VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY

Travel Standards and Guidelines

CONTENTS

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 or exhaustive travel situation or question in an organization the size of VCU, these standards and guidelines ensure compliance with policies established by the Board of Visitors and the Commonwealth of Virginia.

See specifically University Business-Related Travel Policy.

Applicability

These guidelines apply to all employees, students, and non-employees who have been authorized to travel on behalf of the University. Travel-related expenses

Accountable Plan

For VCU to formally reimburse or make allowance arrangements for a VCU traveler, the University must have an IRS compliant Accountable Plan. Otherwise, reimburses would be considered taxable income.

These standards, along with the University's Expense Reimbursement Standards and Guidelines, ensure compliance with federal tax regulations and protects employees from financial penalties. All University travel-related expenses must be incurred in the performance of services to VCU. Travelers must provide valid receipts and other documentation confirming travel is related to a business purpose and that any advanced or overpaid funds are returned within a reasonable timeframe.

VCU requires that travel-related expense reimbursements are submitted within 30 days following the travel return date. These timeframes apply to the submission of travel-related reimbursements.

Submission Window	Tax Impact	Processing Action
0 to 30 days	Non-taxable	Request returns and corrections are allowed beyond 30 days.
31 to 60 days	Non-taxable	Subject to additional review.
61 to 180 days	Fully Taxable	Total included on W-2
181 or more days	Forfeited	Will not be processed.

Please see Expense Reimbursement Standards and Guidelines for more specific details.

Reasonable and Necessary

VCU will reimburse individuals traveling on official University business for reasonable and necessary expenses incurred. Travel expense reports accounts are available to the public and must be able to sustain the test of public review. When planning and paying for travel, economy, sound judgment, and necessity must be the primary considerations. The use of state funds for personal comfort, convenience, or individual preferences is not permitted. VCU assumes no obligation to reimburse for expenses that are not in compliance with the University's travel policies. Travel expenses for individuals not on official business for the University are not allowed.

More Restrictive Guidelines

Schools, centers, or departments may develop additional guidelines with more restrictions than required by VCU's general travel guidelines; however, these additional guidelines cannot be less restrictive than the standard guidelines. Guidelines cannot be arbitrary or capricious and must be fully documented, and consistently applied. When developing any additional guidelines, please consult travel@vcu.edu with any questions.

Sponsored Program Funds

All payments for meals, lodging, airfare, etc. funded solely from sponsored program funds are governed by the terms and conditions of the individual grant or contract. If the grant or contract is silent regarding these monetary reimbursements, the limitations outlined in VCU's guidelines will apply.

Definitions

Authorized Approver

The traveler's direct supervisor or manager, with authority to approve work schedules and expend the source of funds, shall be deemed to have this responsibility. The Authorized Approver must always hold a position within the supervisory chain of command of the traveler. No subordinate can approve a supervisor's expenses

Fiscal Approver

Individual assigned by the department and documented within Banner Finance to have approval authority associated with the index(s) used on the expense report.

Base Point

Designated place, office, or building where the traveler performs their duties. Multiple base points are not allowed. For hybrid workers, base point is the employee's assigned or designated on campus address. For fully remote employees the base point is the home address.

Campus Defined

The official campus sites for the University are the Monroe Park Campus, Medical College of Virginia Campus and VCU Arts Qatar campus (Doha, Qatar).

Commuting Mileage

Round-trip mileage traveled routinely by the employee between their residence and base point (if different) incurred on a scheduled work day. Mileage and other commuting costs incurred during commuting status are considered a personal expense and are not reimbursable.

Day Trip

Travel outside of the official work station that occurs within the employee's working hours, customarily 8AM-5PM and not requiring an overnight stay.

Domestic Travel

Domestic travel includes travel within the 48 contiguous states and the District of Columbia.

Duty of Care

Duty of Care is the University's fundamental obligation to protect the health, safety, and well-being of its authorized travelers. It requires actively anticipating risks, providing emergency support, and ensuring safe travel management throughout the entire journey.

