

STATE OF MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION	TOPIC: TRAVEL
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TRAVEL

The following travel policies are established for the use of the employees of the Mississippi Department of Education (Department) who are required to travel in-state or out-of-state on official state government business. These policies are based on the guidelines established by the Mississippi Department of Finance and Administration (DFA) in accordance with § 25-3-41, Mississippi Code of 1972, Annotated. In addition, these policies address travel reimbursements for Mississippi Board of Education (Board) members and other non-departmental employees.

OFFICIAL DUTY STATION

The official duty station for all employees shall be the office to which they are assigned. In extremely rare instances, an employee's official duty station shall be his or her residence if he/she is not permanently assigned to an office.

RECEIPTS

Please refer to the specific areas within this section for details and exceptions concerning when receipts are required to be reimbursed for travel expenses. The procedures for recording and documenting expenses are also provided throughout this section. Generally, receipts are required for the following items:

- Lodging
- Transportation costs (taxis, buses, rental cars) if over \$10
- Hotel/Airport parking expenses if over \$10
- Tolls if over \$10
- Business telephone calls
- Registration fees
- Airline costs (in the few instances that the ticket is not directly charged to the agency)

VEHICLE RENTAL

DFA has contracted with rental car companies for daily rates on car rentals originating both inside and outside the state of Mississippi. These rates are available to employees (not to contractors) when traveling out of town on Department business. Employees may rent a car from one of these automobile rental companies in lieu of traveling in their personal vehicle. Receipts will be required for the car rental, gasoline purchases, and parking fees (if the fee is in excess of \$10 per instance).

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VEHICLE RENTAL (continued)

The employee will be reimbursed these costs if they are less than the mileage reimbursement rate authorized by DFA. When determining the most economical mode, employees are to consider all costs associated with the car rental, i.e. the daily rate, gasoline cost, personal vehicle mileage to accept and return the rental car, and any parking fees incurred for leaving the employee's personal vehicle at the rental location.

Rental of automobiles using the state account will require prior approval. If an employee needs to rent a car for such travel, a demonstrated savings to the department must be realized (i.e. taxi, shuttle). A memo identifying the realized savings, signed and approved by the employee's Bureau Director or above, should be forwarded to the Director of the Office of Accounting (Accounting) for authorization to use the state corporate accounts for vehicle rental.

Once approval to rent is granted, the Accounting Director will provide the Mississippi corporate account number for vehicle rental. This number is used in order to obtain the free Collision Damage Waiver/Loss Damage Waiver insurance coverage offered by the State contract. The rental car contract includes unlimited mileage and free collision insurance; therefore, the option to purchase insurance from vendors should be declined and will not be reimbursed.

IN-STATE TRAVEL

Travel Advances

Mississippi Code of 1972, Annotated, § 25-1-83, requires prior approval for travel in state to conventions, associations, and meetings. An [Employee Travel Authorization form](#) should be completed to document approval and to request a travel advance. Travel advances are issued to the employee to cover meals, hotel expenses, and other related travel costs. Employees should indicate the amount requested and obtain the required approval by a Bureau Director or above. The approved Employee Travel Authorization Form should be submitted to the Accounting Office at least two weeks prior to departure in order to ensure receipt of the advance.

The employee should submit a completed travel voucher when he or she returns from the trip. The voucher is required whether or not expenses exceeded the amount of the travel advance. If the advance was less than expenditures, payment will be processed for the amount of the difference. If the advance exceeded expenditures, the Accounting Office will notify the traveler of the amount of personal reimbursement due to the state. The check or money order must be made payable to the appropriate State Treasury Fund account number.

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IN-STATE TRAVEL (continued)

Travel Advances (continued)

An employee will be allowed two outstanding travel advances at a time. No additional advances will be given until the previous advances have been cleared. The travel advance must be cleared upon the employee's return. If an advance is not settled within ten (10) working days after the end of the month in which travel was completed, the employee's paycheck will be held or their direct deposit stopped until the debt to the state is resolved.

