

NIH Policy Manual

1500-04 - Per Diem and Other Allowable Expenses

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Transmittal Notice

1. Explanation of Material Transmitted: The material transmitted contains amended language in order to reflect recent changes to the FTR and corresponding HHS policies and procedures, as well as other necessary edits. Specifically, the more important changes include: 1) information inclusive of a web site address for the GSA Federal Premier Lodging Program facilities; 2) clarification regarding policy on temporary duty (TDY) travel and annual leave; 3) guidance on emergency travel, i.e., when an employee is injured or becomes ill while in TDY travel status; 4) additional guidance on the authorization and approval of an Actual Expense Allowance; 5) new HHS policy on reimbursement for laundry/dry cleaning expenses; 6) clarification regarding NIH policies and procedures on mechanisms used to pay for registration fees; 7) information on the use of a cell phone to make a personal call home while in TDY travel status; and 8) the rescinding of the GSA Conference Planning regulation that permitted the use of appropriated funds for light

Partial Revisions: 9/5/06*, 4/29/08, 4/23/12***, 6/04/12****, 11/04/13*****, 01/30/14*****, and 02/10/15*******

*** NIH Manual 1500-04-07 Section E was revised 9/5/06 to reflect recent changes in HHS policy.**

**** NIH Manual 1500-04-07 Section E(5) was revised 4/29/08 to update requirements surrounding the reimbursement for personal phone calls home while in TDY travel status, in a foreign location. As long as an estimate of the costs for such phone calls is displayed on the Travel Authorization, there will no longer be a stipulation that the reimbursement is only to be limited to the international transmitting costs plus not to exceed the first three minutes of conversation.**

***** NIH Manual 1500-04, the following Chapters are revised/added on 4/23/12:**

- Revised 1500-04-06, Section F(3) and G(3) was revised to no longer require an AEA memo for in-kind sponsor lodging.
- Revised 1500-04-07, Section A was revised involving reimbursement for checked baggage, internet fees, GPS for a rental car, and laundry, cleaning and pressing of clothing.

- **Added 1500-04-10, NEW NIH Policy for Compensatory Time for Travel (CTT) is issued prescribing use of new NIH Form 2920-1, *NIH Compensatory Time for Travel (CTT) Request and Approval Form.***

******NIH Manual 1500-04, the following Chapters are revised on 6/04/12:**

- **1500-04-03, Section B to update the Meal Reduction Table for CONUS Locations**
- **1500-04-04 and 1500-04-05, Sections A and C are completely revised to bring these sections of the NIH Manual Chapter in agreement with the HHS Travel Manual (January 2012)**

*******NIH Manual 1500-04, the following are partially revised/rescinded on 11/04/13 as a result of the Conference Lodging Allowance being abolished:**

- **1500-04-06 – “Actual Expense Allowance (AEA),” Section F(1) revised to delete paragraph regarding Conference Lodging Allowance**
- **1500-04-09 – “Conference Planning - Conference Lodging Allowance,” rescinded in its entirety**

*******NIH Manual 1500-04, the following Chapter is partially revised on 1/30/14:**

- **1500-04-07, Section D is revised to capture current HHS Efficient Spending Policy that requires approval of conference attendance prior to the obligation of registration fees.**

*******NIH Manual 1500-04, the following Chapter is rescinded on 2/10/15:**

- **1500-04-10 – "NIH Policy for Compensatory Time for Travel (CTT)" is rescinded, NIH CTT policy can be found in NIH Policy Manual, Chapter 2300-550-3, “Compensatory Time off for Travel.”**

2. Filing Instructions: This revised version of Chapter 04 is to replace the previously issued version of this chapter.

PLEASE NOTE: For information on:

- Content of this chapter, contact the Office of Financial Management on 301-496-4379 or 301-402-8831.
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<http://oma.od.nih.gov/public/MS/manualchapters/Pages/default.aspx>

1500-04-00. Per Diem and Other Allowable Expenses

A. General

This part applies worldwide (both within and outside of CONUS).

B. Authority

A per diem allowance (also referred to as a subsistence allowance) shall be paid as prescribed in this chapter, for official travel away from the official duty station, in the form of, 1) lodgings-plus; 2) actual subsistence expense allowance; 3) conference lodging allowance; or 4) reduced per diem.

C. Maximum Per Diem Rates Established

Generally, employees performing official travel for the Federal Government will be reimbursed for their subsistence expenses based on the “lodgings-plus per diem system”. Under this system, the travel allowance for each day is established on the basis of a maximum amount the traveler is allowed for lodging, plus a fixed allowance for meals and incidental expenses (M&IE). Total subsistence expenses shall not exceed the applicable maximum per diem rate for the location of business or en route to and from official business.

1. **Rates for Continental United States (CONUS).** The per diem allowances within the CONUS shall not exceed the maximum rates established by the Administrator of GSA and listed in Appendix A of the Federal Travel Regulation (FTR).
2. **Rates for Non-Foreign Areas Outside CONUS (OCONUS).** The per diem allowances payable for official travel in non-foreign areas shall not exceed the maximum per diem rates established by the Secretary of Defense and listed in Civilian Personnel Per Diem Bulletins.
3. **Rates for Foreign Areas (OCONUS).** Per diem allowances payable for official travel in foreign areas shall not exceed the maximum per diem established by the Secretary of State and published in Section 925 of the Standardized Regulations. (Web Site: <http://www.state.gov/travel>)

D. Elements of Per Diem

There are two basic elements that make up the standard per diem rates: 1) lodging; and 2) meals and incidental expenses (M&IE).

1. **Lodging** – The term “lodging” includes expenses, except lodging taxes, for overnight sleeping facilities; baths; personal use of the room during daytime; telephone access fees; and service charges for fans, air conditioners, heaters, and fireplaces furnished in rooms when such charges are not included in the room rate. Lodging does **not** include accommodations on airplanes, trains, buses, or ships. Such cost is included in the transportation cost and is **not** considered a lodging expense.

