

FDA STAFF MANUAL GUIDES, VOLUME III - GENERAL ADMINISTRATION

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

TRAVEL

ACTUAL EXPENSE REQUESTS AND LODGING DEPOSITS

Effective Date: 09/27/2016

1. Purpose
2. Background
3. Reference/Authority
4. Definitions
5. Policy
6. Responsibilities
7. Procedures
6. Effective Date
7. History

Appendix A - Request for Approval of  
Actual Expense Allowance Memo

**1. PURPOSE.**

This guide provides Food and Drug Administration (FDA) policy and reimbursement procedures for the approval of actual expenses incurred on official government travel.

**2. BACKGROUND.**

The General Service Administration (GSA) provides authority for agencies to reimburse travelers for actual and necessary travel expenses in certain approved circumstances while on official travel. In addition, this authority prohibits reimbursement for advance lodging costs prior to official travel.

**3. REFERENCE/AUTHORITY.**

- A. Department of Health and Human Services Travel Policy Manual, January 2012 Chapter 3 and 5 ([http://www.psc.gov/docs/default-source/travel/2012\\_policy\\_manual.pdf?sfvrsn=4](http://www.psc.gov/docs/default-source/travel/2012_policy_manual.pdf?sfvrsn=4))
- B. Federal Travel Regulations (FTR), Sections 300-3.1, 301-11.D, 301-71.301 ([www.gsa.gov/federaltravelregulation](http://www.gsa.gov/federaltravelregulation))

#### 4. DEFINITIONS.

- A. Actual Expense – Payment of authorized actual expenses incurred, up to the limit prescribed by the Administrator of GSA or agency, as appropriate. Entitlement to reimbursement is contingent upon entitlement to per diem, and is subject to the same definitions and rules governing per diem. The amount authorized may be reimbursed up to 300 percent of the GSA maximum for the temporary duty (TDY) location.
- B. Continental United States (CONUS) – The 48 contiguous States and the District of Columbia.
- C. Non-Foreign Area Outside the Continental United States (OCONUS)- The States of Alaska and Hawaii, the Commonwealths of Puerto Rico, Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands and the territories and possessions of the United States (excludes the Trust Territories of the Pacific Islands).
- D. Outside the Continental United States (OCONUS) (see International Travel) – The States of Alaska and Hawaii, the Commonwealths of Puerto Rico, Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands and the territories and possessions of the United States (excludes the Trust Territories of the Pacific Islands).
- E. International Travel – The terms “international travel” and “outside the United States,” as used in this manual, are defined as meaning all travel on official duty time (except change of official stations) outside the 50 United States, Guam, American Samoa, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, the Northern Mariana Islands, and any other territory under U.S. jurisdiction. (The term foreign travel may also be used.) Trips to the former U.S. Trust Territories in the Pacific, which are now independent (the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of Palau, and the Marshall Islands), are considered international travel. Note: An HHS traveler stationed outside the United States who conducts official travel solely between foreign countries must follow U.S. Department of State regulations and guidance.
- F. Travel Authorization (Order) – Written permission to travel on official business. There are three basic types of travel authorizations (orders) specified in DHHS Travel Policy Manual, Section 3.1.4: Unlimited-open; Limited-open; and Trip-by-trip.
- G. Travel Claim (Voucher) – Written request, supported by documentation and receipts where applicable, for reimbursement of expenses incurred in the performance of official travel.

## 5. POLICY.

### A. General Policy

This Staff Manual Guide (SMG) applies to both contiguous United States (CONUS) and outside the contiguous United States (OCONUS) travel and is applicable to both Civilian and Commissioned Corps employees when traveling on behalf of the FDA. If Commissioned Corps employees are deployed on military orders, they should follow the Joint Travel Regulations (JTR).

### B. Actual Expense Allowance

FDA employees are expected to travel on a lodgings-plus per diem basis as defined by the Federal Government, except in limited, unusual situations when actual expenses exceed Federal Government rates and is specifically authorized or approved before the particular trip. Under the lodgings-plus per diem method, a maximum per diem rate is established for lodging plus M&IE, at a specified location. For more information about per diem, please refer to HHS Travel Policy Manual, Section 5.1.

Employees on official government travel may state on their travel authorization in the FDA's electronic travel system, which is currently ConcurGov (ConcurGov), that actual expense reimbursement is warranted when:

1. The hosting organization has a prearranged meeting site (i.e., rooms are booked with the hotel well in advance of the meeting dates);
2. Hotel accommodations at the maximum (i.e., Government) lodging rate cannot be obtained within a five-mile radius of the TDY Location/meeting site in a major city, and local ground transportation (e.g., taxi) costs to commute to and from the hotel at the Government lodging rate to the meeting site would negate any savings achieved by staying at the hotel with the Government lodging rate;
3. Hotel accommodations at the maximum (i.e., Government) lodging rate cannot be obtained because travel is to a geographic location where the costs have escalated temporarily due to a special event (e.g., sporting, festival, major conference) and nearby cities/towns have escalated their hotel rates;
4. Safety and security concerns (e.g., heightened terrorist alerts, disease outbreak); or
5. Any other reason acceptable and approved by the agency.

In these unusual circumstances, the Center/Office delegated approving officials may authorize a daily actual expense reimbursement rate up to 300 percent of the applicable maximum per diem rate, but the reimbursement rate should not be set higher than necessary under the circumstances for each day of travel. There is no regulatory authority to exceed the 300 percent ceiling. A per diem rate at or near the ceiling level should be exceedingly rare and must be thoroughly justified on the travel authorization.