Lowest Logical Fare (LLF)

The optimal, cost-effective travel booking strategy that balances budget savings with practical business needs. It ensures employees book the most economical flight or train ticket that maintains policy compliance, reasonable scheduling, acceptable travel duration, and avoids overly complicated routes

International Travel

International travel includes all travel outside the 48 contiguous United States and the District of Columbia, including travel to Alaska, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, and other U.S. territories and possessions.

Lodging

Temporary accommodations for overnight stay, including but not limited to hotels, motels, hostels, apartments, houses, or other similar quarters.

Official Work Station

The area within a 25-mile radius of an employee's designated base point.

Per Diem Meals

A fixed daily allowance provided to an employee or authorized individual for meal expenses based on the travel location, without the requirement for receipts. Per diem meals may only be claimed for overnight travel. The allowance is limited to the maximum GSA rate for the specific location.

Remote Worker

An employee whose home address (or another agreed-upon location) is their official base point, has no expectation to come into the office, and the expectation is that work hours are based on VCU related business needs and within the control of the worker. This is differentiated from a hybrid employee who works offsite up to 100% of the time because hybrid workers retain the VCU official campus address as their designated base point, there is some expectation to come into the office, and the worker has a specific work day and designated work hours controlled and required by VCU.

Travel Arranger/ Assistant

A Travel/ Arranger/ Assistant is someone who is designated by a traveler to book travel on their behalf. This designation occurs in the CTP Lightning Traveler Profile.

Travel Management Company

The travel management company designated by the University (currently Collegiate Travel Planners) and required for booking all University-sponsored air and rail travel.

Travel Status

The period during which an employee is engaged in work-related travel and performing official University business away from their official workstation (see definition of Official Work Station).

Trip

Any continuous travel that begins when the traveler departs from their base point and ends upon their return, conducted on behalf of the University.

Responsibilities

Traveler

Individuals traveling on behalf of the University are expected to exercise sound judgment when incurring travel expenses and to use University funds prudently. Specifically for air and rail, travelers are responsible for selecting the **Lowest Logical Fare (LLF)**, which generally will be the most reasonable and time-saving economy class fare. Travel-related expenses will be reimbursed only if they are reasonable, properly documented, appropriately authorized, and in compliance with established guidelines.

The Traveler is responsible for understanding VCU's travel policies and procedures, obtaining required pre-approval, and submitting expense reports in a timely manner. The traveler must certify, through the designated expense reimbursement system, that all reported expenses are true, accurate, and properly incurred, and that no personal or unallowable expenses are included for reimbursement.

ADA Accommodations for Travel

VCU is committed to supporting all travelers. Employees who require accommodations, including upgrades or exceptions to standard air, rail, car or hotel bookings, must ensure documentation is on file with VCU Equity and Access Services. Exceptions will be considered in accordance with VCU's accommodation policies.

Schools and Centers

Each school is responsible for ensuring that individuals traveling on behalf of the University are aware of and comply with the University's travel guidelines. Schools must also establish a clear hierarchy of responsibility for the preparation and approval of travel pre-approvals and reimbursements in accordance with VCU policies and procedures.

Schools, centers, and departments may establish internal guidelines that are more restrictive than the University policy and guidelines, but never less restrictive. These guidelines must be documented, applied consistently to all employees, and based on objective needs. Contact the Travel and Expense Management Team for guidance before finalizing any internal policies. Travel@vcu.edu.

Authorized Approver

Must verify that expenses and expense reports meet the following criteria:

- the travel expense was incurred while conducting University business
- the expenses were necessary and consistent with University policies,
- the information contained on the expense report and in the attached documentation is accurate
- the expense meets any and all sponsored program guidelines, if applicable

Fiscal Approver

Must verify that expenses and expense reports meet the following criteria:

- expenditures are charged to the appropriate index(s) and are properly categorized
- receipts provided are valid and reconcile with the claimed expenses
- claimed expenses are in compliance with University guidelines and policies

Planning Travel

Prior to traveling, the VCU traveler must attain appropriate permissions and clearance for official University business-related travel. The VCU traveler should understand the limitations and requirements that apply to their official University business-related travel.