(Exception: lodging taxes have *not* been removed from the foreign per diem rates. Therefore, separate claims for these taxes will not be allowed.)

2. **Meals** – Expenses for breakfast, lunch, and dinner and related tips and taxes (specifically excluded are alcoholic beverage and entertainment expenses, and any

expenses incurred for other persons).

3. ***Incidental expenses:***

- a. Fees and tips given to porters, baggage carriers, bellhops, hotel maids, stewards, or stewardesses and others on ships, and hotel servants in foreign countries.
- b. Transportation between places of lodging or business and places where meals are taken if suitable meals can be obtained at the TDY site.
- c. Mailing costs associated with filing Travel Voucher claims and payment of Government-sponsored charge card billings. ([FTR 301-12.1](#))

E. General Rules Affecting Entitlement to Per Diem

1. ***No allowance at official station.*** Per diem shall not be allowed within the limits of the official station or at, or within the vicinity of, the traveler's home from which they normally commute daily to their official station. The local commuting area for the NIH is defined as a radius of 50 miles (For additional information, See NIH Manual Issuance 1500 [Chapter 06](#)).
2. ***Travel of twelve hours or less (12-Hour Rule).*** A per diem allowance shall not be allowed when the period of official travel is 12 hours or less. This rule also applies to travel incident to change of official duty station.

Example: Traveler leaves residence at 7:30 a.m. on 08/14 and travels to Philadelphia, PA. Traveler returns to residence at 6:00 p.m. on 08/14. (No overnight lodging).

Per Diem reimbursement: NONE (less than 12 hours in travel status).

3. ***Beginning and ending of entitlement.*** For computing per diem allowances, official travel begins at the time an employee leaves his/her home, office, or other authorized point of departure and ends when the traveler returns to his/her home, office, or other authorized point at the conclusion of the trip.
4. ***International Dateline.*** In cases where the traveler crosses the international date line (180th meridian), the actual elapsed time shall be used to compute per diem rather than calendar days.

1500-04-01. Per Diem Reimbursement

A. Travel of More Than 12 Hours, but Not Exceeding 24 Hours

When the travel period (entire trip) for which per diem is authorized is more than 12 hours but not more than 24 hours, the per diem for the trip will be calculated as follows:

1. ***Lodging not required.*** If lodging is not required, the per diem allowable shall be three-quarters of the M&IE rate for the temporary duty point involved.

Example: Traveler leaves residence at 6:30 a.m. on 08/14 and travels to Philadelphia,

PA. Traveler returns to residence at 8:00 p.m. on 08/14. (No overnight lodging required.)

Per Diem reimbursement: $3/4 \times \$42$ (Phila. M&IE rate) = \$31.50.

2. **Lodging required.** If lodging is required, the rules for travel of more than 24 hours apply.

NOTE: In this scenario, the payment of meals and incidental expenses becomes taxable in accordance with the Internal Revenue Service regulations.

B. Travel of More Than 24 Hours

The applicable maximum per diem rate for each calendar day of travel shall be determined by the travel status and location of the employee at 12:00 midnight and whether lodging is required at such location. When lodging is required, the applicable maximum per diem rate shall be the maximum rate prescribed for the temporary duty location, or a stopover point where lodging is obtained while en route to, from, or between temporary duty locations. Only one per diem rate is applicable to a calendar day. For travel of more than 24 hours, per diem shall be calculated based on the following rules:

1. **Day travel begins – Lodging required.** When lodging is required on the day travel begins (day of departure from home, office, or other authorized duty point), the per diem allowable shall be the actual cost of lodging incurred by the traveler, limited to the applicable lodging allowance, plus **three-quarters** of the applicable M&IE for the location of the lodging.

Example: Per Diem for New Orleans, LA: Lodging \$88; M&IE \$42. Traveler leaves office at 1:00 p.m. on 11/23 for TDY in New Orleans, LA and incurs lodging cost of \$93 per night.

Per Diem reimbursement 1st day: $3/4 \times \$42 = \31.50 (M&IE) + \$88.00 lodging (maximum on hotel reimbursement) TOTAL: \$119.50 for 1st day.

2. **Day travel begins – Lodging not required.** When lodging is not required on the day travel begins, the per diem allowable shall be **three-quarters** of the destination M&IE rate.

Example: Traveler leaves residence at 5:45 p.m. on 06/20 and travels to Rome, Italy. Traveler arrives in Rome at 8:00 a.m. on 06/21. (No lodging - overnight on plane).

Per Diem reimbursement for 06/20 = $3/4 \times$ Rome M&IE rate. No lodging allowance.

3. **Full calendar days of travel – Lodging required.** For each full calendar day that the employee is in travel status and lodging is required (whether en route or at a temporary duty location), per diem allowable shall be the actual cost of lodging incurred, limited to the applicable lodging allowance prescribed for the location, plus the full M&IE allowance.

Example: Using the example above, the Traveler arrives in Rome, Italy on 06/21 - Entitled to 1 full 24-hour day for 06/21, and all full days of travel when lodging is

required until the day of return.

Per Diem reimbursement: All the M&IE @ Rome rate + lodging @ Rome rate.

4. **Full calendar days of travel – Lodging not required.** For each full calendar day that the traveler is in travel status and lodging is not required, the per diem allowance shall be the destination M&IE rate.

Example: Traveler does TDY in New York City, NY and stays with friends or relatives. No lodging receipt obtained.

Per Diem reimbursement: 3/4 M&IE on the 1st and last day + full M&IE on all full calendar days (24 hours) during the official duty @ NY rate.

