

# **SUNY Maritime College**

## **TRAVEL GUIDELINES**

The purpose of this Traveler's Guide is to help SUNY Maritime College employees understand travel rules and regulations and to provide instructions on how to claim reimbursement for their expenses. As an employee traveling on business for SUNY Maritime College you are performing a valuable service. At the same time, it is your responsibility to spend this travel money as efficiently and economically as possible. The basic rule to remember is that only **actual, necessary and reasonable** business expenses will be reimbursed.

When making travel arrangements, you should check to see if there is an OGS Contract for the type of travel related services that you need. Currently OGS has contracts for car rentals, airfare, and centralized travel agent services, both statewide and regional. More information may be obtained from the accounts payable manager in the Business Office

### **Traveler's responsibility**

- Know State travel rules and regulations
- Know SUNY Maritime College's policies and procedures
- Complete and submit your travel voucher accurately and timely
- Know your official station and its effect on your eligibility for travel reimbursement
- Obtain necessary approvals for travel
- Obtain all necessary travel documents, voucher, tax exempt certificate etc.
- Maintain an accurate record of expenses including departure and return times, and mileage
- Obtain required receipts or documentation
- Claim reimbursement only for actual allowed expenses within reimbursement rates

### **Supervisor's responsibility**

- Know State travel rules and regulations
- Know SUNY Maritime College's specific travel policies and procedures
- Know your staff's official stations and its effect on their travel reimbursement
- Approve requests for staff to be in travel status only when necessary
- Review traveler's itinerary to make sure travel is done in the most effective manner
- Verify that voucher is within allowable rates and all required documentation is attached
- Review and certify traveler's vouchers completely
- Forward vouchers to the Accounts Payable Office in a timely manner (within 30 days of trip)

## **Office of Accounts Payable responsibility**

- Ensure that all expenses comply with travel rules and regulations
- Verify that all charges are actual, reasonable and necessary
- Designate an employee's official station which is in the best interest of the State
- Provide and control all travel related documents (vouchers, tax exempt certificates, etc.)
- Ensure compliance with IRS regulations
- Review and approve travel vouchers completely and in a timely manner
- Ensure that exceptions or waivers are justified and necessary

### **Travel Status**

When you are on assignment at a work location more than 35 miles from both home and official station you are considered to be in travel status. This determines that you are eligible for reimbursement of travel expenses such as meals and lodging.

When travel is to a work location within 35 miles of your residence or official station, you are not considered to be in travel status and not covered by the travel reimbursement policy.

### **Official Station**

Your Official Station is your usual work location. The purpose of an official station is to establish when you are in travel status and eligible for travel expenses. Travel between your home and official station is considered commuting and is not reimbursed.

### **Transportation Expenses**

When choosing the method of transportation you should consider several factors, such as distance traveled, time to travel this distance, number of travelers, number of locations to be visited, and what type of transportation may be available. NYS Contracts should be used whenever possible. If a more expensive method is used, you are required to obtain approval from the Director of Business Affairs and justification should be submitted with your voucher.

Many airlines offer lower fares for travel on weekends. Employees should take advantage of super saver rates whenever possible, if a savings is realized. To obtain the lower airfare, there may be additional lodging and meal expenses. A cost comparison should be done to determine cost effectiveness (show airfare savings exceeds extra costs incurred).

## **Common Carrier**

A common carrier (train, bus, plane.) usually results in the most economical method of transportation. This is true especially for bus or train travel between New York City and Albany. The most economical method should be used unless there are circumstances that would make this unreasonable.

Employees traveling on Amtrak should travel by coach and request the government rate. The government rate can only be requested when making a reservation by telephone at 1-800-USA-RAIL (1-800-872-7245). The government rate is not available when the reservation is made on the Amtrak website.