Pre-Approval

Pre-approving University travel at VCU means obtaining formal institutional permission via the Emburse system before booking any arrangements. This critical step ensures that the intended trip aligns with institutional goals, is financially viable, complies with state and federal guidelines, and qualifies for the University's central billing or out-of-pocket reimbursement.

For all University Travelers, an Emburse Pre-Approval is required for:

- travel expenses estimated to exceed $500
- any travel booking made through Collegiate Travel Planners (CTP)
- all University-related travel to campus for **fully remote workers**, as determined by HR, regardless of dollar amount and funding source. Standard rules for employee travel reimbursements apply.

The estimate should include lodging, transportation, per diem meals, conference registration, and any other travel costs. Costs of the trip that may be direct-billed or paid on a P-card, such as conference registration should also be included in the cost estimate.

Designated Travel Management Company

VCU faculty and staff are **required** to book air and rail tickets for official business using University funds through Collegiate Travel Planners (CTP), VCU's contracted Travel Management Company (TMC) and paid using the Agency Travel Card (ATC). Business travelers are also encouraged to utilize CTP for lodging and vehicle rentals to receive the benefits associated with VCU's managed travel program.

- CTP will require the 12-digit Emburse Pre-Approval number and departmental Banner index number before they can issue tickets using the University's central Agency Travel Card (ATC).

Employee Profile and TSA Requirements

Prior to booking travel using the online booking tool or with a CTP agent, employees are required to update their travel profile with personal information (TSA required) with Collegiate Travel Planners. The First and Last names displayed are pre-populated from HR records. Middle names can be added to the profile. Please make sure that the traveler's first, middle, and last names are identical to those on the photo identification they will be presenting at the airport, in accordance with TSA requirements. All travel tickets are issued based on the information provided in the profile. Due to increased airport security, travelers may be turned away at security if the name on their identification does not match the name on their ticket. If the traveler's first and/or last name in the profile do not match the traveler's ID, please contact travel@vcu.edu for guidance.

Travelers will need to provide a mobile number as this is the primary method of communication used by Collegiate Travel Planners and the airlines. Date of birth and gender that matches the traveler's ID are required fields. Travelers also have the ability to add arrangers to assist with booking travel, as well as a personal credit card to be used for rental car and hotel bookings. Traveler preferences such as seat selection, frequent traveler info, and travel program numbers such as those used for TSA pre-check can be included in the profile but are not required.

Book travel Using CTP's Online Booking Tool

Collegiate Travel Planners provides VCU employees with access to Lightning, a proprietary online booking tool (OBT) designed for air, rail, car, and hotel reservations. Similar in experience to other online booking platforms, Lightning is intuitive to navigate and built with VCU's travel policy integrated directly into the system. The tool also supports guest and small group travel bookings, making it a flexible solution for a variety of travel needs. Training materials are available here.

Contact a Collegiate Travel Planners (CTP) Agent

Contact a CTP travel agent by calling **888-742-2896** or emailing vcu@ctptravelservices.com during normal business hours (Monday through Friday, 8am - 6pm ET) for general booking and scheduling questions. Outside of business hours CTP provides 24/7 service for travel-related emergencies at the same phone number.

Combining Personal and Business Travel

Travelers may combine personal trips with authorized VCU business travel, provided the following procedures are followed to ensure a clear distinction between personal and University expenses.

- All mixed-purpose trips with a **higher fare than** the business-only itinerary, must be booked directly through a Collegiate Travel Planners (CTP) agent by calling 888-742-2896 or emailing vcu@ctptravelservices.com.
- The agent's job is to determine what the trip would have cost if the traveler was only doing business. They will document the lowest logical available economy-class fare considering both time and cost for the required business dates in the reservation. This acts as the "price ceiling" for what VCU will cover.
- If the ticket including the leisure portion costs **the same or less than** the business-only itinerary, VCU will pay for the entirety of the ticket. This can be booked through Lightning or with a CTP agent. A cost comparison **made at the time of booking** must be included with the expense report.
- Payment Methods
  - Business Portion & Booking Fee: Charged to the Agency Travel Card (ATC).
  - Personal Portion & Booking Fee: Must be paid at the time of booking using a personal credit card which must be saved in the traveler profile.