5. **Returning from travel - Lodging required.** For each calendar day of travel when lodging is required at an en route location while the employee is returning to the official station, home, or other authorized point, the per diem allowable shall be the actual cost of lodging incurred, limited to the applicable lodging allowance prescribed for the location of the lodging, plus the applicable M&IE.

Example: Traveler returning from Sydney, Australia on 04/18; stopover in Honolulu, Hawaii, 04/19 en route to Washington, D.C.

Per Diem reimbursement: 04/19 is full M&IE and maximum lodging @ Honolulu rates (stopovers allowed en route to permanent duty station when travel time is over 14-hours and coach class accommodations are used).

6. **Returning from travel - Lodging not required.** For any full calendar day of travel when lodging is not required while the traveler is en route overnight returning to the official duty station, home, or other authorized point, the per diem allowable shall be the full M&IE rate applicable to the preceding calendar day.

Example: Traveler is returning from TDY in San Francisco, CA on 09/27. The plane is due @7:00 p.m. Severe weather conditions delay the return to home until 12:45 a.m. on 09/28.

Per Diem reimbursement: Full M&IE @ San Francisco rate for 09/27 + 3/4 M&IE @ San Francisco rate for 09/28.

7. **Returning from travel - Day travel ends.** For the day travel ends (day traveler returns to the official duty station, home, or other authorized point) the per diem allowable shall be three-quarters of the M&IE rate applicable to the preceding calendar day.

Example: Using the example (5) above, the final "leg" of the return trip-Honolulu, Hawaii to Washington, DC on 04/20.

Per Diem reimbursement: 3/4 M&IE only at the Honolulu, Hawaii per diem rate.

8. **Lodging obtained after midnight.** Although per diem generally is based on the employee's location at midnight, there will be instances when he/she is en route and does not arrive at the lodging location until after midnight. In such cases, the lodging shall be claimed for the preceding calendar day and the applicable maximum per diem for the preceding day will be determined as if the employee had been at the lodging location at midnight of that day.

9. *Commercial Vessel*. For vessel travel, Alaska Ferry System, etc. ([FTR 301-11.101\(b\)](#) for per diem requirements and [FTR 301-10.183](#) for class accommodations).

1500-04-02. Lodging

A. Lodging - Location, Receipt Requirements, and Allowable Expenses

1. ***Lodging Location Rules – At TDY Location.*** It is presumed the employee will obtain lodging at the temporary duty location. However, if the employee obtains lodging away from or outside the temporary duty location because of personal preference or convenience, the allowable per diem shall be limited to the maximum per diem rate prescribed for the temporary duty location.
2. ***Lodging Location Rules – Lodging Not Available at TDY Location.*** In certain circumstances, lodging accommodations may not be available at the temporary duty location and the employee must obtain lodging in an adjacent locality where the prescribed maximum per diem rate is higher than the maximum rate for the location of the temporary duty point. In such cases, the agency may make an administrative determination on an individual basis to authorize the higher per diem rate. If the higher rate is not authorized in advance, the employee must submit a satisfactory justification explaining the situation causing the change of lodging location before reimbursement is paid.

B. Lodging Receipt Requirements

Receipts shall be required to support all lodging costs for which an allowance is claimed under the lodgings-plus system except that a statement instead of a receipt may be accepted for the fee or service charge incurred for the use of Government quarters.

1. ***Double occupancy.*** If two employees on official business share a hotel room. Each employee may claim $\frac{1}{2}$ of the room based on the maximum allowed locality rate. If the person sharing the room is not another Government employee on official travel, the employee is only allowed the single room rate.
2. ***Receipts lost or impractical to obtain.*** If receipts have been lost or destroyed or are impractical to obtain, a statement explaining the circumstances shall be furnished with the travel voucher, including the name and address of the lodging facility, the dates of lodging, and the exact cost incurred. Employees of NIH will be required to obtain copies of lost or destroyed receipts from the lodging facility if at all possible.

C. Allowable Lodging Expenses

The traveler will be reimbursed only for his/her actual cost of lodging up to the maximum amount. The following paragraphs describe other allowable lodging expenses.

1. ***Conventional lodging.*** When an employee uses conventional lodging facilities (hotels/motels, etc.), the allowable lodging expense will be based on the single room rate. For double occupancy (see paragraph B (1) above) and for rentals ([FTR](#)

[301-11.15\(a\)](#).

2. **Government quarters.** A fee or service charge paid for the use of Government quarters is an allowable lodging expense.
3. **Lodging with friends or relatives.** When the employee obtains lodging from friends or relatives, with or without charge, no part of the per diem allowance will be allowed for lodging. In rare cases, some cost may be substantiated if the host actually incurs additional costs in accommodating the traveler (i.e. issues pertaining to use of public laundry facilities, refrigeration, etc.) Reasonable costs of items should be stated on the voucher. Claims should not be based on locality per diem nor "token" amounts when determining reasonableness.
4. **Lodging in non-conventional facilities.** When lodging facilities cannot be obtained (e.g. remote areas) or when there is a shortage of rooms because of an influx of attendees at special events, costs of lodging obtained in non-conventional facilities may be allowed. Such facilities may include college dormitories or similar facilities and rooms generally not offered commercially but made available to the public by area residents in their private homes. Travelers must provide an explanation of the circumstances.
5. **Use of travel trailer or camping vehicle for lodgings.** A per diem allowance for lodging may be allowed when the traveler uses a travel trailer or camping vehicle while on temporary duty assignments away from his/her official duty station.
6. **Hotel/motel discounts.** Many hotels and motels offer reduced rates or Government per diem rates to Federal employees on official business. The NIH Travel Management Center(s) can obtain a current listing. When employees select a commercial lodging facility, first consideration must be given to those facilities contracted under the GSA Federal Premier Lodging Program (FPLP). A list of FPLP facilities may be accessed at the following web site address: <http://www.gsa.gov>.

