

## RCO Sponsor and Contractor Transportation, Travel, and Meal Guidance

### Overview

RCO's [Manual 8: Reimbursements](#) provides rules for transportation, travel, and meal eligibility and reimbursement. According to the manual, "A sponsor must maintain detailed travel information, which includes a name with dates, times, locations, business purpose, and itemized travel costs." This guide helps identify expectations and provides sources of information to aid in calculating travel expenses.

A [template travel expense voucher](#) form may be downloaded from the RCO website. This form helps sponsors and contractors track the required details needed when calculating expenses. It also serves as a backup for expanded billing documentation. Retain any receipts related to travel and enter summarized information in the "Purpose of the Trip" field, such as "Travel to South Bay worksite, 205 miles at 0.70 cents per mile."

RCO recommends organizations review this document and provide clear direction to employees before travelling. Most travel expenses are limited to Washington [state per diem rates](#). These rates define daily limits on mileage, meals, and lodging. Rate information is updated yearly. The rate consistent with the date(s) traveled must be used.

"Travel status" is defined as the official status of a traveler when the traveler is away from both the official residence and the official station, exclusive of commuting between the two, on official business.

### Mileage

#### Calculating Privately Owned Vehicle (POV) Mileage

- Track the actual miles driven.
- No other vehicle charges are allowed in addition to the POV mileage rate. This rate is meant to cover insurance, fuel, oil changes, repairs, and maintenance or lease payments.

#### Calculating Short-Term Vehicle Rental Mileage

- Short-term rentals apply to vehicles rented for one month or less.
- Allowable costs are limited to actual rental and fuel charges.

#### Long-Term Vehicle Lease

- Allowable costs are limited to the long-term lease rates and mileage available on the U.S. [General Services Administration](#) website.

### Other Transportation Charges

Other reimbursable transportation expenses include the costs of necessary business travel on airlines, railroads, ferries, taxis, buses, and other usual means of conveyance such as ride share services. Reimbursements are to be at the lowest applicable charges not to exceed the lowest cost fare.

## Meals

- The sponsor or contractor must have a policy in effect for meals and meal periods for them to be an eligible travel expense.
- Meals are reimbursed at the state's per diem meal rate for the area of travel. If sponsors or contractors choose to reimburse actual meal cost formal policies must be adopted and the reimbursement cannot exceed state per diem limits for meals.
- For non-overnight trips that include multiple destinations, the reimbursement is determined by the county the traveler is in during the meal period.
- For overnight trips, meal reimbursement will be at the current state rates based on where the traveler stops for sleep (not where the food was purchased or consumed).
- For a meal to be considered eligible for reimbursement, the following must be met:
  - The traveler must be in travel status (see definition below) for a minimum of the following:
    - Eleven hours and the full meal period if the traveler is a board member or employee.
    - Five hours and the full meal period if the traveler is a volunteer.
  - The traveler must be gone for the entire meal period.
    - The meal period is defined by the sponsor or contractor.
    - Commonly used meal periods may look like the following:

### **Breakfast**

In travel status, one and a half hours or more before regular work shift.<sup>1</sup>

### **Lunch**

In travel status, between 11 a.m. and 1 p.m.

### **Dinner**

In travel status, one and a half hours or more after regular work shift.<sup>1</sup>

## Meeting Meals

Meals that are served during meetings (including coffee and light refreshments) may be reimbursed when conducting official grant-funded business or training. The state per diem rate limits apply to meeting meals and light refreshments. The eleven-hour travel status requirement does not apply to meetings happening during mealtimes.

The meals must be an integral part of the business meeting or training session. Meeting meals in which social events occur (such as receptions, anniversaries, and ribbon cuttings) are not reimbursable. The meeting or training session must take place away from the regular workplace where the employee performs normal work. This excludes conference and meeting rooms.

To be reimbursed, retain a list of all meeting participant names, the purpose of the meeting (i.e., the agenda). The receipt for the actual costs must be retained in the event RCO requires submittal.

## Lodging

- In-state Lodging is reimbursed at the Washington state per diem rate for the area of lodging, or actual lodging cost, whichever is lower. Out-of-state travel rates are established by the U.S. [General Services Administration](#).
- The traveler's lodging must be at least fifty miles from the traveler's home or workstation.

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<sup>1</sup>In the absence of a defined work shift, use the default of 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Exceptions to this provision are as follows:

- An overnight stay in a commercial lodging facility to avoid having a traveler drive back and forth for back-to-back late night and early morning official business.
- When the health and safety of a traveler is of concern. The change of plans is to be reported to the traveler's supervisor and noted on the billing to RCO.
- When the sponsor or contractor can demonstrate that staying overnight is more economical to the state.
- Lodging tax is not subject to per diem limits; it is allowed in addition to the state per diem rate. If the lodging rate is over the state per diem rate (without preapproval for going over), the lodging tax must be reduced proportionally.
- There are times when lodging costs may exceed the per diem. In these cases, the organization may provide full reimbursement if the reason for the exception is clearly documented. Sample forms may be found on the [RCO website](#).
  - [Lodging Exception Form in excess of 150 percent](#) of lodging per diem rate
  - [Lodging Exception Form up to 150 percent](#) of lodging per diem rate

All travel reimbursements are subject to the SAAM manual [State Administrative and Accounting Manual \(SAAM\)](#).

For questions contact RCO at 360-902-3000 or [ebilling@rco.wa.gov](mailto:ebilling@rco.wa.gov)

For a detailed outline of [how to reserve and reimburse for lodging](#), please visit the [Office of Financial Management's website](#).