Travel Guidelines for the Travel and Expense Module (TEM)

Applicability

These Stephen F. Austin State University Travel Guidelines (Travel Guidelines) are authorized by Stephen F. Austin State University Board of Regents Policy 3.29, Travel. Unless otherwise stated, these Travel Guidelines apply to anyone traveling in a university capacity, including employees, students, and prospective employees, except members of the Board of Regents, the president, and intercollegiate athletics. All policies, rules, and regulations related to travel on behalf of, or in connection with, intercollegiate athletics are located in the current issue of the Intercollegiate Athletics Policy Manual.

The reimbursement limits for lodging may be exceeded only if the additional costs are paid on a discretionary account. For purposes of these Travel Guidelines, discretionary funds shall be defined as specified accounts that may be used for discretionary purposes. These funds are listed on the Controller’s website.

Travel expenses related to contracts and grant funding (federal, state, local, or private) shall be reimbursed on the same basis as travel for other university employees, except when the terms of the contract or grant specify otherwise.

General Travel Regulations

Generally, the Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts (TCPA) is the authoritative source regarding travel. TCPA travel rules (Textravel) are on the university’s travel website. SFA Travel Guidelines take precedence except where state of Texas law prevails. The university president may establish lower travel reimbursement rates than those in Textravel. The university shall make every effort to ensure that travel expenses paid and/or reimbursed are reasonable and the most cost-effective considering all the relevant circumstances.

Employees are responsible for ensuring their travel complies with applicable state law and SFA Travel Guidelines. Failure to comply may result in reimbursement delays and/or rejection of the employee’s claim for travel reimbursement. Fraudulent travel claims will be grounds for disciplinary action.

Employees and others traveling on behalf of the university are reimbursed for actual lodging expenses and on a per diem basis for meals up to the maximum allowable rates, subject to the provisions of these Travel Guidelines. (See sections below pertaining to lodging and meals for maximum reimbursement rates.) In most cases of employees traveling together, each must pay and claim reimbursement for his/her own expenses (except taxi or limousine expenses or when a hotel room is shared by more than one employee – see the Incidental Expenses and Shared Lodging sections of these Travel Guidelines below). No expenses will be reimbursed until the trip is completed and a properly documented expense report is submitted.
Tips and gratuities are generally not reimbursable. (See Student and Other Group Travel section below for exception.) The applicable account manager may limit or prohibit reimbursement of any travel expenditure provided the traveler is notified in advance.

Travel Authorization

Except as stated in the Applicability section of these Travel Guidelines, anyone traveling on university business must obtain permission in advance of the trip. Travel authorizations must be submitted online according to the instructions available on the travel website. All estimated expenses of the trip must be detailed on the travel authorization regardless of payment method. A travel authorization must be submitted and approved at all applicable levels even if no travel expenses are anticipated.

The online travel authorization may be initiated only when account balances are sufficient to cover the total estimated cost of the trip. Whenever possible, the travel authorization should be entered and approved at least seven (7) working days prior to departure.

Blanket Travel Authorization

A blanket authorization is a continuing authority to travel when the job duties require numerous repetitive trips for the same purpose. Under this scenario and on a case-by-case basis, the travel office may approve a blanket travel authorization for the traveler covering a specific period of time (e.g., month, semester, or fiscal year). Each blanket travel authorization must indicate the purpose of travel and the destinations.

Blanket authorizations are not allowed for travel outside the United States, groups of travelers, or when airfare costs or travel advances are involved.

Travel expense vouchers should be submitted on a weekly or monthly basis for employees on continuous travel. A blanket travel authorization will remain open for the specific period of time indicated. Departments will be responsible for closing the blanket travel authorization by stating that it is a final report.

Travel to Washington, DC

The president must be notified in advance of all travel to Washington DC. Before submitting a request to travel to Washington, DC, the traveler must submit to the president’s office, the electronic notification form found on the travel office website under Washington DC Travel Forms. In addition, travel to Washington, DC to confer on legislative or appropriations issues requires notification to the Texas Office of State-Federal Relations (OSFR) about the timing and purpose of the trip. A completed form, Report of State Agency Travel to Washington, DC will meet this requirement when submitted to OSFR prior to the trip. The link to this form is available on the form to notify the president. A copy of this completed form must also be submitted to the president’s office.
Once submitted, a completed online travel authorization must be approved at all the appropriate administrative levels in sufficient time to be reviewed and approved prior to the date of departure.

