

Travel Authorization and Reimbursement

All voting and non-voting members of the Council, members of the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC), Council staff, experts and consultants retained by the Council, and members of the Council's Advisory Panels (APs) and Plan Development Teams (PDTs) are eligible to be reimbursed for travel expenses incurred while engaged in authorized Council business. Employees of the federal government are not eligible for travel reimbursement.

Authorization Prior authorization is necessary to establish eligibility for reimbursement. Either the Council Chairman or the Executive Director may authorize travel and reimbursement for expenses incurred. A numbered *Travel Authorization* (TA) form will be prepared by the Council staff and mailed to all authorized individuals prior to each Council meeting, oversight committee meeting, SSC, PDT or Advisory Panel meeting or other approved activity. The authorization will indicate those persons entitled to receive reimbursement. TA's will be routinely issued for the various types of meetings indicated below:

- **Council Meetings:** Voting and non-voting members designated Council staff. SSC and PDT members and the Chairman of an Advisory Panel will be authorized as needed.
- **Oversight or Other Regular Committee Meetings:** The Council Chairman, committee members, designated Council staff, and the advisory panel chairman. PDT members may be authorized to receive reimbursement for travel expenses for a specific committee meeting, as needed.
- **Mid-Atlantic Council Meetings:** The designated liaison to the Mid-Atlantic Council or other Council members designated by the Council Chairman.
- **Advisory Panel Meetings:** Advisory Panel members, designated Council staff and the oversight committee chairman, if necessary.
- **SSC Meetings:** SSC members, Council members and Council Chairman, and Council staff.
- **Plan Development Team Meetings:** PDT members, the oversight committee chairman and Council staff will be authorized to attend PDT meetings.
- **Additional persons may be authorized reimbursement for expenses.**

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- **Expert members of working groups** that are established with the approval of the Council Chairman may be authorized travel and reimbursement for specific Council, oversight committee or working group meetings.
 - **Consultants** who are authorized for travel and reimbursement by the Council Chairman or the Executive Director. Requests for consultant services should be made to either of them.
 - **Public hearing attendees** such as a Council member who chairs a public hearing and the Council staff member assigned to attend the hearing will be authorized for travel reimbursement for attending the hearing(s).
 - **Other travel** which may include seminars, conferences or other meetings if prior authorization by the Chairman or Executive Director is granted.

All Council, committee and working group meetings are open to the public, but only individuals identified on the *Travel Authorization* form will be reimbursed for travel expenses.

General Limitations Unless otherwise authorized, travel will be reimbursed based on the traveler's primary residence or primary place of employment. Reimbursements are limited to amounts reasonably necessary for the conduct of travel in connection with Council business. Travel must be undertaken using the least expensive means of transportation practicable and appropriate to the nature and purpose of the travel. If an individual elects to use a more expensive mode of transportation, reimbursement will be limited to the least expensive transportation available and the traveler will be responsible for the difference.

If unsure about the lowest cost to travel to a meeting, contact the Council Office for a determination prior to traveling.

From time to time, the Council may issue detailed Travel Policy clarifications and additional guidance which will be provided to authorized travelers and included on all Travel Reimbursement Voucher forms as tab 2. Council travelers are required to follow any Travel Policy clarifications and guidelines so issued.

Airlines may charge a fee for travelers with additional bags or bags over a specified weight or size. The traveler must pay these charges. Reimbursement can be claimed on the travel voucher if the bag is mission-essential, medically necessary or essential for an extended length of stay. Claims for excess baggage reimbursement must include documentation of the charges.

The Chairman or the Executive Director will determine applicable limitations in approving each Travel Authorization, although reimbursement will be guided by the allowances provided by the current version of the General Services Administration (GSA) in the Federal Travel Regulations (FTR). These rates are published by the GSA and can be viewed at <http://www.gsa.gov>. Because of frequent changes, the rates are no longer included in the

Council's Operations Handbook, but will be noted on the Travel Authorization forms distributed prior to each meeting.

Generally, this amount will be the cost of lodging, which cannot exceed 150% of the maximum amount allowed by the federal government for the area, plus a maximum amount per day for meals.

Reimbursement for meals while on travel to cities outside the contiguous states, including Hawaii, Alaska, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands and Canada, will be at the federal level authorized for each of these areas.

Air Travel Air travel reimbursement is limited to the lowest rate that is appropriate for the specific travel. To obtain the lowest possible fare, individuals traveling under Council authorization are encouraged to allow the Council staff to make their air travel reservations and purchase the tickets. Individuals making their own travel reservations will be reimbursed for only the rate that could have been obtained through the staff.

Foreign Travel The Council Chairman or Executive Director ~~may shall~~ approve foreign travel across the United States ~~border to Canada or Mexico, and to any United States territories and possessions.~~ All foreign travel must comply with the Fly America Act. All other foreign travel must be approved in advance by the NOAA Regional Office.

Identification Proper identification is the responsibility of the individual. The Council does not pay for passports or other forms of identification. A passport is considered the best document for identification. Individuals traveling to Mexico or Canada are encouraged to obtain a passport. Effective ~~10/1/2020~~12/3/07, all travel within the United States will require identification that is REAL ID compliant. All travel outside the United States will require a passport. Passport applications or renewal forms can be obtained online at <http://travel.state.gov/passport/>.

Expenses in a 50-mile radius Lodging expenses are not authorized within a 50-mile radius unless official business requires the individual be available before 6 a.m. or after 8 p.m.

Voucher Preparation To receive payment, authorized individuals must prepare and submit a *Travel Reimbursement Voucher*. This form is used to verify meeting attendance, request reimbursement for expenses incurred while attending an authorized meeting and for eligible members to claim compensation. The Travel Authorization number for each meeting must be noted on the *Travel Reimbursement Voucher*. A separate voucher must be submitted for each Travel Authorization.

Hotel receipts are required in all cases where lodging is claimed. Actual hotel costs are reimbursable within the limits of the total level of actual expense reimbursement set by federal

travel regulations. Although receipts for meals, taxis, tolls, parking and other similar expenses are not required, such costs must be itemized. Claims for alcoholic beverage or entertainment expenses are not allowed and will not be reimbursed.

Actual cost of transportation by public carrier or mileage for use of personal autos are also reimbursable, as are road tolls and parking fees. Airline, rail, bus or auto rental receipts must be submitted.

Telephone calls directly related to Council business are also reimbursable. Those included on hotel bills should be noted as business related. Claims for reimbursement for Council-related telephone calls placed from home phones must be supported by a copy of the bill.

Non-refundable Expenses The Council is not responsible for charges resulting from the traveler's failure to cancel a confirmed reservation. Those costs are the responsibility of the individual.

Certification All claims for reimbursement of travel expenses must be signed by the traveler and submitted to the Council office. Faxed copies of the claims are acceptable. Vouchers also are accepted via email. Receipts also can be emailed, faxed or mailed to the office.

A voucher must be submitted within six weeks of the meeting date it covers. Forms received after the cut-off date will be reviewed by the Executive Committee and payment may be held until the end of the fiscal year. Vouchers will be handled promptly. Reimbursement checks will generally be mailed within ten working days from the date received at the Council Office.

All claims are subject to review by the Executive Director for reasonableness. no claims will be approved that are not in accordance with the limitations noted on the Travel Authorization. Any claims considered excessive will be referred to the Executive Committee for disposition.

