

Travel Guidelines & Procedures

- Introductory Statement** No procedure manual can address every conceivable travel situation or question in an organization the size of VCU. The intent of this document is to provide you with a set of practical rules and guidelines deemed to be in the best interest of the university, its faculty, staff and students, while also ensuring compliance with the policies set forth by the Board of Visitors and the State of Virginia.
- Applicability** These guidelines apply to all VCU employees, students, and non-employees who have been authorized to travel on behalf of the University.
- Reasonable and Necessary** VCU will reimburse individuals traveling on official University business for reasonable and necessary expenses incurred. Travel expense accounts are open to the public and must be able to sustain the test of public review. When planning and paying for travel, economy, prudence and necessity are of primary concern. The use of State [funds](#) to accommodate personal comfort, convenience, and taste is not permitted. VCU assumes no obligation to reimburse for expenses that are not in compliance with [VCU's Travel Policy](#). 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 control than required by VCU's guidelines, but never less. These guidelines must not be arbitrary or capricious and must be fully documented, and equally applied. Careful consideration should be taken to minimize the loss of efficiency and additional administrative time required. Travel Services should be consulted when developing guidelines.
- 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 set by VCU's guidelines will apply.

Responsibilities

- Traveler** Individuals traveling on behalf of the University must exercise good judgment with respect to incurring travel expenses and are expected to spend the University's funds prudently. Travel related expenses will be paid by the University if they are deemed to be reasonable, appropriately documented, properly authorized and within the guidelines. The traveler is responsible for understanding VCU's travel policy and procedures, seeking pre-authorization and submitting the expense reports timely. The traveler will certify through the expense system that all expenses are true and an accurate accounting of expenses incurred and there are no expenses claimed as reimbursable which relate to personal and/or unallowable expenses.

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Schools and Centers	Each school must ensure that anyone traveling on behalf of the University is aware of and will abide by the University's travel policy and procedures and will assign a hierarchy of responsibility to the preparation and approval of travel pre-approvals and reimbursements based on VCU policies and guidelines.
Authorized Approver	Must verify that expenses and expense reports meet the following criteria: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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 sponsor guidelines, if applicable
Fiscal Approver	Must verify that expenses and expense reports meet the following criteria: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• expenditures are charged to the appropriate index(s) and are properly categorized• receipts provided are valid and reconciled with the claimed expenses• claimed expenses are following University guidelines and policies

Definitions

Authorized Approver	Should be the traveler's direct supervisor or manager with authority to expend the source of funds being used to pay the travel expense. They cannot be the individual seeking reimbursement, and must always move up the chain of command from the expense owner to prevent the situation of a subordinate approving a supervisor's expenses.
Travel Fiscal Approver	Assigned by the department, documented within Banner Finance to have approval authority associated with the index(es) used on the expense report.
Base Point	Primary work location (home, office or building) where the traveler performs their duties on a regular basis. If the traveler works from multiple locations, the Base Point is where responsibilities are performed the majority of the time. For travel purposes, multiple base points are not allowed. Travelers who need assistance identifying their Base Point should contact their manager or HR representative.
Commuting Mileage	Round-trip mileage traveled routinely by the employee between their residence and base point (if different). <i>Mileage and other commuting cost incurred during commuting status are considered a personal expense and are <u>not</u> reimbursable.</i>
International Travel	All travel to areas outside of the 48 contiguous United States and District of Columbia to include Hawaii, Alaska, Puerto Rico and US territories and possessions.
Lodging	Temporary quarters, hotel, motel, house, apartment, room, hostel, etc.
Official Station	The area within a 25-mile radius of an employee's designated base point. Fully remote employees that need to travel to the MPC or MCV campus (beyond 25-mile) for work related business must have VP approval for mileage reimbursement.

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One-day Travel	Travel that occurs within the employee’s working hours, customarily 8AM-5PM. Normally, not considered in Travel Status.
Per Diem	Specific daily allowance for meal expenses based on the travel location without receipts.
State Employee	Any elected, appointed, classified, or non-classified employee of the Commonwealth.
Travel Management Company	The contracted company (currently Collegiate Travel Planners) mandated by the university for use to book all official university business air and rail travel.
Travel Status	Travel on behalf of the university outside of an employee’s official station.
Trip	Any period of continuous travel between when the traveler leaves their residence or base point and returns to their residence or base point while on university business.
University and Academic Professionals	Employees of VCU (most non-teaching and research employees) that are still considered state employees earning state service.