#### 1. Authorization of Actual Expense Allowance

A request for authorization for an actual expense allowance must be made in advance of travel using the Request for Approval of Actual Expense Memo. Approval should be documented on the travel authorization in accordance with the procedures outlined in Section 7 of this SMG.

When an actual expense allowance is approved for a location, this will apply to the lodging component of the per diem only. The fixed rate for meals and incidental expenses is not affected.

The actual expense authorization will apply only to the destination points specifically named and approved; any other destination points on the trip will have the lodgings-plus per diem rate applied. As a result, both lodgings-plus per diem and actual expenses reimbursement may be applied to a travel authorization because there is more than one destination and approval for actual expenses reimbursement has only been given for some of the destinations. In these circumstances, the lodgings-plus per diem rate would be applied to all other destinations for which actual expenses reimbursement has not been requested.

Actual expense reimbursement may also be approved after travel is completed ("post-approval") when properly justified, under the following conditions:

- a. Emergency situations in which requests for prior travel authorization were not possible;
- b. Unanticipated, unusual, and exceptional circumstances which, during the course of the specific travel assignment, resulted in the incurrence of actual and necessary subsistence expenses that were much greater than the authorized per diem allowance; or

- c. Other unusual circumstances that would necessitate approval by the appropriate delegated official.

### C. Advance Lodging Deposit

The FDA policy is to only purchase refundable travel-related reservations, such as hotel rooms and airline tickets, because travel can be cancelled at any time. Should the employee purchase non-refundable reservations, the employee will not be reimbursed by the FDA if the trip is cancelled for unforeseeable circumstances.

FDA employees are encouraged to find lodging facilities that do not require an advance deposit to secure the room. The FDA will not reimburse any traveler for an advance room deposit prior to travel. The FDA will reimburse the cost of the room deposit as claimed on the travel voucher once the traveler has returned to the permanent duty station and submits the travel voucher in ConcurGov. As always, a lodging receipt should accompany the claim.

## **6. RESPONSIBILITIES.**

The primary roles and responsibilities for the policy directives and required procedures within this chapter are as follows:

### A. Responsibilities of OFM

1. Review and provide final approval of requests for actual expense allowance reimbursement

### B. Responsibilities of the Employee's Center/Office Delegated Approving Official

1. Verify the information on the employee's request for actual expense allowance reimbursement for accuracy
2. Review and approve requests for actual expense allowance reimbursement

### C. Responsibilities of the Employee

1. Prepare the request for approval of actual expense allowance and submit it for approval with the travel authorization

## **7. PROCEDURES.**

To request an actual expense allowance reimbursement, the employee must complete the Request for Approval of Actual Expense Allowance memo. The request memo should be addressed to the Senior Travel Official (STO) and all sections of the memo must be fully completed. For example, even if a comparison hotel is sold out, its information should be entered in the memo along with the stipulation that the hotel is sold out

When requesting actual expense allowance for lodgings, the request memo must indicate (a) the daily lodging cost to be incurred and (b) a specific explanation of why the traveler is unable to use more moderately priced accommodations. Such requests should normally be based on documented unavailability of hotel accommodations within the lodgings component of the per diem rate. Lodging rates must be documented for at least three moderately priced hotels, showing that the targeted hotel is the lowest of the three but still exceeds the allowable per diem rate. Luxury hotels may not be used in making this comparison. For further information on what types of lodging should be used in this comparison, please refer to the definition of the "Prudent Person Rule" in the HHS Travel Policy Manual, Section 14 (Glossary).

The employee should upload the completed Request for Approval of Actual Expense Allowance memo with their travel authorization. The request memo and travel authorization will be submitted to traveler's Center/Office delegated approving official for review. The delegated approving official will verify that that the information provided by the employee on the request memo is accurate and then determine whether to approve or deny the request. Final approval of requests for actual expense allowance reimbursement will be provided by OFM.

If a request for an actual expense allowance reimbursement is made post-travel, then the employee shall follow the same procedures as listed above within five (5) days of returning from travel. If the employee is on long-term TDY travel greater than 30 nights or more, then the employee shall follow the same procedures as listed above every thirty (30) days. The request documentation must include justification in accordance with the conditions listed section 5.B.1 of this manual in addition to the justification required for an actual expense allowance reimbursement in section 5.B.

## **8. EFFECTIVE DATE.**

The guide was signed by Peter Kelchner, Acting Director - Office of Financial Management, effective September 27, 2016.

**9. Document History – SMG 2340.3, Actual Expense Requests and Lodging Deposits**

<b>STATUS (I, R, C)</b>	<b>DATE APPROVED</b>	<b>LOCATION OF CHANGE HISTORY</b>	<b>CONTACT</b>	<b>APPROVING OFFICIAL</b>
Initial	10/22/2009	N/a	OC/OA/ OFO/OFM	William Collinson, Acting Director, Office of Financial Management
Revision	09/26/2016	N/a	OC/OO/ OFBA/OFM	Peter Kelchner, Acting Director, OFM

[Back to General Administration, Volume III \(2000-3999\)](#)

**APPENDIX A – Request for Approval of Actual Expense Allowance Memo**

Here is the URL for the Request for Approval of Actual Expense Allowance Memo:  
(<http://inside.fda.gov:9003/downloads/Administrative/Travel/TravelInformation/UCM501019.pdf>).