## **Air Travel/Business Travel Account**

When making travel arrangements involving air travel, all employees are required to use the Business Travel Account (BTA) set up with the designated state authorized travel agencies. The Business Travel Account is a central billing for all air travel for SUNY Maritime College

**The following process should be followed when using the BTA:**

### **AIRLINE TICKET PURCHASES**

For airline ticket purchases, it is currently necessary to utilize the Business Travel Account (BTA) for securing airline tickets through the State Contract Air Travel Services Travel Agents. Some travel agents that SUNY Maritime College uses frequently are:

Advantage Travel 518-426-0052

Lakeside Travel 914-948-2060

Austin Travel 516-465-1000

The following link provides a listing of all contracted travel agents

<http://www.ogs.state.ny.us/purchase/snt/awardnotes/7900501730can.HTM>

To ensure that they are getting the best price for their airfare, travelers should compare prices offered by more than one contract travel agent and perhaps other sources (airlines, websites, etc.). Travelers should ensure that the pricing that they are getting is for a similar ticket including the same departure and return times, same travel routes, refund ability, etc.

Occasionally, travelers are able to secure better pricing for airfare on their own than the contract agent can provide. In these cases, reimbursement for the airfare can take place provided a justification can be provided showing that there is substantial cost savings by not using the State Contract Agent. Generally, the amount saved should be in excess of \$200.00. This justification must include a written price quote for the flight from one of the contracted travel agents showing the price they charge for a similar ticket.

THE FOLLOWING PROCEDURES MUST BE FOLLOWED FOR AIRLINE TICKET PROCEDURES UTILIZING THE BTA ACCOUNT AND THE STATE CONTRACT TRAVEL AGENT

-The traveler completes a Travel Authorization Request Form for the trip and forwards the form for appropriate signatures, account authorizations and funding approvals. The completed form must be on file with Accounts Payable before authorization will be given for airline ticket purchase.

-The traveler contacts one of the state contract travel agents listed above, identifies oneself as a SUNY Maritime employee, and proceeds with the flight information. The agency will offer schedule and fare options. The fares offered will include the least expensive flight, the most direct routing, etc., and the traveler should select the least expensive option that is consistent with traveler's time schedule. Please make a written record of the destinations, airlines, flight numbers, dates, departure and arrival times and the cost of the ticket. This call is only to obtain information. DO NOT make a commitment during this call.

-Immediately after calling the contract travel agent, contact Accounts Payable who will assign a trip authorization number (provided a properly completed Travel Authorization is on file for the trip). The traveler will advise the Accounts Payable Office of the flight chosen and the amount of the airline ticket and they will keep a written log of the information for reconciliation purposes to the BTA Account.

-The traveler will then call the contract travel agent back to confirm the flight giving the trip authorization number assigned by Accounts Payable. By giving this number, the travel agent is authorized to issue the airline ticket to the traveler and to bill the campus BTA Account. WITHOUT THIS TRIP AUTHORIZATION NUMBER, THE TRAVEL AGENT WILL NOT ISSUE THE TICKET.

-The contract travel agent will then issue an electronic ticket and fax or e-mail confirmation of the ticket to the traveler and to Accounts Payable.

-If the airline ticket needs to be changed or canceled for any reason the traveler must immediately notify the travel agent and Accounts Payable. Any unused airline ticket must be turned in to Accounts Payable for resolution with the state contract travel agency.

-SUNY Maritime will be centrally billed monthly for all airline tickets charged on the BTA Account. Account coding for this monthly payment will reflect the account assigned on each completed Travel Authorization. Accounts Payable has the responsibility for maintaining the trip authorization number log and for reconciling the BTA account to that log.

-Non-official companion travel may be arranged through the contract travel agent for an additional fee and with personal credit card payment.

## USE OF STATE VEHICLES

The College maintains a fleet of State-owned (College-owned) passenger cars and vans for official business travel. Unless there are extenuating circumstances, State-owned vehicles must be used. The State University of New York and SUNY Maritime College set forth the following requirements for use of State-owned vehicles:

### Eligibility

- Must be used only for official University business.
- The driver must be a New York State employee
- The driver must hold a valid N.Y.S. driver's license and accept responsibility for adherence to all vehicle and traffic laws.
- All passengers must be on official University business.
- Personal or unrelated travel may not be combined with official business travel.
- Duration of travel normally should not exceed three days and cost of extended parking (airport, etc.) should not be excessive.