Trip Planning

Pre-Approval	A Chrome River Pre-Approval is required for trips for VCU employees in which expenses are estimated to exceed \$500 or whenever booking air or rail tickets. The estimate should include lodging, transportation, per diem meals, conference registration, and any other travel costs or course fees. Costs of the trip that may be direct billed, such as conference registration, should also be included in the cost estimate.
Mandatory Travel Contracts	VCU faculty and staff are required to book air and rail tickets for official business using University funds through Collegiate Travel Planners , our contracted Travel Management Company (TMC), and paid using the university’s Agency Travel Card (ATC). Business travelers are encouraged to utilize our contracted vendors for vehicle rental (Enterprise Car Rental for round trip and National for one way) and lodging as well to receive the benefits associated with VCU’s managed travel program.

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Combining Personal & Business Travel

Travelers who include personal travel when traveling for authorized VCU business must obtain and provide for reimbursement the cost for the business travel portion only. This cost must be based on the lowest comparable economy class fare(s) obtained through **Collegiate Travel Planners**, our contracted Travel Management Company (either online or agent), and must be at the time of booking. The air and rail tickets must be purchased through our travel management company regardless. The university will not pay more than the travel cost for the business portion. (see **Documentation Requirements**)

Travel days that extend more than one day before and one day after the business dates of the trip must be fully explained and justified or are considered personal.

Visa & Passports

Expenses associated with required business travel may be reimbursed.

Registration Fees

Registration fees should be paid using the department's PCard. If personally paid, the fee cannot be reimbursed until after the trip has occurred. Any fees that are considered tax deductible, a contribution, or fund raiser require the President's Office approval. Sponsorships must be approved by the VCU Enterprise Marketing and Communications department. <https://marcom.vcu.edu/>

Paying for Travel

- Agency Travel Card (ATC) – All Air and rail booked through **Collegiate Travel Planners**, our mandatory travel management company, is paid on this university VISA card.
- Travel Card (Individual Liability or IL) – University issued card for other travel related expenses including meals, car rental, lodging etc.
- Travel Cash Advance – in lieu of IL, payment issued up to 14 days in advance to help cover travel expenses. The expense reimbursement payment is processed against the travel advancement.
- Personal Funds – Paying for travel expenses during travel and seeking reimbursement after returning from travel (Should only be used to pay for airfare if the airline requires or if personal travel increases the ticket cost)

Transportation

Travel Routing Travel routing - whether by air, rail, rental vehicle, personal vehicle, for-hire taxis, shuttles services, or by a State-owned vehicle - should follow the most direct, practical and economical route for your **trip**.

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Personally-Owned Vehicle

Employees may be permitted to use their personally owned automobile vehicle when a contracted rental vehicle is not available, or when the use of a personally owned vehicle is cost-beneficial to the university compared to **all** other travel options. A cost comparison may be required. Typically, using your personal vehicle is only considered cost-beneficial under the following circumstances:

- Vehicle mileage should not exceed 200 round trip miles per **trip**.
- For frequent and/or daily business-related travel within Virginia
- The distance to the nearest Enterprise/National Car Rental and/or the hours of operations would create a travel constraint.

If a personal vehicle is used for business purposes primarily for the traveler's convenience, personal comfort and/or taste, then the traveler will be reimbursed at the reduced rate (.246). Examples include, but are not limited to:

- A traveler is integrating business and personal travel, opting to drive in order to have a vehicle available during their personal time.
- The rental car options (compact, economy, standard) 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 considered part of the mileage reimbursement.

Mileage Rates

VCU reimburses at the current Standard Mileage Rate established by the IRS. <https://www.irs.gov/tax-professionals/standard-mileage-rates>

Travelers are encouraged to use the Chrome River mileage widget powered by Google Maps. This will ensure the origination and destination addresses are documented as required.

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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.

Generally, airline and rail travel should be the most direct route, utilizing economy or coach class accommodations, and one of the lowest available fares. Exceptions for business class may be granted by the Dean or Vice Provosts. The approval must be obtained in writing and received prior to making the reservation.

Additionally, **international destination** or those **outside the continental United States (OCONUS)** may be booked in the Premium, Plus or Comfort class (or equivalent class depending on the airline). These class options provide similar amenities to the former Business Class. For domestic segments, travel should be in economy or coach class. However, some ticketing options may require the full ticket to be purchased under the same class from the original destination. This will be allowed when the domestic coach fare option is not available.

The university allows the following international flight accommodations:

- Angled reclining seats (no lie-flat seats)
- Larger seats and extra legroom
- Complimentary plated meal
- Priority check in and boarding
- Complimentary 1st and 2nd baggage

*Upgrades and overages are allowed on local funds if approved by the department. Domestic First Class and International Business Class luxury upgrades and services are **not generally** allowed and will require advanced VP approval.*

Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) is responsible for arranging roundtrip travel to and from the destination for university-related travel. In the event of disruptions beyond the employee's control—such as airport 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 Fees

Charges for changes to tickets or reservations to accommodate personal comfort, convenience and taste are not reimbursable. This includes fees for early boarding, security pre-screening, extra leg room, etc. Change fees must be fully explained.

