to the new appointee or transferring employee before he or she reports to the first or new official station. The agency must advise the employee, or individual selected for appointment, **not to incur expenses for travel in anticipation of relocation until he or she has received written notification.** The travel authorization shall indicate the specific allowances which are authorized as provided in this policy and provide instructions on the Federal procedures for acquisition of travel and transportation services.

NOTE: In line w/ several provisions in FTR 302, an employee may begin his/her move once they have signed the HHS-355 and they have a paper version of the signed Travel

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Authorization in hand. In the case of the HHS-355 “Employment Agreement for Transfers and Appointments Overseas” (see Section E below), if an employee fails to sign this document, the NIH will not reimburse them for expenses incurred. For a copy of the HHS-355 Form, reference the following web site:

<http://intranet.hhs.gov/forms/HHS/HHS-355.pdf>

2) Applicable provisions for reimbursement. Because of successive changes to the statutes and the regulatory provisions governing relocation allowances and the extended period of time that employees retain eligibility for certain allowances, reimbursement allowances will not be the same for all employee’s claims. The regulatory provisions in effect on an employee’s effective date of transfer or appointment shall be used for payment or reimbursement purposes. (See FTR 302-2.3).

E. Service Agreements.

- 1) Transfers within the continental United States (CONUS) and appointments and assignments of new appointees and student trainees to any position within the United States.** In connection with the transfer of employees between official stations within the continental U.S., expenses authorized in this chapter shall not be allowed until the employee selected for this transfer agrees in writing to remain in the service of the Government for 12 months following the effective date of the transfer unless separated for reasons beyond the employee’s control and acceptable to the Agency. In case of a violation of this agreement, including failure to effect the transfer, any funds expended by the United States for expenses authorized in this chapter shall be recoverable from the individual concerned as a debt due the United States. Such an agreement also is required from new appointees and student trainees appointed or assigned to any position within the United States as a condition of payment for travel, transportation, moving and/or storage of household goods, and allowances as provided in FTR 302-3.2. A signed agreement for 12 months service is required for each permanent change of station.

- 2) Transfers, appointments, and separations involving posts of duty OCONUS.** In connection with the transfer or appointment of employees to posts of duty outside the continental United States, or between posts located in separate countries, or separate areas of the United States located outside CONUS, expenses of travel, transportation, moving and/or storage of household goods or other allowances shall not be authorized until the employee selected agrees in writing to remain in the service of the Government for 12 months following the effective date of the transfer or appointment, unless separated for reasons beyond his or her control that are approved by the agency.

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F. Employee Liability. The agreement to remain in the service of the Government for 12 months following the effective date of transfer is not voided by a subsequent transfer whether the subsequent transfer is at the employee's request or in the interest of the Government, nor is the agreement voided by another service agreement made in connection with a second transfer. The liability of the employee for any funds expended by the U.S. for that employee's travel, transportation, and relocation allowances is a separate liability for each service agreement. The liability in each instance is effective for the full 12-month period in connection with the transfer for which the service agreement was made.

G. Time Limits/Exceptions for Beginning Travel and Transportation. All travel, including that for the employee's immediate family, and transportation, including household goods, shall be accomplished as soon as possible. The maximum time for beginning allowable travel and transportation shall not exceed 2 years from the effective date of the employee's transfer or appointment, except that:

1) *The two-year time period* is exclusive of any time spent on furlough for an employee who begins active military service before the expiration of the two-year period and who is furloughed for the duration of his or her assignment to the post of duty for which transportation expenses are allowed;

2) *The two-year time period* does not include any time during which travel and transportation is not feasible due to shipping restrictions for an employee who is transferred or appointed to or from a post of duty outside the continental U.S.; and

3) *The two-year period* shall be extended for an additional period of time not to exceed an additional two years when the 2-year time limitation for completion of residence transactions is extended (see FTR 302-11.21). In line with FTR 302-11.23, an employee is required to submit a request for this extension to the Director, Office of Financial Management, not later than 30 calendar days after the initial 2-year expiration date.

