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Policies and Procedures

Title: Foreign Travel Plan

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This DIRECTIVE states policies and procedures for approving foreign travel.

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1. REFERENCES

For guidance on revisions, cancellations, and additions to the Foreign Travel Plan, see the Foreign Travel Information System User Manual.

For delegations of authority, see DIRECTIVE 340.0.

For guidance on sharing travel costs with employees, see DIRECTIVE 341.1.

For guidance on accepting travel funds from sources outside of ARS, see DIRECTIVE 341.2.

For guidance on obtaining official passports and visas, see DIRECTIVE 345.3.

2. ABBREVIATIONS

- ABFO - Area Budget and Fiscal Officer (for HQ: FMD-BFSB)
- AD - Area Director
- ATR - Agriculture Travel Regulations
- BFSB - Budget and Fiscal Services Branch, FMD
- DA - Deputy Administrator
- DAAM - Deputy Administrator, Administrative Management
- FMD - Financial Management Division
- FTIS - Foreign Travel Information System
- FTP - Foreign Travel Plan
- HQ - Headquarters
- MU - Management Unit
- NPS - National Program Staff
- ODS - Official Duty Station
- RL - Research Leader
- RMIS - Research Management Information System
- TY - Travel Year

3. DEFINITIONS

Foreign International Meeting. A formal meeting or conference of three or more countries actively participating by presenting papers or otherwise formally involved in the subject matter of the meeting. This may include some workshops, seminars, or professional society meetings held in foreign countries; e.g., the European

Congress of the International Entomological Society. Normally, such international meetings are held every 2 to 4 years.

- International meetings may be convened by any international, intergovernmental, or nongovernmental organization or congress, or at the invitation of a foreign Government, or by an organizing group or committee.
- National meetings of U.S. societies held in Canada or Mexico are not classified as international meetings even though persons from other countries may attend.

FTP. A dynamic plan that reflects approved foreign trips for ARS employees to attend international meetings and work-related travel that occur outside the 50 United States and its territories.

FTIS. An automated system located in RMIS to track and monitor information on (a) recommended and approved travel to attend foreign international meetings, and (b) certain types of work-related foreign travel.

Work-Related Foreign Travel is all foreign travel for purposes of conducting official business other than to attend international meetings.

Intermittent Travel to Work Sites in Foreign Countries is travel to foreign work sites outside the United States that are within the organizational, programmatic, or geographical jurisdiction of the Area or HQ staff. Foreign travel to the Canal Zone, the Caribbean, Central and South America, and Mexico for the ongoing research support of the Medfly, screw worm, and Africanized bee research programs is included in this category. The Administrator may designate and include other research programs in this category.

TY is designated as the period beginning April 1 of one calendar year and extending through March 31 of the following year.

4. AUTHORITY

ATR 1-16

5. POLICY

It is ARS policy that foreign travel, to attend international meetings and work-related foreign travel, shall contribute to the primary goals of the ARS Program Plan and the ARS 6-Year Implementation Plan.

6. RESPONSIBILITIES

The AD will approve foreign travel to attend international meetings based on travel plans submitted by the RL's for the Areas except foreign meetings designated by NPS as requiring the Administrator's approval. The Administrator will approve foreign travel for his/her immediate staff; i.e., AD's, DA's, etc.

The AD's, DA-NPS, or DAAM, as appropriate, will approve work-related foreign travel for employees in their organizations.

7. CONCEPTUAL OVERVIEW

For purposes of this DIRECTIVE, a distinction is made between foreign travel to attend international meetings and work-related travel.

Travel to attend certain international meetings must be approved from a national perspective to ensure relevancy to ARS mission and high-priority programs, and that ARS is neither overrepresented nor underrepresented at these meetings. NPS will review the list of meetings and select those requiring the Administrator's approval.

The planning and approval procedures in this DIRECTIVE do not apply to domestic travel to attend international meetings held in the United States, its territories, or possessions. This type of travel should be approved and managed the same as any other work-related domestic travel.

8. FTIS

The FTIS is an automated database that contains information about both foreign travel to attend international meetings and work-related foreign travel. It is used to monitor approved foreign travel to attend international and work-related meetings and to report trip highlights and accomplishments on both types of foreign travel.

- The **International Meeting Table** contains data on all international meetings scheduled during the designated TY. Each meeting has a record that contains the name, date, location, and an assigned international meeting number for that meeting. A complete listing of the meetings with pertinent information can be obtained from this file.
- The **Active FTIS File** contains a record for each leg of a foreign trip. Some of the data elements in the record include name of traveler, destination, purpose of the trip, estimated cost of the trip, and the source of funds for the trip.
 - **Foreign Travel Included in the FTIS.**
 - **International Meetings.** All foreign travel for attendance at international meetings that has is approved by the AD and those meetings requiring the Administrator's approval.
 - **Work-Related Foreign Travel.**
 - All foreign travel that is requested by sources outside ARS, including the Secretary of Agriculture or other U.S. agencies, foreign Governments or international organizations and agencies, to provide technical assistance or advice, to confer with scientists on ongoing research programs, or to perform scientific research at institutions in foreign locations.
 - Travel to Central and South America and Mexico for the Medfly, screwworm or Africanized bee research programs, or other research programs designated by the Administrator.
 - Travel directed by HQ for special projects, such as germplasm and plant exploration teams, fellowship programs, and narcotics program review travel.
 - All foreign travel in conjunction with ARS in-house programs, including technology transfer training, and foreign-based programs.
- **Foreign Travel Excluded from the FTIS.**
 - Travel to relocate to a permanent duty station in or from a foreign country.
 - Home leave travel.

