



United State
Department of
Agriculture

Office of the Chief
Financial Officer

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TO: Agency Chief Financial Officers
Senior Accountable Travel Officials
Travel Policy Users Group

FROM: Lucas Castillo
Associate Chief Financial Officer for
Financial Policy and Planning

SUBJECT: Local Travel Policy

Purpose: To provide clarification on USDA local travel, designate local travel areas, and grant authority to delegated officials to approve reimbursement of per diem while performing official business in the local travel area for extenuating circumstances. The reimbursement process for local travel and document retention are also addressed.

Background: The Agriculture Travel Regulation (ATR) does not clearly address when reimbursement of local travel expenses may be authorized based on the definition stated in the ATR, published December 8, 2015. Additionally, the ATR does not designate local travel areas nor provide the definitions for official duty station, worksite, alternative worksite, and remote telework. The ATR prohibits the authorization of per diem expenses while in the local travel area. However, there may be extenuating circumstances whereby per diem expenses may be allowable. Therefore, the Office of the Chief Financial Officer (OCFO) will provide additional clarification and guidance to ensure those working for USDA follows proper procedures while performing official business in the local travel area.

Definitions:

Alternative worksite: According to the USDA Telework Program policy, an alternative worksite is defined as:

“A worksite location, other than the traditional office that satisfies all requisite federal health and safety laws, rules and regulations pertaining to the workplace, where an employee performs their official duties while teleworking. Supervisors may authorize telework from a number of alternative worksites. Temporary authorizations or changes in the location of designated alternative worksites do not require a new Telework Agreement.”

Local travel: USDA’s local travel policy is any travel as a result of official business within the 50-mile radius of the employee’s official duty station/worksite **and** residence (using the most direct route) lasting less than 12 hours.

Local travel areas:

For USDA employees located outside of the National Capital Region (NCR), the local travel area cannot be more than the 50-mile radius rule or geographic boundaries defined within their region.

Per Executive Order 13150, the National Capital Region (NCR) consists of the following locations: the District of Columbia; Montgomery, Prince George's, and Frederick Counties in Maryland; Arlington, Fairfax, Loudon, and Prince William Counties in Virginia; and cities now and hereafter existing in Maryland or Virginia within the specified geographic boundaries above.

The above mentioned counties including the District of Columbia are designated as the local travel areas for USDA employees whose official duty station/worksites is located in the Washington, D.C. Metropolitan area.

Commuting expenses: The costs incurred by taking any form of local transportation, e.g., bus, commuter buses, train, trolley, subway, taxi (Uber, Lyft, or any other Transportation Network Company), or driving a car, between your residence and official duty station/worksites. Expenses are calculated on a daily basis, and are based on the mode of transportation used on the day of travel.

Official Duty Station/Worksite: The USDA Telework Program policy, defines the official duty station/worksites as:

“The official worksite generally is the location where the employee regularly performs his or her duties. If the employee's work involves recurring travel or the employee's work location varies on a recurring basis, the official worksite is the location where the work activities of the employee's position of record are based, as determined by the employing agency, subject to the requirement that the official worksite must be in a locality pay area in which the employee regularly performs work. An agency must document an employee's official worksite on the employee's Notification of Personnel Action (Standard Form 50 or equivalent).”

Remote telework: According to the USDA Telework Program policy, remote telework is defined as:

“A telework arrangement in which the employee resides and works at an alternative worksite location full-time. The arrangement may result in a change in duty location to the alternative worksite (e.g., home).”

Telework: Per the USDA Telework Program policy, telework is defined as:

“A flexible work arrangement where an employee performs and completes official duties and responsibilities from an alternative worksite. Telework may be authorized for an entire duty day or a portion of one. Telework does not include the following:

- (1) Work performed while on official travel status;

- (2) Work performed while commuting to/from work; or
- (3) Mobile work.”

Policy:

USDA employees may be approved for the reimbursement of local travel expenses incurred while performing official business in or around their official duty station/worksite and residence; reimbursement is limited to local travel costs exceeding the employee’s normal commuting expense.

Allowable local travel expenses include such things as the cost of subway, bus, train, taxi, transportation network companies, such as Uber, Lyft, etc., innovative mobility technology companies, such as Zipcar, Capital Bikeshare, etc., mileage, tolls, and parking. The use of a rental car in or around the local travel area is strictly prohibited. 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 official duty station/worksite. When a Government-owned vehicle (GOV) is authorized, advantageous, and available, USDA employees should consider using a GOV for local travel.

