

NIH Policy Manual

1500-06 - Local Travel

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

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Transmittal Notice

Explanation of Material Transmitted:

The material transmitted contains amended language that reflects the recently adopted HHS policy pertaining to the authorizing and reimbursing of per diem expenses associated with travel in the local area. The HHS policy contained in Chapter 4-20 redefines the "local travel area" and in doing so, clarifies under what exceptional circumstances a per diem allowance may be authorized. The rewrite also amends the language pertaining to the HHS-99 "Authorization to Attend Non-Government Sponsored Meeting" and highlights that this process is now administered via the automated travel system, and that it no longer consists of a hard copy form.

2. Filing Instructions:

Remove: 1500-06-00, dated 8/20/99 in entirety

Insert: 1500-06-00, dated 11/07/05

Partial Revision: 2/12/08*; 4/21/15**

** Note: A partial revision was made, effective 2/12/08, to Section 06-03 B, Local Telephone Calls, to specify when calls can be claimed for reimbursement.*

*** Note: A partial revision was made, effective 4/21/15, to Section 06-01 C, removing a previous NIH special exemption that authorized per diem and/or subsistence in the local area for Advisory Council and Committee members.*

PLEASE NOTE: For information on:

- Content of this chapter, contact the Office of Financial Management on 301- 496-4379 or 301-402-8831
- NIH Manual System, contact the Office of Management Assessment, OM on (301) 496-2832
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1500-06-00. Local Travel

This directive provides NIH policy for the reimbursement of expenses when employees travel in the conduct of official business either at, or in the vicinity of the official duty station. The policies and procedures contained in this chapter apply to: 1) Employees; 2) Staff (i.e., non-FTE persons); 3) Commissioned Officers; and 4) Invitational Travelers.

1500-06-01. Per Diem Allowances in the Local Travel Area

A. General

The Federal Travel Regulation delegates the authority to Agencies to define a local radius for official business travel either at, or in the vicinity of the official duty station within which per diem will not be allowed.

B. Definitions

1. **Employee** – “An individual employed by an agency, regardless of status or rank; an individual employed intermittently in Government service as an expert or consultant and paid on a daily when-actually-employed (WAE) basis; or an individual serving without pay or at \$1 a year (also referred to as an “invitational traveler”. (FTR 301-1.2)
2. **Invitational traveler** – An individual serving without pay or at \$1 a year when they are acting in a capacity that is directly related to, or in connection with, official activities of the Government. (FTR 300-3.1)
3. **HHS “local travel area”** - When a temporary duty site is outside of the “official duty station” area (see below), but within the vicinity surrounding it; and the site is a minimum driving distance of less than 50 miles, by the most direct route, from the employee’s office/permanent duty station, the site is considered to be a part of the “local travel area”.
4. **“Official duty station”** – The corporate limits of the city or town in which the employee’s office/permanent duty station is situated.
5. **Per diem allowance** - A per diem allowance (also referred to as a subsistence allowance) is a daily payment instead of reimbursement for actual expenses for lodging, meals, and related incidental expenses. The per diem allowance is separate from transportation expenses and other miscellaneous expenses (See FTR 300-3.1).
6. **Training** - The process of providing for or making available to an employee and placing or enrolling the employee in a planned, prepared and coordinated program, course, curriculum which will improve individual and organizational performance and assist in achieving the agency's mission and performance goals. (5 USC 4101).

C. Policy

The following guidelines will apply when travel is performed in what has been defined as the local travel area.

1. **No per diem allowed.** Per diem will **not** be allowed for employees at either their official duty station or within the vicinity surrounding it, i.e., defined local travel area; or from their places of abode from which they normally commute daily to their official duty stations.
2. **No per diem allowed.** HHS Travel Manual Chapter 4-20-20 states, “Irrespective of the definition of “local travel area”, a per diem allowance may not be authorized if the temporary duty site is less than 50 miles driving distance, by the most direct route, from the employee’s usual residence”.
3. **Employees in field offices.** The authority to establish the local travel area for employees in the field has been delegated to the appropriate HHS Regional Administrative Support Center . In those instances where the local travel area has been established, the local area may not have a radius less than 50 miles. (For additional information, you can contact the Director of Operations, Program Support Center in the applicable Region listed in the back of the DHHS Telephone Directory)
4. **Comptroller General ruling.** As a general rule, the Comptroller General (CG) has opined that appropriated funds may not be used to pay per diem in the form of “free food.” Free food includes meals, snacks, and light refreshments at the employee’s official duty station or in the “local travel area”, even if authorized by Government officials. This rule applies regardless of how the “free food” is paid for, i.e., procurement or travel mechanism, and applies even where the expenses are incurred under extraordinary circumstances such as:
 - a. Late conference sessions;
 - b. Heavy volume of work;
 - c. Adverse weather conditions;
 - d. Protective missions by security personnel; or
 - e. Inability to leave duty post.

