

NIH Policy Manual

1500-05 - Advance of Funds/Government-Issued Travel Charge Card

Issuing Office: OD/OM/OFM Phone: [\(301\) 496-4379](tel:3014964379)

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Transmittal Notice

1. Explanation of Material Transmitted: The material transmitted contains amended language in order to reflect recent updates to the FTR* and HHS and NIH policy guidance. Specifically, travel policy no longer defines a "frequent traveler" and thus there is no longer linkage between this and issuance of a government travel card.

***FTR Links:** GSA has recently modified it's web site display of FTR Chapters 300-304. As a result, a new GSA Portal page is available at: <http://www.gsa.gov/portal/content/104790>.

2. Filing Instructions:

Remove: 1500 Chapter 5, dated 8/20/99

Insert: 1500 Chapter 5, dated 4/30/04

Partial Revisions: 4/4/06**, 3/02/12***, 6/20/16****, 12/26/19*****

****4/04/06:** Revisions have been made to 05-01(C) to reflect the recent change in HHS policy regarding travel advances, i.e., the establishment of a 60% rule.

*****3/02/12:** Revisions have been made to 1) update hyperlinks throughout the chapter; 2) correct a typo in 05-02(A) regarding the HHS definition of "frequent traveler" and the citation of the HHS Travel Policy Manual; and 3) update terminology, dollar values, and rates in 05-02(B)(3)&(5) and 05-02(C)(1).

******6/20/16:** Revision made in 05-02(A) to reference new Appendix 13, *HHS Travel Card – Do's & Don'ts for Employees*

*******12/26/19:** This partial revision updates travelers use and policy of the government travel cards for TDY.

PLEASE NOTE: For information on:

- Content of this chapter, contact the Office of Financial Management/Division of Policy and Quality on 301-496-4379 or 301-402-8831.

- NIH Policy Manual, contact the Office of Management Assessment, OM on 301-496-4606, or enter this URL: <https://oma.od.nih.gov/DMS/Pages/Manual-Chapters.aspx>

1500-05-00. Advance of Funds/Government-Issued Travel Charge Card

A. General

Employees and Commissioned Officers who travel on official business are responsible for paying transportation and travel related expenses. However, these persons should not have to pay for those expenses entirely from personal funds. Therefore, the FTR 301-51.200 provides guidance for the advance of funds.

B. Alternative Funding Resource Made Available by Government

A limited number of employees may be eligible for an advance of funds through the direct deposit process via the automated travel system. However, those having a Government-issued travel charge card are not entitled to a cash advance. Rather, they should use their travel card to withdrawal monies at a ATM while on TDY travel. Travel advances should be withdrawn not more than two (2) business days prior to the trip. These cash advances are limited to 60 percent of the M&IE rate for the TDY location. Cash obtained from the ATM in amounts greater than required for the travel duration are considered excessive cash advances and are subject to disciplinary action.

1500-05-01. Conditions for Issuing an Advance of Funds

A. Authority

Delegated officials responsible for authorizing and/or approving travel funding may provide advance travel funds to civilian employees, Commissioned Officers and Non-FTE persons, i.e., Visiting Fellows, etc., whose travel expenses are paid by the NIH. Advances shall be issued in the form of “direct deposit” monies to the traveler’s designated financial institution, third party draft checks, or authorized ATM cash withdrawals when these methods are determined to be in the best interest of the Government (See NIH Manual Issuance 1130 - Delegations of Authority, Travel [#4](#) and [#4A](#)).

NOTE: It is NIH policy that travel advances will not be issued to Invitational Travelers, i.e., private citizens and foreign visitors (See [NIH Manual 1500-12](#)).

B. Limitation

An advance of funds is limited to the estimated “out-of-pocket” expenses which cannot be charged and must therefore be paid using cash, personal check, or travelers checks. This limitation applies to advances issued for travel under single trip as well as open orders; however, for travel covered by an open travel authorization, advances shall be limited to the

estimated cash transaction expenses for no more than a 45-day period. It is assumed that a traveler will be able to charge their common carrier transportation via the Government Travel Account (GTA) and their lodging, meals (when over \$10), and rental car services through use of the Government-issued travel credit card, if applicable. *Except for emergency situations or unavailability of services, NIH travelers must use the Travel Management Center (TMC) to procure air and train tickets, lodging, and rental car services for official business travel.* Therefore, the following expenses should comprise a cash advance:

1. ***Estimated cash transaction expenses include:***

- a. Meals (when under \$10 or if traveler is not in possession of a travel credit card) and incidental expenses (M&IE) covered by the per diem rate or actual subsistence allowance;
- b. Miscellaneous transportation expenses such as local transit system fares; taxi fares; parking fees; ferry fees; bridge, road, and tunnel fees; and airplane parking, landing, and tie-down fees;
- c. Gasoline and other variable expenses covered by the mileage allowance associated with use of a privately owned vehicle for official business when advantageous; and
- d. Other authorized miscellaneous expenses which cannot be transacted using a charge card and for which a reasonable estimate can be established prior to travel.

2. ***Allowable amount for M&IE.*** The amount advanced for meals and incidental expenses shall not exceed the prescribed M&IE rate or other amount authorized by AEA.