> Only expenses directly associated with required business travel are eligible for payment. The University will not pay for any costs exceeding the documented business-only portion of the fare.

Travel days exceeding one day before or one day after the scheduled business dates must be fully justified. In the absence of a documented business purpose, these additional days will be classified as personal.

Paying for Travel

VCU provides several payment options depending on the expense type and traveler status:

- **Agency Travel Card (ATC)** – A University-liability VISA card used exclusively for air and rail travel booked through the University's contracted Travel Management Companies (TMCs).
  - To utilize the ATC card for air and rail bookings, departments are required to supply the 12-digit Eburse Pre-Approval number and the authorized departmental Banner index number via the online booking tool or to the Collegiate Travel Planners travel agent.
- **University Travel Card** – An individual liability card for other travel-related expenses, including lodging, meals, and car rentals. Cardholders are responsible for timely monthly payments and submitting reimbursement requests.
- **P-card –** Subject to an approved P-card exception or travel lift and insurance related restrictions, the P-card may be used for directly billed car rental, hotel or registration fees for travelers. Visit the Use A P-card page for more information.
- **Travel Advance** – Available to faculty and staff as an alternative to using personal funds. Travel advances may be issued up to 14 calendar days before departure to cover estimated travel costs. Final reimbursement requests will be reconciled against the advance.
- **Personal Funds** – Should be used sparingly for travel-related expenses. Travelers may use personal funds for airfare only if required by the airline or if personal travel increases the ticket cost. Reimbursement requests may be submitted after travel is completed.

Receipt Requirements and Documentation

Itemized receipts are required for all airfare, rail, hotel, and car rental expenses regardless of the amount. For all other travel expenses, receipts are required for each individual charge of $75 or more. Itemized receipts are required for all non-travel and non-employee expenses.

See Documentation Requirements for additional details.

Transportation

Travel Routing

Travel routing, whether by air, rail, rental vehicle, personal vehicle, taxis, or shuttle services, should follow the most direct, practical and economical route for the trip.

Air & Rail Tickets

VCU faculty and staff are required to book all air and rail tickets through Collegiate Travel Planners, our mandatory travel management company, when traveling for official business and using University funds.

FARE CLASS

Travel by air or rail should be booked using the **Lowest Logical Fare (LLF)**, which generally will be the most reasonable and time-saving economy class fare.sExceptions for business-class travel may be granted by the Dean or Vice Provost. Written approval must be obtained **prior** to making the reservation.

Additionally, international destinations, or those outside the 48 contiguous United States, may be booked in the Premium, Plus or Comfort class (or equivalent class depending on the airline). For domestic segments, travel should be in economy or coach class. However, many international ticketing options may require all segments of the ticket to be purchased under the same fare class. This will be allowed when a coach fare option is not available for the domestic segments of an international trip.

Upgrades are allowed on local funds if approved by the department. Otherwise, such upgrades and overages must be paid by the traveler with personal funds and are not subject to reimbursement. Any change fees must be fully justified, documented, and directly related to University business. Charges for changes to tickets or reservations made for personal preference or convenience are **not reimbursable**.

In the event of disruptions beyond the employee's control—such as airline delays or adverse weather conditions—the employee should contact the Travel Management Company (TMC) to update their itinerary. Typically, any additional costs incurred under these circumstances are covered by the University. However, if the added costs arise from issues attributable to the employee, reimbursement will not be provided.

AIRLINE CONTRACTS

VCU has preferred airline agreements, discounts, and other benefits for official VCU Business-related travel. Reservations must be made via the CTP online booking tool or agent to take advantage of these benefits. Prices shown in Lightning OBT reflect current contracted discounts.