Exception to CG Ruling: In line with certain activities and functions, the use of appropriated funds and gift funds may be authorized for the provision of meals and/or light refreshments at the employee’s official duty station **when specific parameters are met** as outlined in [NIH Manual Chapter 1160-1](#) “Entertainment.”

5. **Limited circumstances.** Under very limited circumstances the CG has allowed reimbursement of expenses incurred by protectors of life and Federal property in an emergency situation. The CG has also ruled that reimbursement for out-of-pocket expenses could be made on an actual expense basis (not to exceed the per diem rate limitation) when the determination is made that they are necessary training expenses under the Government Employees Training Act (GETA) (see below).

6. **HHS Exception – 50-mile rule.** If the temporary duty site is 50 miles or greater, by the most direct route, from the employee’s office/permanent duty station; AND the temporary duty site is 50 miles or greater from the employee’s residence, a per diem allowance may be authorized.
7. **HHS Exception -80-mile rule.** If the temporary duty site is located *within* the defined “local travel area”, a per diem allowance may be authorized if all of the following conditions are met:
 1. The agency must not have had any influence in the site selection; AND
 2. The local travel assignment will last at least three consecutive nights and four days and entail at least nine and one-half consecutive hours of work per day on each of those days; AND
 3. The employee would be required to perform an extensive amount of driving (**at least 80 miles**) each way between the residence and the temporary duty site; AND
 4. Significant safety issues are raised by combination of the extended hours or work and the required driving time in the performance of this assignment.
8. **Other Exceptions. Government Employees Training Act .** You may be authorized a per diem allowance for travel in the local area in line with the following guidelines:
 - a. If you are authorized to travel under the Government Employees Training Act (5 U.S.C. 4109) and you meet these conditions:
 1. The event must meet the definition of “training” as defined above; AND
 2. A determination is made that the providing of meals is necessary to achieve the objectives of the training program; AND
 3. That **all** participants attending the course have been required by NIH to stay in the same local hotel in order to foster the participation in daytime and evening training activities as a necessary training expense.
 - NOTE:** Payment of travel and related expenses under 5 U.S.C. 4109 includes "Conference Training" but only if the conditions outlined in both, 5 CFR 410.404 and C.9.a above, are met (see NIH Manual 1160-1, Appendix 3 and Appendix 4)
 - b. In order to be eligible for a per diem allowance (meals only) in line with travel to a non-government sponsored conference in the local travel area, you must, 1) be in travel status for more than 12 hours. (The 12 hours should take into account the time it takes to travel from the employee's residence or official duty station to the temporary site and return to the residence or official duty station. Example: If an employee leaves his/her home at 7:00 a.m. to travel to the temporary site for a meeting that begins at 8:00 a.m. and ends at 7:00 p.m., and returns home at 8:00 p.m., the total travel time would be from 7:00 a.m. until 8:00 p.m., or 13 hours); and 2) meet the criteria outlined in [NIH Manual Chapter 1160-1](#) "Entertainment," Appendix 3, Footnote No. 5.

9. **HHS-348 Sponsored Travel.** You may **not** authorize an employee to accept payment from a nonfederal source for transportation and travel related expenses in the “local travel area”, unless you meet one of the above exceptions in Section C.
10. **Temporary Duty (TDY) Travel Authorization.** When a per diem allowance is authorized in line with travel in the local area, you **must** prepare a TDY Travel Authorization via the automated travel system. This should occur even if lodging is not required to better ensure compliance with the pertinent Internal Revenue Service regulations.

D. Delegations of Authority

NIH Manual Issuance 1130 - Delegations of Authority, [Travel #3A](#).

1500-06-02. Transportation Allowances

A. Allowable Reimbursement

Employees who perform temporary duty travel within the local area may claim transportation expenses under the following conditions set forth by the Federal Travel Regulations:

1. **Local transit systems.** Employees may claim expenses incurred while taking local transit systems to and from official business.
 - a. Taxis may be claimed if the employee does not have a Government (GSA) vehicle available and/or a Government provided shuttle, or the METRO could not be used.
 - b. METRO/subway or bus may be claimed to and from the temporary duty location. If the employee normally uses the METRO system for their daily commute, only the excess cost above and beyond their daily commute cost may be claimed.
2. **Privately owned vehicle (POV).** Mileage and parking expenses for the use of a privately owned automobile may be reimbursed if a GSA vehicle or Government provided shuttle was not available, or the METRO system could not be used. If the employee normally uses their vehicle for the daily commute, only the miles in excess of those usually traveled are claimed as expenses.

