

FOREIGN TRAVEL

1. REASON FOR ISSUE. This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Handbook revises procedures associated with VHA staff foreign travel in order to increase the efficiency of the approval processes, as well as, maintaining and improving oversight and accountability. *NOTE: In today's sensitive international environment, foreign travel carries the potential for personal, financial and institutional risk. In an effort to reduce risk and streamline the approval process, the VHA Foreign Travel Handbook has been revised.*

2. SUMMARY OF MAJOR CHANGES. This revision of VHA Handbook 1400.06:

a. Canada and Mexico will now be handled through the standard foreign travel approval process, and will not have identified exemptions.

b. Makes clear that approval of travel cannot be retroactive

c. Clarifies procedures for return of government passports once travel is completed

3. RELATED ISSUE. VA Handbook 0631.2.

4. RESPONSIBLE OFFICE. VHA Office of Academic Affiliations (14) is responsible for the contents of this handbook. Questions may be addressed to (202) 461-9490

5. RESCISSIONS. VHA Handbook 1400.06, Foreign Travel dated January 14, 2010 is rescinded.

6. RECERTIFICATION. This VHA Handbook is scheduled for recertification on or before the last working day of February 2016.

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FOREIGN TRAVEL

1. PURPOSE

This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Handbook establishes approval authorities and procedures relating to foreign travel by VHA personnel.

2. BACKGROUND

International meetings and educational opportunities occur annually throughout the world. VHA staff members are often requested to present information at those conferences or participate in administrative, technical, or other onsite reviews or activities, such as inspecting health care facilities or health care delivery systems. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) patient care, education, research, and administration are enhanced by experiences which lead to new knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors. Therefore, it is of great benefit and value to VA in allowing these types of travel opportunities for its employees.

3. SCOPE

a. This Handbook addresses travel to foreign countries while in duty status. Procedures and criteria are delineated to minimize risks involving safety and security of the traveler, which are inherent in the current international environment. Legal issues such as conflicts of interest also create potential risk, and methods of avoidance are addressed in this Handbook.

b. This Handbook allows delegation of authority to the lowest possible managerial level in VHA.

4. PROCEDURES

a. The Department of State requires all official travel to a foreign country to proceed under an official government passport. Any travel time while in an official duty capacity, which includes authorized absence, constitutes non-personal time, and needs to be performed under the auspices of an official government passport.

b. If at any time during the episode of foreign travel, the traveler takes annual leave, or vacation, a personal passport is also required for that portion of the trip. At no time shall a VHA employee travel under an official government passport while on annual leave. In addition, at no time shall a VHA employee travel under a personal passport while conducting official government business, except when under the following conditions:

(1) Where Official or Diplomatic passports are not recognized by the foreign country.

(2) When the employee is a foreign national (non-US citizen). **NOTE:** *Foreign nationals are required to travel with a personal passport from their respective country.*

(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.

(4) Where US Citizenship interferes with entry into the foreign country.

c. All requests for foreign travel while in a duty status (travel or authorized absence), including shipboard cruises which exit U.S. territorial waters, require review and approval by the officials described in paragraph 8.

e. The review process must give primary consideration to the importance and value of the trip to VA and to the employee's performance of official duties. Justification must clearly indicate how the proposed trip will further the mission of VA. Public relations or good will on their own merits are not ordinarily considered appropriate justification to warrant approval of foreign travel. However, exceptions will be made on a case-by-case basis, as approved by, or at the request of the VHA Under Secretary for Health.

f. Approval of requests for additional time away from the facility (annual leave or leave without pay) in conjunction with approved foreign travel is the responsibility of local management in accordance with existing guidelines covering absences (see current VA Human Resource Directives and Handbooks). Authorized absence may be approved for attendance at meetings even if travel at government expense is not approved. However, the period of authorized absence without charge to employee leave for travel at the employee's expense will not exceed the time for which per diem would have been paid had travel been authorized at Government expense (reference: VA Handbook 5011, Part III, Ch. 2 and Ch. 3).