> *link to Travel Contracts Page*

LOW COST CARRIERS

While VCU encourages the use of Low-Cost Carriers such as JetBlue and Southwest to maintain competitive airfare prices to/from Richmond, the use of other budget and discount carriers (Frontier, Allegiant, and Breeze, etc.) are not recommended because they offer limited services. Additionally these budget and discount carriers do not support VCU’s Duty of Care efforts.

INTERNATIONAL FLIGHT PROTOCOLS

- ITAC Safety Reviews: All international travel requests are subjected to an upfront safety and risk assessment by the International Travel Advisory Committee (ITAC) before moving to regular departmental sign-off.
- Active Travel Bans: VCU maintains fluid global restrictions. The International Travel Advisory Committee (ITAC) will review all pre-approvals to ensure travel is allowed to the chosen country. Travel to certain countries will also need to be approved by the Office of Export Controls (OEC) which is also part of the pre-approval routing.
- Export Control Tracking: If a high-risk country is selected in Emburse, the system triggers an automatic routing to the Office of Research to ensure compliance with federal export control laws regarding technology and information sharing.

> For international travel, the University recognizes various premium standards that are not permitted on domestic flights. While lie-flat seats, in-flight wellness, amenity kits and other upgrades may be considered an acceptable standard when they are an inherent feature of the specific flight's business class, they cannot be purchased as a separate add-on or upgrade option.

University-approved international accommodations include, but are not limited to:

- Angled reclining or larger seats with extra legroom
- Complimentary plated meal service

- Priority check-in and boarding
- Complimentary first and second checked baggage

FLY AMERICA ACT

Travelers using Federal grant funds are required to use US air carrier services for all travel funded by the US government. For International travel, the US government has entered into air transport agreements to allow use of foreign air carriers under certain circumstances. Visit the GSA website for further guidelines and FAQ: https://www.gsa.gov/policy-regulations/policy/travel-management-policy/fly-america-act

BAGGAGE FEES

Charges for checking bags on a flight are reimbursable. Charges of $75 or more must be fully justified and documented.

CHANGE FEES

Charges for changes to tickets/reservations to accommodate personal comfort, convenience and taste are not reimbursable. Change fees must be justified and documented.

CANCELLED FLIGHTS/ AIRLINE CREDITS

If a traveler needs to cancel a ticket or receives a credit for a future purchase, the credit must be applied towards the traveler's next University business trip. Any monetary compensation or refund should be refunded to the original form of payment.

Since the University has paid for tickets with public funds (grant, local, and state appropriated), tickets belong to the University. Failure to use unused ticket credits in a timely manner may result in forfeiture of the credits.

COMBINING PERSONAL AND BUSINESS TRAVEL

Travelers may combine personal trips with authorized VCU business travel, provided the following procedures are followed to ensure a clear distinction between personal and University expenses.

- Booking ProceduresAll mixed-purpose trips with a **higher fare than** the business-only itinerary, must be booked directly through a Collegiate Travel Planners (CTP) agent by calling 888-742-2896 or emailing vcu@ctptravelservices.com.
- The agent's job is to determine what the trip would have cost if the traveler were only doing business. They will document the lowest reasonable available economy-class fare considering both time and cost for the required business dates in the reservation. This acts as the "price ceiling" for what VCU will cover.
- If the ticket including the leisure portion costs **the same or less than** the business-only itinerary, VCU will pay for the entirety of the ticket. This can be booked through Lightning or with a CTP agent. A cost comparison made at the time of booking must be included with the expense report.
- Payment Methods
  - Business Portion & Booking Fee: Charged to the Agency Travel Card (ATC).
  - Personal Portion & Booking Fee: Must be paid at the time of booking using a personal credit card which must be saved in the traveler profile.

Only expenses directly associated with required business travel are eligible for payment. The University will not pay for any costs exceeding the documented business-only portion of the fare.

Travel days exceeding one day before or one day after the scheduled business dates must be fully justified. In the absence of a documented business purpose, these additional days will be classified as personal.

