

Travel Standards and Guidelines

Virginia Commonwealth University — Operational Policy & Standards

This guidance outlines practical rules and procedures designed to support the University's best interests while providing faculty, staff, and students with an efficient and positive travel and booking experience. As no procedural manual, standards, or guidelines can address every conceivable travel situation in an organization the size of VCU, these standards ensure compliance with policies established by the Board of Visitors and the Commonwealth of Virginia (specifically the *University Business-Related Travel Policy*).

1. Applicability & General Guidance

These guidelines apply to all employees, students, and non-employees authorized to travel on behalf of the University.

Accountable Plan

For VCU to formally reimburse or make allowance arrangements for a traveler, the University must maintain an IRS-compliant **Accountable Plan**. Otherwise, reimbursements would be considered taxable income. These standards, along with the University's *Expense Reimbursement Standards and Guidelines*, protect employees from financial penalties and ensure federal tax compliance.

- **Business Purpose:** All travel-related expenses must be incurred in the performance of official VCU services.
- **Documentation:** Travelers must provide valid itemized receipts and documentation confirming the business purpose.
- **Refunds:** Advanced or overpaid funds must be returned within a reasonable timeframe.
- **Reimbursement Window:** Expense reimbursements must be submitted within **30 days** following the travel return date.

Expense Submission Windows & Tax Impacts

Table 1: Tax Impact and Action by Reimbursement Submission Timeline

Submission Window	Tax Impact	Processing Action
0 to 30 days	Non-taxable	Standard processing. Request returns and corrections allowed beyond 30 days.
31 to 60 days	Non-taxable	Subject to additional administrative review.
61 to 180 days	Fully Taxable	Total amount included on employee Form W-2.
181 or more days	Forfeited	Reimbursement will not be processed or paid.

Reasonable and Necessary Expenses

VCU reimburses individuals for reasonable and necessary expenses incurred on official business. Travel expense accounts are public records and must sustain public scrutiny. Economy, sound judgment, and necessity are primary considerations. Use of state funds for personal comfort, convenience, or individual preferences is strictly prohibited.

More Restrictive Guidelines & Sponsored Funds

- **Departmental Rules:** Schools or departments may establish more restrictive guidelines, but never less restrictive than VCU standards. Guidelines must be fully documented, non-arbitrary, and consistently applied. Consult travel@vcu.edu prior to implementation.
- **Sponsored Grants:** Payments funded by sponsored programs are governed by specific grant/contract terms. Where grants are silent, standard VCU policy applies.

2. Key Definitions

Authorized Approver: The traveler's direct supervisor/manager within the supervisory chain of command who has authority to approve schedules and funds. Subordinates cannot approve a supervisor's expenses.

Fiscal Approver: Individual assigned in Banner Finance with approval authority associated with the specific index(es) charged.

Base Point: Designated official duty location. For hybrid workers, it is the assigned campus address; for fully remote workers, it is the home address. Multiple base points are prohibited.

Campus Defined: Official campus sites: Monroe Park Campus (MPC), Medical College of Virginia (MCV) Campus, and VCU Arts Qatar campus (Doha).

Commuting Mileage: Routine round-trip travel between residence and base point. Considered personal expense and non-reimbursable.

Day Trip: Travel outside official workstation occurring within normal working hours (8:00 AM – 5:00 PM) without an overnight stay.

Domestic & International Travel: Domestic includes the 48 contiguous states and D.C. International includes all travel outside the 48 contiguous states (including Alaska, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, and U.S. territories).

Duty of Care: VCU's legal and moral obligation to safeguard authorized travelers by actively anticipating risks and delivering emergency assistance.

Lowest Logical Fare (LLF): The optimal, cost-effective booking strategy balancing budget savings with practical business needs, policy compliance, and reasonable scheduling.

Official Work Station: The geographical area within a 25-mile radius of an employee's designated base point.

Per Diem Meals: Fixed daily meal allowance based on travel location for overnight trips, capped at maximum GSA rates (no receipts required).

Travel Management Company (TMC): VCU's contracted agency (currently Collegiate Travel Planners - CTP) required for booking air and rail travel.

3. Roles and Responsibilities

Traveler

Travelers must exercise sound judgment, select the Lowest Logical Fare (LLF), obtain pre-approval, understand policies, and submit timely expense reports. Certification through Emburse confirms all expenses are accurate, true, and business-related.

ADA Accommodations for Travel

Employees requiring travel accommodations (such as seating upgrades or special booking exemptions) must maintain documentation on file with **VCU Equity and Access Services**. Exceptions are reviewed in accordance with University accommodation policies.

Schools and Centers

Schools must ensure policy awareness, establish approval hierarchies, and maintain documented, objective internal guidelines where additional restrictions apply.