g. Official attendance at international conferences, including professional, medical, and scientific meetings, requires clearance from the Department of State. All requests for country clearance are processed through the Charge Card Oversight and Travel Policy Service (CCO&TPS). At the time of clearance, any specific or specialized instructions or limitations will be provided to the traveler. In certain circumstances, the traveler may be required to change lodging reservations if the selected lodging does not meet Department of State approval. This is normally due to the location of the lodging, not the quality of the lodging. *NOTE: Questions regarding country clearance procedures may be addressed to the local travel office who will contact CCO&TPS at officialpassports@va.gov.*

h. Medical Care appropriations will not be used to fund foreign travel for House Staff, Trainees, Without Compensation (WOC) appointees, or less than 3/8 part-time physicians.

i. No appropriated funds are earmarked specifically for foreign travel. Approval of funds for foreign travel must be based on the availability of local (facility, VISN, program office) travel dollars.

j. Foreign travel to attend a conference without formal participation on the agenda must be scrutinized carefully for appropriateness; approval is contingent on the evaluation of circumstances by the approving officials.

k. Routine agency travel provisions relating to employee travel management contained in VA Employee Travel Management policies are always applicable.

l. When traveling in a foreign country on official business as an employee of the Federal Government, all travelers must enter and exit the host country using either an Official Government Passport or a Diplomatic Passport. An Official Passport is burgundy in color and the Diplomatic Passport is black. These passports are issued to an official or employee of the U.S. Government proceeding abroad in the discharge of official duties. The CCO&TPS retains all Official or Diplomatic Passports between official usages. Official Passports must be returned to CCO&TPS immediately on return to the United States as they are the property of the US government and safeguarded by CCO&TPS. See Appendix G for procedures on returning Official or Diplomatic passports. The type of passport is determined by the destination country, the physical work location, and the rank and duties of the traveler. When an employee travels officially to a foreign country, if any issues arise, the host country is required to notify the U.S. Embassy or Consulate office within a short time frame. *NOTE: 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.*

m. 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 facility Director. A completed copy of VA Form 0893, Advance Review of Offer to Donate Support for Official VA Travel, <http://vaww.va.gov/vaforms/va/pdf/VA0893.pdf>, (*NOTE: This is an internal VA link, not available to the public.*) 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. The completed VA Form 0893 and Regional Counsel, Office of General Counsel, or Office of Intergovernmental Affairs comments need to accompany all foreign travel requests that request authority to accept non-VA support (reference: 31 United States Code (U.S.C.) § 1353). *NOTE: Office of General Counsel or Regional Counsel does not approve travel, but indicates there is no legal objection to the travel.*

n. The Philippines Outpatient Clinic (OPC) is the only VA medical care facility located in a foreign country and is an integral part of the United States mission to the Republic of the Philippines. As a result of its mission, travel to the Philippines is required for oversight and conduct of clinical and administrative operations. Travel to that site is considered part of conducting responsible and routine business. Review and approval of foreign travel requests by any staff to this OPC is delegated to the VISN 21 Network Director. The delegation of authority is limited to authorizing VA staff that may provide oversight or operational, clinical or administrative guidance to the clinic. However, travel requests for any other travel to Manila or the Philippines that does not involve specific VHA work at the Philippines OPC will follow all requirements of Foreign Travel Requests, review and approval, and is not delegated to the VISN 21 Network Director.

5. DEFINITIONS

a. **Authorized Absence.** Authorized time away from normal duty without charge to leave. Employees in an authorized absence status are considered to be in an official duty status for the purposes of foreign travel and as such, remain representatives of VA. VA does not support any travel costs when a traveler is in an authorized absence status for foreign travel. *NOTE: Foreign travel in an authorized absence capacity requires an official government passport.*

b. **Dangerous Country.** Dangerous countries are those where travel warnings have been issued by the U.S. Department of State. Travel warnings are issued when conditions in a certain country or location might affect traveler safety and security. The list of identified countries changes frequently. Travelers need to review the DOS Web site prior to each episode of travel. In addition, the State Department issues Consular Information Sheets for every country of the world with information on such matters as, health conditions, crime, unusual currency or entry requirements, areas of instability, and the location of the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate in the subject country. The State Department determines final approval for travel to dangerous countries. Travel to dangerous countries and locations needs to be undertaken with proper consideration for the risks of travel. The Web site for the list of dangerous countries is http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/tw/tw_1764.html.

