



## TRAVEL GUIDELINES

(August 2021)

### MEETING AUTHORIZATION

According to Department of Commerce guidance, persons authorized to perform travel for the Council are expected to exercise the same care when incurring expenses that a prudent person would exercise if traveling for personal reasons. All travel must be authorized and approved in advance by a Meeting Authorization (MA) before any travel reimbursements may be issued. Points of travel are indicated on the Meeting Authorization, and deviations from these points of travel must have prior approval for payment or reimbursement. When a person, for his own convenience, interrupts the official route of travel by an indirect route, any extra expenses shall be borne by the traveler. The Travel Coordinator can, upon request prepare a cost comparison prior to travel to advise the traveler of authorized reimbursement for any altered travel. Travelers are encouraged to submit Travel Expense Reimbursement forms no later than 60 days from the last day of travel.

### METHOD OF TRANSPORTATION

Travel on official business shall be by the method of transportation that will result in the greatest advantage to the Council. Travel may be performed by common carrier (air, bus, etc.), Council vehicle, rental vehicle, privately owned vehicle (POV), or other means. If a traveler chooses a means of travel that results in a higher cost than the prevailing GSA City Pairs airfare rate, the traveler may not be reimbursed for the difference, depending on the circumstances.

### ALLOWABLE EXPENSES

The following describes travel costs that can be claimed on the Travel Expense Report and provides instructions on making proper claim for reimbursement. Expenses deemed by the Executive Director as non-essential will be disallowed.

- A. **AIR FARES:** Flights should be booked no less than 14 days from the scheduled date of departure whenever possible to avoid excessive airfare which may not be reimbursed. Non-refundable tickets should be selected. First-class and business class airfares are prohibited and will only be paid in unusual circumstances and with prior written approval. Miscellaneous fees and taxes, including early boarding and seat selection fees (except as noted above) are considered reimbursable expenses.

Flights booked directly with an airline are reimbursed upon receipt of an airline ticket receipt along with your travel expense reimbursement claim at the conclusion of your travel. Note: Flights that are booked directly with an airline are considered "personal tickets" until travel has commenced, and may not be reimbursed prior to travel or should you need to cancel your trip. Change fees may also be disallowed depending on the situation.

When travelers find they will not or cannot use their booked travel arrangements, they should release them within the time limits specified by the carriers. Failure to cancel reservations without justification may require the traveler to pay for assessed penalties and/or cancellation fees.

- B. **PRIVATELY OWNED VEHICLES:** Mileage costs associated with the use of privately-owned vehicle can sometimes be more expensive than air travel or rental cars, therefore, such use must be justified by cost or price comparison with use of GSA City Pairs airfare rate, with considerations being given to total distance of travel, number of points visited, and the number of travelers. Mileage will be paid at the prevailing federal rate for the number of miles shown and as verified by Google Maps. When a privately-owned vehicle is used as a matter of personal preference and is not advantageous to the Council, reimbursement will be limited to the lesser of amounts determined by the cost comparison. Receipts are required for all POV related expenses, such as tolls and parking fees. Private vehicle mileage to and from the airport is an allowable expense when traveling on a meeting authorization.
- C. **AIRPORT/HOTEL SHUTTLE/TAXI:** Reimbursement is allowed for usual taxi, hotel and airport shuttles incurred for the conduct of business. Courtesy transportation furnished by hotels should be used as a first source of transportation when practical. Tipping is reimbursable up to 20% of the fare. Taxi fares to restaurants

are prohibited unless a restaurant is not available or near the hotel or the temporary duty location. Reimbursement for taxicab fares plus tip is also allowable from the traveler’s home or office to the airport on the day of departure for an official trip requiring at least one night’s lodging, and from the airport to the traveler’s home on the day of return from the trip. A receipt is required.

**D. RENTAL CARS:** The use of rental cars can be costly and is generally discouraged. Travelers who want to use a rental car must submit a written request to the Travel Coordinator for cost comparison and prior authorization must be obtained from the Executive Director to determine circumstances justify the need. A mid-size or lower class vehicle is allowable. If rental of another vehicle class is procured and extenuating circumstances are not present, the traveler must provide written justification. The Council will not reimburse the costs for collision damage waiver or collision damage insurance available in commercial rental contracts for an extra fee, except when foreign travel is involved. Arrangements for such insurance coverage for rental cars must be made in advance through the Council office under the federal car rental contracts. The cost of personal accident insurance is not reimbursable. Receipts and rental agreement are required for all expenses relating to use of rental cars.

**E. LODGING:** When travel is 50 miles or less from the traveler’s origination, lodging is allowed on a case-by-case basis upon prior approval by the Executive Director. Failure to cancel reservations without justification may require the traveler to pay for assessed penalties and/or cancellation fees. To take advantage of tax exemptions, lodging typically will be billed to the Council’s hotel master account. When a traveler decides, as a personal preference, to occupy lodging at a location other than the one selected by the Council, commuting costs between the meeting location and the alternate place of lodging are not allowed. Unusual circumstances that prohibit use of previously assigned meeting hotel accommodations and that result in higher lodging costs may be approved by the Executive Director for payment in the higher amount, but only on a case-by case basis. Temporary lodging receipts issued upon registration and credit card payment slips are not valid receipts. Paid itemized receipts for lodging must accompany the Travel Expense Report, and the receipt must indicate a zero balance. Lodging taxes are to be claimed under Section E., Other.

**F. M&IE EXPENSES:** All travelers, unless otherwise restricted by their own agency rules, must claim the daily M&IE per diem allowance rather than actual expenses and adhere to the per diem limits in the General Services Administration (GSA) Travel Regulations (see 2019/2020 per diem limits in the table below). Expenses listed on the Travel Expense Report must be for the traveler only. The reimbursement of alcoholic beverages is prohibited.