Meals

Reimbursement for meals is authorized for in-state travel only when such travel involves an overnight stay. Employees will be reimbursed for the actual cost of meals not to exceed the Department of Finance and Administration's (DFA) authorized limit. The current authorized meal reimbursement allowances are found on the [Accounting website in the Travel section](#). This site also details the meal reimbursement allowances for the designated high-cost areas within the State of Mississippi. The breakfast meal will be allowed when the departure time is prior to 6:00 a.m. and overnight travel is involved. The lunch meal will be allowable when time of departure is prior to 11:00 a.m., return is after 2:00 p.m., and overnight travel is involved. The dinner meal will be allowed while traveling when the employee returns later than 8:00 p.m. and overnight travel is involved. "Early Departure" or "Late Arrival" must be footnoted on the employee's Travel Voucher. Meal receipts are not required. In no instance will meals be reimbursable in the city in which the employee resides or uses as the official duty station.

Meal tips should be included in the actual meal expense unless the inclusion of the tips would cause the meals to exceed the maximum daily limitations placed on meals. If the daily limitation would be exceeded, the employee is allowed to record meal tips for each day as other authorized business expenses. Total meal tips shall not exceed 20% of the maximum daily meal reimbursement claimed.

When an employee is required to attend a conference or meeting held in the official duty station city and a meal is served, reimbursement of the lunch will be allowable only if approval is received from the Bureau Director or above. If the conference registration fee includes the cost of a meal, the cost should not also be included as a meal expense. If the employee, for whatever reason chooses not to attend the meal, he or she shall not be entitled to any reimbursement for the cost of the meal. If the fee charged for attending an official meeting, where the meeting includes a meal, causes the employee to exceed the daily maximum meal allowance and is supported by a receipt from the convention officials, the total fee will be reimbursed.

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IN-STATE TRAVEL (continued)

Lodging

Reimbursement for overnight lodging will be made when travel circumstances prevent departure and return travel in one day. Generally, any time an employee must travel a distance greater than 75 miles one way, he or she is eligible for overnight lodging. Charges for reservations that were not used will not be reimbursed by DFA. Reimbursement for lodging expenses will be made for the amount actually paid, when supported by a receipt. When an employee has a choice, good judgment should be exercised in selecting the lodging to avoid unreasonable charges. A listing of hotels and motels which have offered the State of Mississippi discount rates is provided in the [Travel section of the Accounting website](#). It is not mandatory that hotels from this list be selected, but the list is provided for employee assistance. These rates or general government rates should always be requested at the time the reservation is made or confirmed, and verified when checking into the hotel. If the discounted rates are not honored, please contact the Director of Accounting.

If no acceptable lodging is available at the work destination, the Bureau Director or above may approve travel to the nearest town where acceptable accommodations are available. If the nearest town is out-of-state, no Travel Authorization form will be required; however, approval must be obtained. An employee may elect to stay overnight with friends or relatives. Such lodging is not a reimbursable expense; however, travel to and from the lodging site and the work site in lieu of a hotel expense shall be allowable (the total travel reimbursement amount may not exceed the "normal" lodging reimbursement). Lodging within the city of the employee's official duty station is not an authorized expense.

Only standard single room rates are allowable. If the employee utilizes or requires a rate other than the single occupancy rate, the hotel must certify the current rate for a single unit on the paid receipt. If two or more employees share a hotel room, separate invoices should be obtained which report each employee's pro-rata share of the room cost. If the employee chooses to extend his or her stay for pleasure, he or she must note on the paid receipt the leisure days and hotel rate not authorized as official state business.

All reimbursable expenses for lodging should be billed to the employee and not the Department. Lodging expenses will not be reimbursable without an original, itemized receipt which shows a zero (\$0) balance or is accompanied by an original credit charge receipt.

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IN-STATE TRAVEL (continued)

Private Automobile Travel

Actual mileage shall be calculated from the official duty station and back, or actual miles traveled, whichever is less. The most direct route to and from a destination should be claimed for reimbursement. The Travel Voucher must indicate if intermediate stops were made. The notation "Vicinity Travel" may be used for travel within the vicinity of a specific city/town. All actual and necessary travel will be reimbursed at standard [mileage rate](#) determined by DFA annually. Travel from a hotel to a restaurant and back is not a reimbursable expense.

Travel in State-Owned Vehicles

The Office of Career & Technical Education, Schools for the Blind and Deaf, School of the Arts, and the Mail Room have state-owned vehicles which may be utilized when employees of these offices are required to travel. When it is apparent that repairs, tires, or batteries are needed, the operator must initiate a request to the appropriate director for this service. The Bureau Director or above will approve a request and submit it to Accounting for authorization, with the exception of an extreme emergency. All other repairs or purchases are not permitted without prior written approval. Under no circumstance shall repairs or purchases be made without prior approval.