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Baggage Fees Charges for first checked bags on a flight are reimbursable. Any charges of \$75 or more, as well as fees for a second personal bag, must be fully justified. Additionally, expenses for checking any baggage required for business purposes – such as meeting materials and equipment – are also eligible for reimbursable.

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 credits should be refunded to the original form of payment. If the original ticket was purchased using the university travel card (ATC) and the credit is applied to another card, the traveler will be responsible for reimbursing the university.

Vehicle Rental Vehicle rental expenses are limited to official University business travel use only. Travelers are to utilize the Enterprise/National contract whenever this option is available. The traveler should select the most economical type of vehicle available (economy, compact or midsize) and acquire the appropriate contracted discounted rate when the vehicle is rented. Rental costs for a larger vehicle may be reimbursed when traveling in a group or when a no-cost upgrade is available. Travelers must provide the university contract number (XZ21184) in order to receive all contractual benefits.

Rental Insurance The option to purchase insurance (including LDW/CDW) offered by rental car contractors depends upon the following circumstances:

If traveler is a:	Then	Notes
<u>VCU Employee*</u>	Decline	VA Department of Treasury, Division of Risk Management, provides a Statewide Self-Insured Automobile plan for State employees.
<u>Non-State Employee</u>	Accept	Rental insurance will not be reimbursed. Liability Damage Waiver (LDW) and Collision Damage Waiver (CDW) insurance are reimbursable expenses.
<u>All International Rentals</u>	Accept	Individuals traveling outside of the contiguous 48 States <u>are required to purchase</u> 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.

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*Because insurance is already available through the University contract, travelers will not be reimbursed for collision insurance.

The insurance policy does not cover a traveler's personal belongings; therefore, if a traveler desires insurance for personal property, the traveler should purchase the insurance from the rental agency at his or her own expense.

Vehicle Refueling Travelers must ensure that the rental vehicle is refueled before returning the vehicle to the rental contractor unless an exception is noted. Reimbursement will be based on the fuel used and receipts provided. Travelers must never authorize prepayment for fuel as there is a potential for purchasing fuel over the amount needed and rental car vendors do not return a credit for unused fuel. Receipts are required for reimbursements in excess of \$75.00.

Optional Add-ons Proper Business justification is required for optional add-ons (GPS, toll passes, etc.). Enterprise/National charges unpaid tolls to the credit card on file plus adds an additional one-time fee for this service.

Tolls & Parking Receipts are required for any individual claim of \$75.00 or more. GPS, EZ Pass/Tolls pass rental charges must be placed on local funds.

Ground Transportation Public transportation such as city metro services, taxis and shuttle services such as Lyft and Uber, and similar services are allowable for VCU official business travel, except as noted below. Receipts are required for reimbursements requests in excess of \$75.00.

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.

Mileage vs. Other Transportation Options VCU reimburses mileage at the rate established by the IRS. When travel is by personally-owned vehicle, the total cost of the mileage reimbursed should not exceed the total cost using the most economical transportation method available (air, rail or rental car). Travelers may be granted an exception to this policy when justified.

Personal Use Aircraft The use of personal aircraft is permitted for official state travel with the prior approval of the President Office. Documentation of comparable costs for other travel means must be included in the reimbursement request. The reimbursement shall be limited to the most economical means of travel available at that time.

State-Owned Aircraft State-owned aircrafts are available on a priority basis and can be scheduled through the Department of Aviation (DOAV). Refer to the Aircraft Use Policy and Guidelines that can be found on DOAV's website at <https://doav.virginia.gov>. Costs should be compared with commercial rates to determine the best air carrier travel for State travel.

Lodging

Lodging expenses may be reimbursed for individuals traveling overnight on official business outside their official station. Reimbursement amounts will vary based on the travel destination. All lodging expenditures must be necessary and reasonable.

Lodging Rates Reimbursement for lodging is capped to actual expenses incurred, up to 100% over the CONUS and OCONUS rates, in addition to applicable taxes and surcharges for a single room. Exceptions may be made for a larger room if shared with another University employee or conference attendee, or in special circumstances that necessitate a larger room or suite (e.g. to host a business reception or meeting).