c. **Duration of Foreign Travel.** Requests for foreign travel that exceed 14 days, in either a single request or as an aggregated total for the fiscal year, must be sent to the Under Secretary for Health for approval. *NOTE: Any single foreign travel request in excess of 30 days will be considered under the Extended Educational Leave Handbook.*

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.

e. **Foreign Government.** For the purpose of acceptance of gifts, a foreign government is defined as:

- (1) Any unit of foreign governmental authority, including any foreign national, state, local, and municipal government;
- (2) Any international or multinational organization whose membership is composed of any unit of foreign government as described in subparagraph e1; or
- (3) Any agent or representative of any such unit or such organization, while acting as such.

f. **Foreign Travel Request Packet.** Documents which provide complete information necessary to facilitate all aspects of the foreign travel request process. The packet includes:

- (1) Request for Foreign Travel Approval (Cover Letter).
- (2) Foreign Travel Information Collection Forms, Appendix A.
- (3) Copy of brochure describing the meeting or activity.
- (4) A complete itinerary of the trip.

(5) Letters of invitation or acceptance confirming specific activities while in the foreign country.

(6) Department of Veterans Affairs Travel Policy Division, Application for Country Clearance, VA Form 0900, July 2008, <http://vaww.va.gov/vaforms/va/pdf/VA0900.pdf>. *NOTE: This is an internal VA link, not available to the public.*

(7) Where a gift or donation of any type has been offered in support of official travel, VA Form 0893, Advance Review of Offer to Donate Support for Official VA Travel, <http://vaww.va.gov/vaforms/va/pdf/VA0893.pdf> (*NOTE: This is an internal VA link, not available to the public*) must be completed and signed by either Regional Counsel or the Office of General Counsel. All gifts or donations from a foreign government must also be reviewed by the Office of Intergovernmental Affairs.

g. **High Cost Travel Trigger.** For appropriate fiscal management, single trips where the cost to the VA exceeds \$3000 will trigger an automatic review by the Second Line Reviewer (this is the Network Director for facility-based staff). For single trips where the cost to the VA exceeds \$5000, an automatic review by the Level III Reviewer (Under Secretary for Health) is required. *NOTE: See para. 9 VHA Review and Approval Process for Foreign Travel, for definitions of first, second and third level reviewers.*

h. **Official Duty Status (Official Capacity).** 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.

i. **Official Passport (Government Passport).** An Official Passport is burgundy in color and is issued to an official or employee of the U.S. Government proceeding abroad in the discharge of official duties. The passport remains the property of the United States and is valid up to 5 years from the date of issue as long as the bearer maintains the status that continues entitlement to this passport. A passport with less than 6 months before its expiration must be renewed prior to official travel. The lifespan of both Official and Diplomatic passports is normally five years. The official passport will not be used during episodes of personal travel. If personal travel is combined with authorized foreign travel, the traveler must use a Tourist Passport (see subparagraph 5l, Tourist Passport). Official Passports must be returned to the Charge Card Oversight and Travel Policy Service (CCO&TPS) between official usages. *NOTE: Both Official and Tourist passports must be taken and used accordingly when official and personal travel is combined.*

j. **Philippines OPC Travel.** Approval of travel by any staff to the Philippines OPC for the purposes of oversight of clinical and administrative operations is delegated to the VISN 21 Network Director. However, all other procedures must be followed. *NOTE: An official government passport is necessary for this category of travel.*

k. **Charge Card Oversight and Travel Policy Service (CCO&TPS).** CCO&TPS manages all aspects of travel policy relating to official and authorized travel for all VA employees. This includes temporary duty (TDY), permanent change of station (PCS), foreign, and local travel. Within that scope, the CCO&TPS reads, writes, interprets, defines and provides training when needed, requested or required. The CCO&TPS is responsible for providing information to GSA, Congress, and other agencies and offices when requested or required by regulation or statute.

l. **Tourist Passport.** A Tourist Passport is blue in color and is to be obtained by persons proceeding abroad in an unofficial or personal capacity. The passport is valid up to 10 years from the date of issue. Use of the tourist passport when traveling in an official capacity misrepresents the true purpose for which the traveler has entered the country and can have serious and adverse affect on U.S. reciprocal relations with foreign countries. Some countries will deny entry at the border to someone entering the country on official business who arrives with only a tourist passport and not the official passport. An official or diplomatic visa cannot be stamped on a tourist passport. Travelers are responsible for their tourist passport.

