

ARS □ CSREES □ ERS □ NASS

Policies and Procedures

Title: Travel Advances

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Distribution: REE Offices in Headquarters, Areas, and Locations

This P&P states criteria and policy for obtaining advances of funds to pay authorized travel expenses for official travel and for the use of Government contractor-issued charge cards. Travelers will normally be able to use a Government contractor-issued charge card to charge major expenses, such as common carrier transportation fares, lodging costs, and rental of automobiles. **Minor change made on 1/12/2000, to the first sentence in the second paragraph (POLICY) on page 3.**

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1. Authorities

- Agriculture Travel Regulations (ATR) 301-7, 301-8, 301-10, 301-15
- Federal Travel Regulations (FTR) 301-7, 301-8, 301-10, 302-1, 302-2, 302-3, 302-4, 302-5, 302-6, 302-7, 302-8, 302-9, 302-10
- National Finance Center (NFC) Voucher and Invoice Payments Manual, Title II, Chapter 2, Section 2.1
- REE Policies and Procedures 340.0

2. Policy

It is REE policy to use travel advances when necessary. Advance of funds may be made for the payment of meals and incidental expenses (M&IE), mileage, other expenses, and relocation expenses in accordance with this P&P. Travel advances will be limited to expenses that cannot be charged to the travel charge card.

All REE employees who are required to travel on temporary duty (TDY) at least once a year, must **be offered (changed on 1/12/2000)** a Government contractor-issued charge card. For those employees who choose not to use the Government contractor-issued charge card, travel advances are subject to the limitations in Section 4 of this P&P.

NOTE: Applications for ARS employees for a Government contractor-issued charge card should be obtained from the Area Budget and Fiscal Officer (ABFO)/Area Transportation Assistants (ATA) or, in the case of ARS Headquarters and CSREES personnel, from the Travel Office, Travel and Relocation Services Branch (TRSB), Financial Management Division (FMD). Applications for NASS employees may be obtained from Field Operations. Applications for ERS employees may be obtained from a designated division representative.

All applications require the signature of the employee's immediate supervisor. Since the charge card company does not allow a specific block for this purpose, it should be signed in the margin of the application.

Individuals will use the Government contractor-issued charge card for all TDY assignments to pay for expenses that can be charged to the charge card.

3. Purpose of Travel Advances

Travel advances may be obtained for the following types of expenses while individuals are in official travel status:

Relocation Expenses

- Subsistence while occupying temporary quarters.
- Transportation and temporary storage of household goods when the individual was authorized relocation under the commuted rate method.
- Transportation of mobile homes.
- M&IE and mileage.
- Authorized househunting trip.
- Travel advances are **NOT** authorized for the following:
 - Miscellaneous allowance expenses.
 - Residence transactions.
 - Nontemporary storage of household goods.

Temporary Duty

Advances of funds may be made for the payment of:

- M&IE.
- Other expenses, such as taxi fares, parking fees, and tolls.
- Mileage.
- Other out-of-pocket expenses which cannot be charged to the travel charge card and can be reasonably estimated prior to travel.

Advances may be made to:

- Employees.
- New employees who are authorized to incur travel expenses to the first duty station.
- Non-Federal Government people and employees of other Federal Government agencies when traveling for REE.

4. Limitations on Amounts of Travel Advances

The first source for obtaining an advance of funds is through the NFC.

Approving officials shall limit the advance of travel funds to those estimated expenses that a traveler will incur during authorized travel which the traveler would normally pay by cash.

For travel within the contiguous 48 United States and the District of Columbia (CONUS), the amount advanced shall not exceed the prescribed M&IE rate and up to 80 percent of other miscellaneous expenses authorized under the FTR's, as appropriate.

A maximum of \$5,000 can be obtained for TDY or relocation travel. The Administrators of NASS, ERS, and CSREES, and the Director, FMD, on behalf of the ARS Administrator, may authorize an amount, not to exceed \$7,500 from NFC, if:

- The traveler has been authorized the commuted rate for movement of household goods and the estimated costs require substantially all of the travel advance.
- The employee's allowable costs for a 30-day period of temporary quarters exceed the \$5,000 maximum amount.
- The employee is detailed for longer than 30 days to an area where receipt of additional advances and filing of travel vouchers would be difficult.

5. Exceptions to Travel Advance Limitations

This P&P presumes individuals will use the Government contractor-issued charge card for all TDY assignments and for transfer-of-station expenses.

