

**TAMPA VA RESEARCH AND EDUCATION FOUNDATION, INC.**  
**Standard Operating Procedure**  
**TVAREF SOP- 04 – Travel Policy**  
**Revised – July 23, 2019 – Original Date - November 3, 2008**

Tampa VA Research and Education Foundation, Inc. (TVAREF) may support expenses for the domestic or foreign travel of authorized individuals to bona fide scientific meetings or for other research or research-related educational purposes. The travel support will be consistent with TVAREF policies and the stipulations of any relevant funding source(s).

The Executive Director must approve travel related to educational or training activities. If the travel reimbursement is for a visiting fellow or scholar, the visa status of the individual must allow such reimbursement. TVAREF Board must pre-approve travel for foreign fellows or scientists.

**TRAVEL PROCEDURES**

After approval and notification of travel has been received from TVAREF, travelers should purchase their own tickets, pay for their costs, and apply for reimbursement after the travel is completed. Cash advances and pre-paid airfare are generally not provided to members or other non-TVAREF employees. Pre-paid airfare may be available to TVAREF employees.

The approved request should be submitted on the TVAREF Travel Reimbursement Form either as a PDF or in the Excel template. Requests for reimbursement should be submitted within 60 days after travel has been completed. The traveler must sign and certify that the expenses were incurred for official business of TVAREF or VA research or education activities, and that such expenses were not reimbursed by another organization.

If another organization is providing partial reimbursement for a trip, sufficient information must be provided to TVAREF to show that we are reimbursing appropriately. For example, the VA travel documents showing which items have been reimbursed and the amount. If a PI has agreed to fund only a set portion of a trip, that should be documented, and settled between the PI and traveler prior to making any travel related purchases.

An agenda or documentation of the meeting dates, location, and topic or theme must be provided. A program guide or brochure (a copy of the cover is sufficient if all the information is stated on it); an invitation letter; or other written documentation that includes the dates, location and purpose must be submitted with the reimbursement request as part of the justification for expenses.

## **Registration**

After travel has been approved by the appropriate parties (PI, Service Chief, and/or TVAREF Executive Director as necessary), meeting registrations can be pre-paid through TVAREF directly to the meeting organizer. Alternatively, the registration cost will be reimbursed after the meeting along with other travel expenses.

## **Lodging**

Full reimbursement of reasonable lodging expenses with appropriate documentation will be made. Please consult the General Services Administration lodging rates by city for the current year for guidance on reasonable lodging rates. The original itemized hotel bill must be submitted with the signed and approved travel reimbursement request. Government rate should be requested, if not available, approval will be required from the TVAREF Executive Director.

## **Per Diem**

The per diem reimbursement (meal and incidental expenses) will be at the federal per diem rate. Travel days will be paid at full day per diem rate for TVAREF employees, regardless of the time of departure. Travel that begins and ends within the same day (e.g., 7 AM to 7 PM) will not include per diem reimbursement.

If a member plans to host a special dinner meeting with research collaborators, these costs must comply with the policy "Meeting and Conference Support." Such events should be pre-approved with the Executive Director or designee to ensure that the reimbursement will be allowable.

## **Transportation**

Reimbursement for travel costs will be based on the most reasonable method of travel to the location. Any airfare class that is more expensive than coach airfare requires pre-approval by the Executive Director or designated authority. If there is insufficient justification for premium class airfare, or approval was not issued in advance, the full cost of the airfare may not be reimbursed.

If the traveler chooses to take an indirect route, interrupt the business travel or utilize a mode of travel that requires additional accommodations, any resulting expense will be borne by the traveler.

The cost of a rental automobile may be allowable under certain circumstances. For example, if rooms are unavailable at the conference hotel, a shuttle service is not available, or cab fare is prohibitively expensive. However, car rental is allowable only as an exception. Pre-approval is required. Specialty vehicles such as convertibles and SUVs are not allowable. Rental cars should be requested for multi-city travel, otherwise

shuttles, taxis, rideshare, or local transportation should be used for local transportation. Only transportation expenses relevant to trip purpose will be reimbursed.