6. OVERVIEW OF THE FOREIGN TRAVEL APPROVAL PROCESS

a. Foreign travel for the VHA employee is a privilege that carries responsibility, accountability, and risk. All requests for foreign travel must be completed in time to allow for review and concurrence by the appropriate oversight officials, and to obtain an official government passport. Requests requiring Under Secretary for Health or Principal Deputy Under Secretary for Health approval must be submitted to the Office of Academic Affiliations and the CCO&TPS Office at least 60 days prior to the initiation of travel. Requests that are submitted with an inadequate lead time will be returned to the traveler without review or concurrence. Appropriate level approval must be obtained prior to travel; retroactive approval will not be granted. In the event a traveler does not obtain appropriate approval, the traveler will be responsible for any travel costs and time owed to VA. The Request for Foreign Travel packet requires that the request for an official government passport be initiated at the start of the travel approval process. Submission of the approval package to the Office of Academic Affiliations does not meet requirement of notifying CCO&TPS. The VA Form 0900 must be submitted to CCO&TPS separately from the submission of the approval package.

b. For most trips involving both low cost and low risk, authority to review and approve foreign travel has been delegated to the facility and VISN Directors. As the risk or cost of the trip increases, the approval occurs at higher and higher organizational levels. The approval level is determined by the position of the individual traveling, the danger of the country, the travel funding source, the number of days requested, and the total cost of the single travel request. Specifics to the scope and function of foreign travel approval authority are found in para. 9 VHA Review and Approval Process for Foreign Travel.

c. Only those requests for travel that are the highest cost or risk are submitted to the Under Secretary for Health for approval. All requests for foreign travel, where cumulative fiscal year travel exceeds 14 days, must be approved by the Under Secretary for Health. Requests for foreign travel in excess of 30 days in a single trip are also considered an Extended Educational Leave trip and must be processed under the Extended Educational Leave approval process, as well as the Foreign Travel approval process. *NOTE: All foreign travel requests must be*

complete and follow the processes shown below. Any foreign travel request that is incomplete or not timely will be disapproved.

7. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE TRAVELER

All requests for foreign travel must allow adequate time for review and concurrence by the appropriate oversight officials according to the following requirements:

a. Foreign travel in a duty status must result in a specific benefit to the VA. Foreign travel will not be for routine purposes or to accommodate personal interests. Authorization of foreign travel is a privilege to the employee and will not be abused. Employees must understand the following:

(1) Annual leave in conjunction with official travel is scrutinized carefully.

(2) The period of official duty must always be longer than the period of annual leave. If the balance between official duty and annual leave appears inappropriate, the foreign travel request will be disapproved.

(3) No further requests to use annual leave while in the foreign country will be approved during this period of travel. Emergency situations requiring leave are handled locally on a case-by-case basis.

b. For requests requiring Under Secretary for Health or Principal Deputy Under Secretary for Health approval, the VHA traveler must complete and submit the Foreign Travel Request Packet (Appendix A) to the Office of Academic Affiliations and CCO&TPS 60 days prior to anticipated foreign travel. Information that must be supplied by the traveler to complete a foreign travel request includes:

(1) "Request for Foreign Travel Approval" cover letter addressed to the Under Secretary for Health and signed by all requisite institutional officials. This letter needs to describe in detail the circumstances of the travel, the justification for VA support of the travel, and all relevant details that support the request. See para. 9 VHA Review and Approval Process for Foreign Travel for necessary signatures.

(2) Completed Foreign Travel Information Collection Form (Appendix A).

(3) Copy of completed Application for Country Clearance, VA Form 0900 <http://vaww.va.gov/vaforms/va/pdf/VA0900.pdf> . **NOTE:** *This is an internal VA link, not available to the public.*

(4) Completed VA Form 0893 Advance Review of Offer to Donate Support for Official Travel <http://vaww.va.gov/vaforms/va/pdf/VA0893.pdf>, (**NOTE:** *This is an internal VA link, not available to the public.*) required in instances where a VHA employee receives a gift or donation for transportation, lodging, registration or other travel expense.