Approvers

- **Authorized Approver:** Verifies business necessity, accurate documentation, and compliance with policy and grant terms.
- **Fiscal Approver:** Verifies proper Banner indexing/categorization, valid receipts, and budget availability.

4. Planning & Booking Travel

Pre-Approval Requirements

Formal pre-approval via the **Emburse system** is mandatory prior to booking arrangements for:

- Estimated travel expenses exceeding **\$500**.
- Any travel reservation made through Collegiate Travel Planners (CTP).
- All University-related campus travel for fully remote workers (regardless of dollar amount).

Note: Estimates must encompass lodging, transit, per diem meals, registration fees, and direct-billed charges.

Booking via Travel Management Company (CTP)

Faculty and staff must book all business air and rail tickets through CTP using the central Agency Travel Card (ATC). CTP requires a **12-digit Emburse Pre-Approval number** and Banner index prior to ticket issuance.

- **Profile & TSA Rules:** Profiles in CTP Lightning must match photo IDs exactly. Mobile phone, date of birth, and gender are required fields. Contact travel@vcu.edu for name correction assistance.
- **Online Booking Tool:** Use CTP's *Lightning OBT* for air, rail, car, and hotel bookings.
- **Agent Support:** Phone 888-742-2896 | Email vcu@ctptravelservices.com (Mon–Fri, 8 AM–6 PM ET; 24/7 emergency support available).

Combining Personal and Business Travel

Mixed-purpose trips costing more than a business-only itinerary must be booked through a CTP agent, who will establish the business fare "price ceiling". If the combined ticket costs equal or less than business-only, VCU

covers the full fare. Personal portions and excess days beyond 1 day before/after business must be paid via personal card and justified.

Payment Options

- **Agency Travel Card (ATC):** University liability card for air/rail via CTP.
- **University Travel Card:** Individual liability card for lodging, meals, and car rentals.
- **PCard:** Permitted for direct-billed hotel, car rental, or registration fees with approved lift/exception.
- **Travel Advance:** Issued up to 14 days prior to departure for faculty/staff lacking cards.
- **Personal Funds:** Should be used sparingly; reimbursed post-trip.

5. Transportation & Lodging Guidelines

Air & Rail Travel

- **Fare Class:** Lowest Logical Fare (LLF) coach/economy is required. Business class requires written Dean/Vice Provost pre-approval. International flights allow Premium/Plus/Comfort class.
- **International Rules:** Requires International Travel Advisory Committee (ITAC) safety review, Export Control tracking in Emburse, and Fly America Act compliance on federal grants.
- **Credits & Fees:** Ticket credits belong to VCU and must be applied to future business trips. Personal preference change fees are non-reimbursable.

Vehicle Rentals

Travelers must use contracted vendors (**Enterprise/National** or **Hertz**) and select mid-size/intermediate vehicles or smaller.

- **Insurance:** Collision (CDW) and Loss Damage (LDW) insurance are required. Included automatically in contracted rates; must be purchased separately for non-employees or international rentals.
- **Van Driver Qualification:** Passenger van drivers must be 20+ years old, licensed 2+ years, and complete online defensive driving, van safety, and VCU Police behind-the-wheel training.
- **Refueling:** Refuel prior to return. Pre-paid fuel options are non-reimbursable.

Personal Vehicle (POV) Mileage

POV usage is allowable when cost-effective (e.g., round trips under 200 miles). Reimbursed at current IRS standard mileage rates via the Emburse Google Maps widget. If driven solely for personal preference, reimbursement drops to the reduced GSA rate.

Lodging & Rates

- **Rate Limit:** Reimbursed up to **200% of GSA per diem rate** plus taxes.
- **Conference Lodging:** Book via official conference links. Exceeding 200% GSA requires official conference documentation attached to expense report.
- **Alternative Lodging (Airbnb/VRBO):** Caution required for strict cancellation fees. Contracts paid via PO must go to contracts@vcu.edu 10 days in advance. Cleaning and service fees count toward nightly rate calculations.

6. Per Diem, Incidentals & Post-Travel Procedures

Meal Per Diem (M&IE)

Per diem is allowable for overnight travel only based on GSA location rates.

- **Travel Days:** Departure and return days are reimbursed at **75%** of the daily per diem rate.
- **Provided Meals:** Meals provided by conferences or hosts must be deducted using the Emburse Per Diem Wizard.

Receipt Requirements

- **Itemized Receipts Required:** All airfare, rail, lodging, and rental cars (regardless of dollar amount).
- **\$75 Threshold:** Itemized receipts required for all other individual expenses of \$75 or more.
- **Non-Employee/Non-Travel:** Itemized receipts required for all amounts.

Post-Travel Reporting

Expense reports must be submitted in Emburse within **30 days** of return. Expenses submitted after 180 days are forfeited and will not be paid.