H. Two or More Family Members Employed.

1) **Members of the same immediate family who are employees.** When two or more employees are members of the same immediate family, the allowances authorized under this chapter shall apply either to:

- a) **Each employee separately**, in which instance none of the employees is eligible for any allowance as a member of the immediate family; or

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- b) **Only one of the employees** (that being the employee selected for the new position of employment), in which case the other employee(s) is eligible for allowances solely as a member(s) of the immediate family.

2) Non-employee members of the immediate family. When two or more employee members of the same immediate family elect separate allowances under paragraph 1) (a) above, non-employee members of the immediate family shall not receive duplicate allowances because of the fact that the employee members elected separate allowances.

3) Payment limitation. When employee members of the same immediate family elect separate allowances under paragraph (1) (a) above, the employing agency or agencies shall not make duplicate payment for the same expenses.

4) Procedures. A determination as to which of the two alternatives provided in paragraph 1) (a) above is selected shall be made in writing and signed by all employee members of the same immediate family. When employee family members elect separate allowances under paragraph 1) (a), the determination also shall specify under which employee member's authorization non-employee family members will receive allowances. A copy of this determination shall be filed with the agency in which each employee member is employed.

I. Reduction-in-Force Involved.

1) Impending separation. When an employee is assigned to a new official station after having been notified of involuntary separation not for cause but incident to the reduction, cessation, or transfer of the work at the station where the employee was employed, the transfer of the employee is deemed to be in the interest of the Government unless there is an affirmative administrative determination that the transfer is primarily for the employee's convenience or benefit.

2) Reemployment after separation. A former employee separated by reason of reduction-in-force or transfer of function who, within 1 year of the date of separation is re-employed by an agency for a non-temporary appointment, at a different permanent duty station from that where the separation occurred, may be allowed and paid the expenses and other allowances (excluding non-temporary storage when assigned to an isolated permanent duty station within the continental U.S.). These procedures would occur in the same manner as though he or she had been transferred in the interest of the Government to the permanent duty station where re-employed, from the permanent duty station where

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separated, without a break in service, and subject to the eligibility limitations as described in this chapter.

1500-09-02 Relocation Travel and Shipping Allowances and Benefits

A. Agency Notification Responsibilities. All prospective candidates for appointment or assignment to the NIH shall be notified and fully informed of the benefits which **may be available** to them for travel and transportation involved in reporting to their official stations. Special care must be taken as well to adequately inform new personnel of the **limitations** on available benefits. For benefit limitations on New Appointees, reference FTR 302-3.2. For benefit limitations on Transfers, reference FTR 302-3.101.

B. Procedural Requirements. No payment for otherwise allowable expenses or advance of funds shall be made unless the **service agreement** appropriate to the employee's particular situation is **signed**.

C. NIH Resource Pamphlet/Request Form. The NIH pamphlet entitled "*NIH Travel and Shipping of Household Goods Entitlements for Employees*" contains guidelines and information on travel and transportation allowances, methods of shipment of household goods, and residence transactions. This document can be accessed at the following web site:

<http://ofm.od.nih.gov/travel/travshi2002.pdf>

The NIH Form 2028 "*Request for Permanent Change of Station Orders– Civilian Personnel and Other Appointed Individuals*" is included for immediate use by the new employee. (See <http://forms.nih.gov/adobe/personnel/NH2028.PDF> (Both the form and pamphlet are included in the title and URL.)

D. Advance of Funds. An employee may be advanced funds for use while traveling and for certain expenses which the employee may incur incident to a transfer based on his or her prospective entitlement to reimbursement for those expenses after they are incurred.

1) Anticipated relocation entitlements that may justify an advance. The expected relocation entitlement of an employee to reimbursement for the following expenses will form the basis for payment of a travel advance.

- a) Per diem, mileage, and common carrier costs incident to the employee's change of official station travel within CONUS. (See FTR 302-4.200 for specific details).
- b) Authorized house-hunting trips. (See 302-5).
- c) Subsistence while occupying temporary quarters. (See 302-6 for specific details).