In addition, some states offer tax exemptions on lodging accommodations for Federal employees on official business. A list of those states is available at the following web site address: <https://smartpay.gsa.gov/about-gsa-smartpay/tax-information/state-response-letter>

D. Mixed Travel Reimbursements

Mixed travel occurs when official travel within a single trip is subject to payment of per diem under the lodgings-plus system and an actual expense allowance under the actual expense system. Reimbursement will be computed under only one system for each calendar day. ([FTR 301-11.4](#)).

1500-04-03. Reductions in Maximum Per Diem Rates

A. Lodging

When all or part of the lodging is furnished at no cost, or at a nominal cost, to the employee by the Government (e.g. included in a conference registration fee or similar training fee), the

lodgings-plus system automatically reduces the maximum per diem rate to the M&IE rate only (or fraction thereof).

B. Meals

When all or part of the meals are furnished at no cost or at a nominal cost to the employee by the Government, the applicable M&IE rate shall be reduced by the amounts prescribed by the Government in TABLE 1 below. In cases where **all meals** are provided on any whole or partial day of travel, the reimbursement will be the incidental expense (IE) portion of the per diem.

1. *Meal Reduction Table for CONUS Locations.* (FTR 301-11.18)

Meal Reduction Table for CONUS Locations

	M&IE RATES					
	\$46	\$51	\$56	\$61	\$66	\$71
Breakfast	\$7	\$8	\$9	\$10	\$11	\$12
Lunch	\$11	\$12	\$13	\$15	\$16	\$18
Dinner	\$23	\$26	\$29	\$31	\$34	\$36
Incidentals	\$5	\$5	\$5	\$5	\$5	\$5

(NOTE: These rates are subject to change)

2. *Meal Reductions Outside CONUS.* When meals are provided at no charge to an employee traveling outside the continental U.S., the M&IE rates for localities in both non-foreign and foreign areas shall be reduced by the applicable dollar amount shown in **Appendix 1** (Foreign M&IE rate chart) at the end of this directive.

3. *Complimentary Meals.* Per FTR 301-11.17, the M&IE rate should not be reduced for complimentary meal(s) provided by common carriers or by hotel/motels.

1500-04-04. Reductions in Per Diem for Extended-Stay Travel

A. General Policy

It is both HHS and NIH policy that an employee on a long term assignment should be able to maintain a reasonable standard of living, without reaping any significant financial gain, suffering any substantial loss or living in an unsafe location. An employee's personal preference, i.e., staying in superior accommodations, should not be considered as necessary additional living expenses. Should an employee elect to secure lodging that is more expensive for reasons of personal convenience, s/he must pay the excess cost over the authorized rate.

B. Assignments within CONUS and Non-Foreign Travel Areas

For assignments less than 30 nights, the maximum daily amount in the FTR for the traveler’s locality may be used when reasonable for the expected duration of the assignment. For assignments of 30 nights or greater, the allowable per diem should be reduced, as employees are expected to secure Extended Stay or Long-term Lodging Facilities at substantially lower rates. Such lodging will normally include cooking facilities allowing for a reduction in the M&IE rate as well. Close attention must be given to setting a daily lodging rate appropriate for the timing of the assignment and the particular location involved. The goal is to reduce the cost to the Government as much as possible for the entire period of travel/occupancy, while providing safe and adequate lodging to the employee, with reasonable transportation option(s) to the TDY site at a cost not exceeding the lodging savings. Travelers will always receive 75 percent of per diem on travel days. The following guidelines in Table 1 and Table 2 below are provided for setting per diem rates for assignments of 30 nights or more. The guidelines are based upon the length of the entire TDY assignment, and do not represent a sliding scale during the length of the TDY assignment. The reduction begins on day one.

Table 1 - Reduced Per Diem Lodging Allowances

Assignment Period	Percent Reduction
30 to 90 Nights	70% of lodging per diem rate for location
91 to 180 Nights	60% of lodging per diem rate for location
Over 180 Nights	50% of lodging per diem rate for location

Table 2 - Reduced Per Diem M&IE Allowances

M&IE Allowance	Percent Reduction
Cooking facilities included in lodging	50% of M&IE rate for location
No cooking facilities or meals provided	75% of M&IE rate for location
Lodging site provides all meals	Only Incidental Expenses allowance for location

C. Assignments outside the Continental United States (OCONUS)

For assignments of less than 30 nights, the maximum daily amount in the FTR for the traveler’s locality may be used when reasonable for the length of the assignment; however, a lower amount may be more appropriate. The rate should be realistic and fair for the location involved, given the timing of the travel.

For OCONUS assignments of 30 nights or greater, the allowable per diem should be reduced if, it is reasonable to expect employees to be able to secure long-term lodging facilities at substantially lower rates within the location. Due to varying considerations of availability, cost, safety, and features of lodging options in foreign areas, no guideline amounts for setting reduced rates for lodging in foreign countries is provided in this section. Supervisors and/or AOs should gather sufficient reliable information about the location of the assignment to enable them to assess what is a reasonable and fair lodging rate given the circumstances of the travel and length of assignment. The rate must be specified on the travel order and discussed with the employee. If lodging options that include meals or meal preparation facilities are reasonably available, the M&IE rate must be reduced or, if all meals are provided with the lodging, only the incidental expenses portion of the locality's M&IE rate should be authorized.

1500-04-05. Leave Taken While in Travel Status

It is NIH policy that leave taken prior to or upon completion of an official travel assignment, should be recorded on the Travel Authorization and on the Travel Voucher. As such, the type and number of hours of leave for each day must be displayed. In the conduct of international travel, all leave must be included on the Notification of Foreign Travel as part of that automated process.

A. Annual Leave

Leave of absence (other than illness or injury or a personal emergency situation) for one-half or less of the prescribed daily working hours shall be disregarded for per diem purposes. Where the leave is more than one-half of the prescribed daily working hours, no per diem shall be allowed for that day.

