

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20250**

DEPARTMENTAL REGULATION		Number: 2300-005
SUBJECT: Agriculture Travel Regulation	DATE: December 8, 2015	
	OPI: Office of the Chief Financial Officer	

Section

1. Purpose	1
2. Cancellation	2
3. Policy	2
4. Responsibilities	14
5. Definitions	17
6. Internal Controls	19
7. Records Retention	20
8. Major Policy Changes	21
9. Appendix A	A-1

1. PURPOSE

This regulation supplements the [Federal Travel Regulation](#) (FTR) issued by the General Services Administration (GSA), with policy specific to United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). This regulation is the primary source of USDA policy on managing Temporary Duty (TDY) travel. All provisions of this regulation shall comply with applicable Federal guidance.

This regulation applies to the travel of USDA employees, individuals employed intermittently by the Department, and non-employees who execute official USDA activities. The Agency or Staff Office paying for the travel is responsible for policy and procedures for travel management.

Personnel policies, including policies applicable when employees are in travel status, are outside the scope of this document. USDA managers and employees should seek the guidance of their servicing personnel office for policies pertaining to pay, compensatory time off for travel, other compensatory time, personnel benefits, requirements for overseas assignments (such as cost of living allowances and hardship pay differentials), administering leave, and other personnel actions involving employees in travel status.

2. CANCELLATION

This regulation supersedes DM 2300-001, dated June 15, 2010.

3. POLICY

a. Travel Authorizations.

- (1) Travel may only be authorized for official Government purposes.
- (2) Travelers and approving officials are responsible for complying with USDA's E-Gov Travel requirements for providing complete and accurate information in travel authorizations.
- (3) Travelers who normally use open or "blanket" travel authorizations, and need to travel for different purposes, must submit separate authorizations which describe the purpose of this travel for approval.
- (4) Travel authorizations for premium class travel must follow the procedures as detailed in the FTR.

b. Trip-by-Trip and Open or "Blanket" Authorizations.

- (1) Travel may be authorized by either a trip-by-trip or open authorization.
- (2) A trip-by-trip authorization requires an approving official to authorize each trip before travel commences and expenses are incurred. Trip-by-trip authorizations are USDA's preference due to the level of accountability and reporting detail.
- (3) Open or "blanket" travel authorizations can be used by an approving official to authorize multiple trips for an employee over a specific period of time. In this scenario, the employee or travel arranger can then book individual trips at later dates without further authorization. These authorizations may be used for frequent, routine travel with consistent restrictions and travel purpose. They should be made as specific as possible and list locations, dates, methods of transportation, and approved miscellaneous expenses whenever possible. The FTR requires several types of travel expenses to be specifically approved in an open authorization (e.g. use of a rental car).

c. Travel Vouchers.

- (1) Travelers must submit travel vouchers for authorized travel to their designated approving official, as required by the FTR, within 5 working days after completing a trip or period of travel. Travelers in a continuous travel status must submit interim travel vouchers, at a minimum, every 2 weeks.

- (2) Travel vouchers must be reviewed and approved/disapproved for payment by the designated approving official within 5 days of receipt.
- (3) An approving official may authorize an appropriate official at a traveler's duty station to approve travel vouchers if the traveler's supervisors are located at other geographic locations.
- (4) All travel vouchers are subject to post-payment audit by OCFO.

d. Actual Expense.

OCFO sets the threshold under which Agency and Staff Office heads may authorize travelers to incur actual expenses above per diem for authorized expenses, and approve reimbursement. Such expenses should be approved only when prudent, such as when travelers would have to endure sub-standard lodging and meals at per diem rates. Agency and Staff Office Heads may approve actual expense reimbursements at or below per diem and delegate this authority.

Authorization requests for actual expenses should be made, to the fullest extent possible, in advance of travel. Actual expense reimbursement may also be approved after travel is completed ("post-approval") when the approving official determines that one of the following has occurred:

- (1) An emergency situation in which a request for pre-travel authorization was not possible; or
- (2) Unanticipated, unusual, and exceptional circumstances resulted in the incurrence of actual and necessary expenses that were much greater than the authorized per-diem allowance.

e. Receipts.

- (1) To receive reimbursement, travelers are required to provide electronic receipts for lodging, airfare, and all expenses greater than \$75. This policy includes obtaining receipt(s) from the airline or other documentation as proof they took the flight(s) and incurred the fare(s) for which they are seeking reimbursement.
- (2) For audit purposes, USDA may request a hard copy receipt for expenses greater than \$75 not electronically attached to the travel voucher.
- (3) Travelers are responsible for all transportation documents for official travel issued to them. They also are personally responsible for any additional cost for official travel resulting from improper safeguarding of these transportation documents. Travelers must return any unused tickets, coupons, or other evidence of refund to their Travel Management Center.

f. Mixed Official and Personal (Leisure) Travel.

Official travel must be in the best interest of the Government. Approving officials should not authorize travel that mixes official business and personal activity when there is an appearance that the focus of the trip falls under the latter category.

When mixing personal (leisure) travel with official travel, documented approval from the delegated approving official must be received. Documented approval can be provided electronically through comment fields in the E-Gov Travel system, email or paper methods. The approval should clarify what expenses are authorized and how they will be calculated. It also should be attached to the electronic travel authorization. General Officers, through the delegation of authority, may approve their own mixed travel.

g. Transportation Expenses.

(1) Rental Car.