**International Travel**

See [SFA International Travel Rules and Guidelines](#).

**Individual Traveler Charge Card**

An individual corporate charge card is available for eligible employees. To be eligible to apply, the employee must expect to take three (3) or more business trips per fiscal year or expend at least $500 per fiscal year for official state business travel. An employee is not required to apply for or accept a state-issued traveler charge card.

The state-issued traveler charge card is to be used for business-related charges only while traveling on official state business. Use of the card for personal business is considered a violation of state policy and these Travel Guidelines, and the employee may be subject to disciplinary action. The individual whose name appears on the card is solely responsible for payment of the account.

If the application is approved by the credit card company, the employee agrees to be bound by the card member agreement (which will be sent with each card) and by the state policies governing the use of the card. Applications and further information concerning this program are available online at the travel website. The employee, the employee's supervisor, and the travel office manager must sign the application. The corporate charge card must be returned to the travel office for cancellation upon termination of employment or transfer to a non-traveling position.

**Departmental Charge Card for Travel Expenses – T-Card**

The state-issued departmental travel charge card (T-Card) is to be used for travel charges related to official state business. Use of the card for personal travel is considered a violation of state policy and these Travel Guidelines, and the employee may be subject to disciplinary action.

Use of the T-Card should be used only for certain travel related expenses. This includes registration fees, airfare, lodging expenses, and rental car charges. Other type charges may be allowed if approved by the travel office. Employees using the card agree to be bound by the state and university policies governing the use of the card. The T-Card is issued to the department head or account manager. Department heads have the option of using one card for all the
accounts (Banner: Fund-Organization-Programs FOP) under his/her control, or having separate cards for different FOPs.

**Advance Travel Funds**

*Advance travel funds are only available for student group travel. The T-Card can be used for charges that are normally incurred in advance of the trip, such as airfare and registration fees. Advance travel funds for individuals are no longer available in TEM. No exceptions are allowed.*

**Travel Expense Report (Travel Voucher)**

*The use of the term “Travel Voucher” is being phased out as the University moves to the Travel and Expense (TEM) Module. Documentation for either form is the same, but will be submitted electronically when using the TEM module.*

In order to receive reimbursement, travel expenditures must be documented on the expense report (available in TEM). The expense report must reflect the total expenses paid for the trip. Expenses paid by the traveler should be coded as reimbursable. Expenses paid by the university should not be coded as reimbursable expenses on the expense report. T-Card expenditures should be detailed separately to match expenses paid with the T-Card to the TEM expense report. See the T-Card Guide for more information on matching T-Card charges to the expense report.

Original receipts are required for most travel expenses (see applicable section of these Travel Guidelines for specific details), except meals. Meal expenses for group travel require the sponsor/advisor to provide documentation to show how the funds were expended. (See the Student and Other Group Travel section, below.)

The expense report, with the documentation scanned and attached, should be submitted to the travel office within 15 days from the ending date of the trip, except at fiscal year-end when an earlier deadline may be established by the travel office. All documentation will be submitted electronically, in a format prescribed by the travel office. All prior year encumbrances will be cancelled after the end of the fiscal year.

Conference, workshop, or meeting agendas must be attached to the expense report. Registration fees paid often include the cost of certain meals provided during the event. An employee cannot claim per diem for the meals that are included in the cost of the conference or any meals provided by a third party.

**Foreign Currency Conversion**

All amounts listed on the expense report must be converted to U.S. dollars using the rate applicable on the date of the expenditure. A foreign currency conversion table is available online at the travel website. Documentation of the conversion calculation must be attached to the expense report. Receipts are required for all reimbursed expenses. In lieu of providing receipts
and foreign currency conversions for foreign meals, travelers may elect to be reimbursed at in-state per diem rates.