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- d) Transportation and temporary storage of household goods. (See FTR 302-7 for specific details).
- e) Transportation of mobile homes. (See FTR 302-10).
- f) Transportation and storage of the employee's automobile. (See FTR 302-9).

2) No advance allowed. Travel advances will not be issued to cover any of the expenses authorized by subpart B "Relocation Entitlements Upon Separation for Retirement" of FTR 302-3. Transportation expenses should be paid through the use of U.S. Government Transportation Accounts (GTA) and U.S. Government Bills of Lading to the maximum extent possible to minimize travel and transportation costs and the need for individuals to use personal funds.

3) Rules. Advances and collection of advances by deduction from the employee's voucher are the same as for regular Federal travelers on official business travel. (See FTR 301-51 and 301-71).

E. Funding of Transfers Between Agencies.

- 1) Transfer from one agency to another.** Allowable expenses shall be paid from the funds of the agency to which the employee is transferred.
- 2) Transfers between agencies for reasons of reduction-in-force or transfer of functions.** Allowable expenses may be paid in whole or in part by the agency from which the employee is transferred or by the agency to which the employee is transferred as may be agreed upon by the heads of the agencies concerned. (See FTR 302-3.205)

1500-09-03 Pre-employment Interview – Reimbursement of Travel Expenses

References for this section include HHS Travel Manual Chapter 1-30 "Travel for Pre-employment Interview", and FTR 301-75 "Pre-employment Interview Travel", 5 CFR Part 572 "Travel and Transportation Expenses: New Appointees and Interviews".

A. Policy. Allowable expenses are subject to the limitations applicable to a Government employee traveling on official business. However, an agency is not required to offer all allowances to each interviewee. In accordance with 5 CFR 572.102, the agency has the discretion to pay travel and transportation or interview expenses in filling any position. The agency can also consider such factors as availability of funds as well as the desirability of conducting an interview for a particular job or offering a recruitment incentive to a particular candidate.

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B. Eligibility Determination. It is HHS policy that such payments should be limited to applicants for certain high-level or unique positions when the interview is necessary to determine the applicant's qualifications for the position.:

1) Competitive Service and Excepted Service (non-competitive) Travel expenses for pre-employment interviews may be reimbursed under the following conditions:

a) A determination is made that a position is of such a high-level or is so unique that interviews are necessary to enable the hiring agency to determine the applicants' qualifications.

b) Payments of travel expenses will be limited to applicants for unique or high-level positions that are defined as technical, professional, or administrative. These positions are considered to be those with unusual combinations of duties, responsibilities, and qualifications. Authorizing officials should take into account the costs associated with travel of top-ranked applicants.

2) **Entry-level positions.** The authority to reimburse travel expenses for pre-employment interviews is not to be used for entry-level positions, except in rare and unique cases; for example, research scientists with doctoral degrees.

C. Application.

1) **Authorization.** Reimbursements of travel expenses for pre-employment interviews must be approved in advance on a Travel Authorization in the automated travel system. The purpose field must include a sentence to the effect that a personal interview is necessary to evaluate the traveler's qualifications for employment.

2) **Expenses limitations.** Travel expenses authorized for pre-employment interviews are the same as those authorized for regular travel on official business. An Actual Expense Allowance cannot be authorized for per diem expenses.

3) **No advance of funds.** An advance of funds cannot be authorized for pre-employment interviews.

4) **Fire safety responsibilities.** A prospective employee should be encouraged for his or her safety to stay in a Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA) approved accommodation while performing interview travel, and the agency shall provide the individual with a list of approved accommodations in the applicable areas.

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5) Interviewee's potential liability notice. ICs should make every effort to provide written instructions to the interviewee explaining NIH administrative procedures for controlling and accounting for passenger transportation documents. The prospective employee is accountable for all transportation tickets issued for use in performing pre-employment interview travel.

6) Claiming travel expenses. Claims for reimbursement of pre-employment travel expenses are processed in the same manner as other claims for travel expenses and allowances. The IC Delegated Official must consider all travel expenses to be incurred and the time constraints when approving reimbursement for a pre-employment interview.