The use of a rental car requires explicit authorization from the Approving Official, and must be deemed advantageous to the Government. Approving officials must authorize the least expensive compact size car available. Justifications must be made in travel authorizations for the rental of vehicles larger than economy class. Such determinations include cost, number of passengers, security, location of rental facilities, office hours, and wait times. Employees must refuel the rental vehicle prior to returning the vehicle at the drop off location to preclude added expense charges by the rental car company. Employees are encouraged to share rental cars when appropriate.

(2) Agency Use of Government Contract, Restricted, and Non-Refundable Fares.

Employees should book airfares that are most advantageous to the Government. USDA has determined that restricted fares are most advantageous in many instances. The Department has delegated authority to authorize restricted fare use to Agency and Staff Office heads.

(a) Government Contract Fares: GSA provides both regular contract fares (city pairs), and city pairs with capacity limits. The lower-cost city pairs with capacity limits fares should be used whenever available, as required by FTR. FTR mandates the use of Government contract fares unless travelers meet one of the exceptions listed within the regulation. These exceptions include a non-contract carrier offering a lower fare to the general public that, if used, will result in a lower total trip cost to the Government.

(b) Restricted and Non-Refundable Fares: Employees are encouraged to use these lower-cost fares when they meet FTR exceptions. Individual travel authorizations requesting the use of these fares shall be justified, routed, and approved through USDA's E-Gov Travel system. Travelers and approving officials must consider the potential cost savings and risks of using these fares. Additional costs due to official travel being curtailed, cancelled, interrupted for official purposes, or for

other reasons beyond the employee's control, if acceptable to the agency or staff office, may be fully reimbursed.

- (c) Agencies that allow their employees to use non-refundable tickets must implement internal controls over the process.

h. Premium Class Travel.

(1) General.

Coach class travel is the USDA preference. Authorization can be requested for the use of premium class travel. It must meet FTR requirements. Any additional costs or penalties incurred by an employee resulting from unauthorized use of non-contract service are levied to the traveler. Authorization is unnecessary when an employee's frequent travel benefits are used to upgrade to premium class or business class service on an airline or AMTRAK trains.

(2) Requests for Approval.

All requests for premium class travel should be submitted to the approving official at least 7 days before the commencement of travel, unless it is emergency travel. Premium class travel must be approved in advance of booking travel. Requests are approved on an individual trip basis. Approving officials may approve a "blanket" authorization for travelers to accommodate a disability or special need substantiated by a medical authority.

(3) Reporting.

Agencies, Staff Offices and OIG will report quarterly to OCFO on the use of premium class travel.

i. Use of Paper Tickets.

There are two situations where paper tickets are allowed:

- 1) For international travel, or
- 2) When electronic tickets are unavailable.

j. Local Travel.

- (1) Travelers may be reimbursed for travel expenses incurred through performing official duties in and around their duty station. This reimbursement does not cover normal commuting expenses, except under the Commuter Transit Subsidy Benefits Program. When the expense appears reasonable and necessary to conduct business, the traveler should be reimbursed for out-of-pocket expenses. Local travel expenses must be claimed within the fiscal year the expenses were incurred.

- (2) Local travel expenses may include such things as the cost of subway, bus, train, taxi, mileage, tolls, and parking. Local travel expenses could be incurred in a variety of work-related situations including, but not limited to, required attendance at meetings, conferences, other official functions, training, or periodic work assignments at alternative duty locations in or around the duty station. Per diem expenses, including lodging costs, cannot be authorized or reimbursed.
- (3) Approval for local travel expenses shall be made on a case-by-case basis. The traveler seeking reimbursement must clearly illustrate and justify that local travel costs incurred were additional, out-of-pocket expenses, and not part of the normal commuting expense.
- (4) Agency and Staff Office Heads or their designees may determine the appropriate method for reimbursing their employees for local travel expenses.
- (5) Agencies should issue guidance on calculating additional out-of-pocket expenses that are not part of the employee's normal commuting expense. The employee's supervisor (or designated approving official) will determine whether those expenses are reasonable and should be reimbursed.

k. Emergency Travel.

Approving officials are authorized to make payments for travel expenses incurred as a result of an illness or injury of an employee while the employee was in a travel status away from his official station in the United States, or while performing official duties outside the continental United States or in transit to or from the temporary duty station.

While an employee is in official travel status, an approving official may authorize emergency travel due to the death or serious illness of a member of the employee's immediate family. For the purposes of emergency travel, the approving official may extend the definition of family on a case-by-case basis. The relationship between the employee and the family member shall be taken into consideration for the extension of the definition of family. The approving official must use their best judgment in extending the definition of family.

l. Expenses Incurred Due to the Death of an Employee in Travel Status.

Agency heads are authorized to make payments for expenses incurred as a result of the death of an employee while the employee was in travel status away from their official duty station in the United States or while performing official duties outside the continental United States or in transit to or from the temporary duty station. FTR provides specific instructions.

The appropriation or fund available for the activity in which the deceased employee was engaged shall be charged with the allowable expenditures.

m. Conferences.

(1) General Guidelines.

Agencies and Staff Offices are expected to carefully plan and manage conference and training activities to mitigate the risk or appearance of inappropriate spending and activities. Conference and training management should be performed in accordance with the FTR, and GSA guidance, Office of Management and Budget (OMB) directives, and this regulation (see Appendix A). To ensure efficient spending, agencies are encouraged to devise strategic alternatives to Government conference and training travel, including local or technological alternatives (e.g. video teleconferencing). All conference and training activities shall be held at the most cost-effective location, considering such factors as per diem, transportation, and rental of conference or training rooms. When choosing a conference or training location, a cost comparison of at least three geographically diverse viable cities must be conducted. A cost comparison is not required if a majority of the likely attendees are stationed in the local vicinity of the proposed conference or training location. A contracting officer should be used to assist in finding the most cost-effective conference or training facility.