**Reimbursement Rates - Lodging**

Reimbursement may not exceed the amount of lodging expenses actually incurred at a commercial lodging establishment, subject to maximum allowances stated below. The original itemized lodging receipt, attached to the expense report, is required. If the actual cost of lodging exceeds a locality's lodging allowance, an employee may reduce the maximum meal and incidental expenses (MIE) reimbursement rate for that locality and use the reduction to increase the lodging reimbursement rate for that locality. No such adjustment can be made to increase the maximum meal reimbursement rate.

The State Travel Management Program of the Texas Procurement and Support Services (TPASS) has contracted with several commercial lodging establishments for special rates. The contracted vendors and rates are listed on the Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts website. Employees are encouraged to utilize the contracted vendors when possible.

**Travel Tip:** The governmental rate for lodging is usually less than the conference rate. Employees should check the governmental rate first. Since there is often a limited number of rooms available at the governmental rate, employees should make hotel reservations far in advance of the travel dates.

**In-State Lodging**

Travelers may be reimbursed for the actual cost of lodging, not to exceed the travel rates published by the Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts. Generally, the rates listed refer to amounts designated in the federal Domestic Per Diem Rates published by the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA). However, if a specific area is not listed, the comptroller’s published rate will apply.

Hotel taxes are not included in maximum lodging reimbursement rates. Local taxes on the allowable lodging cost will be reimbursed and should be recorded as lodging tax on the expense report. State tax on in-state lodging will not be reimbursed to state employees. Instead, state employees must submit a completed Texas Hotel Occupancy Tax Exemption Certificate (available online at the travel website) to commercial lodging establishments at check-in. Employees should also be prepared to show proof of state employment.

**Out-of-State Lodging**

The Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts provides the maximum reimbursement rates for out-of-state lodging. A list of the rates, which is updated from time to time, is available online at the travel website. Within the continental United States, lodging reimbursement is limited to the locality-based allowance as stated on the Domestic Maximum Per Diem Rates published by the General Services Administration (GSA). For cities and counties not included on the list, the allowance is the Continental US (CONUS) rate established for lodging in that state. For Alaska
and Hawaii, the lodging rate is set by the Department of Defense (OCONUS rates). Since employees are not exempt from any tax for out-of-state or international travel, they may be reimbursed for hotel occupancy taxes. Travelers to a foreign country may be reimbursed for actual, reasonable costs.

**Shared Lodging**

Shared lodging between travelers is reimbursable to one of the travelers if it does not exceed the maximum reimbursement rate. If the room rate exceeds the maximum reimbursement rate, the cost must be split between the two or more travelers and individual requests for reimbursements must be submitted. Individual receipts showing the traveler’s pro-rate share of the split costs will be required for each request for reimbursement.

- **Example 1:** If two travelers share a room while attending a conference and the room rate is within the allowable maximum, one traveler may pay and be reimbursed for the entire lodging expenses.
- **Example 2:** If two travelers share a room while attending a conference and the room rate exceeds the allowable maximum, the two travelers must split the cost to be reimbursed individually and be within the allowable maximum. Each traveler must provide a receipt in his or her name showing his or her pro-rate share of the split costs to be reimbursed.
- **Example 3:** If two travelers share a room while attending a conference and the room rate exceeds the allowable maximum, the two travelers must split the cost to be reimbursed individually, and each traveler must provide a receipt in his or her name showing his or her pro-rate share of the split costs to be reimbursed. If the split amount exceeds the allowable limits, then a discretionary FOP must be provided to cover the amount that exceeds the per diem limits.

**Reimbursement Rates - Meals**

This section of the Travel Guidelines does not apply to road bus drivers. Normally, road bus drivers are not reimbursed for meals. Meal reimbursement for road bus drivers is subject to the discretion and approval of the director of the physical plant.

Meals are eligible for reimbursement if travel includes an overnight stay. The following table sets the per diem rate of reimbursement:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>IN-STATE With Overnight Stay</th>
<th>OUT-OF-STATE* With Overnight Stay</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Breakfast</strong></td>
<td>$6.50</td>
<td>17% of locality-based allowance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lunch</strong></td>
<td>$11.50</td>
<td>33% of locality-based allowance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dinner</strong></td>
<td>$18.00</td>
<td>50% of locality-based allowance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>$36.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Within the continental United States, Alaska and Hawaii, meal and incidental expenses (MIE) reimbursement is limited to the federal Domestic Per Diem rates provided by the GSA. For cities
and counties not included on the list, the allowance is the CONUS or OCONUS rate established in that state for meals and incidental expenses. Per the GSA’s website, incidental expenses include tips and transportation between places of lodging or business and places where meals are taken. When using the MIE rate, these costs will not be reimbursed separately. Travelers to a foreign country may be reimbursed for actual, reasonable costs.