ALTERNATE AIR TRAVEL OPTIONS: CHARTERED, PERSONALLY-OWNED, OR STATE-OWNED

Please contact travel@vcu.edu for information about chartered, personally-owned, or State owned aircraft.

Vehicle Rental

Travelers should determine the necessity of using a rental car when planning travel. Consider alternative transportation methods (train, plane, rideshare, taxi, shuttle, etc.) as well as related costs (parking, tolls, etc.). Please use the Trip Comparison Tool to determine cost effectiveness between methods of transportation.

Reimbursement of vehicle rental expenses is limited to official business use only. The traveler should select a mid-size/ intermediate vehicle or smaller, Travelers are required to use one of VCU's contracted vendors, Enterprise/National Car rental or Hertz for local, domestic and international rentals. The Vehicle Accident Prevention and Safety policy applies to all University or business-related rentals.

RENTAL CAR CONTRACTS (ENTERPRISE/NATIONAL AND HERTZ)

View the Travel Contracts Page for information about how to make a reservation with Enterprise/National or Hertz Car Rental companies.

PASSENGER VAN RENTALS

1. Driver Qualifications

Before driving, ensure the traveler meets these baseline requirements. Every student or employee permitted to operate a passenger van must:

- Be at least 20 years old and have held a valid driver's license for a minimum of two years.
- Have no medical conditions that would interfere with the safe operation of a motor vehicle.
- Read the Vehicle Accident Prevention and Safety Policy and sign the Vehicle Accident Prevention and Safety Acknowledgement Form.

2. Required Training

All drivers must complete two specific training modules before transporting passengers:

1. Complete the **university-authorized online defensive driving training course**.
2. Complete the **university-authorized online van driving safety course**.
3. Complete the **"behind-the-wheel" van driving course** conducted by VCU Police.

> **Pro Tip:** Don't wait until the day before the trip! These training sessions can fill up fast, so schedule the VCU Police training well in advance.

COLLISION AND LIABILITY INSURANCE

To ensure full coverage and compliance with University policy, please follow these requirements for vehicle rentals:

Employee Requirements: All VCU employees must have Collision Damage Waiver (CDW) and Loss Damage Waiver (LDW) coverage.

- Contracted Vendors: Travelers should book through Enterprise/National or Hertz. These contracted rates automatically include the required CDW and LDW insurance.
- Alternative Vendors: If a contracted vendor is unavailable and a different company must be used, the traveler is required to purchase CDW and LDW insurance at the time of rental. This insurance is reimbursable.
- Non-Employee Requirements: Individuals who are not employees must purchase and will be reimbursed for CDW and LDW insurance for all rentals.
- International Travel: For all rentals outside the contiguous 48 states, travelers must purchase and will be reimbursed for LDW and CDW insurance.

Other types of insurance offered such as trip cancellation, personal, health or life insurance are not reimbursable.

VEHICLE REFUELING

Travelers must refuel rental vehicles before returning them to the rental contractor. Reimbursement will be provided based on the actual fuel used, with receipts required. Travelers should **never** prepay for fuel, as this can result in paying for more fuel than used, and rental companies do not issue refunds for unused fuel. Any extenuating circumstances requiring an exception must be fully justified and documented.

Personally-Owned Vehicle/ Mileage

Employees may be permitted to use their personally owned vehicle when it is more cost-effective for the University compared to other travel options, or when a contracted rental vehicle is unavailable. A cost comparison may be required to justify the use of a personal vehicle. Typically, personal vehicle use is considered cost-beneficial under the following circumstances:

- Vehicle mileage does not exceed 200 round trip miles per trip.
- For frequent and/or daily business-related travel within Virginia
- The distance to the nearest car rental location and/or the hours of operations would create a travel constraint.

*VCU reimburses at the current Standard Mileage Rate established by the IRS.