HHS and NIH leave policy for employees is the same whether the trip involves domestic/non-foreign travel or international TDY. The leave policy is as follows:

1. An employee who spends a minimum of three lodging nights may be authorized, not to exceed, three (3) days of annual or compensatory leave in conjunction with domestic/non-foreign trips.
2. An employee who spends a two (2) or more lodging nights may be authorized, not to exceed, two (2) days of annual or compensatory leave in conjunction with domestic/non-foreign trips.
3. An employee who spends only one (1) lodging night may be authorized, not to exceed, one (1) day of annual or compensatory leave in conjunction with domestic/non-foreign trips.
4. An employee whose TDY trip includes no overnight stay will not be authorized annual or compensatory leave in conjunction with a domestic/non-foreign trip.

For items 1, 2, and 3, lodging nights include conventional lodging, Government quarters, lodging with friend(s) or relative(s), nonconventional lodging (e.g., college dormitories or

similar facilities), and recreational vehicles (e.g., trailers/campers). In addition, overnight en route travel time is included in the number of lodging nights. This includes hotel rooms booked when arriving after midnight in accordance with FTR 301-11.7

It is HHS and NIH policy that employees will not be authorized annual or compensatory leave in conjunction with any trips, both domestic/non-foreign or international, that are sponsored, in whole or in part, by non-Federal sources, whether for-profit or non-profit.

B. Charging Employees for Annual Leave for Monday Returns.

NIH policy is that employees are required to return by the “first available flight” upon completion of duties, even if this entails travel during the weekend. Under various CG decisions and guidance provided in the GAO Civilian Personnel Law Manual, it is clear that an employee may be required by their IC to return from official travel on his or her own time to avoid excess costs associated with delaying travel unnecessarily over a weekend. Should an employee elect to delay their return until the following Monday, they would be entitled only to the additional per diem which would have been payable had they begun return travel following completion of work, e.g., on Friday. An employee’s supervisor has discretion whether or not to approve leave for an employee, for Monday returns. If the employee is “ordered” to return on Friday for reasons of official necessity, the employee may also be entitled to compensatory time for the travel time. “Mere presence” at the job on Monday, or the next workday, is not sufficient justification to entitle the employee to compensatory time.

C. Emergency Travel Due to Illness or Injury

If an employee has to interrupt or discontinue his/her temporary duty travel due to an emergency situation, provisions governing transportation and per diem allowances can be found in Section 5.2.4 of the HHS Travel Manual Chapter. Emergency travel results from:

- 1) Employee becomes incapacitated by illness or injury not due to his/her own misconduct;
- 2) The death or serious illness of a member of the employee’s family; or
- 3) A catastrophic occurrence or impending disaster, such as fire, flood, or act of God, which directly affects the employee’s home.

1500-04-06. Actual Expense Allowance (AEA)

A. General

This part applies world-wide (both within and outside CONUS) for Civilian travelers on official Government business.

B. Authority

Agencies may authorize or approve reimbursement for actual and necessary subsistence expenses incurred during official travel when such expenses are unusually high due to the special circumstances of a specific travel situation, or when the authorizing official deems it necessary to carry out the mission of the trip. Actual expense allowance reimbursement shall be authorized for individual travel assignments or specific travel situations only after appropriate consideration of the actual facts existing at the time the travel is directed or performed. Authorizing officials may approve actual and necessary expenses for a group of travelers attending the same meeting or event for the same period of time, but blanket issuances for automatic actual and necessary expenses for an entire locality, regardless of when travel occurs there, is forbidden.

C. Delegation of Authority

(See NIH Delegations of Authority, [Travel #1](#).)

D. Relationship to Per Diem

Generally, authorization of actual subsistence expenses is contingent on the entitlement to per diem, therefore, a traveler who would be entitled to Government per diem on days of travel when official business is being conducted, would be allowed actual and necessary expenses in the same situation when the business is under unusual circumstances.

E. Prudent Traveler Rule

An employee traveling on the actual subsistence expense basis is expected to exercise the same care in incurring expenses as he/she would for travel on a per diem basis.

F. Conditions Warranting Authorization of Actual Expenses

1. ***General.*** Travel on an actual subsistence basis may be authorized "when deemed warranted", or under unusual circumstances when the applicable maximum per diem rate is insufficient. The maximum per diem rate, although generally adequate, may be insufficient for a particular travel assignment because the actual and necessary subsistence expenses are unusually high due to special duties or because subsistence costs have escalated due to special or unforeseen events. Since lodging constitutes a major portion of the subsistence expenses, travel on an actual expense basis may be authorized when the lodging costs absorb all or nearly all of the applicable maximum per diem allowance.
2. ***Situations Which May Warrant Approval of Actual and Necessary Expense Reimbursement.***

NOTE: It is NIH policy that staying in a particular hotel to be close to the place of

official business is not in itself, adequate justification for requesting, authorizing, or approving travel on an actual expense basis. However, the following scenarios may warrant such authorization or approval:

- a. The employee is attending a prearranged meeting or conference where meals and rooms must be procured without availability of other less expensive alternatives, or
- b. Available accommodations cannot be obtained within a reasonable commuting distance from the TDY location and transportation costs to commute to and from the less expensive lodging facility consume most or all of the savings achieved from occupying less expensive lodgings, or
- c. The travel is to an area where the applicable maximum per diem allowance is generally adequate but subsistence costs have escalated for a short period of time due to special functions such as national sports events, festivals, etc., or
- d. The employee, because of special duties of the assignment, necessarily incurs unusually high expenses in the conduct of official business, or
- e. The employee necessarily incurs unusually high expenses incident to accompanying another employee in a situation similar to the one described in (d) above.