When a state-owned vehicle is utilized, it should always be returned in the same condition as it was prior to travel. The gas tank should be filled, and the interior should be free from all trash. As are the buildings of the Department, these state-owned vehicles are smoke-free environments.

State-owned vehicles will not be routinely used for transportation to and from private residences and the office (this does not apply to drivers who have commuting approval from DFA). If the employee must travel any earlier than he or she would normally be leaving for work, it will be permissible for the state vehicle to be driven home that night. This would also apply if the employee returns from his or her travel after the office's close of business.

Travel Voucher

All Travel Vouchers for in-state travel should be prepared in ink or typed and should be delivered to the employees' immediate supervisor. The Travel Voucher must be reviewed for accuracy and compliance with state law and Department policy by a designated employee of the office and must be approved for payment by a supervisor of the employee. A duplicate of the approved voucher shall be submitted to Accounting along with the approved original Travel Voucher; the original receipts shall be attached to the original voucher and duplicate receipts with the duplicate voucher. A blank copy of the Travel Voucher and instructions for completion are provided in the [Travel Section of the Accounting website](#).

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IN-STATE TRAVEL (continued)

Travel Voucher (continued)

Only actual expenses shall be claimed on the Travel Voucher. Any claims above actual expenditures constitute fraud. In addition, any claim for reimbursement of an expense when the expense was actually paid by another constitutes fraud. Please refer to the Discipline Policy (Section 10.0) for actions which will be taken when fraud of this nature occurs.

OUT-OF-STATE TRAVEL

Travel Agent

Whenever an employee travels by airplane or other public carrier, travel arrangements may be handled by a travel agency, except when attending a conference (see Conference Travel). The confirmation from the travel agency must be attached to the Travel Voucher in order for a reimbursement to be made.

Should an employee desire to rent a vehicle, refer to the Vehicle Rental section.

Conference Travel

If the employee is attending a conference which has reserved a block of rooms for its attendees, the employee may make his or her own reservations utilizing the information supplied by the conference. The conference brochure detailing the room rates must accompany the employee's Travel Voucher in order for DFA to provide reimbursement. If the conference has negotiated airfare rates, the employee may contact the travel agency and provide the airfare rates and other pertinent information. The travel agent will make the airline reservations utilizing the data to obtain the same rate.

Travel Advances

All out-of-state travel must have prior approval from the employee's Bureau Director or above, Executive Cabinet Member, and the State Superintendent or designee. Requests for out-of-state travel (e.g. conventions, seminars, conferences) must be submitted using the [Employee Travel Authorization form](#). If the employee would like to receive a travel advance for out-of-state travel, the employee must indicate the amount requested on the Travel Authorization form and obtain the required approval. The approved Travel Authorization form must be submitted to the Accounting Office at least two (2) weeks prior to departure in order to ensure receipt of the advance.

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OUT-OF-STATE TRAVEL (continued)

Travel Advances (continued)

Travel advances are issued to cover meals, hotel expenses, and other related travel costs. The advance should not include the cost of airline travel or conference fees as these should be paid in advance by the Department.

The employee should submit a completed travel voucher when he or she returns from the trip. The voucher is required whether or not expenses exceeded the amount of the travel advance. If the advance was less than expenditures, payment will be processed for the amount of the difference. If the advance exceeded expenditures, the Accounting Office will notify the traveler of the amount of personal reimbursement due to the state. The check or money order must be made payable to the appropriate State Treasury Fund account number.

An employee will be allowed two outstanding travel advances at a time. No additional advances will be given until the previous advances have been cleared. The travel advance must be cleared upon the employee's return. If an advance is not settled within ten (10) working days after the end of the month in which travel was completed, the employee's paycheck will be held or their direct deposit stopped until the debt to the state is resolved.

Meals

Employees will be reimbursed for the actual cost of meals not to exceed the daily maximum allowances established by DFA. The [high-cost areas for various states](#) have been set by DFA.

Meals which are included as part of a conference registration fee shall not be reimbursable as meals on the Employee Travel Voucher. If the employee, for whatever reason, chooses not to attend the conference meal, he or she shall not be entitled to any reimbursement for the cost of the meal purchased outside the conference.