(5) Copy of brochure describing the meeting or activity.

(6) A complete itinerary of the trip describing each day of activities or travel.

(7) Letters of invitation or acceptance confirming specific activities while in the foreign country. The letters of invitation or brochure must specifically delineate the exact character of the activities of the traveler such as poster presentation, plenary session presentation, breakout session presentation, facilitation role, moderator role, panel presenter, keynote speaker, or attendance only.

c. Care must be taken that the Application for Country Clearance (VA Form 0900, <http://vaww.va.gov/vaforms/va/pdf/VA0900.pdf> *NOTE: This is an internal VA link, not available to the public.*) has been completed and emailed to the CCO & TPS (officialpassports@va.gov) within the required 60-day timeframe. Approval to obtain an official government passport is independent of the approval process for the trip, and both must occur simultaneously. Failure by the traveler to obtain a government passport negates all approved travel plans. No VHA employee may proceed with foreign travel in an official duty status without an official government passport. Periods of personal travel that is followed directly by official duty foreign travel require an additional personal passport.

d. If the funding source is non-Federal, the traveler must complete VA Form 0893, Advance Review of Offer to Donate Support for Official VA Travel, <http://vaww.va.gov/vaforms/va/pdf/VA0893.pdf>, (*NOTE: This is an internal VA link, not available to the public.*) for review by Regional or General Counsel. Counsel review must be accomplished by Regional Counsel for facility or VISN staff and the Office of General Counsel for VHA Central Office staff. 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.

e. Requests for foreign travel greater than 30 days in a single trip are considered a request for extended educational leave (sabbatical). These requests need to be reviewed and approved through both the Foreign Travel and Extended Educational Leave Processes.

f. At no time while on VA-supported foreign travel shall a VA patient care provider assume responsibility for the clinical care of a non-VA patient, except those non-Veteran patients at the Philippines OPC. This prohibition applies to periods of both VA-supported travel and authorized absence. While on foreign travel, an employee is not protected by 38 U.S.C. 4116 for personal liability (for malpractice) in the care of non-VA patients.

8. RESPONSIBILITIES OF VHA FACILITY AND VISN NETWORK DIRECTORS

VHA facility and VISN Directors have the responsibility to:

a. Review carefully all foreign travel requests of VHA employees, including those trips where only authorized absence is requested.

b. Ensure travel to foreign countries is a fiscally responsible decision and avoids conflicts of interest generated by the acceptance of gifts, i.e. when funding originates from a non-VA source, including gifts from foreign governments.

9. VHA REVIEW AND APPROVAL PROCESS FOR FOREIGN TRAVEL

For most low cost, low risk trips, authority to review and approve foreign travel has been delegated to the facility and VISN Directors. As the risk or cost of the trip increases, the approval occurs at higher and higher organizational levels. The approval level is determined by the position of the individual traveling, the danger of the country, the travel funding source, the number of days requested, and the total cost of the single travel request. Approvals occur in a multi-level process, as the potential for risk, cost, or legal issues rise.

a. **Level I (Primary) Review/Approval Responsibilities.** Level I Review (Primary Review) is conducted following receipt of the completed Foreign Travel Request packet.

(1) Medical facility Directors review the foreign travel requests of all medical center staff.

(2) VISN Directors review the foreign travel requests of all Medical Center Directors and VISN staff.

(3) The Deputy Under Secretary for Health for Operations and Management reviews all foreign travel requests of VISN Directors and all VHA Central Office 10N staff.

(4) Each Chief Officer reviews the foreign travel requests of all their program office staff.

(5) The Principal Deputy Under Secretary for Health reviews all Chief Officer and Deputy Under Secretary for Health for Operations and Management foreign travel requests.

(6) The Under Secretary for Health reviews the foreign travel requests of the Principal Deputy Under Secretary for Health.

b. **Level I (Primary) Review/Approval Criteria.** The Primary Review needs to include focus on the approval criteria:

(1) The Foreign Travel Packet is complete, including the cover letter, checklist and required attached materials, and appropriate consultations and forms.

(2) The travel is of specific benefit to VA.

