Policy: Travel

Purpose
To define the policy, guidelines and procedures for VHF funding of travel and travel related expenses.

Scope
This policy applies to any VHF employee or affiliated VA traveler anticipating the use of VHF funds for reimbursement.

Policy
All travel requests must be received at least 30 days prior to departure.

VHF funds may be used in support of travel under the following circumstances:

i. Attendance at meetings of professional societies or groups, the recognized or stated primary goals of which are to further medical knowledge, research, education, or public health;
ii. Collaboration with scientific colleagues or experts for discussing research plans or projects, reviewing data, or learning new techniques
iii. Meeting with individuals or business entities for furthering the interests of VHF or affiliated VA research or education
iv. Interviewing prospective employees.

The traveler must submit adequate information or documentation to justify primary research, education, or business purpose for the travel. For travel funded by a sponsored award the travel must be allowable by the sponsor.

Acknowledgement of Institutional Affiliation – VHF was established to facilitate VA research and education. Therefore, implicit in the commitment of funding for travel is the expectation that the traveler's VA affiliation be identified appropriately in conference brochures, attendee rosters, identification badges or published meeting materials.

Hotel, Meals, Incidentals, and Ground Transportation

"Reasonable" amounts for hotel accommodations as determined by the destination city and meeting sites are allowable unless sponsored award terms are otherwise restricted. The U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) per diem rate is considered reasonable. Exceptions may be considered when hotels are unavailable at the per diem rate or when the conference hotel rate differs.

Meals/incidentals will be reimbursed using GSA per diem rates. Reimbursement will be adjusted based on stated meals provided to travelers during trip. Receipts are not required.

Per Diem for the first and last day of the trip is reimbursed at 75% of the M&IE rate. Claims for 100% M&IE on the first and last day of travel must be requested and pre-approved as part of the travel authorization request. For example, a flight itinerary departing at 6 am, returning 10 pm would be sufficient documentation to

request 100% per diem on both first and last days of travel.

Ground transportation reimbursement covers travel to and from the departure city and the destination city where the business conferences or meetings are held. Excessive transportation costs will not be reimbursed if the traveler elected to forgo reasonable means of transportation.

Use of a rental car may be considered reimbursable with appropriate business justification. Travelers should elect to take insurance offered by the rental car company. If the traveler foregoes such insurance any liability will accrue to the traveler.

Lowest Economy Class Airfare

If, for personal convenience or preference, an indirect route is traveled or travel by a direct route is interrupted, any resulting expense will be borne by the traveler.

VHF will reimburse one checked bag round trip. Excess baggage charges may be allowed if justified by an explanation of the circumstances and provision of a legible receipt for such charges.

Airfare other than economy class (e.g., business or economy upgrade) is not permitted for VHF business purposes unless an exception is met, documented, and approved.

Federal regulations (2 CFR §200.474.3(d)) require that airfare costs in excess of the lowest economy fare class are unallowable except when the latter would:
- Require circuitous routing;
- Require travel during unreasonable hours;
- Excessively prolong travel;
- Result in additional costs that would offset the transportation savings; or
- Offer accommodations not reasonably adequate for the traveler's medical needs.

Exceptions for business-class or upgraded economy airfare must meet one of these criteria and be justified and documented to be allowable to travel on a federal award

Foreign Travel
Foreign travel is generally restricted by sponsors and requires at least 30-60 days' advanced approval.
VA imposes special requirements for foreign travel for VA-paid employees. VA-paid employees are responsible for complying with these requirements.

U.S. Department of State Foreign Per Diem Rates typically apply. If expenditures are not incurred in U.S. Dollars, current currency conversion rates at the time of travel will apply.

Travelers are responsible for obtaining necessary visas or passports. VA Financial Policy Volume XIV Travel, Chapter 6 International Travel describes the requirements for VA employees.

Additional airfare requirements for foreign travel include the following:
Airfare under the Fly America Act

The Fly America Act is a federal regulation that states that any foreign air travel that is financed by federal funds must be booked on U.S. flag air carriers, regardless of cost or convenience when compared to foreign air carriers.

Private Automobile Use

Reimbursement for travel using the traveler's personal automobile will be made at the prevailing federal mileage reimbursement rate plus applicable tolls, but may not exceed lowest economy class airfare cost to destination.

Local Travel

VHF will provide reimbursement for local travel to affiliated VA sites and academic affiliates, workshops, seminars and symposiums based on the following rules:

i. Per Diem allowances must be reasonable and must be limited to the days of attendance plus the actual travel time required reaching the location by the most direct route available. Actual parking costs are also reimbursable.

ii. Meals and/or lodging furnished without charge or at a nominal cost (e.g. as part of the registration fee), will be considered by determining the per diem allowance. For example, if breakfast is provided the traveler should indicate as such.

iii. Local travel is defined as a distance between the traveler's home and workshop which is less than or equal to the distance between the traveler's home and work location. If the distance traveled to the workshop is greater, then the traveler will be reimbursed for the mileage difference.

Scientific Accoutrements

Scientific accoutrements purchased during travel, such as scientific books or professional society memberships may be purchased and included with the travel reimbursement request.

Definitions

Lowest economy class airfare**:** Airfare often referred to as coach, standard economy fare class or base airfare which includes a reserved seat, one personal item, one carry-on bag, and one checked bag

Procedures

VA Employee Travel Requirements

VA employees seeking travel reimbursement from VHF must comply with additional requirements through VA. Please be sure to obtain and complete the appropriate VA forms prior to travel. A copy of the approvals must be submitted with reimbursement documentation.

Leave Status

VA-paid employees traveling on VHF funds should normally be on VA travel status or authorized absence (AA) to receive reimbursement for travel expenses. Where appropriate, VHF will reimburse expenses incurred related to business travel during an approved leave. VA-paid employees are strongly encouraged to seek guidance from their supervisor on applicable VA travel rules and regulations. If the leave for personal reasons is combined with VA travel or authorized absence, VHF will not pay lodging, car rental or per diem for expenses incurred during the personal annual leave portion of the travel.

A. The VHF Travel Authorization Request must be completed by all travelers at least 30 days in advance. The following attachments are required with the request form:

- Conference program/ announcement.

No cash advances, reimbursement, or pre-payment will be made prior to the date of actual travel. Meeting registration fees may be requested in advance and will only be made payable to the organization sponsoring the meeting.

B. VHF Travel Reimbursement Form should be submitted with all required original receipts (or VHF Missing Receipt Affidavit Form) within 30 days upon completion of travel unless an exception is approved.

Legible itemized invoices or receipts (not a credit card receipt) documenting proof of payment are required for each item for which the traveler requests reimbursement. The only exceptions from the need for itemized invoices or receipts are travel expenses following the published GSA per diem rates as well as ground transportation costs of $25 or less per leg.

Charges or forfeited refunds from failure to cancel in a timely manner will not be reimbursed.

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES

i. Any traveler utilizing VHF funds is responsible for adhering to this policy, completing and obtaining appropriate approvals and required documentation prior to travel.

ii. VHF Administration is responsible for the review and approval of all travel related to sponsored awards.

iii. VHF CEO or designee is responsible for the review and approval of all travel related to VHF business

Related Documents

i. Travel Authorization

ii. Travel Reimbursement

iii. Missing Receipt Affidavit

iv. VA Form 0893 – “Advance Review of Offer to Donate Support for Official Travel”