Travelers will exercise the same care in incurring expenses that a prudent person would exercise if traveling on personal business and using personal funds. Excess costs, circuitous routes, delays or luxury accommodations and services unnecessary or unjustified in the performance of official business will not be reimbursed and are not acceptable under this standard. Travelers will be responsible for excess costs and any additional expenses incurred for personal preference or convenience (e.g., taxi or a TNC in lieu of available free shuttle, mass transportation, or Government-furnished automobile, etc.).

Generally, USDA employees performing local travel may not be reimbursed for per diem (lodging and meals/incidental) expenses. However, an exception may be made for extenuating circumstances such as a threat to human life or Federal property. If an instance like the aforementioned arises, then an employee may use the Government-issued travel charge card to pay for travel expenses; prior approval must be granted before incurring any expenses. For normal local travel, the travel charge card **cannot** be used.

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 costs incurred were additional, out-of-pocket expenses, and not part of the normal commuting expenses.

Local travel expenses must be claimed within the fiscal year the expenses were incurred, and may be reimbursed through the Agency/Staff Office Time and Attendance system, or direct entry via the Department’s financial system. When requests are submitted via direct entry, the processor must use the *Local Travel Invoice* module in the financial system to process the request.

Regardless of which system is used to process the claim, the traveler must complete and submit Optional Form-1164, *Claim for Reimbursement for Expenditures on Official Business*. The form must be submitted to the traveler's approving official for review and approval. Receipts, or other appropriate documentation (e.g. summary of metro card swipes), must be included for expenses, regardless of cost. Either the traveler or the approving official must maintain a copy of OF-1164 and the receipts for six years, in accordance with the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) [General Records Schedule \(GRS\) 1.1: Financial Management and Reporting Records, item 010](#).

Agencies and Staff Offices must report the following information to their designated Senior Accountable Travel Official annually by September 30th:

- Total number of local travel expenses paid by expense type e.g., parking, taxi, bus, and mileage (using a Privately-Owned Vehicle or GOV); and
- Total cost of each local travel expense type.

Local Travel Examples

Example 1: Peter's duty station/worksites is at the USDA Headquarters located in Washington, DC. He is a part of a carpool and parks at the USDA building. His daily commute by privately owned vehicle (POV) is 30 miles round trip; he does not have to pay for parking. Peter is asked to attend a meeting in Fairfax, VA. On the day of local travel, he drives to the meeting and incurs a \$10 parking fee. The round trip mileage from Peter's residence to the offsite meeting is 50 miles. What is Peter's reimbursable local travel expense?

Explanation 1: Since parking is not a part of John's normal commuting expenses, he would be reimbursed for parking, as well as the additional 20 miles. Local mileage reimbursement can be processed through the Department's Time and Attendance system or direct entry through the financial system.

Example 2: Stacey's duty station/worksites is at the USDA Headquarters located in Washington, DC. She normally commutes from her residence in Arlington, VA via subway and pays \$10 a day out of pocket. Stacey has to attend a conference in Greenbelt, MD. On the day of local travel, Stacey drives from her residence to Greenbelt, MD which is 60 miles each way and her total travel time is less than 12 hours. What is Stacey's reimbursable local travel expense?

Explanation 2: Stacey would be reimbursed mileage 60 miles roundtrip minus the \$10 costs she would normally pay for Metro. Since per diem expenses and no significant transportation expenses were incurred such as air, rail, or hotel, local mileage reimbursement can be processed through the Department's Time and Attendance system or direct entry through the financial system.

Example 3: Thomas teleworks from his home in Madison, Wisconsin, on Tuesday and Thursday. He reports to his official duty station/worksites Monday, Wednesday, and

Friday. His residence is 40 miles from his official duty station/worksites. Thomas is asked to attend training on Monday and Tuesday which is 40 miles roundtrip. What is Thomas' reimbursable local travel expense?

Explanation 3: Thomas would not receive reimbursement for local travel as the distance from his residence to the temporary worksite is the same miles as his normal commute.

Example 4: Monica teleworks from her residence on a full-time basis in Reston, VA. She is asked to attend a conference on Monday in Washington, DC which is 50 miles roundtrip from her residence. Monica chooses to drive to the offsite location. What is Monica's reimbursable travel expense?

Explanation 4: Since Monica teleworks from her residence on a full-time basis, she is entitled to be reimbursed the full 50 roundtrip mileage as there is no deduction for daily commute for a full-time teleworker. Local mileage reimbursement can be processed through the Department's Time and Attendance system or direct entry through the financial system.

If you have any questions or comments, please contact Marie Butler, Fiscal Policy Division Director, at marie.butler@usda.gov.