(2) Annual Plans for Conference and Training Activities

No later than August 31 of each year, each Agency and Staff Office is required to submit to OCFO a fiscal year annual plan for all conference and/or training activities that will be hosted/sponsored or attended and where the estimated cost to the Federal Government is more than \$7,000. OIG's annual plan must be submitted to the Secretary or Deputy Secretary of Agriculture.

Agencies are to report to OCFO any conference and/or training activity that is not included in the annual plan prior to conducting the event.

For more detailed information on conference and training management, see Appendix A.

(3) Approval to Conduct Conference and Training Activities

(a) Before submitting a proposal for a conference or training activity to the appropriate official identified in subsection (d) below, the Agency or Staff Office must determine if the following statements are true:

1. The conference or training activity will help further the agency's or the Department's mission;
2. The information cannot be shared as effectively through another means such as a teleconference or the Internet;
3. The number of employees attending is justified;
4. The location is appropriate and justified, and a prudent person would not think it a waste for tax dollars to be spent for this conference or training event at this

location. (The request must indicate whether the conference or training will take place at a non-USDA government facility, commercial facility, or a combination of facilities);

5. The meeting location is near where a majority of the attendees are stationed. If not, the detailed cost analysis is to include cost comparisons to locations near the majority of attendees;
 6. The conference or training activity is necessary, considering the limited budget of the agency; and
 7. For conferences or training activities held or sponsored by a USDA Agency or Staff Office, any vendors providing supplies or services for the conference or training activity were selected through a competitive contracting process. (Conference or training requests involving a sole source contract or no contract must include additional justification).
- (b) Agencies and Staff Offices must submit proposals and obtain approval from officials listed in the subsection (d) below to conduct conference and/or training activities which have estimated total USDA costs exceeding \$7,000.
- (c) Proposals must be approved by Agency Heads and/or the Under Secretary or Assistant Secretary, in conformance with approval limits, and submitted in USDA's OCFO Conference Transparency and Tracking tool, six (6) weeks before any funds are committed. If agencies submit hardcopy proposals, the OCFO templates must be completed. The templates are located on the OCFO's Website under the Travel Express link. Agencies and Staff Offices must obtain approval before funds are obligated, except for events that must be conducted due to emergencies or newly emerging issues. Each proposal must include the FTR required information, including justifications for the events, and estimated costs for:
1. Temporary duty and local transportation;
 2. Per diem;
 3. Rental/facilities and audio visual costs;
 4. Refreshment/meal costs;
 5. Printed materials;
 6. Promotional materials and exhibit costs; and
 7. Employees' salary and benefits for time attending and traveling to/from the conference.

If an agency is proposing to receive financial support for the event from non-Federal sources, these proposals shall also include Agency or Staff Office Heads' certification that there is no conflict of interest.

- (d) To mitigate the risk of inappropriate spending, the following levels of approval are required:
1. Agency and Staff Office Heads' approval for all conference and/or training activities that are less than \$40,000. This authority may be delegated to the Agency Senior Accountable Travel Official. Further delegations are not permissible;
 2. General Officers' approval for conference and/or training activities estimated to cost less than \$75,000; and
 3. Deputy Secretary's approval for conference and/or training activities estimated to cost more than \$75,000.
- (e) Conference and training activities exceeding \$450,000 are prohibited and require a waiver from the Secretary per OMB [Memorandum 12-12](#). If Agencies are required to host or sponsor a conference and/or training activity exceeding \$450,000, and the conference and/or training activity meets the criteria of an exceptional circumstance, OCFO will automatically seek the approval of the Secretary.
- A cushion is built into the process to ensure that actual costs do not exceed estimated costs and thereby mistakenly violate OMB M-12-12 (e.g., a conference with net expenses projected to be \$450,000 actually has net expenses of \$500,000).
- (f) Proposals to conduct events not included in an Agency or Staff Office's Annual Plan may be denied on that basis. Consideration may be given to events addressing emergencies, newly emerging issues, or others with acceptable justification.

(4) Quarterly and Annual Reporting.

Based on the dates below, the Agency or Staff Office Senior Accountable Travel Official must provide and certify to OCFO a quarterly report where net expenses exceeded \$7,000 for USDA hosted, sponsored, and attended conference and/or training activity. OCFO will obtain data from the certified quarterly reports to prepare annual reports that meet the requirement 7 U.S.C. 2255b and OMB Memorandum-12-12. The quarterly due dates are listed below:

QUARTER	PERIOD	REPORT DUE DATE
First	October 1st – December 31st	January 31st
Second	January 1st – March 31st	April 30th

Third	April 1st – June 30th	July 31st
Fourth	July 1st – September 30th	October 31st

The reports shall include:

- (a) Conference and/or training name as listed on brochure, flyer, publication or organization’s Web site;
- (b) Whether the event was attended, sponsored, or hosted;
- (c) Location of the conference and/or training activity;
- (d) Dates of the conference and/or training activity;
- (e) For conferences where the Department awarded a procurement contract, a description of the contracting procedures related to such conference awarded through competition or sole source;
- (f) Basis for city selection;
- (g) Type of facility where event was held, i.e., USDA, Federal, University, or Commercial;
- (h) Total number of individuals whose travel or other conference and/or training expenses were paid by the agency and;
- (i) Total actual costs associated with the conference and/or training event (travel expenses, audio/visual costs, food or beverage cost, salary costs, facility costs, registration fees, exhibit costs, etc.);
- (j) A brief explanation of how the conference and/or training activity advanced the agency’s mission.