B. Receipts

Receipts are required for reimbursement of all transportation expenses over \$75 incurred during official business travel in the local area.

1500-06-03. Other Reimbursable Expenses

A. Registration Fees

Payment of registration fees for conferences held within the designated local travel area may be authorized prior to attendance. Methods of payment are the same as those outlined in NIH Manual 1500 [Chapter 04](#)). If the registration expense is initially borne by the traveler, claim for reimbursement will be displayed on the Local Travel Voucher.

B. Local Telephone Calls

When an employee performs temporary duty in the local area, he or she is permitted to make a brief daily call to locations within the local commuting area to: 1) speak to spouse or minor child to see how they are; 2) advise family of change in schedule; 3) arrange for emergency repairs to residence or automobile; and 4) make other necessary business-related telephone calls, including long distance telephone calls. These calls can be claimed for reimbursement **ONLY** when the employee has been placed on Travel Orders and meets the HHS minimum one night's lodging requirement (See HHS Travel Manual Chapter 4-10-10). NOTE: The NIH Telephone Calling Card should be the first alternative for placing a long distance telephone call.

C. Vouchering Local Travel Expenses

Employees who wish to claim expenses incurred while performing official business away from the permanent duty station in the local area must process the automated version of the "Local Travel Voucher" (formerly SF-1164 "Claim for Reimbursement for Expenditures on Official Business") through the NIH automated travel system. As long as no per diem has been authorized, the "Local Travel Voucher" should be prepared for official business travel in the local area to include government sponsored meetings/conferences and training. If per diem has been authorized, then a Travel Authorization should be prepared accordingly. The administrative officer or budget officer is responsible for certifying funds and the traveler is required to electronically certify the completed form. Direct deposit reimbursement is made to the traveler's designated financial institution.

1500-06-04. HHS-99 "Authorization to Attend Non-Government Sponsored Meetings"

A. General

NIH may authorize attendance and approve reimbursement of expenses incurred in connection with domestic non-governmental sponsored meetings, and unofficial international meetings held in the United States that **do not** require travel outside the local travel area (See NIH Manual Issuance 1130 - [Delegations of Authority Travel #5](#)).

B. Non-Governmental Organization

A non-governmental organization is one that is not a Federal, State, local, foreign government, or an intergovernmental agency. The non-governmental character of an organization is not altered by the fact that it is composed partially or exclusively of members who are also Government employees.

C. Policy on Attendance at Meetings

1. **Official purpose.** Attendance is for official purposes and is consistent with the policies and best interests of the Department and NIH.
2. **Advantageous to the Government.** Attendance is concerned with an authorized departmental program or with an activity in which the Department has an interest, and it would be advantageous to the Government to have one or more representatives in attendance.
3. **Number attending.** The number of representatives does not exceed the minimum necessary to serve the Department's interest.
4. **Expenses.** Expenses for attendance are fully justified and in accordance with local travel policies.

D. General Requirements

1. **"HHS-99, Authorization to Attend Non Government Sponsored Meeting"**, This is a request prepared in the automated travel system as a Travel Authorization to authorize attendance at a meeting/conference, or similar function in the local area that is sponsored by a non-governmental organization, that does not entail temporary duty travel expenses, e.g., lodging, per diem, etc. In instances where non-travel status expenses are incurred, the "HHS 99" must support the claim for reimbursement.
2. **Procedures.** The "HHS-99" should be prepared at least 15 calendar days prior to the meeting. The approved HHS-99 must be retained as proof that the employee has obtained authorization to be absent from his/her office for the purpose of attending the meeting. **Preparation of "HHS-99" in automated travel system.**
 - a. On the Itinerary Screen, select Trip Type "HHS-99 Local Non-Government"
 - b. Itinerary Screen: Except for "location", complete all fields as you would for a TDY trip.
 - c. Select "Add Location" button – On the Location Screen, enter the word HHS in the Location Field and select SEARCH button. Result: "HHS-99 Non-Government Local Travel, US", will appear in the Location Field – SAVE Location.

- d. Continue entering expenses as necessary. Leave ticketed information blank and ensure that the Lodging/M&IE amounts are \$0 since NO per diem will be authorized unless one of the exceptions in 1500-06-01 above applies.
- e. Stamp and route for approval.

3. ***Processing claims.*** Upon completion of the local travel, a voucher for the “HHS-99” Authorization is prepared to claim expenses incurred in line with attendance at the meeting.