

Department of Veterans Affairs
Harry S. Truman Memorial Veterans' Hospital
800 Hospital Drive
Columbia, MO 65201

HPM 589A4-064
March 11, 2011
Issued by: Research

FOREIGN TRAVEL REVIEW PROCESS

1. **PURPOSE:** To establish a formal review process for considering all foreign travel requests from Department of Veterans' Affairs (VA) personnel while in official duty status or representing the VA.

2. **BACKGROUND:** International meetings and educational opportunities occur annually throughout the world. Veterans Health Administration (VHA) staff is often requested to present information at conferences or participate in administrative, technical, or other onsite reviews or activities, such as inspecting health care facilities or health care delivery systems. VA patient care, education, research and administration are enhanced by experiences which lead to new knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors. There is benefit and value to VA in allowing these types of travel opportunities.

3. **DEFINITIONS:**

a. VA employee: For the purposes of foreign travel and the foreign travel review process, a VA employee is defined as a 3/8ths or greater employee.

b. Official duty status: Foreign travel by VA employees may occur as an extension of their education, research, patient care or administrative responsibilities. Official duty status may be offered for attendance at conferences or other international-level meetings, presentation of research results, learning or sharing skills, competencies or knowledge, or site visits to institutions or agencies that could be of value to VA. Foreign travel under either an Official Travel Authority or under Approved Authorized Absence is considered to be travel in an official duty status.

c. Representing the VA as a VA employed investigator: Representing the VA refers to a VA employed investigator engaging in any activity that is based on, or the result of, VA research. This could be an oral presentation, poster presentation, workshop, expert panel, or similar conference activities. VA research is defined as research that is reviewed and approved by the Harry S. Truman Memorial Veterans' Hospital Research and Development Committee, regardless of the funding source.

d. Foreign country: For the purpose of foreign travel considerations, any country or government not part of the United States is considered a foreign country. The United States is defined as the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and U.S. Territories and Possessions, which include the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, the Northern Mariana Islands, Guam and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

4. **POLICY:**

a. An official Government passport and special travel authorization are required for VA employees traveling on official Government business to foreign countries. This applies to any VA employee traveling on authorized absence or travel status regardless of the funding source. This has been implemented for the protection of VA employees traveling on official Government business. Travel under an official government passport, which includes a diplomatic passport, protects the traveler and ensures that the U.S. Embassy or consulate will take responsibility for the traveler in an emergency. For trips that combine official and personal travel, the traveler must have both an official Government passport and a personal passport. Also note that some foreign countries will require an entry visa. Employee government passport requests must arrive at VA Central Office, Travel Policy Division, at least 60 days prior to travel. The only exceptions to the use of a government passport are (1) where official or diplomatic passports are not recognized by the foreign country, (2) when the VA employee is a foreign national, (3) when the Department of State or Foreign Embassy/Consul cannot process an official or diplomatic passport or visa in time for the official travel, and (4) where US citizenship interferes with entry into a foreign country.

b. At no time is a VA employee to travel on personal time under an official government passport, and at no time is a VHA employee to travel on official duty with only a personal passport.

c. Foreign travel in duty status must result in a specific benefit to the VA.

d. Approval of foreign travel does not simultaneously convey authority for an employee to accept non-VA support for the travel. Approval of the acceptance of any non-VA support remains the responsibility of the Medical Center Director. A completed copy of VA Form 0893, Advance Review of Offer to Donate Support for Official VA Travel must be reviewed and signed by Regional Counsel or Office of General Counsel prior to the approval of the trip by the designated approving official.

e. All requests for foreign travel where the funding source is a foreign government must be forwarded to the Office of General Counsel and Office of Intergovernmental Affairs for review before local management approval. All requests for foreign travel where the funding source is a foreign government must be approved by VHA Under Secretary for Health before travel.

5. **RESPONSIBILITY:**

a. The traveler is responsible for:

1. Submitting requests 60 days prior to the initiation of travel.
2. Completing the Foreign Travel Request Packet (Attachment 1).
3. Completing Application for Country Clearance, VA Form 0900.
4. Completing VA Form 0893, Advance Review of Offer to Donate Support for Official VA Travel if funding/reimbursement is non-federal.
5. Providing a copy of the brochure describing the meeting or activity.

6. Providing a complete itinerary of the trip.
 7. Providing letters of invitation or acceptance confirming specific activities while in the foreign country.
 8. Returning the official passport to the Research Service so that the passport can be promptly returned to the Charge Card Oversight and Travel Policy Service. This must occur no later than 5 days from the last date of the travel episode. Failure to do so will result in the cancellation of that passport and will require re-application.
- b. Medical Center Director is responsible for approval/disapproval of all foreign travel requests including those forwarded by the Research and Development (R&D) Committee, whether local final approval is authorized, or approval is required by the Under Secretary for Health.
 - c. The R&D Committee or Education Committee is responsible for reviewing all requests for foreign travel and recommending approval or disapproval to the Medical Center Director.
 - d. Associate Chief of Staff for Research & Development (ACOS/R&D) is responsible for initial review of all requests for foreign travel and recommending approval or disapproval to the R&D Committee and/or Medical Center Director.