### **Personal Car**

If you are authorized to use your own car for State business, you will be reimbursed a specified rate for mileage. This rate includes all charges for gas, oil, maintenance, repairs and insurance on your car. No other charges will be reimbursed. The mileage rate in effect as of January 1, 2006 is 44.5 cents per mile. See the link below for the latest mileage rate:

<http://www.osc.state.ny.us/agencies/travel/mileage.htm>

### **Car Rentals**

Rental cars may be used for short-duration trips because this is usually a more cost-effective option. If a rental car is used, it should be rented from an authorized car rental agency as specified in the OGS contract. Gasoline and any other direct costs of the rental will be reimbursed.

### **Parking and Toll charges**

All reasonable and necessary parking and toll charges will be reimbursed. Tolls that you have paid by the EZ pass method will be reimbursed. Ordinary and necessary expenses are generally reimbursed without receipts.

## Taxi Charges

Reasonable and necessary taxi fares will be reimbursed, along with a customary tip.

## Meals and Lodging

There are two different methods of claiming reimbursement for lodging and meals. Only breakfast and dinner are reimbursed, lunch is not. Tips and incidental expenses are included in the reimbursement amounts.

### Method I:

This allows for a fixed per diem reimbursement without receipts. This method may be used even when lodging is obtained with a relative or friend. To be entitled to the full per diem, you must be in overnight travel status and eligible for both breakfast and dinner.

New York City and Nassau, Suffolk, Rockland and Westchester Counties	\$50.00
Cities of Albany, Binghamton, Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse and their respective surrounding metropolitan areas	\$40.00
All other locations in New York State	\$35.00
Out of State (includes any out of state tax on lodging)	\$50.00

### Method II:

This allows for reimbursement of actual lodging costs up to a specific amount, plus an allowance for meals. The per diem amount is based on the geographic location of your work assignment. **Receipts are required for lodging.** Receipts are not required for meals. The reimbursement amounts are based on rates established by the Federal government. These rates are established by county, so the county must be indicated on your travel voucher as well as the city. No taxes should be paid within New York State. For out-of-state travel, local and state taxes will be reimbursed in addition to the per diem amount. When seeking lodging, employees should always request the government rate. Most hotels provide rooms at a government rate which is within the reimbursement rates established by the U.S. General Services Administration <http://www.gsa.gov>. Please refer to the OSC website for the meal allowance breakdown between breakfast and lunch. <http://www.osc.state.ny.us/agencies/travel/meals.htm>

## **Per Diem Rates**

Federal per diem rates are available at the following website: <http://www.policyworks.gov/perdiem>. We encourage you to visit the website when completing all travel reimbursement requests to ensure the proper rates are used. Regarding meals, any meals paid for with the SUNY travel card must be reported on the employee's travel voucher so that the expenditure can be deducted from their meal allowance

### **Time limits on meal allowances**

In order to receive the full per diem it must be necessary for the traveler to be in an overnight status and be eligible for both breakfast and dinner. You may be eligible for breakfast on the day of departure or dinner on the day of return, if you meet the following time limits:

#### **Breakfast**

You will be allowed reimbursement for breakfast if you have to leave before 7:00 a.m.

#### **Dinner**

You will be allowed reimbursement for dinner on the day the trip ends if you return after 7:00 p.m.

#### **Meals for Day Trips**

You may be eligible for meals if your departure and return meet the time limits for meals. You can get reimbursed up to the maximum Federal amount with a receipt, or you may claim the unreceipted meal allowances shown below:

Breakfast           \$ 5.00

Dinner               \$12.00

### **Weekend Allowance**

You are allowed lodging and meals for weekends when it is necessary for you to be in travel status.

