Below are key takeaways and answers to questions posed by attendees of the February, 2020 edition of the Procurement Open Forum. The February edition of the forum focused on the results of the 2019 Travel Services Survey, updates to travel policies at VCU, and the university’s mandated travel agency — Christopherson Business Travel.

If you have any questions about the below, please call us at 828-1077

**Key Takeaways, February Procurement Open Forum**

- Procurement communicated issues with the Online Booking Tool (OBT) to Christopherson Business Travel (CBT). VCU Travel would like to see improvements made to the Online Booking Tool that make booking travel through the OBT easier. CBT has committed resources to improving the OBT.

- CBT is not required to be the cheapest services available, nor does Procurement Services pursue the absolute cheapest provider available. Rather, Duty of Care (the ability of VCU to know the whereabouts of and have contact with traveling employees) and other crucial service capacities are prioritized. These service requirements are ultimately reflected in the overall cost of the service.

- CBT is working to hire their own after-hours team to better support VCU customers calling for travel assistance outside of normal business hours. CBT may provide a pocket-sized resource for travelers to use during travel for assistance.

- Strategic mission and unique demands of some departments has resulted in some flexibility regarding which vendors those departments can use for certain travel types/situations.

- CBT is working to develop and or release an app for travelers to serve as a one-stop-shop for employees while on university travel.

- Procurement will work on improved communication plans to express the purpose of a mandated travel agency and the benefits of using Christopherson Business Travel specifically.

- Procurement will work to increase training availability and incorporate specific community-identified training needs.

- Procurement Services will work to improve communication around these topics to better inform the VCU community on travel policy, the benefits of CBT, and why we do things the way that we do.
Questions and Answers

1) Do employees have travel insurance? What if someone gets hurt?

VCU does have travel insurance through the Office of Risk Management’s contract with AIG Travel Assist. This contract provides services for travelers experiencing serious injury or sickness, facing situations such natural disaster or political unrest while traveling, or who encounter other situations which warrant evacuation. AIG Travel Assist offers:

- Travel Medical Assistance
- Worldwide Travel Assistance
- Security Assistance Services
- Identity Theft Assistance

For more information please visit: https://srm.vcu.edu/i-want-to-know-about/insurance/

Or https://internationaltravel.vcu.edu/

2) Is there a specific delegation that an FA would use for VIP travel?

VIPs are identified in advance in the system. When travel is booked for those individuals, the additional services and benefits conferred to the traveler are automatically included/available.

3) Does Christopherson Business Travel exclude basic economy tickets from available travel options?

Yes. Basic Economy Tickets are extremely restrictive for travelers and may ultimately result in greatly increased cost to the traveler. These tickets are restricted in order to reduce the overall cost of travel to the university. This type of ticket does not allow ticket costs to be applied to a new flight should one be cancelled or missed. Oftentimes, the listed price of these tickets do not include related fees and charges – service fees, checked bag fees, etc. that once added greatly reduces any potential cost effectiveness. Basic economy almost always costs travelers more and provides less.
4) Why does Google show cheaper options when I search for flights on the internet?

In short, the answer is that Google is only a search engine and is not a travel management system. Google shows what is “possible”, but does not accurately represent the flight availability nor its associated costs. Oftentimes, these flights are not available in CBT because they are automatically screened out by the system.

CBT offers the lowest published flights and airfare from airlines that are in compliance with VCU’s guidelines and policies.

5) Travel encumbrances description is no longer showing in Chrome River!

Travel Services is working with ChromeRiver on a resolution and anticipates a solution will be implemented soon.

6) May travelers use homestay services like Airbnb instead of a hotel?

The Virginia CAPP manual is the foundation for much of VCU travel policy and does not allow for the use of services like Airbnb. However, VCU has a significant amount of flexibility given our Tier 3 status. Presently, reimbursements for lodging expenses with AirBNB and similar services are not restricted, though they are not encouraged. VCU Travel is investigating the use of these services with the Office of Risk Management.

Departments should consider that these services offer few insurance resources, and none similar to those of a hotel, should an employee be injured or harmed while staying at an individually-owned property. This creates a significant liability to both VCU and to the traveler.

Individual departments have the right to set more restrictive policies than those enforced through the Office of Procurement Services provided those policies are in writing, are universally applied, and do not conflict with university policy.
7) Is it possible to adopt group workflows for the travel approval process? What if an approver is out of the office?

Approval roles are established via policy and changing them would require a substantive change in policy. Because the authorized approver role must be higher on the “chain of command” than the expense owner, it is a challenge to automate approvals for one group of people to approve travel for another group. However, Travel Services understands the difficulty with travel approvals and is actively researching options to increase approval flexibility.

8) Why can’t departments pay for hotel costs on the ATC Card instead of reimbursing travelers?

Virginia sets restrictions for the use of Agency Travel Cards (ATC) that VCU must follow. The ATC is restricted to air and rail purchases only and cannot be used to pay for lodging expenses. Frequent travelers may apply for the Travel (Individual Liability) Card. This is an alternative to paying out of pocket or receiving a travel advance.

9) What does ‘Duty of Care’ mean?

VCU (in coordination with VCU Safety and Risk Management) defines Duty of Care as the responsibility to know where their employees and students are traveling throughout the world at all times and be prepared to assist them take appropriate actions in the event of an emergency.

Christopherson Business Travel’s Duty of Care program provides VCU with real-time security, weather, flight delays and disaster alerts. These alerts are also automatically pushed to travelers via text and email.

Read more about Duty of Care: (https://www.cbtravel.com/2016/07/what-is-duty-of-care/)
10) Where can an employee go to receive travel training?