If a personal vehicle is used for business purposes primarily for the traveler's convenience and/or personal preference, then the traveler will be reimbursed at the reduced GSA rate. Examples include, but are not limited to:

- A traveler is combining business and personal travel, opting to drive in order to have a vehicle available during their personal time.
- The rental car options (economy, compact, mid-size/ intermediate) are not the traveler's preferred car class

- The traveler chooses not to fly, travel by rail or utilize a car rental, due to personal or medical reasons. Exceptions to this preference are granted when supported by VCU Equity and Access Services.

When using a personal vehicle, the traveler is responsible for maintaining adequate insurance coverage to protect their vehicle and any passengers. In the event of an accident, the vehicle owner or traveler will be fully responsible for any damages and their insurance will be the primary coverage for any claims.

VCU will only reimburse mileage for use of a personal vehicle. Increased insurance premiums or fuel expenses incurred while using a personal vehicle for University business will not be reimbursed as these costs are included as part of the mileage reimbursement.

VCU reimburses at the current Standard Mileage Rate established by the IRS.

Travelers must use the Emburse mileage widget powered by Google Maps. This will ensure the origination and destination addresses are documented as required.

Tolls & Parking

Tolls and parking are allowable expenses when in travel status. Airport Parking is reimbursable and should be in Long Term or Economy. Other airport parking requires justification. Purchased or rented toll pass transponders or related devices require justification.

Ground Transportation

Public transportation such as city metro services, taxis, shuttle services, ride share services such as Uber and Lyft, etc. are allowable for VCU official business travel. Any transportation costs for travel between and within the MPC and MCV campuses, and parking fees at VCU owned or occupied spaces are not reimbursable as these are considered commuting costs.

Lodging

Lodging may be reimbursed when an individual is traveling overnight on official business outside their official station. All lodging expenditures must be necessary and reasonable.

Travel lodging is distinguished from local lodging. VCU has secured agreements with local hotels and lodging spaces as identified at the Travel Contracts page. Local lodging discounts are available in CTP's online booking tool and are subject to regular updates.

Lodging Contracts

Review the Hospitality resources>> Local Lodging Page for details.

Lodging Rates

Reimbursement for lodging is limited to actual expenses incurred up to 200% of the GSA per diem lodging rates, plus taxes and surcharges.

Conference Lodging

Conference lodging should be booked through the lodging link provided by the conference. Exceptions may be granted if the conference lodging rate exceeds 200% of the GSA rate, provided that the official conference documentation is submitted to justify the exception. However, travelers who book accommodations outside of the designated conference hotel(s) and exceed 200% of the GSA rate, may be required to use local funds or their reimbursement request may be denied.

Alternative or Third Party Lodging

When booking accommodations outside of traditional hotels or motels—such as Airbnb, VRBO, or private apartment rentals—or when using third-party travel websites, travelers must carefully review all cancellation, refund, and prepayment policies, as well as any hidden fees

Unlike standard hotels, which usually provide liability insurance for guests and allow full refunds for cancellations made 24 hours prior to arrival, alternative providers and booking sites may:

- Charge extra for insurance or lack coverage entirely
- Enforce stringent cancellation policies or require full prepayment
- Offer limited or no refunds

Travelers are strongly discouraged from booking any lodging that does not offer a full refund for cancellations made with at least one day's notice. Additionally, alternative lodging contracts paid via Purchase Order must be submitted to contracts@vcu.edu for approval at least ten (10) business days in advance.

Lodging Rates and Reimbursable Fees

The lodging rate limits outlined in the Lodging Rates section above apply to both alternative lodging options and hotel rooms booked through travel websites. Some applicable fees may be included in the nightly rate calculation.

Fees included in the allowable nightly rate calculation:

- Cleaning fees
- Service fees
- Reservation/Booking fees

Advance Payments

Advance prepayments are highly discouraged on personal credit cards because these charges are not reimbursed until after travel has been completed. If an advance payment is required, it may be accomplished using a department PCard. Please contact corpcard for additional assistance - corpcard@vcu.edu.