6. PROCEDURE:

- a. Level I (Primary) Review/Approval Criteria
 1. For facility-based staff the facility Director approves Level I foreign travel.
 2. The cost of the trip requests \$3,000 or less of VA-appropriated funds
 3. The request is for a single episode or cumulative travel of seven days or less in the current fiscal year. The seven days includes travel time, holidays, and weekends occurring within the approved travel period.
- b. Level II (Secondary) Review/Approval Criteria
 1. For facility-based staff the Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) Director approves Level II foreign travel.
 2. The cost of the trip requests between \$3,001 and \$5,000 in VA-appropriated funds. The request is for a single episode or cumulative travel of between and seven and 14 days.
- c. Level III (Tertiary) Review/Approval Criteria
 1. For facility-based staff the Under Secretary for Health approves Level III foreign travel.
 2. The trip request exceeds \$5,000 in VA-appropriated funds.
 3. The request is for a single episode or cumulative travel of greater than 14 days in duration.
 4. A foreign government is funding or reimbursing the travel.
 5. The request for travel is to a country on the Department of State's dangerous country list.
 6. The travel involves significant legal issues as determined by the Office of General Counsel.

7. **APPEALS:** None

8. **REPORTS:** The facility will report approved and disapproved foreign travel to the VISN Office by the 21st of the month after the end of each quarter (January 21, April 21, July 21, October 21).

9. **REFERENCES:** VHA Handbook 1400.06 Foreign Travel, February 6, 2011;
https://vaww1.va.gov/CCOTPS/International_Travel.asp, Charge Card Oversight and Travel Policy Service

10. **FOLLOW-UP RESPONSIBILITY:** ACOS, R&D

11. **RECISIONS:** HPM 589A-064, dated August 2, 2010.

APPROVED:

Sallie Houser-Hanfelder, FACHE

SALLIE HOUSER-HANFELDER, FACHE
Director

Date: 3/11/11

Key Words:

Research
Foreign Travel

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| FOREIGN TRAVEL BRIEFING SLIP | | VA Form 10-5504 | |
| 1. <u>Name of Medical Center</u> | | 2. <u>Date of Request</u> | |
| 3. <u>Name of Requestor and VA Title</u> | | 4. <u>Full-time Equivalent</u> | |
| 5. <u>Name of Meeting:</u> Date of Meeting <i>(excluding travel time)</i> : Location: Purpose and Benefits to VA: | | | |
| 6. <u>VA Support Requested</u> Dates of trip <i>(leave/return)</i> : _____ Total number of days <i>(excluding AL)</i> : _____ Registration: _____ Transportation: _____ Lodging: _____ Meals: _____ Total Estimate: _____ | | | |
| 7. <u>Source of VA Support</u> <i>(GPF, VA-appropriated travel funds)</i> | | | |
| 8. <u>Support other than VA</u> <i>(attach completed VA Form 10-0101B)</i> If no external support is being requested, indicate NONE in this block. | | | |
| 9. <u>Trip Itinerary</u> <i>(complete on second page of this form.)</i> | | | |
| 10. <u>Previous Official Foreign Travel during prior 2 years</u> <i>(complete on second page of this form)</i> | | | |
| 11. <u>Recommendation of Hospital Education Committee:</u> <input type="checkbox"/> Approve: ___ Official Travel Status: ___ Days ___ Use of GPF <input type="checkbox"/> Disapprove: ___ Insufficient Justification ___ Missing Information <input type="checkbox"/> Forward to Under Secretary for Health: ___ Exceeds 20 days/3 trips ___ Use of VA appropriated funds ___ Other: | | | |

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| 12. <u>Education Committee Chairperson</u> <hr style="width: 50%; margin-left: 0;"/> | 13. <u>Date</u> <hr style="width: 50%; margin-left: 0;"/> |
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| 14. <u>Medical Center Director</u> <input type="checkbox"/> Approve <input type="checkbox"/> Disapprove <input type="checkbox"/> Forward to Under Secretary for Health <hr style="width: 50%; margin-left: 0;"/> <p>Sallie Houser-Hanfelder, FACHE Harry S. Truman Memorial Veteran's Hospital</p> | 15. <u>Date</u> <hr style="width: 50%; margin-left: 0;"/> |
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16. Itinerary: *(Summarize daily activity, indicate weekends and annual leave days, specify day of return to Chicago)*

| Travel Day | Date | Day Activity |
|------------|------|--------------|
| 1 | | |
| 2 | | |
| 3 | | |
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| 5 | | |
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| 7 | | |
| 8 | | |
| 9 | | |
| 10 | | |
| 11 | | |
| 12 | | |
| 13 | | |
| 14 | | |

17. Official Foreign Travel during prior 2 years:

| Location | Date From: | Date To: | Amount of VA Support |
|----------|------------|----------|----------------------|
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