Lodging

Reimbursement for lodging expenses will be made for the amount actually paid, when supported by an itemized receipt with a zero (\$0) balance or an original credit card charge receipt. When an employee has a choice, good judgment should be exercised in selecting the lodging to avoid unreasonable charges. Only standard single room rates are allowable. If the employee utilizes or requires a rate other than the single occupancy rate, the hotel must certify the current rate for a single unit on the paid receipt. If two or more employees share a hotel room, separate invoices should be obtained which report each employee's pro-rata share of the room cost. If the employee chooses to extend his or her stay for pleasure, he or she must note on the paid receipt the leisure days and hotel rate not authorized as official state business.

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OUT-OF-STATE TRAVEL (continued)

Travel by Public Carrier

All travel arrangements for out-of-state travel on a public carrier may be made through a travel agency. The travel agency will charge the Department's business travel account (BTA) and invoice the Department on a monthly basis. When completing the Travel Voucher, airline, bus, or train travel costs should not be included on the voucher. The Department will be invoiced for these fares.

Travel by taxi cab, bus, shuttle, etc. should be indicated as a part of "Other Authorized Expense" on the Travel Voucher.

Driving in lieu of Airfare

For the purpose of determining reimbursable driving expenses in lieu of air travel cost for out-of-state travel, a cost comparison must be completed. The total cost of driving (mileage) will be compared to the cost of the lowest unrestricted air fare plus the cost of all required ground transportation at the destination point. The employee will compare these two totals and request reimbursement for the lesser of the two.

Travel in State-Owned Vehicles or Airplanes

All requests to utilize the plane from the Office of Air Transport Services must have prior written approval by the State Superintendent or designee. To request a state-owned automobile for out-of-state travel, the same procedures as noted in the In-State Travel section apply.

Out-of-state travel expenses shall be recorded on the out-of-state portion of the Travel Voucher. The original voucher must include all original receipts, the Travel Authorization form, the travel advance request when appropriate, and a copy of the travel agency's itinerary. A duplicate voucher and duplicate documentation must also be submitted with the original.

INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL

Prior Approval and Travel Advances

Travel outside the continental limits of the United States (Canada, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, and Mexico are outside), must be approved by DFA prior to departure. The employee should complete an [Employee Travel Authorization form](#) for approval of international travel. The Bureau Director or above, Executive Cabinet Member, and the State Superintendent are to approve international travel. The Travel Authorization form requesting approval for international travel must be submitted to DFA at least 15 days before the trip.

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INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL (continued)

Prior Approval and Travel Advances (continued)

The Travel Authorization form has a space for the employee to request an advance; noting the amount requested on this form will suffice for the employee to receive an advance for international travel. DFA will return the Employee Travel Authorization form indicating if the international travel is approved or denied.

Travel Arrangements

All travel arrangements, including airline tickets, lodging, and rental car services, may be made through a travel agency. The travel agency will provide information on inoculation requirements and assist the employee in obtaining passports and visas, when needed. Changes after departure from the continental United States will be made independently by the traveler.

The [Employee Travel Voucher](#) should be completed and submitted when the employee returns from the international trip. In addition, the actual expenses must be recorded on the original approved Travel Authorization form. The approved form must be attached to the Employee Travel Voucher when any associated reimbursement or payment is requested. If actual expenses exceed the estimated expenses listed on the [Employee Travel Authorization form](#), the original form shall be resubmitted to DFA showing the excess charges and approved by DFA again.

CONSULTANT TRAVEL

Individuals who are contract employees of the Department may be authorized to receive travel reimbursement from departmental funds. This type of authorization may be granted to enable the members of the Board to travel on departmental business, a consultant or contract worker hired by the Department to travel while performing services, or to allow school district employees to attend a pre-approved conference.

The [Consultant Services Authorization Form](#) can be used by program offices to document prior approval of consultant travel, if deemed necessary by program management.

Often special conditions apply to this type of travel. The mileage, hotel, meals, and other travel expenses may be reimbursed at special, lower rates than the employee rate. If no special rates are arranged, the approved department rates will apply. Payments for consultant travel are charged to the budget category "Contractual Services."

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CONSULTANT TRAVEL (continued)

In order for non-employees to receive reimbursement, offices should submit the appropriate Consultant Services Conference Travel Voucher to the Office of Accounting as follows:

- Consultant Services Travel Voucher for travel expenses by non-employees and all supporting travel documentation (Object Code 61653), or
- Consultant Services Travel Voucher for travel expenses by Vocational non-employees and all supporting travel documentation (Object Code 61790).