(3) If a gift or donation is involved, VA Form 0893 has been completed by the traveler and has been reviewed by the Office of Regional Counsel, and approval for the acceptance of the gift has been granted (Funding Source Criteria).

(4) The request is for travel by eligible staff. **NOTE:** *Trainees, WOC appointees, or less than 3/8 part time staff are ineligible for medical care appropriation funding of their foreign travel.*

(5) The appropriate consultations have taken place and the resulting responses or comments are recorded.

(a) The local Education Committee or the Research and Development Committee review and approval is completed.

(b) If VA-appropriated research funds are being used, the mandatory review and approval by VHA Office of Research and Development is completed.

(6) The request to obtain an Official Government Passport is in progress and was submitted 60 days in advance of travel.

(7) The travel involves a scientific meeting, educational experience, or other appropriate opportunity not reasonably available in the United States.

(8) The traveler has been invited by a credible and well-known national or international organization.

(9) If more than one person is applying to travel to the same meeting, a determination by the appropriate authority has been made that this travel is appropriate.

(10) The balance between official time and personal time appears reasonable and appropriate, and this trip can withstand external scrutiny.

(11) If any of the applicable approval criteria are not met the travel request must be disapproved at the Primary Reviewer Level, and the traveler notified. *NOTE: All paperwork for approved and disapproved travel must be saved for quarterly reporting to the Office of Academic Affiliations.*

c. Criteria for Advancement of Requests to Level II Review

(1) If the funding support (direct or in-kind) is from a foreign government the request must proceed to a Level II and Level III Reviewer.

(2) If the cost for the trip is in excess of \$3,000 of VA-appropriated funds (Cost Criteria) the request must proceed to a Level II Reviewer.

(3) If the request is for cumulative foreign travel in the current fiscal year lasting more than 7 days including this current trip the request must proceed to a Level II Reviewer. *NOTE: The 7 days away from the facility includes travel time, holidays and weekends occurring within the approved travel period, and is not prorated in any way because of a full or part-time VA appointment. The primary reviewer may approve 7 cumulative days in a fiscal year or 7 days in a single trip (Duration Criteria).*

(4) If the trip is to a dangerous country (Safety Criteria) the request must proceed to a Level II and Level III Reviewer.

(5) If the travel request has significant legal issues the request must proceed to a Level II and Level III Reviewer.

d. **Level II (Secondary) Review Responsibilities.** Level II (Secondary) Review must be conducted following a full review of the Foreign Travel Request packet and after approval by the Primary Reviewer has been obtained. A Level II Secondary Review is only necessary when the request meets the following criteria:

(1) The VISN Director is the Secondary Reviewer for foreign travel by all medical facility staff.

(2) The Deputy Under Secretary for Health for Operations and Management is the Secondary Reviewer for foreign travel by Medical facility Directors and VISN staff.

(3) The Principal Deputy Under Secretary for Health is the Secondary Reviewer for foreign travel by VISN Directors, program office staff, and 10N staff.

(4) The VHA Chief of Staff is the Secondary Reviewer for foreign travel by program office staff for which they are responsible.

(5) Under Secretary for Health is the Secondary Reviewer for all foreign travel requests for Chief Officers, The Principal Deputy Under Secretary for Health, The Deputy Under Secretary for Health for Operations and Management, the Chief of Staff and other direct reports.

e. **Level II (Secondary) Review/Approval Criteria.** Level II (Secondary) review of foreign travel requests must occur when the request meets one or more of the following criteria:

(1) The travel cost to the VA is between \$3001 and \$5000 in VA-appropriated medical care or research dollars. If the cost is more than \$5000, the request must proceed to a Level III Review.

(2) The foreign travel requested is between 8 and 14 days in a single trip or cumulative in the fiscal year, including the current request. If the request is more than 14 days, the request must proceed to a Level III Review.

(3) If the trip is to a dangerous country as defined by the State Department the request must proceed to Level III Review.

(4) If the traveler requests approval to receive foreign government support the request must proceed to Level III Review.

(5) If the travel request has significant legal issues the request must proceed to Level III Review.

f. **Level III (USH) Review/Approval Criteria.** Level III Review, conducted by the Under Secretary for Health, is needed for foreign travel requests meeting any one these specifications:

(1) Any foreign government paid travel requests. Such requests must have been reviewed and approved by the Office of General Counsel and the Office of Intergovernmental Affairs, before submission to the Under Secretary for Health.

