



Traveling on University Business FAQ

Related Policy: [Direct Costs on Sponsored Projects](#)

Related Policy: [Traveling on University Business](#)

General Questions

1. Where are the per diem rates located?

Consult the [US Government General Services Administration \(GSA\)](#) website for domestic per diems.

Consult the [US State Department website](#) for international per diems.

2. If the per diem rate for meals seems too low for the location, can I request reimbursement at a higher rate, exceeding the per diem (for Domestic & International)?

No, meal reimbursement is limited to the per diem rate. The GSA has an email process that allows users to provide feedback for regarding inadequate per diem rates. GSA considers this information when reviewing rates.

3. What amount do I use if I cannot find my destination city on the website – (for Domestic & International)?

Use the [GSA web site](#) for domestic travel. Select the state where you wish to view a rate and use the CONUS "Standard Rate" provided.

Use the [Foreign Per Diem Rates](#) on the US DOS website for international travel. Select the country where you wish to view a rate and use the Post Name "Other" rate provided.

4. The per diem sites mention incidentals. Is that amount included in the daily meal per diem total and can I claim it – (for Domestic & International)?

The Meals and Incidental Expenses (M&IE) rate table lists a separate amount for incidental expenses. Travelers can claim this amount for each day of travel for domestic and international travel.

5. The conference includes a continental breakfast (rolls, juice, coffee, etc.). Can I eat a full breakfast elsewhere and claim the per diem?

No, unless there is a business or health reason for an alternate meal.

6. Are there limitations on how to spend the per diem?

The purpose of per diem is to reimburse employees a flat rate for travel related meal expenses. Broad discretion is granted to travelers on how and where the per diem is spent. However, the University will not reimburse for documented alcohol expenses.

7. Is per diem allowed for extended day travel?

Extended day travel must be 12 hours or longer. Employees may occasionally request reimbursement for dinner per diem only and under prescribed limits. Breakfast and lunch are NOT reimbursable expenses for extended day travel.

8. I manage an employee in Duluth whose job responsibilities require frequent travel to the Twin Cities. Most of the time the employee is not in extended day or overnight travel status. I believe the employee should receive incremental compensation to cover their meal expenses. How do I determine the appropriate amount of incremental compensation?

At the beginning of the year, estimate the number of trips that may be required during the year and the estimated meal costs. Augment the employee's salary for this amount through payroll, using a separate earning code (contact the HRMS Payroll Department for the appropriate code). At a minimum, annually review the augmentation. For questions, consult with the University Tax Director.

9. While campuses, colleges, and departments may not establish policies different from the University's policy, can travelers claim less than the per diem?

At the traveler's discretion, they may choose to claim less than the per diem allowed.

10. How do two or more employees in travel status together handle reimbursement when one employee pays the bill for dining?

It is recommended that the employees' request separate checks or each employee claim their per diem and "work it out themselves" after being reimbursed.

11. When an employee's trip involves multiple cities (e.g. Chicago in the afternoon and London in the evening) what is the appropriate meal per diem rate?

The traveler should claim meal per diem specific for the destination city. This is to eliminate confusion and administrative burden.

12. An employee travels for University business from Sunday to Wednesday and personal travel from Wednesday to Sunday. What days do we reimburse meal per diems and how much?

The employee would be reimbursed 75% of the meal per diem for Sunday and Wednesday (their first and last days of business travel) and full per diem for Monday and Tuesday.

13. My unit is requiring receipts for parking expenses below \$25 from employees seeking travel reimbursement on non-sponsored ChartField strings. Is this allowed?

No, receipts are required only for expenses of \$25 or more. Departments, colleges, campuses, and units cannot establish policies that differ from the University-wide policy.

14. While entertaining a non-employee (recruitment, fundraising, etc.) while in travel status, must I stay within the meal per diem allowance for my meal?

This type of expense falls under Administrative Policy: [Hospitality and Other Special Expenses](#); not Administrative Policy: [Traveling on University Business](#). Hospitality does allow for expenses beyond the per diem with appropriate documentation. *Note:* Itemized receipts are required.

15. A traveler returned from a trip and submitted a request for reimbursement more than 60 days after the conclusion of travel. The traveler provided no justification for the late reimbursement. Does this reimbursement have to be reported as taxable income?

Yes.

16. A traveler returned from a trip and submitted a request for reimbursement more than 60 days after the conclusion of travel. In the justification for the late reimbursement the traveler noted a medical reason for why they were unable to submit their reimbursement within 60 days. Does this reimbursement have to be reported as taxable income?

This request may meet the definition of extenuating circumstances to be reimbursed as non-taxable. Consult with the Chief Financial Manager for a final decision.

Travel on Sponsored Funds

17. How do I obtain prior approval from a sponsor?

Draft a request that justifies the business need for the expense. Submit the request to the grant administrator in Sponsored Projects Administration for approval and transmittal to the appropriate business officer at the sponsoring organization.