Non-Canceled Reservations and Other Penalties

Travelers must communicate travel plan changes as soon as possible when a confirmed reservation is being held. Charges may be incurred for non-cancelled reservations, late cancellations outside of the allowable cancellation window, or no-shows. These charges will not be reimbursed if the traveler is negligent in canceling reservations.

Per Diem - Meals & Incidental Travel (M&IE) Expenses

Per Diem Meals

A per diem meal allowance is a fixed daily payment given to travelers for **travel food/meal related expenses** in lieu of tracking actual receipts. GSA rates can be searched at the GSA per diem rates page.

Proration and Reduction

On travel departure and return days, meals and incidental expenses (M&IE) are reimbursed at **75%** of the applicable per diem rate. For trips with multiple destinations, use the rate for the location where the traveler spent the night (Departure Day) or where they spent the night prior to returning home (Return Day).

If meals are provided at no cost during the trip, the per diem must be adjusted as follows:

- **Standard Days:** Reduce the total daily rate by the specific meal amount (breakfast, lunch, or dinner) by selecting the meal provided in the Emburse Per Diem Wizard.
- **Departure/Return Days:** Travel days are calculated at a 75% prorated deduction, regardless of departure and arrival times. This calculation is included in the Emburse Per Diem Wizard. Travelers must still deduct meals provided on these days. Please see Food and Meal Purchases page for more information.

Other Travel Expenses

Visas, Passports, and Travel Authorizations

Expenses associated with obtaining passports, visas, and travel authorizations required for business travel may be reimbursed.

Registration Fees

Registration fees should be paid using the department's purchasing card (PCard) whenever possible. If these fees are paid with personal funds, the fees will only be reimbursed after the trip has concluded. Any registration fees that are considered a contribution, donation or fundraiser require approval from the President's Office. All outgoing sponsorships must be reviewed and approved by VCU Enterprise Marketing and Communications to ensure brand alignment. See https://marcom.vcu.edu/ for more details.

Miscellaneous Expenses

Miscellaneous business related expenses that are not covered by the incidental allowance in the daily per diem may be reimbursable. Please contact travel@vcu.edu with questions about expense allowability.

Duty Of Care

Duty of Care is the University's fundamental obligation to protect the health, safety, and well-being of its authorized travelers. It requires actively anticipating risks, providing emergency support, and ensuring safe travel management throughout the entire journey.

CTP provides Duty of Care services for VCU Travelers. Travelers may receive travel alerts and/or advisories via text or email in case of an event that may affect their travel. Information sent is determined by travel arrangements secured through CTP.

Visit Duty of Care page for more details.

Exceptions

Exceptions are determined on a case-by-case basis and may be subject to approval and fund source restriction by a department's fiscal administrator, the traveler's supervisor, and VCU Travel & Expense Management Team.

During Travel

Travel Documentation

Maintain all travel documentation. Please refer to **Documentation Requirements** for additional details.

Documentation can be uploaded to Emburse in real time in the Emburse Enterprise App. This application is available for iOS or Android phones.

Emergencies and Changes

If a traveler experiences an emergency during travel there are various options depending upon the severity of the emergency.

If travel arrangements need to be changed:

- Contact a Collegiate Travel Planners (CTP) agent to make changes by calling **888-742-2896** or by emailing vcu@ctptravelservices.com.
- If any portion of the trip is booked outside of CTP, such as hotel or car rental, please contact those providers directly to make changes.

If there is a political, major weather-related, medical or other emergency:

- Please reach out to The Office of Emergency Management - EMAIL ADDRESS

After Travel

Once a traveler returns from their trip, they must follow the Expense Guidelines to submit any expenses for reimbursement. Reimbursement requests must be submitted within 30 days of the return date of travel. Expenses exceeding 180 days will not be processed.

Travel Reimbursement Requirements

> *See Website for References*

Resources

- Travel Advances
- Emburse Enterprise (Reimbursement Tool)
- Fly America Act
- Collegiate Travel Planners (CTP)
- CISI Insurance / International Page
- Occupational Health and Safety Accidents & Insurance