Approving officials may, under the circumstances listed below, increase the travel advance provided to the traveler:

- Travel circumstances preclude the use of a Government contractor-issued charge card to purchase items normally chargeable. These reasons might include infrequent travelers or travel circumstances where use of a Government contractor-issued charge card is nearly always impractical.
- When the approving official determines the use of Government contractor-issued charge cards is not feasible, travel advances shall not exceed 80 percent of the estimated additional cash expenses that the traveler expects to incur.

An approving official may authorize a financial hardship exception on a case-by-case basis.

- If a financial hardship exists, the approving official may advance up to 100 percent of the estimated expenses for an individual trip.

NOTE: A **financial hardship** is defined as a situation when an individual does not meet the criteria to be issued a Government contractor-issued charge card and does not have the personal funds to pay for TDY expenses.

- The request for an advance not to exceed 100 percent of the estimated expenses must be presented in writing and attached to the original travel authorization.
- Financial hardship expenses for long-term TDY assignments may not exceed a 45-day period and for 45-day increments thereafter.

No **financial hardship exceptions** are allowed in the following situations:

- The employee has elected not to accept and use the Government contractor-issued charge card as an alternative funding resource.
- The REE agency or the Government contractor has suspended or revoked the traveler's charge card because of delinquent payment or misuse.

6. Procedures for ARS

These procedures apply to all requests for travel advances for official TDY assignments and transfer of station. Complete instructions for preparing Section E of the AD-202 are contained in the NFC Voucher and Invoice Payments Manual.

Traveler

- Request the preparation of an AD-202, Travel Authorization/Advance.
- Sign and date Section E for your travel advance request.
- Process through the following levels of management (as applicable).

AFM Division/Staff

- Review AD-202 for completeness.

Director/Research Leader/Location Coordinator

- Approve/disapprove the AD-202.

- If approved, forward AD-202 to LAO/ABFO/NFC for further processing (as applicable).
- If disapproved, return request to traveler.

Location Administrative Officer/Area Budget and Fiscal Officer

- Review AD-202 to determine if travel advance should be processed through NFC.
- Ensure approval has been recommended.
- Electronically release the AD-202 to NFC for processing of the travel advance.
NOTE: Process travel vouchers and liquidate travel advances within 5 days after returning from official travel or every 30 days if in a continuous travel status.

7. Procedures for NASS

- Approval for advance of funds for international travel and senior executives should be prepared for the Administrator's signature.
- The AD-202, Travel Authorization/Advance, Section E, must be completed along with the employee's signature and date.
- Forward through the employee's supervisor to the appropriate State Statistician, Branch Chief or Division Director for approval.

8. Procedures for ERS

- The AD-202, Travel Authorization/Advance, Section E, must be completed along with the employee's signature and date.
- Forward through the employee's supervisor to the appropriate Branch Chief or Division Director for approval.

9. Procedures for CSREES

- The AD-202, Travel Authorization/Advance, Section E, must be completed along with the employee's signature and date.

- Forward through the employee's supervisor to the appropriate Division Director or Deputy Administrator for approval.

10. Summary of Responsibilities

Approving Official. The approving official will be an official who ordinarily directs the travel of employees and approves their travel authorization. See P&P 340.0 for delegations of authority to approve travel. These officials will:

- Determine that the travel advances are made to persons authorized to perform official travel.
- Determine that the amount requested is necessary to accomplish the travel objective.
- Determine the propriety of the advance.
- Plan travel far enough in advance to allow for travel advances to be obtained from NFC by routine methods rather than by emergency methods.
- Take administrative action to have travelers liquidate outstanding travel advance balances.
- Obtain prompt repayment of travel advance balances from employees, non-USDA, and non-REE persons traveling for REE.
- Notify employees who are scheduled to have travel advance balances deducted from their salaries.

Employees and Non-Federal Government Persons will:

- Use travel advances for the purposes obtained.
- Submit AD-616 promptly to account for advances.
- Promptly repay travel advances no longer required for official travel.

11. Glossary

AAO. Area Administrative Officer

ABFO. Area Budget and Fiscal Officer

AD-202. Travel Authorization/Advance

AD-616. Travel Voucher

ATA. Area Transportation Assistant

ATR. Agriculture Travel Regulation

CONUS. Contiguous 48 United States and the District of Columbia

FMD. Financial Management Division

FTR. Federal Travel Regulation

LAO. Location Administrative Officer

LC. Location Coordinator

M&IE. Meals and Incidental Expense

NFC. National Finance Center

RL. Research Leader

TDY. Temporary Duty

/s/

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