For more detailed information on conference and training management, see Appendix A.

n. Miscellaneous Expenses.

Miscellaneous expenses may be authorized for official travel if the approving official deems them appropriate. Approving officials should evaluate the need to reimburse miscellaneous expenses on a case-by-case basis. They should disallow any expenses not in the Government’s best interest. Many of these expenses can often be avoided with proper planning or the use of Government-provided alternatives. Travelers and approving officials should discuss and establish a clear understanding of which miscellaneous expenses are authorized for a specific trip. Travelers should itemize each miscellaneous expense with its estimated cost on the travel authorization.

(1) Personal Telecommunications.

Personal telecommunications may be authorized for travel lasting more than one night. This policy covers personal telephone calls, Internet access for personal use, and other methods identified as personal telecommunications. While personal telecommunications may be used on any day at any location during official travel, reimbursement is limited to \$5 a day in the 50 States, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, or the Virgin Islands, and \$15 a day outside of the aforementioned. The total telecommunications cost may exceed the daily limit on a particular day; however, the total reimbursement cannot exceed the \$5 and/or \$15 per day limit multiplied by the number of lodging nights.

Agencies and Staff Offices may authorize different policies for employees with Government-provided mobile telephones.

(2) Hotel Taxes.

While the Federal Government, generally, is exempt from local and State sales taxes, not all States and localities offer tax exemptions to individual travelers. Some locations do not specify a particular form on which to claim the tax exemption. When available, travelers should complete the necessary documentation required to waive State and local hotel sales taxes. In locations where these taxes cannot be waived, the taxes are reimbursed as a miscellaneous expense. Additional information can be found on GSA's [SmartPay](https://smartpay.gsa.gov/about-gsa-smartpay/tax-information/state-response-letter) Web site (<https://smartpay.gsa.gov/about-gsa-smartpay/tax-information/state-response-letter>).

o. Expenses Not Authorized.

Expenses related to office supplies, conference fees, training fees, shipping costs, conference/meeting rooms, and light refreshments are not travel expenses. They may not be authorized or paid through the Department's travel system.

p. Travel Allowances for Intergovernmental Personnel Act (IPA) Assignees.

(1) Overview.

IPA ([5 U.S.C. § 3371- 3376](#)) provides for temporary exchanges of personnel between the Federal Government and State or local Governments, institutions of higher education, Indian tribes or tribal organizations, and any other eligible organization. Each such exchange is executed under the provisions of a specific agreement that states the purpose and duration of the exchange, the places, hours, and conditions of work, and the methods of financing the individual's pay and allowances.

(2) Coverage.

State or local Government agency employees assigned to USDA under IPA appointments, and USDA employees assigned to State and local Government agencies may be paid travel and transportation allowances. USDA appropriations

may be used to pay for all or part of these expenses. The type and extent of expenses to be authorized are based on an administrative determination by an authorized official, and must be set forth in a written IPA agreement. IPA assignees may receive either certain change of official duty station allowances or per diem for each assignment.

(3) Service Agreement.

Expenses for either per diem or change of official duty station allowances may not be authorized unless the IPA assignee has agreed, in writing, to complete the entire period of assignment or 1 year, whichever is shorter. Such expenses may be authorized if the employee is separated or reassigned for reasons beyond the assignee's control and found acceptable by USDA. If the IPA assignee violates the agreement, the money spent for expenses other than those for official travel while away from the assignment location is recoverable from the assignee as a debt due, unless waived in whole or in part by the head of the agency in which the assignee is located.

(4) Assignments where change of official duty station allowances are not involved.

The following travel allowances are authorized for the IPA assignee only:

(a) Between home and assignment location. Travel between the assignee's home and assignment location to include coach transportation or mileage as allowed in the FTR for use of privately owned vehicle, plus the standard Continental United States per diem rate during travel when initially reporting for duty and when returning to original duty station upon completion of the assignment.

(b) While at assignment location:

1. Assignment of 30 days or less. The applicable maximum per diem rate (standard CONUS or locality rate from FTR Chapter 301, Appendix A) will be paid to the assignee for the first 30 calendar days after reporting for duty.
2. Assignment greater than 30 days. For the first 30 calendar days of an assignment, per diem, as shown in (1) above, may be paid to the assignee. During this 30-day period, the assignee shall seek long-term residence accommodations. After the first 30-day period, a lower per diem rate of up to 55 percent of that paid during the initial period may be authorized for the remainder of the assignment. If the reduced rate is not known at the time the travel authorization is prepared, include a statement in the authorization that an amendment will be issued during the first 30 days of the assignment. This statement will specify the reduced rate. A travel authorization must be issued before the start of the assignment. It also must specify exactly what travel allowances are approved.

(5) Dual per diem rates.

An IPA assignee, who is receiving per diem at the assignment location, is authorized receipt of an additional per diem allowance while on official temporary duty at another location (except as noted above). The additional per diem is allowed only if the assignee is occupying long-term residence accommodations, and limited to the increased expenses resulting from the temporary duty travel.