Meal per diems for initial day of travel and final day of travel will be based on the following schedule according to departure and arrival times.

Initial day of travel:

- Breakfast – must depart no later than 6:00 AM
- Lunch – must depart no later than 11:30 AM
- Dinner – must depart no later than 6:00 PM

Final day of travel:

- Breakfast – must return after 8:00 AM
- Lunch – must return after 1:30 PM
- Dinner – must return after 8:00 PM

No per diem meal reimbursement is allowed for trips not including an overnight stay.

The daily reimbursement rate for meals and incidental expenses is established by state and federal government regulation and is subject to change.

Some registration fees include meals. In this case, the registration fee is fully reimbursable but the employee must not claim per diem for the included meal, according to the applicable rates above.

Meals purchased for the traveler by another person or entity are not reimbursable and per diem may not be claimed for these meals.

Employees traveling together must pay and claim their own expenses.

Receipts are not required for meal expenses except for group and foreign travel. (Refer to the Student and Group Travel section of these Travel Guidelines.)

**Business Meals While on Travel Status**

Business meals purchased by the traveler for another person are allowed provided the same documentation is kept to validate the business purpose that would apply if the person was not in travel status. The T-Card or the employee’s own credit card may be used for these meals. Use of the P-Card is acceptable only if a T-Card is not available, or the T-Card has been declined by the
eating establishment. If a business meal is purchased while on travel status, the employee must not claim per diem for that meal. Employees may be reimbursed for business meals by including these expenses on their travel expense report if they personally paid for the business meal. The reimbursement amounts are subject to the limits set for business meals in the Guidelines for Expenditures from University Funds.

**Travel To/From the Duty Point; Travel Before/After Conducting Official Business**

Subject to the other provisions of these Travel Guidelines, meals and lodging expenses may be reimbursed for travel expenses to/from the duty point and prior to/after conducting official business. This is only as necessary, and generally limited to no more than one day before/after the business event, unless it is financially beneficial to the university (e.g., when discounted airfare requires Saturday night stay and the additional expenses incurred (hotel, meals and/or transportation costs) would not exceed the airfare savings. In these instances, the total net savings must be documented and attached to the expense report.

**Reimbursement Rates - Mileage**

Employees will be reimbursed for the most efficient mode of travel with regard to a personal vehicle or a rental vehicle. A cost comparison calculator is available on the travel website. The employee will be reimbursed for the lower rate based on the results of the cost comparison calculator. The university has negotiated with Enterprise to provide cost savings to the university. There is no additional charge for picking up a rental car on Saturday (or after 4 pm on Friday) for travel beginning on Sunday. There is no drop fee associated with one way rentals. It is oftentimes more cost effective to drive a rental vehicle to the airport and drop it off there than use a personal vehicle and pay parking fees associated with airport parking. These calculations are not included in the cost comparison calculator but should be considered by the traveler.

The number of reimbursable miles traveled by an employee may not exceed the number of miles of the most cost-effective route. The shortest route between points, including the use of all farm-to-market roads, is presumed to be the most cost-effective route between two duty points. Google Maps or MapQuest calculates the mileage between two locations. When both locations are in the map website database, the employee may be reimbursed for the number of miles calculated by the map website. A printed copy of the mileage calculation must be included with the expense report. When one or both locations are not in the map site database, the number of reimbursable miles is calculated by the employee's odometer. Mileage determined by use of the employee's odometer must be itemized on a point-to-point basis on the expense report. Any vicinity mileage at the destination location must also be itemized separately on a point-to-point basis. For the purposes of this paragraph, "point" means a building, house, highway intersection, or other similarly localized spot. A Point-to-Point Odometer Log is available in the forms section of the travel website if needed.