TRAVEL REIMBURSEMENT

Other Expenses

Other actual expenses which will be reimbursed include parking fees, taxi fares, rental car charges, gasoline for rental cars, and toll road charges. Certain expenditures of this nature require that the receipt be submitted with the Travel Voucher.

Charges for transportation, such as buses, taxis, etc. shall be allowed while traveling on official business. Taxi cab charges shall be allowed at the point of origin from an office to the air terminal or from the air terminal to the office. Charges shall be allowed from the air terminal to your destination hotel and/or meeting location, as well as the return to the air terminal. These expenses should be coded as other travel cost on the Travel Voucher. The state does not reimburse taxi fares for optional travel to/from restaurants.

Parking expenses incurred for airports and hotels are reimbursable when supported by a receipt if over \$10. If business telephone charges are reflected on the hotel bill, no other receipt will be necessary. Personal calls are not reimbursable expenses.

Registration fees for conferences, seminars, etc. are allowable expenses. Whenever possible, the employee should pre-register and have the Department prepay the expense. If the Department does not prepay the fees, the employee may be reimbursed for the expense provided he or she has prior approval and a receipt accompanies the Travel Voucher. Tips for meals will be reimbursable provided they do not exceed 20% of the allowable daily rate or actual meal cost, whichever is less. Tips for taxi fares which do not exceed 20% of the claimed expenditure are allowed for out-of-state ground transportation. Baggage carriers may also be tipped when they assist the employee with luggage. Reasonable charges will be allowed without receipt (reasonable is defined as \$1 per bag).

Necessary travel expenses do not include personal expense items such as entertainment, liquor charges, telephone calls to family members, and trip insurance.

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VENDOR BENEFITS FOR TRAVELERS

Several companies offer benefits to frequent travelers. These benefits, which are normally awarded on a point system, include free or reduced airplane tickets or hotel rooms. Any bonus or promotional gratuity received as a result of official state travel shall be used to offset or reduce the cost of subsequent official state travel. Under no circumstances can the traveler keep a bonus or other promotional gratuity so earned for his own personal use. As sufficient mileage earned as a result of state-paid travel is accumulated, free ticket coupons will be applied for and used to offset official state travel costs. Follow airline procedures to exchange the miles for a ticket. The Department may utilize points earned by one employee for another employee who will be traveling. There is no prohibition on earning the points and participating in any of the programs offered by these companies providing these guidelines are followed.

ACCIDENTS AND INJURIES

An employee traveling on behalf of the Department who is involved in an accident while traveling on the job, whether in their own vehicle or in any other vehicle and whether or not they are operating the vehicle, must report the accident and their involvement to the Human Resources Director and the Bureau Director or above within one (1) working day after the accident, unless they are incapacitated. Should they be incapacitated, they should make a report as soon as they are able to notify the appropriate Department management. Furthermore, the employee operating the vehicle shall be responsible for completing the motor vehicle accident report or other such report to ensure that the accident is reported to the proper law enforcement agency. Any employee having any knowledge of a job-related incident that could result in a legal action against an employee of the Department or the Department shall immediately report the incident to the Bureau Director or above. The Bureau Director or above shall notify the Human Resources Director. Failure of an employee to follow this policy could result in disciplinary action by the Department.

Should an employee be involved in an accident while on state business which may or may not implicate a state vehicle, the following steps should be followed:

- Dial 911 for assistance, including an ambulance, if anyone is injured.
- Immediately notify the city police, sheriff's office, or highway patrol.
- Do not move either vehicle until an officer of the law advises you to do so.
- Exchange the name, address, license number, auto tag number, and name of insurance company with the other party.
- The Proof of Insurance number that should be entered on the police report is 11-46-15 (if in a state-owned vehicle).

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ACCIDENTS AND INJURIES (continued)

- Do not make any statement of guilt to any party.
- Notify your Bureau Director or above of the accident as soon as possible.
- Notify your insurance agent as soon as possible (if traveling in private automobile).
- Complete the State of Mississippi Liability Claim Reporting Form, available online at www.dfa.state.ms.us/tort/LiabilityClaimForm.pdf
- Submit the form, along with the police report and any other applicable information to the Accounting Director to be forwarded to the Tort Claims Board.