

The Ledger

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Travel Planning and Reimbursement Changes

The Commonwealth of Virginia recently changed some of its travel policies and procedures. The university procedures closely mirror those of the state; therefore, some of our procedures have changed. Most of the procedures were effective on May 1, 2000. Exceptions to the May 1 date are noted in the description of the changes below. A brief listing of the changes are followed by a more detailed description of the travel revisions.

- 1) Total expense of the trip is no longer needed on the travel voucher.
- 2) Secretary of Education permission is not needed for conference travel.
- 3) The traveler's American Express card can be used to purchase airline tickets.
- 4) Personal vehicle mileage rate increases effective July 1, 2000.
- 5) The M&IE rates have been modified.
- 6) The lodging rates have been modified.
- 7) Virginia Tech cannot approve rates over 150% of the listed lodging rate.
- 8) Lodging limits for double, triple occupancy has been defined.
- 9) Hotel bills must show a zero balance.
- 10) Business meals must include an itemized receipt.
- 11) Out-of-country lodging and M&IE rates are available online.
- 12) Travelers may now claim some expenses for other travelers. (M&IE excluded.)

The following list is a more detailed explanation of each change and some implementation procedures.

- 1) The total cost of the trip no longer has to be recorded on the travel voucher. This change reduces the administrative tasks for the traveler and the department fiscal office. The total costs for a conference registration, airfare, and actual travel expenses may be useful to the department but it is no longer used by the Controller's Office or the State Department of Accounts in their review of the travel voucher.
- 2) The requirement to request Secretary of Education approval for more than two people traveling to the same conference has been eliminated.
- 3) The traveler's American Express travel card can now be used for the purchase of airline tickets. Reimbursement will be made on the travel reimbursement voucher after the trip occurs. The full itinerary and receipt must be attached to the travel voucher.

- 4) Effective July 1, 2000, the mileage rate to reimburse travelers for the use of their personal vehicle when no state vehicle is available will be increased to 32.5 cents per mile. The motor pool statement indicating no vehicle is available must be attached to the travel voucher. This rate also applies to mileage driven when the trip is less than 100 miles. The one-half cent must always be rounded down on the total voucher because the 32.5 cent rate is the maximum limited by the state appropriation act. The personal vehicle mileage rate for trips over 100 miles when a state car is available remains at 23 cents per mile.
- 5) A fifth category has been added to the Meal & Incidental Expense per diem (M&IE). All procedures and use of the M&IE remain the same but there is a 5th category at \$46 for high cost areas. The new M&IE rates are posted to the Controller's web page at <http://www.co.vt.edu/Procedures/p20335r.htm>.
- 6) Several lodging rates have changed. We requested a special review of the lodging rate for Blacksburg because of the difficulty university guests have in securing lodging within the established rate. When they reviewed the rate, all of Montgomery County was included in their review and the rate increased by only \$4 to \$55. All new lodging rates are posted to the Controller's web page at <http://www.co.vt.edu/Procedures/p20335r.htm>. As in the past, if the city or county is not listed either in the list or in the footnotes, the standard rate applies.
- 7) Virginia Tech can no longer approve lodging exceptions above 150% of the listed lodging rate. All requests for exceptions to the rate must be sent to the Manager of Disbursements Review and Fixed Assets at the state Department of Accounts **in advance** of the travel. Requests must include sufficient documentation showing alternative cost comparisons, the efforts made to secure less expensive lodging accommodations, and any other documentation that would help justify the excess above the established rate. Departments should send these requests to the Travel Section of the University Controller's Office (mail stop 0312) where they will be reviewed and forwarded to the State office for approval. Upon approval, they will be returned to the department for documentation support to be attached to the travel voucher.
- 8) When two or more people are traveling on official business and staying in the same hotel room, the allowable lodging rate is the lodging rate allowed in the area they are staying, plus the cost charged by the hotel for any additional persons in the room. Documentation from the hotel listing additional hotel charges for each additional person, per room must be provided. The state Department of Accounts can approve exceptions when requests are made **in advance** and are supported by a letter explaining the reasoning behind the request.
- 9) Advance payments using the Accounting Voucher (Combo form) for lodging are limited to one night's lodging but are discouraged because of the additional administrative work involved with making prepayments. Use of the state sponsored travel charge card is encouraged to secure room reservations. Actual advance payments using the travel charge card program will not be reimbursed prior to the trip.

- 10) Hotel bills must show a zero balance. Express checkout statements must show a zero balance before the expense will be reimbursed. Most travelers use the “zero balance” statement for their expense reimbursement but we have permitted the itemized hotel bills with non-zero balances as long as the bill was in the traveler’s name. The state is now requiring travelers to document the expense by using a final settlement bill which will show the balance due to be “zero.”
- 11) Direct billing of hotel bills from the hotel to the university is now allowed as long as all pertinent information and receipts are provided and all expenses meet the guidelines of the travel policy. We have been following this policy on an exception basis but it is now accepted and included in the state guidelines. The direct bill will not show the “zero balance” as shown on individual travelers reimbursement requests because the account is open until the bill is paid.
- 12) Business meals must now include an **itemized** receipt to better document the business necessity and reasonableness of the expense. Continue to include the business purpose for the meal and the names and association of all attendees to document for tax purposes that the meal was an official business function. Remember, one traveler cannot claim the meal for another traveler when the two of them meet together to discuss business while on travel status. They must both use the M&IE on their respective vouchers.
- 13) All exceptions approved and out-of-country travel rates must be attached to the voucher. Departments may now obtain out-of-country lodging and M&IE limits by going to the following web site and making a copy of the page that reflects the rate for the area traveled <http://www.state.gov/www/perdiems/index.html#2000>. Travelers have the option of using the standard out-of-state rates as the limits for international travel.
- 14) A traveler can now claim expenses for another traveler if all expenses and receipts are provided. M&IE cannot be claimed for another traveler because the M&IE is not an actual expense but rather it is a reasonable allowance for meals and incidental expenses.

The Lodging and M&IE tables have been changed on the Controller’s web page to reflect the revised rates. The other changes will be made to the procedures on the Controller’s web page in the near future. If travel vouchers were processed where the new rates would have affected the amount of reimbursement, the traveler can submit a new travel voucher along with a copy of the original voucher and ask for the additional reimbursement.

If you have questions about the new travel regulations, please contact one of the following people who work with travel reimbursements every day. Roger Thomas (thomasr@vt.edu or 231-8551), Norma Burke (njburke@vt.edu or 231-8604), or Valerie Jones (jonesvl@vt.edu or 231-8617).