Employees can go to training.vcu.edu and use the keyword “travel” to find and register for training. We currently offer 3 travel related training classes. New training offerings are being planned for FY21. If a department would like to host a departmental travel session for faculty and/or staff, please email travel@vcu.edu for more information.

In addition, Travel Services has recently created a channel on Kaltura (here) where employees will be able to access tutorials, webinars and other training offerings.

11) Can I attach a pre-approval and edit expense lines while completing a reimbursement request?

Currently, only the header information on the pre-approvals can be imported into an expense report. Travel Services continues to work with Chrome River to enhance this feature to soon allow the expense lines to import over from the pre-approval as well.

12) Can a delegate CBT Travel for guests/non-employees online, or must we use an agent?

Yes. Under Book/Manage Online Trips, there is an option to Book for a Guest. The employee will need to obtain the traveler's name as it appears on their government issued ID, gender, date of birth, phone number and email address. Optional information can also be entered such as frequent flyer numbers and special requests (e.g. meal preferences). The link below provides a step by step cheat sheet for your assistance.

[Delegate CBT Travel for Guests/Non-Employees Cheat Sheet (PDF)]

13) Is there a way to clear paid or cancelled travel encumbrances in mass instead of individually?

Currently, the only way to clear paid/cancelled travel encumbrances is to manually liquidate them in Banner. For more information on this, the best source of information would be VCU’s Controller's Office. The contact information for Banner training/information is VCUFinance@vcu.edu.
14) Are non-employee allowable expenditures different than employee allowable expenditures?

Most expenditures for non-employees are governed by the same policies and guidelines as those for employees, however, there are some notable exceptions:

- **Air & Rail Tickets** - Non-Employees are not required to have air/rail tickets booked through Christopherson Business Travel. It is an *option available* to departments.
- **Reimbursable Business Expenses** - Expenses that are defined for reimbursement purposes in Chrome River as “Personal Reimbursements”; non-employees may be reimbursed for reimbursable business expenses, including state sales tax, as they do not have access to VCU purchasing methods (PO, P-Card)

There may be other times an exception may be allowed, but these are handled on a case-by-case basis and should be reviewed/approved by Travel Services and/or Procurement Services prior to the expenditure to ensure approval of reimbursement.

15) How do I register a non-employee in ChromeRiver, and where is the non-employee list?

Non Employee do not have access to Chrome River. To determine if a Non-Employee is in the non employee database in Chrome River, you will access the Non Employee tile located on the Add Expenses screen. In the payee box you will search by the individual’s Vendor number.

To add a non employee to Chrome River, a request must first be made through VCU RealSource. Contact Realsource@vcu.edu for further instructions. For further guidance, a Non-Employee Cheat Sheet link is available on the dashboard of Chrome River.
16) Can CBT help cancel a ticket for a non-employee who is traveling?

CBT can only help cancel IF the ticket was purchased through Christopherson Business Travel. Cancellation can be done either through the online booking tool or by contacting a CBT agent at vcu@cbtravel.com or 855-864-1718.

Note: if the ticket was purchased outside of CBT, and the department would like to help the guest traveler, Travel Services may be able to assist you. While we are not able to cancel the reservations for the traveler, we may be able to provide some guidance. Please email travel@vcu.edu.

17) Where can I learn about what can be paid on ATC cards and what can’t for student travel?

Policies, guidelines and processes for the use of the VCU ATC card are the same for employees, students and non-employees. The ATC is only for purchasing air and rail tickets. Please contact corpcard@vcu.edu if you have further questions.

18) Can unused employee tickets be transferred to another employee?

Christopherson Business Travels works closely with the Travel Services team to monitor unused tickets. CBT also notifies the ticket holder when the ticket is close to expiration to prevent departments from losing the cost of an unused ticket.

Christopherson Business Travel, like all travel agencies, are held to the same rules for fares/tickets sold by them which are set by the airline(s). In general airline tickets are not transferable to other individuals; there may be times where CBT is able to secure exceptions from the airlines. These exceptions should only be requested when the department is at risk of losing the cost of a ticket that exceeds $800. To inquire as to whether or not a ticket may be transferable to another traveler, please contact Christopherson Business Travel at VCU@cbtravel.com.
19) Why are some rail tickets only available for booking through a CBT agent?

Amtrak routes/trains that are not available in the online booking tool are those that offer sleeper-car service. To ensure this class of service are not booked, they were eliminated from the online booking tool.

Faculty are sometimes confused when some of their expense lines automatically approve and pay – how can I show them what has been paid and what hasn’t?

The tracking feature in Chrome River shows what has been approved and paid. Under the Submitted Expenses Reports queue, click on the expense report listed and then Tracking. This will show the status of each line item on the expense report.

20) How do I complete pre-approvals when there are different funding sources for the same travel? Do I need 2 pre-approvals for each funding source?

Chrome River allows split-allocation for pre-approvals. You do not need 2 pre-approvals. Once the first index is entered, click “Add Allocation” to enter the 2nd index. Click “Save” and enter the expense lines. If the allocations are split unevenly (ie 25%-75% for a 2 index split), you have to go back and adjust the allocation split in the header. Click on the report header (where the report name is), click edit and under Allocations, adjust the split.

If you still have questions related to this process please email Travel@vcu.edu.
21) What if a traveler has one receipt that applies to 2 different pre-approvals? Do I need to attach 2 pre-approvals to the reimbursement request?

Only one pre-approval can be attached to a reimbursement request. If there are 2 pre-approvals, one would be attached to the expense report and the encumbrance for the other should be manually liquidated in Banner.

Please Note: Supplemental and/or additional pre-approvals are not necessary and are discouraged by Travel Services.

22) What in-person P-Card training is available?

Dates for P-Card classroom trainings are now available! New cardholders and approvers are highly encouraged to attend. Please register on training.vcu.edu using the keyword “pcard”.