Reimbursement for ground transport is limited to travel between the home or place of business and the airport; the airport and meeting site and return. Mileage expenses for private automobile use will be at published government rates. Reimbursements for travel using a private automobile will not exceed the cost of roundtrip coach airfare or the most reasonable travel method. Coach airfare will be reimbursed. Any exceptions require prior approval from the Executive Director or designated authority. If the appropriate authorization is not received prior to travel, reimbursement may be issued at coach airfare rates.

TVAREF recognizes the particular requirements of persons with disabilities and will make every effort to accommodate those needs. Please contact the TVAREF administrative office for further information.

Individual expense items must be accompanied by receipts in order to be reimbursed. If claiming mileage, a map printout (such as Google Maps or MapQuest) detailing the mileage and route must be included with the travel reimbursement request. Original receipts are required for reimbursement.

## **FOREIGN TRAVEL**

All foreign travel must be approved by TVAREF prior to the purchase of airfare or any required registration. International travel may require additional approval from the sponsor. The TVAREF grant administrator should be advised and will work with you to get this approval from the sponsor before any international travel is scheduled. In addition to the travel justification required for foreign conference trips, it must be demonstrated that there is not a comparable domestic alternative.

Foreign travel reimbursements should be submitted within 60 days from return of travel. The traveler must submit original receipts on the Travel Reimbursement form certifying the travel claim purpose, accuracy and appropriateness of expenditures.

### **Foreign Travel – Federal Grants**

For foreign travel to be charged to a federal project, the Guidelines on the Fly America Act must be followed. Failure to comply with the Fly America Act will result in non-allowable expenditures on a federal grant. These charges cannot be reimbursed from the grant. VA employees may have additional approval requirements for travel, and the traveler is responsible for complying with the procedures of JAHVH.

### **Transportation – Federal Grants – Fly America Act 49 U.S.C. 40118**

All flights charged to federal projects must be taken on U.S. flag air carriers or on foreign air carriers that code share with a U.S. flag carrier on the flight taken. This

includes flights within the U.S. if there is no U.S. carrier to your destination, you must travel on a U.S. carrier as far as possible. By law, additional cost for U.S. carrier flights is not sufficient justification to fly on foreign carriers. Please note that the same rules apply to foreign visitor flights.

### **Exceptions to the Fly America Act**

There are strictly limited circumstances in which an exception may be appropriate. For example:

- a U.S. flag carrier does not provide service on a particular leg of your trip
- The use of a U.S. carrier will unreasonably delay your travel time as defined by GSA Regulations
- You are involuntarily rerouted
- Medical or safety reasons per GSA regulations

The biggest exception to the Fly America Act is the Open Skies Agreement. When air travel is supported by federal funds, travel must either be on a U.S. carrier, or for specific destinations as outlined in the Open Skies Agreement. The Open Skies agreement does not apply if travel is funded by the Department of Defense or by a department of the U.S. military, these trips must be on a U.S. flag air carrier.

To satisfy regulatory requirements for charges to a federally sponsored project, a U.S. flag carrier designator code must be present on documentation for a flight; for example, UA1776 for United Flight 1776 or AA1787 for American Flight 1787. If you believe that you were on a code share flight, but there is no documentation showing the U.S. flag carrier code and flight number, you cannot charge the flight to a federally sponsored project.

A paper ticket or documentation for an e-ticket normally provides this proof. However, in some code sharing situations, only the boarding pass will show the U.S. flag carrier code. In this case, the boarding pass should be retained for documentation.

If you are claiming an exception under the Act, GSA Regulations 301-10.141 and 301-10.142, you must document the reason for the exception by submitting a Certification of Exception to Fly America Act Form. Submitting this information prior to or in conjunction with a reimbursement request, as applicable, will speed the payment process and is required prior to reimbursement.

### **VA Requirements**

As a government employee going on domestic or foreign travel, you are responsible for complying with the requirements of your employer. If you are a VA employee seeking reimbursement from TVAREF for travel related to your research or education programs, there are additional VA procedures you must follow. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Departmental approvals
- Travel status
- SharePoint submissions
- Government passport for foreign travel
- Foreign travel authorizations
- Concur authorizations and vouchers
- VA Form 0893 – Advance Review to Offer to Donate Support for Official Travel



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