C. Exceptions to Travel Advance Limitation

1. ***Change of duty station.*** The limitation set forth in this directive above does not apply to change of official duty station expenses (see [NIH Manual 1500 Chapter 09](#)).
2. ***Use of charge card precluded.*** Use of the Government-issued charge card is not feasible (or accepted) in a specific TDY location for the purchase of lodging, rental car, or other expenses that normally would be chargeable.
3. ***Charge card not issued.*** At this time, the NIH has determined that the following four groups of employees will not have access to the Government-issued charge card:
 - a. Infrequent travelers performing travel 1 time or less per year;
 - b. Temporary employees;
 - c. Non-FTE Persons, i.e., Visiting Fellows, IRTA's, CRTA's, Special Volunteers, Guest Researchers; and
 - d. NIH Contractors
4. ***Amount allowed.*** Travel advances under the above exceptions shall not exceed 60% of the estimated additional cash expenses authorized on the travel order unless the 60% limitation will cause financial hardship on the employee. In cases of financial hardship,

the NIH may authorize up to 100% of the estimated expenses for an individual trip, or for an open travel authorization not to exceed a 45-day period.

5. **Exception precluded.** This exception authority may not be used in situations where the employee has elected not to use alternative funding resources made available by the Government, i.e., Government-issued charge cards, ATM services, etc. This exception authority also may not be used for travelers whose Government-issued charge cards have been canceled or charged off because of delinquent payments.

For additional policy guidance on travel advances, please reference HHS Travel Policy Manual, Section 3.3, at: http://www.psc.gov/docs/default-source/travel/2012_policy_manual.pdf?sfvrsn=4.

1500-05-02. Government-Issued Travel Card

A. General

The scope of those who must be issued a government-issued charge cards has been changed from “frequent travelers”, i.e., five or more trips per fiscal year, to encouraging its use for everyone on TDY travel. At the same time, there is a “cost” associated with more travelers having a government-issued charge card in terms of monitoring and controlling its usage. As such, NIH policy is for those who are on TDY travel at least two times a year to use a government-issued charge card. The travel charge card is to be used **ONLY** for official business expenses *while* on an authorized trip. **NO PERSONAL EXPENSES MAY BE CHARGED TO THIS ACCOUNT** nor is the card to be used to pay for any type of expense for another individual.

B. Features of the Travel Card

The Government-issued travel charge card offers the following features for Federal employees under the card program:

1. **No annual fee.** The travel charge card is issued to individual Federal travelers upon application. The card is embossed with the Agency name (DHHS/NIH) and the traveler’s name. It is renewed without fee to cardholders in good payment standing.
2. **No spending limits.** The travel charge card is issued without limits to the amount of business expenses that may be charged to the account.
3. **No late fees.** The travel charge card offers an extended “grace period” for payments to allow the employee voucher processing time. A second billing of an account does not accrue late charges or interest. When a bill is in excess of 61 days without payment or proper explanation for a late payment, the card may be suspended. Delinquent accounts in excess of 126 days may result in cancellation of the account. *Suspended accounts* may be reinstated. *Canceled accounts* may be reinstated upon payment of the delinquent principal amount and late fee. A late fee of \$25 is applied to each monthly

unpaid balance until the debt is cleared. The Credit Bureau is notified when no payment is received for 180 days.

4. **Insurance benefits.** When transportation tickets and rental cars are purchased with the travel charge card, insurance benefits up to \$250,000 are automatically available to the employee. Baggage coverage is also included.
5. **ATM access.** Assigned PIN accounts with the travel charge card allow the traveler to access travel advance funds as authorized on his or her Travel Order from any ATM worldwide that accepts the card. The issuing bank has placed a limit of \$300 per day not to exceed \$500 per week (Tuesday – Monday) on ATM withdrawals. Cardholders may also present their card to an accepting financial institution to receive a cash advance, in which case, the same limitations apply.

NOTE: On a case-by-case basis, the IC Travel Credit Card Coordinator may request the issuing bank to temporarily increase the daily and/or weekly cash advance limitation.

C. Reimbursable Charge Card Fees

1. **ATM service fee.** The Government contractor charges a 2.5% (.025) or a minimum fee of \$3.00 on all advances taken from an automated teller machine (ATM). Employees may claim this fee on their travel voucher, up to the amount authorized, for full reimbursement.
2. **Local bank fee.** When travelers use their travel charge cards to access advance funds from an accepting financial institution, that entity will assess a small fee for this usage. This fee may also be claimed as a reimbursable expense on the traveler's voucher.
3. **Currency conversion.** When expenses are charged during foreign travel, conversion from the foreign currency to American dollars appears on the billed account. Cardholders are assessed a nominal fee of 1% for this service which may be claimed as a reimbursement expense on the traveler's voucher.

D. Terminating the Travel Card

When an employee leaves the NIH, the Government-issued charge card must be submitted to the employee's Administrative Office. It is the employee's responsibility to notify the contractor, e.g., card-issuing bank, of separation and reconcile all outstanding bills. If the employee is taking a position with another Federal Agency, another application must be processed for a Travel Card to be issued under the new agency. (See NIH Manual [2300-940](#), "Clearance of Personnel for Separation or Transfer"). If the employee remains with the NIH but transfers between ICs, proper steps must be taken by both IC Travel Credit Card Coordinators and the e.g., card-issuing bank to place the employee in the appropriate account.