The maximum reimbursement rate for use of an employee's personal vehicle is established by state and federal regulation, and is subject to change. The president may establish a lower rate than the state or federal rate.
Motor Vehicle Rentals

If approved on the travel authorization, some expenses of renting a motor vehicle are reimbursable. The daily rate, applicable taxes, and other mandatory charges are reimbursable. (The Texas motor vehicle rental tax is not reimbursable.) An additional driver charge is reimbursable if it is incurred for an official state business reason. Based on the current contract with Enterprise, there is no additional charge for an additional driver. Collision damage waiver and loss damage waiver expenses are reimbursable if they are not already included in the contracted rate (see next paragraph).

The following expenses are not reimbursable: liability insurance supplement, personal accident insurance, safe trip insurance, personal effects insurance, fuel purchased from the rental car company, and prepaid fuel without an itemized receipt of the number of gallons and the rate per gallon.

The Texas Travel Management Program has contracted with several vehicle rental agencies to provide special rental rates. Most rates include unlimited free mileage, free loss damage waiver, and free primary liability coverage. University employees traveling on official state business are encouraged to use these contracted rates when possible. A listing of the agencies and rates is available online at the travel website with detailed instructions for making your reservation at the state contracted rate. The university has additionally partnered with the University of Texas System Office for even lower rates than the state contracted rates. The link for “Rental Cars” on the travel website has these negotiated rates.

A detailed receipt from the motor vehicle rental company, attached to the expense report, is required for reimbursement of motor vehicle rental expenses. In order to take advantage of the tax exempt status of the university, the employee must provide a motor vehicle rental tax exemption certificate when renting a vehicle. Alternatively, the employee can elect to have Enterprise direct bill the university and the tax will not be charged.

Four-Per-Car-Rule

Coordination of travel must occur when two, three, or four employees travel on the same dates with the same itinerary to conduct the same official state business. When coordination of travel is required, only one employee may be reimbursed for mileage.

Reimbursement Rates – Board of Regents, University President, President’s Spouse, and Representative of the President

Members of the Board of Regents, the president, and the president’s spouse are reimbursed for actual expenses when traveling on university business in an official capacity.

If the president is unable to attend a meeting or conference, the president may designate, on an individual trip basis, one employee as a representative to travel. Under this provision, the employee is reimbursed for actual expenses. The expense report must be accompanied by the
original designating document from the president. Receipts are required as specified in these Travel Guidelines, and the employee may only claim his/her own expenses.

Registration Fees

The registration fee for attendance at a professional meeting or conference must be reflected on the travel authorization regardless of payment method. After the travel authorization has been approved, the registration fee may be paid as follows:

- by the traveler– the registration fee will be reimbursed from the expense report with the original receipt.
- by purchase voucher – when requested in sufficient time, the university will prepay the registration fee to the conference vendor. An approved purchase voucher must be submitted to the travel office with the completed registration form and travel authorization number. Registration fees will not be paid more than six (6) weeks in advance of the seminar or conference unless the cost savings is considerable to the university (such as early-bird discounts) or if there is a limited capacity for attendance.
- with a travel card (T-card) – the T-card should be used instead of the P-card for registration fees reimbursed in TEM.
- with a procurement card (P-card) – the P-card can be used when a traveler is unable to use their T-Card for certain registrations because of multiple registrations on the same card or when the T-card does not recognize the vendor as an acceptable purchase type.

Registration fees for in-town conferences, virtual conferences or webinars do not require a travel authorization. These can be paid by P-card, a purchase voucher to the vendor, or if paid by the employee, reimbursed through the procurement process.

Airline Ticket Purchases

Any airline ticket expense, whether to be prepaid or reimbursed, must be listed on the approved travel authorization.

The State Travel Management Program of the Texas Procurement and Support Service has contracted with several airlines to provide special airfare rates for certain flights. A listing of the flights and rates is available online at the travel website.

Employees are encouraged to make flight reservations at discounted fares. Often this requires that the ticket be purchased well in advance of the travel date. Upon approval of the travel authorization, employees may make the airfare purchase personally or have it charged to the university, using the following procedures:

NEW: If a department has a T-Card available, the employee is expected to use the T-Card for these purchases. No special advances will be made to employees in these instances.