- (a) In computing dual per diem allowances, the lodgings portion of the authorized per diem rate at the assignment location will be paid. For the first and last days of travel, only a proportionate share of the amount allowed for meals may be paid.
- (b) Full per diem at a temporary duty location will be paid to assignees who will not incur dual lodging costs, or who received change of official duty station allowances instead of per diem. Assignees are authorized the same allowances as USDA employees.

q. International Travel.

- (1) Specific authorities and rates pertaining to international travel are contained in the FTR. The requirements in this part are in addition to those generally applicable to all travel.

The Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) provides assistance and support to all USDA employees who travel internationally. FAS shall prepare the USDA Foreign Trip Report bi-weekly for submission to the Office of the Secretary. Travelers are required to work with the agency to obtain visas, country clearances, and official Government passports. Travelers are encouraged to use the FAS Web site for guidance when taking an international trip at www.fas.usda.gov/international-travel. Help is also available via email: international-travel@usda.gov.

- (2) International travel will be authorized when it is in the USDA's best interests and the expenses to be incurred can be justified in advancing its programs. International travel may also be performed for the benefit of another Department, an international Government, an international organization, etc., subject to such laws and regulations as may be most appropriate under the circumstances involved. Careful administrative consideration should be given to all authorizations for international travel and related costs. Before issuance of each authorization for such travel, the authorizing official must exercise prudent judgment as to its necessity, and determine that the purpose of the travel:
 - (a) Relates directly to the accomplishment of USDA authorized programs or functions and, therefore, that the expenses may be properly paid from funds appropriated or otherwise available to the agency;
 - (b) Concerns the authorized program or functions of another Federal agency, and that the expenses are chargeable to the funds of that agency; or

- (c) Benefits jointly, the Department and another Federal agency, another country, an international organization, etc., and that such benefit warrants a sharing of expenses by the parties involved.

4. RESPONSIBILITIES

As management officials are delegated authorities under this regulation, there must also be corresponding accountability. The delegated officials are required to maintain necessary records to respond to any internal audits or external inquiries from the Congress, the OIG, the Government Accountability Office, and other agencies regarding these regulations. Management officials are required to immediately report any violation of these regulations to the Chief Financial Officer (CFO).

a. Delegation from the Administrator of General Services to the Secretary of Agriculture.

Per the GSA Administrator, through the FTR, the Secretary of Agriculture is authorized to implement policies for travel by employees and others authorized to travel at USDA expense. The GSA Administrator:

(1) Promulgates the FTR to:

- (a) Interpret statutory and other policy requirements in a manner that balances the need to assure that official travel is conducted responsibly with the need to minimize administrative costs.
- (b) Communicate resulting policies clearly to Federal agencies and employees.

(2) Authorizes the:

- (a) Secretary and Deputy Secretary to authorize all types of travel for any traveler, including themselves, per Agriculture Travel Regulation (ATR) and the FTR.
- (b) Secretary or Deputy Secretary to approve premium class travel for the Inspector General (IG), when approval is within the FTR requirements.

b. Delegation from the Secretary to the CFO.

- (1) The CFO is delegated full responsibility for Departmental travel policy as contained in this regulation.
- (2) The CFO also has the authority to approve all forms of travel for special situations including, but not limited to, pandemics, natural disasters, and acts of terrorism to ensure the safety of Government employees, continuity of Government operations, and the safety of the general public.

c. Delegation from the Secretary to General Officers.

General Officers may authorize, within ATR and FTR requirements, all types of travel, including premium class travel for their employees, and other individuals traveling for their office on Departmental business. General Officers:

- (1) Are authorized to approve their own travel (except premium class travel – see section (2) (a) below), but are encouraged to have their travel authorized by a subordinate or alternate. Specific approval for premium class travel must follow the procedures outlined in 3.h.(2) of this regulation.
- (2) May not delegate the authority to approve premium class travel, except in cases where employees have disabilities or special needs certified in accordance with Departmental Manual 4300-002, Reasonable Accommodation Procedures. In such cases, General Officers may grant blanket approval of premium class travel during the effective period of the certification.
 - (a) May not authorize premium class travel for themselves (except the Deputy Secretary). The Secretary's Chief of Staff is authorized to approve premium class travel for the CFO. The Secretary or Deputy Secretary will approve premium class travel for the IG.
 - (b) When the Deputy Secretary or relative General Officer (and those officially acting in their positions) is on travel or leave, or is otherwise unavailable, the authority to approve premium class travel may be exercised by the CFO. If the CFO is on travel or leave, or is otherwise unavailable, any General Officer may authorize premium class travel for another one within the requirements of this regulation.
- (3) Are authorized to approve payments for expenses incurred because of the illness, injury, or death of an employee while the employee was in a travel status as specified in this regulation.

d. Delegation from the Secretary to Agency and Staff Office Heads.

Agency and Staff Office heads may authorize, within the requirements of this regulation and FTR, all types of travel for their employees and other individuals traveling for their agencies, except premium class travel. Agency and Staff Office heads:

- (1) May approve all international and domestic travel, unless specifically restricted by this document.
- (2) May approve payments for expenses incurred as a result of the illness, injury, or death of an employee while the employee was in a travel status.
- (3) Shall ensure employees are trained and knowledgeable about travel regulations, manuals, process, and USDA's E-Gov Travel system. This includes mandating that approving officials and all new employees be trained, and requiring refresher training for employees when needed.

e. Delegation from Agency and Staff Office Heads to Approving Officials.