<b>M&amp;IE Breakdown</b>					
<b>M&amp;IE Total</b>	<b>Continental Breakfast/ Breakfast</b>	<b>Lunch</b>	<b>Dinner</b>	<b>Incidental Expenses</b>	<b>First &amp; Last Day of Travel</b>
<b>\$55</b>	\$13	\$14	\$23	\$5	\$41.25
<b>\$56</b>	\$13	\$15	\$23	\$5	\$42.00
<b>\$61</b>	\$14	\$16	\$26	\$5	\$45.75
<b>\$66</b>	\$16	\$17	\$28	\$5	\$49.50
<b>\$71</b>	\$17	\$18	\$31	\$5	\$53.25
<b>\$76</b>	\$18	\$19	\$34	\$5	\$57.00

**First and last** calendar day of travel is calculated at **75 percent** if on travel/work status for less than 12 hours.

Note: Travel status begins when the traveler leaves their home/office and ends upon their return. For travel that extends beyond 24 hours, a new travel day begins at 12:00 a.m. each day.

Any meals provided by a common carrier or a complimentary meal provided by a hotel or other non-government organization does not affect the per diem. However, your M&IE allowance must be adjusted for meals furnished to you by the Council, any government agency, or included in a conference registration fee

(example: a full sit down breakfast, working lunch, or banquet dinner) by deducting the appropriate amount shown in the chart above.

**FOREIGN TRAVEL**

With the exception of travel to Canada and Mexico, all foreign travel must be approved in advance by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Approval of Foreign Travel could take NOAA up to 30 days to process. Please submit your Travel Request Form for Foreign travel to the Travel Coordinator as soon as possible for preparation of appropriate documents. The Council shall comply with the provisions of the Fly America Act.

**TIPS and GRATUITIES**

Tips to waiters, dining room stewards, porters, baggage handlers, housekeepers and bellmen are included in the M&IE allowances. Gratuities or tips to taxi/shuttle drivers and others providing necessary services to the traveler will be limited to no more than 20% of the basic charge.

**MISCELLANEOUS COSTS**

Incidental travel costs submitted for reimbursement (telephone, internet service, supplies, services, etc.) should have adequate explanation of the nature and purpose of the expense and show that the cost is reasonable and related to the conduct of official business. Expenses for laundering of clothing while at the temporary duty location are allowed if the approved and actual travel duration involves at least four consecutive nights and the expense is incurred during the authorized travel period (at the temporary duty location). Valet parking at hotels is discouraged

**REQUIRED RECEIPTS**

While receipts are not required for all items of travel expenses, receipts are necessary for the following:

<b>RECEIPTS REQUIRED</b>	<b>DOCUMENT</b>	<b>PROHIBITED COSTS</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Airfare / Other Transportation Conveyance</li> <li>✓ Travel Itinerary showing points of travel &amp; payment method</li> <li>✓ Baggage Fees</li> <li>✓ Airport &amp; Hotel Shuttle Fees / Taxis</li> <li>✓ Lodging (zero balance required)</li> <li>✓ Registration Fees</li> <li>✓ Car Rental Agreements with final receipt</li> <li>✓ Car Rental Associated Expenses</li> <li>✓ Parking</li> <li>✓ Toll Receipts</li> <li>✓ Shipment, freight or express fees</li> <li>✓ Excess baggage</li> <li>✓ Baggage or property storage</li> <li>✓ Equipment rentals</li> <li>✓ Laundry</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Private Vehicle Mileage</li> <li>✓ Rental Car Justification</li> <li>✓ Valet Parking Charges</li> <li>✓ Fax Charges</li> <li>✓ Justification for Taxi fare to restaurant</li> <li>✓ Personal Travel Costs</li> <li>✓ Unusual Circumstances</li> <li>✓ Official Telephone Calls (placed from hotel rooms)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ First Class Travel</li> <li>✓ Business Class Travel</li> <li>✓ Excessive POV Mileage</li> <li>✓ Alcoholic Beverages</li> <li>✓ Unauthorized Travel</li> <li>✓ Personal Expenses</li> </ul>

### **SUPPLEMENTAL REMARKS**

To avoid delays in payment of a claim, additional explanations should be made for items which would appear improper or excessive to the voucher auditor. The comments should also describe periods of time and expenses which were personal. Typical remarks would explain the reason why (1) departure from origin was made earlier than expected, (2) return to origin was not made immediately upon conclusion of official business, (3) mileage claimed is unusually high, etc.

### **DISALLOWANCES**

Disallowances to a reimbursement claim may occur at the time the travel expenses are processed for payment. This may result because of a missing receipt, a discrepancy between a cost comparison and the expenses submitted, an error in the computation of cost shown on the Travel Expense Report, an insufficient description of a questionable item in the claim, etc. Amounts disallowed may be reconsidered for payment upon presentation of the necessary receipt, after providing the requested additional information, or after taking other necessary corrective measures.

**TRAVEL EXPENSE REPORT CERTIFICATION:** All claims submitted by travelers for reimbursement of travel expenses must contain a certification by the traveler that expenses claimed are valid official costs and do not include personal expenses. The certification also assures that the period of travel shown is accurate and that costs claimed will not be presented for reimbursement elsewhere, which would result in a dual reimbursement.

The traveler should include additional explanations on the Travel Expense Report when it is possible that any portion of the claim might appear questionable or different from the norm.

Please feel free to contact the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council with questions or further clarification:

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