18. What is the Fly America Act and when can I use other carriers?

According to federal regulations, if you travel using federal project funds, you must use a U.S. flag air carrier if service provided by such a carrier is "available." This rule applies to air transportation to, from, between, or within a country other than the U.S. Under the law, U.S. flag air carrier service is considered "available" even if:

- o Comparable or a different kind of service can be provided at less cost by a foreign-flag air carrier;
- o Foreign flag air carrier service is preferred or is more convenient;
- o Service by a foreign flag air carrier can be paid for in excess foreign currency.

For more information, refer to the University of Minnesota [Travel Services Fly America Act Regulations](#) website.

19. Federal regulations require me to fly to the conference but for medical reasons, I am unable to fly. What do I need to do to take the train or drive my car?

Travelers must obtain prior approval from the sponsor if rail or vehicle expenses exceed the cost of airfare. Include a copy of that approval with the Expense Report documentation.

If the train or vehicle expenses are equal to or less than the airfare cost, prior approval is not necessary. Include documentation with the Expense Report comparing the costs and highlighting the savings.

20. If I use sponsored funds for a trip, must I certify the effort on that project?

If the traveler is providing effort to that project during that effort quarter, yes the traveler must certify the effort.

If the traveler is not providing effort to that project during that effort quarter, it is then dependent on the traveler's role on the project and how federal regulations must be applied:

- o If a principal investigator or a senior researcher: No, the effort can be uncommitted cost sharing, which does not require certification.

- o If an employee with a full time (100%) appointment on another project: Yes, because that person is employed full time by the other project and has no "outside" time to spend traveling. Travel expenses are permitted on the second project only if the employee decreases their effort on the first project, puts it on the second, and certifies the effort. The effort must be certified or cost shared to the project during the effort period in which the travel occurs.
- o If a trainee (appointed on a training grant) or an employee with a part time (less than 100% appointment): No. If the principal investigator has determined this travel is necessary for the project, the principal investigator may incur travel expenses against the project for activity or travel that occurs outside of the University appointment. The effort does not require certification but it does require documentation in the comments section of the Expense Report, such as "This travel or activity occurred outside of my University appointment time."

21. May I charge a cancellation fee or a flight change fee to a sponsored account?

Any time a University account pays for a flight change fee, sponsored or non-sponsored, there should be a valid business reason. If the charge is on a sponsored account, there should be a valid business reason and evidence of savings presented if the change results in leaving early. These savings could be hotel charges as well as savings on per diems. If there is no savings greater than or equal to the fee then the traveler should seek sponsor's approval and submit documentation with the travel reimbursement.

22. Can I extend a trip to take advantage of resources that will benefit the project? For example, an expert is available to meet after a conference and the delaying the return trip. Can I charge a change fee for the airline ticket to the project?

Request a written approval from the sponsor if you can support the change fees and additional costs by a valid business reason. Include a copy of that approval with the Expense Report documentation.

23. When do I need prior sponsored approval to travel on a project?

- o The sponsor requires prior approval.
- o The travel is a result of, or results in a change in, the work scope.

24. Can a student travel on a grant?

Yes, if the travel is necessary and provides benefit to the project. Follow the procedures below:

- o If the student is a full time employee on the grant, certify the effort on the sponsored project when the student incurs travel expenses.
- o If the student is on a training grant or an employee with a part time (less than 100%) appointment on a different project, do not certify the effort but provide an explanation in the Comments section of the Expense Report such as, "This travel/activity occurred outside of my University appointment time."
- o If the student is not an employee or a trainee, do not certify the effort. Justify the expenses according to justification standards and include a statement that indicates that the student travels on a volunteer basis.

25. The conference ends on Friday, can I stay over through Saturday night to take advantage of a cheaper airfare?

If all associated trip costs (meals, lodging, transportation, etc.) for a Saturday night stay are lower than the trip cost to return on Friday, than yes. Include documentation with the Expense Report comparing the costs and highlight the savings.

26. A sponsor allows first-class travel; however, University policy does not allow this (see exception in #25). Can I fly first class and charge the grant?

Follow applicable federal or nonfederal sponsored regulations:

- o **Federal sponsor:** The federal Government Services Administration identifies specific criteria for first class and business travel. Follow those regulations found on the [US General Services Administration](#) travel information website
- o **Nonfederal sponsor:** Request a prior written approval from the sponsor if the additional fee is supported by a valid business reason. Include a copy of that approval with the Expense Report.

27. Can I upgrade an airline coach seat to first-class?

Policy states:

"When the total flight time, excluding layovers, from departure to arrival is 8 or more hours, travelers may, with preapproval from their unit, upgrade from coach to the next most economical class of travel over coach (business class in most cases, first class in cases where business class is not offered)."