Agency and Staff Office heads are instructed to use special care to ensure that delegations of authority are held to sufficiently high levels to ensure proper review and control of travel. Delegations must be in writing and contained in agency internal regulations. Agency and Staff Office heads may delegate their authority, except for the following:

- (1) Approving payment of subsistence and transportation expenses for threatened law enforcement/investigative employees. OIG must be notified of all instances where threatened individuals are moved into temporary living accommodations either at or away from the official duty station.
- (2) Designating the specific award ceremonies for which employees (and one individual related by blood or affinity of the employee's choosing) may be reimbursed for travel expenses.

f. CFO delegation of authority to Agencies and Staff Offices to Issue Supplemental Travel Regulations and Procedures.

Agencies and Staff Offices may issue travel regulations and procedures that supplement the ATR. To help standardize and streamline travel policy and management, agencies are encouraged to minimize such regulations and limit them to procedural interpretations. A USDA Agency or Staff Office travel regulation cannot grant additional benefits or adjust processes defined in the FTR or this regulation.

To ensure agency policies and procedures are consistent with FTR and this regulation, Agencies and Staff Offices may be required to submit their travel regulations to the CFO for review.

g. Employees' Responsibilities.

- (1) Employees must use Government funds only for travel for official purposes. Accordingly, employees shall ensure that their activities, while on travel, are prudent, appropriate, and justifiable to the public.
- (2) Employees on official travel must also comply with guidance governing behavior on the part of Federal employees (such as ethics rules, standards of conduct, and FTR, USDA, or Agency and Staff office-specific policies and manuals).

5. DEFINITIONS

- a. Agency. For this regulation, the term "agency" means an organizational unit of USDA, other than staff offices, whose Head reports to officials within the Office of the Secretary, Deputy Secretary, and Under Secretaries.
- b. Agency Head. The head of an organizational unit of the Department who reports to an Under Secretary; the head of an administrative staff office who reports to the Secretary; and the IG.

- c. Approving Official (AO)/Approver. USDA official who has been delegated the authority to authorize travel and payment of travel vouchers for a traveler by an Agency or Staff Office Head.
- d. Baggage Fees. Fees pertaining to checked bags. Checked bags refer to those handed over to the airline and usually carried in the cargo compartment of the same aircraft.
- e. City-Pair Fares. These are GSA-contracted airfares for Federal employees for official travel. The fares are fully refundable, do not have change fees, and have a fixed maximum price. Under the terms of the Government contract with the airlines, Federal employees on official travel must use these fares unless they meet one of the exceptions listed in the [FTR 301-10.107](#).
- f. Conference. A meeting, retreat, seminar, symposium, or event that involves attendee travel. The term “conference” also applies to training activities that are considered to be conference under [5 CFR 410.404](#).
- g. Conference Expenses. All direct and indirect conference costs paid by the Government, whether paid directly by agencies or reimbursed by agencies to travelers or others associated with the conference.
- h. Conference Attendance. Employee participation in a USDA or non-USDA sponsored/hosted conference.
- i. General Officers. Those who assist the Secretary in the supervision and control of the Department as defined in [7 CFR §2.4](#).
- j. Government Facility. Property owned or substantially controlled by the Government.
- k. Immediate Family. Any of the following named members of the employee’s household at the time he/she reports for duty at the new permanent duty station or performs other authorized travel involving family members: spouse, same-sex domestic partner, children of the employee, of the employee’s spouse, or of the employee’s same-sex domestic partner, who are unmarried and under 21 years of age or who, regardless of age, are physically or mentally incapable of self-support. (The term “children” shall include natural offspring; stepchildren; adopted children; grandchildren, legal minor wards or other dependent children who are under legal guardianship of the employee, of the employee’s spouse, or of the same-sex domestic partner; and an unborn child(ren) born and moved after the employee’s effective date of transfer; dependent parents (including step and legally adoptive parents) of the employee, of the employee’s spouse, or of the employee’s same-sex domestic partner; and dependent brothers and sisters (including step and legally adoptive brothers and sisters) of the employee, of the employee’s spouse, or of the employee’s same-sex domestic partner, who are unmarried and under 21 years of age or who, regardless of age, are physically or mentally incapable of self support ([FTR 300-3.1](#)).

- l. Interim Travel Voucher. An official request for reimbursement of travel expenses prior to the completion of the temporary duty travel.
- m. Local Travel. Any travel as result of official business within 50 miles of the employee's duty station or residence lasting less than 12 hours.
- n. Local Travel Expenses. Includes expenses such as subway, bus, taxi, mileage, tolls, and parking incurred as a result of official business.
- o. Official Travel. Travel performed on behalf of the U.S. Government which is authorized via written or electronic travel authorizations/orders. Normally results in the traveler submitting a settlement voucher for reimbursement of authorized expenses.
- p. Official Travel Expense. An authorized expense incurred as a result of official travel. Authority to incur such expenses is generally provided through a travel authorization/order.
- q. Open or "blanket" travel authorizations. Permission to travel on official business without further authorization; or limited by certain specific conditions, i.e., travel to specific geographic area(s) for specific purpose(s), subject to trip cost ceilings, or for specific periods of time.
- r. Premium Class Travel. Any class of travel accommodations above coach class (e.g. first class or business class.)
- s. Rest Period. A break of more than 23 hours, but less than 24 hours, between the times an employee arrives at a destination and must begin official duties.
- t. Restricted and Non-refundable Fares. Fares offered by a private-sector supplier of air, rail or bus transportation available to the public.
- u. Senior Accountable Travel Official. An official selected by an Agency Head or Staff Office Director who is responsible for the conference and training related reports, internal controls, cost tracking procedures and activities.
- v. Sponsored/Hosted Conference/Training. A conference or training for which an agency leads or participates in the arranging, planning, conducting, or funding. Each conference or training event has a principal sponsor and may have multiple co-hosts. The sponsor typically pays for all or part of the fees associated with facility rental, speakers/presenters, etc.
- w. Staff Office. Departmental administrative office whose head reports to the Assistant Secretary for Administration or officials within the Office of the Secretary.
- x. Temporary Duty (TDY) Travel. A place, away from an employee's official duty station, where the employee is authorized to travel.