3. Acceptance of Actual and Necessary Expense Reimbursements from a Nonfederal Source, i.e., HHS-348 Sponsored Travel.

When a sponsoring organization arranges a block of rooms for a conference/meeting in excess of 25% above the maximum lodging per diem rate, it is HHS policy that such acceptance should be authorized only if the NIH would have authorized such acceptance using appropriated funds. For in-cash sponsorship, an AEA memorandum is required in addition to submitting a STO waiver request. While it is not required for in-kind lodging, IC Ethics Officials are still required to review and clear each sponsor's letter of invitation notwithstanding the discontinuance of the AEA memo for sponsor in-kind lodging. In place of the AEA memo, travel planners/AOs will instead document their due-diligence in the Travel Authorization. ICs can choose which section within GovTrip to insert this documentation, i.e., Trip Details, Other Authorizations, Additional Remarks, etc. Regardless of its placement in GovTrip, information required includes the nightly lodging cost, its percentage over the government per diem and what the government lodging rate is for this location. Also included will be a notation that the sponsor attests that similar accommodations are also being provided to non-federal participants.

G. Advanced Authorization

Advance authorization for Actual Expense Allowance will be requested by memorandum, accompanied by a notation on the Travel Authorization, justifying the expenses on the basis of the individual circumstances in the particular case. Requests must contain the following:

1. ***Identification of the specific TDY location and purpose*** of the travel;

2. A ***recommended maximum daily rate not to exceed 300%*** of the applicable rate for the area including a description of the specific circumstances why the higher rate is necessary;
3. A ***comparison cost of three (3) other lodging rates within the TDY location***. One of the hotels for the comparison must be at the maximum lodging rate set by GSA. If there is no hotel available at the maximum per diem rate, as provided by the TMC, the traveler must provide this information as part of the justification (three cost estimates are still required). The cost comparisons also should include the cost of ground transportation (e.g., taxi/shuttle) from the hotels to the site, and the location and distance in miles from the meeting site.
4. An ***estimate of the cost impact*** (AEA rate vs. Government per diem rate);
5. The recommended time ***period for effectiveness of the established rate***; and
6. The ***number of employees applying for the Actual Expense Allowance*** on a single request memo.

Section 5.1.7 of the HHS Travel Manual (January 2012) provides a sample AEA memorandum available for the travel planners to use.

H. Post Approval

Post approval of actual expenses reimbursement will be limited to:

1. ***Emergency situations*** in which requests for prior travel authorization were not possible.
2. ***Change of per diem rate or similar situation*** where during the course of a particular assignment, actual and necessary subsistence expenses incurred were much greater than the per diem allowance due to unanticipated changes in per diem (i.e., foreign rate change) or other exceptional circumstances.

NOTE: When travel has been authorized on an actual subsistence basis at less than the maximum per diem rate (e.g., Not to exceed situation (NTE) fixed expense reimbursement), post approval may not be made to increase the daily monetary limitation of the specified Travel Authorization.

I. Maximum Daily Rates

For ***travel within CONUS***, or outside CONUS, the maximum daily rate for subsistence expenses shall not exceed 300% of the applicable maximum per diem rate (Appendix A of the FTR) rounded to the next higher dollar. (See [FTR 301-11.305](#)).

J. Reimbursement Limitations

When the actual subsistence expenses incurred during any one day are less than the maximum daily rate authorized, the employee shall be reimbursed only for the lesser amount. Expenses incurred and claimed (including those for fractional days) shall be reviewed and allowed only to the extent determined to be necessary and reasonable by the agency.

Reimbursement not to exceed 100%. When meals and incidental expenses are to be reimbursed on the 100% flat rate basis, reimbursement shall not exceed the maximum per diem rate on full calendar days of travel or $\frac{3}{4}$ of the applicable rate on partial days of travel. ([FTR 301-11.101\(a\)](#)).

K. Documentation/Receipt Requirements

When travel is authorized on an actual subsistence basis, the employee shall itemize on the travel voucher each expense for which reimbursement is claimed on a daily basis. Receipts shall be required for lodging, regardless of amount, and any individual meal when the cost is over \$75. Meals must be itemized separately; i.e., breakfast, lunch, and dinner. **Exception.** If reimbursement for M&IE remains at 100% (Government rate), NO RECEIPTS or itemization of meals is required.

1500-04-07. Other Allowable Expenses

A. General Expenses

When authorized or approved, the following miscellaneous expenses shall be allowed:

1. **Checked Baggage.** Requires pre-approval on the Travel Authorization including the first bag.
2. **Baggage expenses** for transport of "official business materials." Requires pre-approval on the Travel Authorization.
3. **Services of guides, interpreters, and drivers of vehicles.**
4. **Use of computers, printers, faxing machines, and scanners.** (Includes fees for internet connection associated with official business).
5. **Services of typists, data processors, or stenographers.**
6. **Use of conference center room or hotel room** for official business.
7. **Official telephone calls/service** (use Government provided services whenever possible; commercial lines when necessary.)
8. **Faxes, telegrams, cablegrams, or radiograms.**
9. **Lodging taxes.** Taxes may be claimed only for the "authorized per diem stated on the Travel Authorization". **NOTE:** Only lodging taxes for domestic and non-foreign locations may be claimed as a miscellaneous expense. Foreign lodging taxes are built in to the per diem rates and therefore may not be claimed as a miscellaneous expense.
10. **Laundry, cleaning and pressing of clothing expenses.** These expenses are applicable for TDY travel (**CONUS only**) extending a period of **4 consecutive nights or longer**. When travel meets this requirement, a traveler may claim up to **\$20 for the first 4 nights**. For each additional night, a claim may be made up to **\$5 per night**. The reimbursable amount is reduced to \$3 per night for nights 31-90 and further reduced to \$2 for night 91 and beyond. The above expenses must be authorized on the Travel Order prior to departure. It is HHS policy (HHS Travel Manual Chapter 4.2.1.5) that receipts are required for **ALL** laundry/dry cleaning reimbursement claims (except coin-operated machine usage where receipts are not available).