If using sponsored funds, follow the instructions in question 24.

Policy allows this if you are using personal funds or personal frequent flyer miles. However, you must have clear documentation to prove that sponsored or University funds were not used. A receipt indicating use of a personal credit card or a printout of your personal frequent flyer account will suffice.

Policy allows this if the airline automatically grants an upgrade based on travel status, and there is no cost.

28. Is per diem allowed for extended day travel?

Extended day travel must be 12 hours or longer. Employees may occasionally request reimbursement for dinner per diem only and under prescribed limits. Breakfast and lunch are NOT reimbursable expenses.

Accrual and Use of Frequent Flyer Miles

Applicability of the Policy

29. Does the policy apply to individuals other than employees?

No. This policy applies only to University employees. However, departments may choose to apply the policy to non-employees, such as students, contractors, volunteers, or other individuals who travel at University expense.

30. Does this policy apply to frequent flyer miles accrued while traveling on sponsored funds?

Yes. The policy and the Minnesota statute refer to "public funds," which include any funds received by the University from any source, including sponsored funds.

31. If the federal grant, contract, or policy of the granting agency allows me to use frequent flyer miles for personal use, may I do so?

No. Although the funding source may not prohibit the use of frequent flyer miles for personal use, the State of Minnesota does prohibit such use.

32. Does the policy apply regardless of where or how I purchase the tickets?

Yes.

33. Why don't miles accrue to a department or central University pool rather than to an individual?

Airlines will only issue mileage credits to individuals and not to corporate entities such as the University.

Tracking Frequent Flyer Credits

34. Must I use a frequent flyer account if I travel on University business?

The Statute does not require employees to establish a frequent flyer account.

35. How do I track business miles separately from personal miles?

You may establish a separate frequent flyer account for University business travel. This assures separate accounting and appropriate documentation. Alternatively, if you choose to have a single account, keep a copy of your frequent flyer statements and indicate the trips flown at University expense.

36. Do the airlines allow more than one frequent flyer account per traveler?

Delta Airlines and American Airlines will allow you to set up separate accounts by slightly varying the account information provided to the airlines (e.g., use a middle initial on one account but not on the other or use a home address for your personal account and a work address for your University [business] account). Contact the airlines for more information.

37. Do I own Bonus Miles?

No. If an airline awards Bonus Miles in connection with the purchase of an airline ticket for University travel, whether based on status (e.g., Silver/Platinum/Gold Member) or other airline promotions (e.g., on-line check-ins) those Bonus Miles must accrue to the University.

38. If I have credits accrued on a specific airline, should I give a preference to that airline over other airlines in order to maximize the likelihood of earning a ticket for the University?

It depends on the cost of the ticket. Do not give preference to a specific airline if the ticket costs more than a ticket on a non-membership airline.

Using Free Tickets

39. Can I combine or pool miles from different employees' frequent flyer accounts to have enough miles for a free ticket?

No. The airlines will not allow individuals to combine or pool miles from different individual's accounts.

40. May I use my University frequent flyer points to upgrade to business or first class?

If your total one way air time will be 8 hours or more, you may use your frequent flyer points to upgrade to business or first class.

41. Can another University traveler use a ticket if I have accrued enough miles for it?

Yes. The traveler who earned the points may redeem them for a ticket in another traveler's name.

42. How do I get a ticket for another University traveler?

The individual who has accrued the miles may contact the airlines and arrange a ticket in another individual's name.

43. If I use my own personal frequent flyer miles to purchase a ticket for University business, can I be compensated/reimbursed?

No. The University will not compensate/reimburse employees or non-employees for use of personal frequent flyer miles.

Monitoring Compliance

44. Does the University monitor compliance with this policy?

Yes. Travel by individuals is subject to review or audit.

45. What is the penalty for non-compliance?

By virtue of Minnesota statute, the University "owns" frequent flyer credits/benefits awarded when University funds are used to pay for an employee's airline ticket. As such, using these credits for personal or non-University use is akin to any other misappropriation of University funds or property, and may subject an employee to discipline, up to and including termination. Repayment of funds may also be required based on fair market value. In addition, converting frequent flyer miles earned through a ticket purchased with University funds for personal use may subject an employee to civil or criminal prosecution under Minnesota law. In such cases, employees may not be eligible for defense and indemnification under Board of Regents Policy: *Legal Defense and Indemnification of Employees*, which precludes coverage when an employee has reasonable cause to believe that their own conduct was unlawful.

University Policy Program

350-2 McNamara Alumni Center, Minneapolis, MN 55455 - P: [612-624-8081](tel:612-624-8081), policy@umn.edu

Have a good faith belief there has been a violation of University policy? Please report concerns to your supervisor, the appropriate University administrator to investigate the matter, or submit a report to [UReport](#).