- y. Training. Travel in conjunction with educational activities to become proficient or qualified in one or more areas of responsibility ([FTR Appendix C to Chapter 301](#)). [5 CFR 410.404](#) defines 'training' to mean the process of providing for and making available to an employee, and placing or enrolling the employee in a planned, prepared, and coordinated program, course, curriculum, subject, system, or routine of instruction or education, in scientific, professional, technical, mechanical, trade, clerical, fiscal, administrative, or other fields which will improve individual and organizational performance and assist in achieving the agency's mission and performance goals.
- z. Training activity. An employee's attendance at a conference as a developmental assignment when: 1) The announced purpose of the conference is educational or instructional; 2) more than half the time is scheduled for a planned, organized exchange of information between presenters and audience which meets the definition of training; 3) The content of the conference is designed to improve individual and/or organization performance; and 4) Development benefits will be derived through the employee's attendance as stated in [5 CFR 410.404](#).
- aa. Travel Management Center (TMC). A commercial travel firm under contract that provides reservations, tickets, and related travel-management services for official travel.
- bb. Viable City as related to conference and training planning. A city with an available conference facility and lodging, if needed, that a prudent person would consider to be a cost-effective location, including being reachable by standard methods of transportation.

6. INTERNAL CONTROLS

Each agency and staff office is expected to maintain effective internal controls over travel activities, cost, and reimbursement. Essential elements of such controls include, but are not limited to:

- (1) Ensuring travel is appropriate and necessary;
- (2) Limiting the authorization of travel expenses and reimbursement to only those necessary to accomplish the organization's and Department's mission in the most economical and effective manner;
- (3) Using the method of travel most advantageous to the Government, including lower-cost airfares. Special consideration should be given to minimizing travel time and cost to the Government;
- (4) Ensuring travelers, travel arrangers, approving officials, Federal agency travel administrators, and other travel management staff:
 - (a) Are trained on travel regulations, policies, and USDA's E-Gov Travel system.

- (b) Understand and meet their responsibilities (i.e., for requesting, approving, conducting, and reimbursing travel), and comply with the FTR, this regulation, and related regulations and manuals.
- (5) Monitoring travel activities, including approvals, obligations, and expenditures;
- (6) Coordinating travel when more than one employee is going to the same event or for the same purpose, avoiding duplication;
- (7) Identifying and correcting issues that hinder travel management and/or increase costs, including:
 - (a) Timeliness and accuracy of travel authorization and voucher submission and approval;
 - (b) Reimbursement of inappropriate or excessive expenses;
 - (c) Inadequate and/or ineffective use of lower-cost airfares;
 - (d) Delays in resolving E-Gov Travel system and related financial management system problems; and
 - (e) Maintaining travel management office(s) with adequate staffing, expertise, and authority to effectively manage travel.

7. RECORDS RETENTION

Records relating to reimbursing individuals, such as travel authorizations, travel vouchers, and all other supporting documents relating to official travel of officers, employees, dependents or others authorized by law to travel should be maintained as required.

As of the publication date of this regulation, the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) required that travel-related records be retained 6 years and 3 months. However, refer to your Agency Records Officer for current retention requirements.

USDA records schedules authorize destruction of temporary records (paper and electronic) when their retention period expires, providing the record is not involved in litigation, audit, FOIA requests or other actions that may require the record to be kept beyond the normal retention period.

8. MAJOR POLICY CHANGES

This update also includes a number of changes:

- a. Streamlines the regulation by eliminating all sections which duplicate the FTR. Thus, it limits the policy to USDA's specific additional requirements;

- b. Sets expectations for Agency and Staff Offices' internal controls over travel activities, cost, and reimbursement;
- c. Replaces the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (Farm Bill) definition of a conference with the FTR's definition;
- d. Adds the definition of baggage fees, conference expenses, training, training activities, and Senior Accountable Travel Official;
- e. Requires agencies to report and seek pre-approval for training activities as well as conferences;
- f. Changes the approval threshold for conference and training activities for Agency and Staff Office heads, OCFO, and the Deputy Secretary;
- g. Conference and training proposals are no longer submitted to the Assistant Secretary of Administration for approval;
- h. Proposals to conduct conference and training activities are to be submitted for the Deputy Secretary's approval 6 weeks before obligating funds;
- i. Annual and quarterly reports require certification by the agency's Senior Accountable Travel Official;
- j. Agencies must submit a quarterly report of conference and training activities where net expenses exceed \$7,000;
- k. Requires agencies to submit annual plans for hosted/sponsored as well as attended conference and training activities;
- l. Changes the requirement for obtaining approval for conference/training activities and agency requirements to use the automated OCFO tool, when available;
- m. Increases the mileage threshold for what can be considered local travel to within 50 miles of the duty station or the employee's residence;
- n. Removes the International Travel Procedures (formerly Appendix A) and references the Foreign Agricultural Service Web site. The site provides current information on international travel; and
- o. Requires approving officials to review and approve/disapprove travel vouchers within 5 days of receipt.
- p. Requires employees to rent a compact size vehicle and not an economy car.
- q. Requires employees to refuel rental vehicle prior to dropping off at rental location.