NOTE: As laundry and dry cleaning expenses are included in the per diem rate calculations for OCONUS travel, separate claims for such expenses incurred in those areas are **not** allowed.

11. **Energy surcharges and lodging resort fees** when not optional to the traveler.
12. **Global Positioning System (GPS) for a rental car.** Requires authorization in advance. After the fact, reimbursement will not be authorized except in the event of an emergency. The STO or STO designee must approve any after the fact exceptions.
13. **Internet Fees.** Reimbursement is allowed regardless of connectivity locations, i.e., hotel, conference location, etc., but requires pre-approval on the Travel Authorization.

B. Traveler's Checks, Money Orders, Certified Checks, or ATM Services

Reimbursement for the cost of each of these items in connection with official travel may be allowed. The amount of the checks, money orders, or ATM withdrawals may not exceed the amount of funds set forth in the authorized **travel advance** on the Travel Authorization to cover the estimated reimbursable expenses.

C. Fees Related to Travel Outside CONUS

Reimbursement for the following items may be approved:

1. **Conversion of currency.** Commissions for conversion of currency in foreign countries.
2. **Check cashing costs.** Charges covering exchange fees for cashing United States Government checks or drafts issued for the reimbursement of expenses incurred for travel in foreign countries. (Reimbursement for fees to cash salary checks is **NOT** allowed).
3. **Trip insurance.** Cost of trip insurance purchased by employees for using a government-furnished or privately owned vehicle during official business, for specific or individual trips into a foreign country. Trip insurance covers potential liability for property damage or personal injury or death to third parties. Reimbursement is limited to instances in which the purchase of such insurance is required by foreign statute or is a practical necessity due to the legal procedures of a foreign country which, in the event of an accident, could result in detainment of the driver or impoundment of the vehicle. The amount of reimbursement is limited to the cost of the minimum amount of insurance required for the use of a foreign country's roads or the minimum amount required to be purchased by industry custom.
4. **Travel document costs.** Fees in connection with the issuance of official passports, visa fees, cost of photographs for passports and affidavits.
5. **Charges for inoculations** that cannot be obtained through a Federal dispensary.
6. **Other expenses.** Miscellaneous expenditures not enumerated in this section, when necessarily incurred by the traveler in connection with the transaction of official business, are allowed when approved.

D. Registration Fees and Other Advance Deposits

HHS policy precludes the obligation of registration fees until the appropriate authority has granted approval of conference participation. Depending upon the aggregated costs of each conference, approval/non-approval resides at either the HHS level or the corporate NIH level. Once approval is obtained, the preferential order for the payment of these fees is:

1. ***Direct Payment by the Government Using the I.M.P.A.C. VISA Purchase Card.***
Under no circumstance, is the IMPAC Purchase Card to be used to pay for a registration fee involving HHS-348 Sponsored Travel when the sponsor is to reimburse NIH for the cost of the registration paid. However, if payment of the registration fee is the responsibility of NIH, the I.M.P.A.C. VISA Purchase Card can be used.
2. ***Direct Payment by the Government Via the Pre-Trip Direct Deposit.*** An automated Travel Authorization may be initiated early with ONLY the registration fee “vouchered”. When the authorizing official approves the voucher, the monies are electronically deposited to the traveler’s designated banking account. The traveler then uses these monies to pay the registration fee.
3. ***Other options.*** Only when none of the above two payment methods are viable, the traveler may use personal funds. However, the traveler must wait until their attendance has been authorized. Otherwise, the NIH is under no obligation to reimburse the employee for the cost of the registration fee, should s/he be denied attendance, or should the event be postponed or canceled. Reimbursement to the traveler using personal funds will be made by via the Travel Voucher prepared at the trip’s conclusion.
4. ***Other Advance Deposits.*** Where other costs (e.g., one night of lodging) are required in advance, the automated travel process will effect a pre-trip advance deposit for the one night of lodging and the registration fee, if applicable. In this scenario, a partial voucher will be created in the automated travel system.

NOTE: If either paragraphs D(2) and D(4) apply, the final voucher should not capture any prepaid lodging or registration fees.

E. Telephone Calls

NIH policy for the reimbursement of telephone calls while in travel status is as follows: (Reference 41 CFR 101-35.201).

1. ***Official business calls.*** When justified, calls to conduct official business while in travel status are fully reimbursable. There is no cost limitation for telephone calls necessary to fulfill business commitments and the mission of the travel purpose.
2. ***Use of Government-issued telephone calling card.*** If travelers make use of the Government calling card for business telephoning, then reimbursement is not claimed on the travel voucher; however, if the traveler incurred personal expenses for the business calls, then the reimbursement is claimed on the travel voucher with proper

justification and receipts if possible.

3. ***Personal Telephone calls home while in travel status – CONUS.*** HHS Travel Manual Chapter 4-10 states that an employee while in temporary duty travel status may be authorized reimbursement for a personal phone call home subject to the following restrictions:

- a. The employee must be in TDY travel status for a minimum of one night's lodging ;
- b. Government-provided long distance telephone systems and services (including government-issued calling cards), are not available, so that a commercial toll service must be used; and
- c. Employees are expected to incur expenses in the same manner as a prudent person would when, e.g., making a long distance call from the residence to a family member.

Chapter 4-10 further states that travelers for the Department will be allowed a brief call not to exceed an average of \$5 per day. For example, in averaging the allowable number and cost, a traveler on a trip of five (5) days could:

- (1) Make up to five calls. This could be one call per day or three calls one day and two on another day.
- (2) Be reimbursed up to \$25. This could be for five calls costing \$5 each or one call costing \$25.