(2) Requests that exceed \$5000 in total travel cost.

(3) Requests that exceed 14 days duration (single or multiple trips including current trip).

NOTE: The 14 days away from the facility includes travel time, holidays and weekends occurring within the approved travel period, and is not prorated in any way because of full or part-time VA appointment. The primary reviewer may approve 14 cumulative days in a fiscal year or 14 days in a single trip (Duration Criteria).

(4) Requests for travel to a country appearing on the Dangerous Country list.

(5) Requests for travel involving significant legal issues as determined by the Office of General Counsel.

10. RECORDS AND REPORTS

a. All foreign travel requests, approved and disapproved, must be tracked by the originating facility, VISN or office. The specific informational items that must be tracked are:

(1) Identity of the traveler (name, facility, service, eighths);

(2) Country of travel;

(3) Duration of the trip (days);

(4) Estimated and Actual Cost of the trip;

(5) Purpose of the trip;

(6) Funding entity and corporate status (VA vs. non-VA, for-profit, non-profit, governmental); if VA, which appropriation (medical care or research); and.

(7) Whether the travel was approved or disapproved.

b. Individual facilities must submit the information required in paragraph 9a (1) through (6) on each foreign travel request to their VISN office by the 21st of the month after the end of a fiscal quarter (January 21, April 21, July 21 and October 21) of each year.

c. Each VISN must submit a consolidated report reflecting information from all of their facilities on the first of the next month after the fiscal quarter ends (for example, February 1, May 1, August 1, November 1). Consolidated VISN data needs to be submitted to the Office of Academic Affiliations, either through email distribution or using upload/data entry to a Web site (TBA).

d. Each Program Office must submit a report reflecting information from all of their staff on the first of the next month after the fiscal quarter ends (for example, February 1, May 1, August 1, November 1). Program Office data needs to be submitted to the Office of Academic Affiliations, either through email distribution or using upload/data entry to a Web site <http://vawww.oaa.med.va.gov/ForeignTravel/OTRReport>. *NOTE: This is an internal VA link, not available to the public.*

e. At the end of each fiscal year's data collection efforts, the Office of Academic Affiliations submits a consolidated report for all VISNs to the Deputy Under Secretary for Health for Operations and Management, Principal Deputy Under Secretary for Health, and the Under Secretary for Health.

FOREIGN TRAVEL INFORMATION COLLECTION SHEET

1. Required Attachment Check List

- “Request for Foreign Travel Approval” Cover Letter addressed to Under Secretary for Health and signed by all intermediary approving levels (see Foreign Travel Approval Decision grid)

- Foreign Travel Information Collection Forms (Appendix A – D)

- Completed Application for Country Clearance (VA Form 0900)
 - <http://vaww.va.gov/vaforms/va/pdf/VA0900.pdf> *This is an internal web site not available to the public.*
 - Must be emailed to officialpassports@va.gov .
 - Must be submitted at the same time as the VA Foreign Travel request **but in no case less than** 60 days before travel begins
 - Must be completed for every individual Foreign Travel Request
 - For passport and foreign travel related matters contact VA’s International Travel Coordinator at 202-461-6140 or officialpassports@va.gov
 - Additional VA Travel policy and passport information can be found at <https://vaww1.va.gov/ccotps/> *This is an internal web site not available to the public.*

- VA Form 0893, Advance Review of Offer to Donate Support for Official Travel, when a gift or donation in support of official travel has been offered (<http://vaww.va.gov/vaforms/va/pdf/VA0893.pdf>). *This is an internal web site not available to the public.*

- Copy of brochure describing the meeting or activity

- A complete itinerary of the trip describing each day of activities or travel

- Copies of letters of invitation/acceptance confirming specific activities while in the foreign country

REQUIRED INFORMATION: TRAVEL DATES AND EXPENSES

- Name of Traveler, Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Title, and Mail Code

 - Destination and Name(s) of Meeting(s)

 - Dates of Travel (list each day of trip and annotate VA versus a non-VA day)
NOTE: The dates of travel should include all days of personal leave, authorized absence, as well as paid TDY travel authority.