APPENDIX A

CONFERENCE AND TRAINING MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES

The following information provides additional guidelines for managing conference/training activities.

(1) Annual Plan.

Agencies must develop and submit their Annual Plan no later than August 31 of each year.

Each agency or staff office is required to submit and publish to OCFO a fiscal year Annual Plan for all hosted/sponsored conference attendance and training activity. At a minimum, agencies are required to provide a simple, least cost alternative analysis in the annual plan (e.g. using GSA's Travel Trax automated tool to estimate airfare, lodging, and per diem). Plans are to be entered in the Conference Transparency, Approval and Tracking tool, by selecting the "Annual Plan" option.

When determining the cost of a conference or training activity, agencies must:

- (a) Carefully plan and manage conference or training to mitigate the risk or appearance of inappropriate spending and activities;
- (b) Hold events at USDA or other Government facilities whenever possible;
- (c) Ensure attendees' time is fully utilized (e.g. agendas reflect 8-hour work days, excluding lunch periods, and minimize travel days/expenses);
- (d) Not include "networking events" or receptions in the agendas, for these can be construed as non-business activities. If informal face-to-face discussions about the business are needed among attendees (e.g. those who normally do not interact, but need to understand and support each other in implementing programs), describe that business purpose clearly in the session title;
- (e) Limit or eliminate spending on refreshments;
- (f) Limit or eliminate spending on promotional materials;
- (g) Ensure per diem is reduced when meals are provided through other funding (e.g. conference fees);

(h) Plan in advance and use:

1. Lower-cost airfares, including restricted fares, when it benefits USDA and follows the FTR and ATR.
2. Competitive bidding to obtain below-per-diem lodging, and low-cost or free local transportation and facilities. Any meeting, conference, or training sponsored or co-sponsored by any USDA agency must conform to the Hotel and Motel Fire Safety Act of 1990. This law specifically prohibits the use of Federal funds to sponsor or cosponsor any conference, meeting, or training seminar in a hotel or motel that does not meet the law's fire protection requirements.

(i) Agencies and Staff Offices should have the following information available prior to submitting their Annual Plan:

1. Event name
2. Location
3. Purpose description
4. Justification
5. Conference and/or training dates
6. Names of attendees
7. Travel costs for each employee
8. Salary costs for employees travel time
9. Salary costs for employees time attending conference or training
10. Per diem
11. Transportation costs
12. Local transportation
13. Miscellaneous travel expenses
14. Conference registration fees
15. Speaker fees
16. Printing costs
17. Rental/Facilities costs including cost comparisons
18. Audio Visual support costs
19. Consulting services costs
20. Conference or training planning costs

Estimates are permitted when developing the Annual Plan, which may include previously-held conference or training data, if applicable.

(2) Location Selection.

First consideration must be given to less-costly locations for conference or training activities. Justification must be provided for not choosing the lowest cost alternatives. Agencies should make all appropriate efforts to conduct business and sponsor conference

or training in space controlled by the Federal Government, wherever practicable and cost-effective. The order of preference for USDA-sponsored conference events is:

- (a) Local USDA facilities;
- (b) Other Federal, State, and local Government facilities;
- (c) Colleges and universities; and
- (d) Commercial space.

Agency and Staff Offices are encouraged to use a competitive contracting process for lodging, facilities, audiovisual support, and other expenses.

(3) Registration.

All USDA-sponsored and attended conference and training that require attendee registrations are encouraged to use the Department's electronic online training system, AgLearn, to enter and track registration fees.

(4) Conference Meal, Refreshment, and Promotional Materials Costs.

The cost of any meals provided at non-USDA sponsored conference/training or covered by conference or training fees are to be deducted from travelers' per diem in accordance with FTR 301-74.21.

Agencies and Staff Offices should not purchase promotional materials unless deemed critical to achieving the mission purpose.

(5) Reporting.

Agencies and OIG are to submit quarterly conference and training data to OCFO within a month of quarter's end for any conference and/or training activity where the cost to the Federal Government exceeds \$7,000. This process will facilitate the submission of the Secretary's report to the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Agriculture and the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry on conference sponsored or held by USDA or attended by its employees. Reports must be submitted to OCFO on or before the report due date.

The report shall include:

- (a) Conference or training activity name as listed on a publication, brochure, flyer, or organization's Web site;
- (b) Location of the conference or training activity;
- (c) Dates of the conference or training activity;
- (d) Brief explanation how the conference or training activity advanced the mission of the agency;
- (e) Total number of individuals whose travel or other conference or training expense were paid by the agency; and
- (f) Total actual costs associated with the conference or training activity (i.e. travel expenses, audio/visual, food or beverage, salary and benefits, facility costs, registration fees, exhibit costs, etc.)

The table below lists the due date and time period associated with each quarterly submission.

QUARTER	PERIOD	REPORT DUE DATE
First	October 1st – December 31st	January 31st
Second	January 1st – March 31st	April 30th
Third	April 1st – June 30th	July 31st
Fourth	July 1st – September 30th	October 31st

An OCFO data call may request additional information should requirements change.