4. ***Telephone calls home while in travel status – OUTSIDE CONUS.*** Chapter 4-10 also states that an employee traveling on Government business to a foreign country longer than two (2) days may be authorized to make a phone call to his or her residence. Approving officials must be sensitive to the employee's needs yet at the same time keep in mind the Government's interest by assuring that the expense of such calls are reasonable. Therefore, the following guidelines are to be applied in authorizing foreign telephone calls:

- a. The determination that telephone calls home from a foreign country will be allowed must be made **prior to the beginning of travel**. Once the determination is made, authorization for these calls must be stated on the Travel Authorization.
- b. Due to major cost differences in foreign phone rates, the authorizing official must also authorize the frequency, and estimated costs of telephone calls on the Travel Authorization.

5. ***Conditions affecting foreign telephone calls.*** Numerous conditions affect the cost of telephone calls from foreign countries. These include the foreign country's telephone carrier system, hotel add-on charges, additional tariffs added on from country to country, etc. Major deviations from the estimated costs displayed on the Travel Authorization may be accepted if the approving official, upon review of the voucher claim, determines that the amount is justified and reasonable under the circumstances.

6. **Personal Emergencies.** It is HHS policy, when personal emergencies occur, the delegated official may approve a higher amount of reimbursement than either the standard limitation (CONUS) or a previously authorized amount (OCONUS) only when the following conditions are met:

- a. Government-provided long distance telephone systems and services are not available, so that a commercial toll service must be used;
- b. A justification for the higher personal telephone expense allowance must be documented on the approved Travel Voucher; and
- c. Receipts are required for ALL charges, to the extent that the calls were placed through a method that furnishes a receipt.

NOTE: Telephone access fees are included in lodging costs as outlined in NIH Manual Issuance 1500 Chapter-04-00 D(1)).

7. **Receipt Requirements.** If an employee incurs costs for personal telephone calls (i.e., does not use Government-provided long distance telephone systems and services), the employee must provide a receipt for those costs claimed on his/her Travel Voucher. Acceptable receipts include hotel bills and store receipts listing the purchase of pre-paid phone cards. Employees must sign a certification that accompanies the receipt(s) stating that the entire claimed expense was incurred for telephone calls permissible under the rules of this Section. No claim for reimbursement is permitted when a personal cell phone is used to place a call.

For additional information on this subject matter, you can reference HHS Travel Manual Chapter 4-10.

1500-04-08. Conference Planning – Agency Responsibilities

A. General

This part applies worldwide (both within and outside CONUS) for NIH travelers when attending a Government sponsored conference or a non-Government sponsored conference.

B. Authority

FTR 301-74, "Conference Planning", sets forth agency responsibilities when arranging or planning a conference. In addition, this part addresses specific statutory requirements that must be applied when performing this function.

C. Delegation of Authority

(See NIH Delegations of Authority, [Travel No. 17](#), "Conference Planning Provisions")

D. Planning Costs

When planning a conference, all direct and indirect conference costs paid by the Government should be taken into consideration, whether paid directly by other agencies or reimbursed by other agencies to travelers or others associated with the conference (See FTR 301-74.2).

Some examples of such costs are:

1. Authorized travel and per diem expenses;
2. Hire of rooms for official business;
3. Audiovisual and other equipment usage;
4. Computer and telephone access fees;
5. Light refreshments;
6. Printing;
7. Registration fees;
8. Ground transportation; and
9. Employees' time at the conference and on en route travel.

E. Cost Comparisons

Cost comparisons should include, but not be limited to, a determination of adequacy of lodging rooms at the established per diem rates, overall convenience of the conference location, fees, availability of meeting space, equipment and supplies, and commuting or travel distance of attendees (See FTR 301-74.4 and FTR 301 Appendix E).

F. Conference Arrangements/Requirements

When planning a conference, efforts must be made to: **1)** minimize all conference costs, including administrative costs, conference attendees' travel costs, and conference attendees' time costs; **2)** maximize the use of Government-owned or Government provided conference facilities as much as possible; **3)** identify opportunities to reduce costs in selecting a particular conference location and facility; (e.g., availability of lower rates during the off-season at a site with seasonal rates); **4)** limit your agency's representation to the minimum number of attendees determined necessary to accomplish your agency's mission; and **5)** develop and establish policies and procedures to ensure that these requirements are met.

NOTE: Accessibility. All sponsors of Government conferences must ensure that selected facilities are accessible to and usable by individuals with disabilities as required under section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by the Rehabilitation, Comprehensive Services, and Developmental Disabilities Act of 1978, 29 U.S.C. 794, and Departmental regulations at 45 C.F.R. Parts 84 and 85.

G. Granting Waivers of the Requirement to Hold a Conference in Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Approved Accommodations

he FEMA publishes a list of hotels/motels that meet fire and life requirements of the Hotel and Motel Fire Safety Act of 1990. Federally funded conferences cannot be held in properties that do not comply with this law, unless a written waiver is granted for a particular event based upon a public interest need (See NIH Delegations of Authority, [Travel No. 17](#), "Conference Planning Provisions", and FTR 301-74.14 to 74.16).

H. Conferences Held in the District of Columbia

HHS will provide the NIH with a list of alternative government sites in the District of Columbia when short-term conference space cannot be secured in an NIH installation or facility. You can contact the OFM Travel, Fellowship Pay, and Cashier Section on (301)-435-2927 to obtain this list (See FTR 301-74.17).

I. Record-keeping Requirements for Auditing Purposes

For each conference you sponsor or fund, in whole, or in part for 30 or more attendees, a record of the cost of each alternative conference site considered and the selection rationale must be maintained. In doing so, cost comparisons must be established for at least three sites (See FTR 301-74.19). This documentation is to be maintained for inspection and auditing purposes as prescribed in the Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) 4.7 "Contract Records Retention".