 - Travel Costs
 - Lodging: \$
 - Meals: \$
 - Airfare: \$
 - Ground Transportation: \$
 - Rental Car \$

 - Other Expenses:
 - Registration Fee for the meeting or similar function: \$
 - Other \$

 - Total Trip Expense (Add Total travel costs + other costs)
- \$ _____

REQUIRED INFORMATION: TRAVEL FUND SOURCES
(*PROVIDE DOLLAR AMOUNT PER SOURCE)

- Non-Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) requiring Office of General Counsel (OGC) review. **(NOTE: Acceptance of any gift or donation in support of official travel requires regional or OGC (023) review and approval according to VA Form 0893,)**
- <http://vaww.va.gov/vaforms/va/pdf/VA0893.pdf> *This is an internal web site not available to the public.*

- 501c3 source (non-profit) (such as VA non-profit corporations) \$
- For profit source \$
- Foreign non-Governmental Entity \$
- Foreign Government Entity \$
(this support requires OGC, Office of Internal Affairs (OIA), and the Under Secretary for Health's review according to VA Form 0893)

- Other funding Sources not requiring OGC review
 - General Post Funds** \$ _____
 - Other Federal Agency** \$ _____ (National Institutes of Health (NIH), (AHRQ), (NSF)
 - Travelers Personal Funds (for authorized absence)** \$ _____
 - Other \$ _____

- Travel Funds from VA appropriated Travel or Tuition Funds
 - Medical Care Appropriation \$ _____ *requires local Education review
 - Research Appropriation \$ _____ *requires local Research and Office of Research and Development (ORD) review

Total Trip Funding Support (Total of above)

\$ _____

REQUIRED INFORMATION: ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS

Is Authorized Absence for Foreign Travel being requested?

Yes_____ No_____

- Number of cumulative days of Authorized Absence for Foreign Travel used this Fiscal Year? _____

- Is the request for Foreign Travel being submitted in conjunction with a request for Extended Educational Leave? Yes _____No_____

- Has appropriate coverage been arranged to cover patient care during the period of Foreign Travel? Yes_____ No_____

- Have patient clinics been cancelled to accommodate Foreign Travel?
Yes_____ No_____

- Number of Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) travelers expected on this trip?

 - o If greater than one traveler, please give reason.

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS (VA) FORM RELATED LINKS

1. **Link to VA Form 0893:** <http://vaww.va.gov/vaforms/va/pdf/VA0893.pdf> *This is an internal web site not available to the public.*
2. **Link to VA Form 0900:** <http://vaww.va.gov/vaforms/va/pdf/VA0900.pdf> *This is an internal web site not available to the public.*

PROCEDURES FOR RETURNING YOUR OFFICIAL OR DIPLOMATIC PASSPORT

1. Pursuant to Title 22, Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Section 51.9, the passport remains the property of the United States (U.S.) and must be surrendered upon request through your employing agency (the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)), the Department of State, or the U.S. Federal Marshall Service.
2. You may not hold in your possession the Official or Diplomatic passport after completion of your official travel assignment. Where instances of back to back episodes of official VA travel take place, the Official or Diplomatic passport is returned after the last leg of the foreign travel episode. Where personal travel immediately follows the official VA related travel, the Official or Diplomatic passport will be returned to Charge Card Oversight and Travel Policy Service (CCO&TPS) thereafter the personal travel.
3. Upon completion of all foreign travel, the Official or Diplomatic passport must be returned to the VA Central Office Passport Office no later than 5 business days upon completion of the foreign travel. The countdown to the 5 days begins from the last date of the travel episode.
4. Failure to return the Official or Diplomatic passport will result in cancellation of the passport issued the employee for U.S. Government travel and the employee will be required to reapply for a new passport. When returning the passport, the use of a traceable means or overnight courier service (for example: UPS, FedEx, DHL or US Post Office Overnight) is required. **Do not send the passport by regular mail as this may result in loss or damage and the employee will need to reapply for an Official or Diplomatic passport.** The return address is:

Department of Veterans Affairs
Travel Policy Service (047E3)
810 Vermont Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20420

ATTENTION: RETURNS