CONUS and OCONUS rate tables

<https://www.gsa.gov/travel/plan-book/per-diem-rates>

Conference Lodging Exceptions may be granted if the conference lodging rate exceeds the 100% overage allowance, provided the conference documentation is **submitted**. Travelers who book accommodations outside of the conference hotel and exceed 100% of CONUS and OCONUS rates may be required to use local funds or have their reimbursement denied.

Non-Canceled Reservations Communicate travel plan changes as soon as possible when a confirmed reservation is being held. Since charges may be incurred for non-canceled reservations, these charges will not be reimbursed if the traveler is negligent in canceling reservations.

Lodging Charges The cost of laundering, cleaning or pressing of clothing incurred while traveling is reimbursable if a trip exceeds five (5) consecutive business days. Additional charges and fees for the fitness center, health club membership or spa are not reimbursable.

Per Diem - Meals & Incidental Travel Expenses

*For overnight **official** business travel outside the traveler's official station, meals and certain incidental travel expenses are reimbursed on a per diem basis rather than actual expenses. The applicable Meals and Incidentals Expense (M&IE) per diem will be paid to the traveler without the need for receipts.*

Per Diem Meals Travelers must follow the meal limits published on the Government CONUS AND OCONUS travel charts for their travel destination. The M&IE per diem must correspond to the location of overnight lodging.

<https://www.gsa.gov/travel/plan-book/per-diem-rates>

Overtime Meals Overtime status is when work or travel time occurs beyond an employee's normal, schedule work hours, but not overnight. Therefore, overtime meal allowance does not apply during overnight travel.

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Incidental Allowance	All service fees and tips – including, but not limited to, those for bellhops, skycaps, maids, waitstaff, laundry expenses, personal telephone calls, and transportation between lodging or business locations and meal sites – are reimbursed through the incidental expense portion of the M&IE per diem.
Miscellaneous Expenses	Miscellaneous business-related expenses that are not covered by the incidental allowance are reimbursable. Receipts are required for any individual claim of \$75.00 or more.
Proration and Reductions	On a travel <u>departure or return day</u> , 75% of the M&IE is reimbursed. For trips involving multiple travel destinations , base the reduction rate in effect for where the night was spent as follows:

Departure Day: Where the traveler spends the night.

Return Day: Where the traveler spent the night before returning home.

When meals are provided, the applicable meal per diem (breakfast, lunch, or dinner) must be reduced by the amount shown for the applicable meal on the Government CONUS AND OCONUS travel charts.

When meals are provided on a travel departure or return day, the full day's per diem rate is reduced by the full amount of the appropriate meals, followed by prorating the balance by 75%.

Travel Reimbursement Requirements

Travel Expense Reimbursement Request	Travelers should submit the Travel Expense Reimbursement request to the Authorized Approver within 30 days after completion of the trip. In the case of continuous travel, the traveler should submit the reimbursement request to the Authorized Approver within 30 days of the last day of travel for which reimbursement is requested.
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Timely submission of expense reports is a federal requirement. Both VCU policy and the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) mandate that employees submit reimbursement requests within 60 days of incurring an expense. According to [IRS Publication 463](#), any reimbursements processed after 60 days must be reported as taxable income.

In certain cases, exceptions may be granted for expenses submitted after 60 days, provided there is proper documentation and additional approval. These exceptions can extend up to 180 days from the date of the expense. However, reimbursements submitted more than 180 days after the last day of travel will not be accepted.

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Documentation Requirements	Although not all-inclusive , the following information is required for expense reimbursements: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Business purpose for travel• Receipt for each expenditure of \$75 or more• Itemized receipt for lodging (regardless of dollar amount)• Itemized receipt for car rental (regardless of dollar amount)• Business purpose for unusual fees (e.g. change fees, phone calls)• Personal & Business travel – Collegiate Travel Planners (CTP) documentation in the form of the OBT search page result or agent email or “Airtinerary” showing the cost of the business portion only and must reflect and be from the same date the trip is booked.
Missing Receipts	If a receipt is missing, the traveler must provide proof of payment in the form of a redacted credit card statement or copy of cashed check.
Disallowed Expenses	Although not all-inclusive , the following expenses are not reimbursable: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lost or stolen articles• Damage to personal vehicles, clothing, or other items• Services to gain entry to a locked vehicle• Movies charged to hotel bills• All expenses related to the personal negligence of the traveler, such as fines• Towing charges and tickets for violations• Expenses for children, spouses, and companions while on travel status (car seats, cribs, etc.).• Interest on credit cards• Parking for employees attending meetings /training in a VCU owned or occupied space.• Mileage between Monroe and MCV campuses.• Mileage from home (base location) to campus (Monroe or MCV)
Exceptions	Any exceptions must be paid with local funds and approved by the Vice President, Provost, Dean, or Executive Director.