An employee wishing to charge an airline ticket directly to the university may use the T-Card. The Airfare Billing Form will be phased out as departments receive their T-Cards. An employee
may elect to use a travel agency, but the charge should be charged to the T-Card or the employee’s personal credit card.

If it is necessary to change an airline ticket, the traveler may be reimbursed for the additional fee only if there is a valid reason for the change as outlined by TPASS. The reason must be documented in writing, and approved by the account manager. A traveler will not be reimbursed for a second ticket to or from the same destination.

The university cannot reimburse an employee for the cost of air transportation by a non-commercial transportation company.

**Use of Non-University Owned Vehicle While on Official Business**

An employee operating a personal vehicle must carry insurance as required by state law. An employee operating any non-university owned vehicle, including his/her own personal vehicle or a personally rented vehicle, does so at his/her own risk. The university accepts no responsibility for vehicle or other damage, personal injury, claims filing, vehicle repair, maintenance, insurance costs, towing or citations.

**Incidental Expenses**

Expenses for ground transportation to and from the airport such as taxi, limousine, subway, bus and other modes of mass transit are reimbursable, subject to the provisions of this section. (Travel to and from restaurants at the destination are not reimbursed since the MIE rate includes these expenses.) All expenses must be listed on the approved travel authorization and expense report. Limousine expenses are reimbursable if it was the most cost-effective mode of transportation available considering all relevant circumstances. If two or more state employees share a taxi or limousine, it is allowable for one employee to pay and be reimbursed for that full expense. Other official business expenses (e.g., parking, telephone calls, and copy services) are also reimbursable. Valet parking is not reimbursable unless there is a valid written explanation as to why self-parking is not feasible, advisable, or available.

Receipts are requested, but not required, for reimbursement of these incidental expenses. If receipts are not provided, an explanation of the reimbursable expenses must be detailed on the expense report (including type of expense, date, amount and location).

**The following are not reimbursable: expenses of a personal nature, expenses that would be incurred by the traveler regardless of official state business travel, and tips and gratuities.**

**Student and Other Group Travel**

With the exception of the president and vice-presidents, employees traveling together are not considered group travel. Each employee must pay and claim his/her own expenses.

When a non-employee group, such as a student group, travels together, it may be more convenient for one person to pay and claim expenses of the entire group. In this case, the person
paying the expenses will be responsible for submitting the travel authorization and the expense report. Receipts are required for all expenses of group travel, including meals. The students may be given funds for their meals by signing individually on a list of names (including their campus ID) of all travelers that they have received a certain sum of money for their meals (not to exceed university per diem rates per day). If the sponsor pays for meals, the itemized receipts must be attached to the expense report in order to be reimbursed. The signed list of all travelers’ names and campus ID numbers must be included on the authorization and attached to the expense report.

Tips or gratuities paid in conjunction with meal expenses are generally not reimbursable. A “mandatory” service charge may only be reimbursed if the service charge is imposed by an establishment and cannot be refused by the customer. In this case, the person paying the expenses must obtain and submit documentation that the charge was mandatory.

If the group sponsor/advisor is an employee, he may request advance travel funds (not subject to the 50% limit) to pay expenses for the group (refer to the Advance Travel Funds section of these Travel Guidelines for procedures). The sponsor/advisor will solely be responsible for claiming reimbursement on the expense report and for repayment of the advance travel funds. Refer to the Group Travel Guidelines available online at the travel website.

No Educational and General Funds (fund 1075xx or 12xxxx or 13xxxx funds) may be used to pay or reimburse travel expenses for students. All other provisions of these Travel Guidelines apply to student travel.

Prospective Employees

All provisions of these Travel Guidelines apply to prospective employees. Additional methods of payment are available to pay expenses incurred during the interview process and are listed on the Travel Authorization-Prospective Employee form (available online at the travel website). Prospective employees will be paid through the TEM module.

Non-Reimbursed Travel

A travel authorization is required for any out-of-town university-related travel even if travel expenses are not reimbursed. Examples include:

- travel for which university funds are not approved;
- travel for which the traveler does not request or expect reimbursement; or
- travel that has been paid by another source.