- Travel within the countries of assignment for employees stationed at overseas duty stations.
- **Reports.**
International Meeting Plan. A list of each international meeting scheduled is generated for NPS review so that meetings can be designated as requiring the Administrator's approval.

9. CRITERIA FOR APPROVING TRAVEL

International and work-related foreign travel will be reviewed and prioritized at several management levels as part of the approval process. Program managers at each organizational level will screen and submit trip requests to the next management level. Managers at different levels will consider travel requests from different perspectives. However, some basic criteria should be applied and used to approve or disapprove all travel requests. The following criteria are not inclusive, but should be used to place emphasis on the relationship and the merit of the foreign travel in accomplishing the mission of the ARS Program Plan.

- **Purpose of Travel.** The purpose of travel should support the program priorities as established in the ARS Program Plan and contribute either directly or indirectly to the accomplishment of priority research projects.
- **The Role of the Employee.** Employees who are approved to travel should have a high level of participation in the purpose of the travel (e.g., chairing a meeting session or presenting a scientific paper would involve a higher degree of participation than just attending a scientific meeting). The employee's assignments or areas of specialty should be directly related to the purpose of the travel. Additionally, employees should possess the necessary knowledge and skills to participate and accomplish the goals and objectives of the travel.
- **Benefits of the Travel.** The anticipated benefits of the travel should be evaluated in light of the ARS Program Plan and in terms of the specific programs on which it impacts. Benefits should be applicable to ongoing research.
- **Relationship With Requesting Organization.** The ARS Program Plan calls for close coordination with other research organizations in and out of USDA, the action agencies in USDA, and other organizations that use ARS' research

findings. Therefore, when making a decision to recommend or approve a travel request, approving officials should consider whether cooperating with the requesting sponsoring organization will further the goals of the ARS Program Plan.

- **Annual Leave.** Employees should avoid taking excessive amounts of annual leave (more than 3 to 5 days) in conjunction with official travel. Recommending and approving officials should consider the effect of the use of annual leave on the employee's research projects at his/her official duty station.

- **Impact to the MU.**
 - No more than one-fourth of the scientists in an MU can attend the same meeting.
 - Consider All Other funds available within a project to a unit before approving foreign travel.

- **Employee Travel History.** Secondary to the ARS objective of sending our best representatives, the approving official may want to consider other qualified employees who have not attended the meeting or have attended it less frequently but can still do a very good job of representing ARS.

- **Employee Travel Plan - Current Year.** Consider domestic travel plans for the TY. Scientists on Performance Improvement Plans are not to be approved for foreign travel. The same employee cannot attend more than two meetings per year without a special justification.

10. PROCEDURES FOR APPROVING FOREIGN TRAVEL

Responsible Person/Office	ACTION	Target Completion/ Approval Date
AD's or DA-NPS	1 Submit international meeting names, dates, city, and country to FMD-BFSB for inclusion in international meeting list.	Ongoing, as meetings become known

FMD-BFSB	2	Enter international meeting names as submitted and assign number.	Ongoing, as meetings become known
DA-NPS	3	Determine which meetings require the Administrator's approval. Designate NPS coordinators who will be responsible for managing ARS representation at each international meeting.	Within 2 weeks of new meeting entry
Traveler/ Location	4	Submit foreign travel requests in accordance with instructions contained in FTIS User Manual. Locations are responsible for keeping data current in the FTIS.	Ongoing, as meetings become known
RL's	5	Review, screen, and approve/disapprove requests according to stated criteria. Requests which are approved should be prioritized and forwarded to AD.	2 weeks after meeting requested
AD's	6	Approve/disapprove employees to attend international meetings and work-related travel.	2 weeks after request received
DA-NPS	7	Recommend approval/disapproval of appropriate international travel.	2 weeks after request received
Administrator	8	Approve/disapprove recommended international travel.	

11. PROCEDURES FOR PREPARING TRIP REPORTS

The traveler will prepare a mandatory trip report upon completion of foreign travel. The report will be a brief digest highlighting the basic accomplishments of the trip. This report will be entered into the RMIS/FTIS and should not exceed 54 lines of 75 characters. It should include personnel contacted, achievements, actual cost of the trip, etc. This trip report is not in lieu of any requirement for a more detailed trip report that may be required by the AD or supervisor.

Responsible Person/Office		ACTION	Target Completion/ Approval Date
Traveler	1	Prepare the trip report(s) and forward to the approving official via RMIS/ FTIS.	Within 15 workdays of return to ODS
Approving Official	2	Review and approve/disapprove trip report.	Within 5 workdays after receipt
Area Travel Clerk	3	Enter approving official's signature in RMIS/FTIS to move record into official database.	Within 5 workdays after signature

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