## **Conferences, Seminars, Conventions**

### **State Sponsored**

State-sponsored conferences or seminars must be in accordance with the maximum Federal per diem amounts for meals and lodging. The cost of extra items, such as meeting room rentals, equipment, luncheons and breaks will be considered separately. In selecting the conference site, the agency should consider cost, location and any other special requirements. No alcoholic beverages will be reimbursed. Standard procurement procedures should be followed.

### **Non State sponsored**

When employees attend conferences sponsored by other than a state agency, there is no control over the location of the conference. If the lodging rate exceeds the maximum per diem rates, the traveler should receive prior approval from the Director of Business Affairs. The traveler should consider the following when submitting an over-the-maximum request:

- If there is available lodging within the rate at a nearby location
- Transportation cost saved by staying at the conference site
- Late evening or early morning conference functions
- The attendee is an officer of the sponsoring organization
- The attendee is a lecturer or performing other functions essential to the conference

If the conference agenda indicates that meals will be provided as part of the conference registration fee, then a reduction to the per diem amounts must be made on the travel voucher submitted.

Social activities such as sight seeing, golf outings etc. are considered personal expenses and will not be reimbursed.

When travelers stay at the conference site, it is usually not necessary to incur transportation expenses to attend conference events. Also, many conferences offer direct transfers from transportation terminals to the conference site. If a traveler rents a vehicle, the expense must be justified.

## **New York State Travel Policy**

The following link provides detailed information on New York State travel policies:

<http://www.osc.state.ny.us/agencies/travel/travel.htm>

### **IRS reporting**

The Internal Revenue Service requires withholding and reporting on the following types of travel reimbursements.

1. Per diem amounts paid in excess of the per diem rate and not substantiated with receipts
2. Meals for non-overnight travel - with or without receipts
3. Mileage reimbursement in excess of the maximum rate allowed by the IRS
4. Reimbursement for expenses at a single location in excess of one year

### **Fraudulent claims - Section 175.35 Penal Law**

Offering a false instrument for filing is a Class 'E' felony. Employees, including supervisors, who knowingly misrepresent the facts concerning travel for official business or who file or sign any travel form which contains deliberate false statements given with intent to defraud the State may be subject both to administrative and/or disciplinary action, including the possibility of termination and criminal action.

### **Foreign travel**

Travel outside the continental United States is reimbursed based on the maximum per diem allowance established by the U.S. Department of State. The rates are published monthly and are posted on their web site at <http://www.state.gov/m/a/als/prdm/> Expenses should be converted to American dollars, based on the exchange rate in effect during the period of travel.

#### **Per diem rates**

The foreign travel rates provide for lodging costs up to a maximum amount, and an allowance for meals and incidental expenses. If a traveler is not entitled to the full meal per diem, the allowance is divided into 80% for dinner and 20% for breakfast.

## **Incidental expenses**

Expenses directly related to lodging and meals are included in the per diem allowance and are not reimbursed. However, some expenses unique to foreign travel may be reimbursed. Examples of some of these expenses include:

1. Passports
2. Visa fees
3. Cost to convert currency
4. Travelers' checks
5. Laundry charges for extended stays
6. Departure taxes

## **Miscellaneous Expenses**

### **Expenses for Promotional Exams or Interviews**

Travel expenses for State employees traveling more than 50 miles from their home or official station to report for promotional exams or interviews may be reimbursed at the discretion of the appointing agency. Non state personnel reporting for interviews for difficult to fill positions may be reimbursed for travel expenses in accordance with the same rules as state employees. Eligible positions in the competitive class must be determined by the Department of Civil Service. For positions outside of the competitive class, the eligibility must be approved by the head of the agency.

### **Telephone Charges**

Only telephone charges for official State business may be reimbursed.

### **Baggage Transfer Charges**

Reasonable baggage transfer and storage charges will be allowed.

### **Personal Expenses Not Reimbursable**

Personal expenses, such as laundry, valet service; movie rentals, theater or banquet tickets, entertainment, and transportation to and from meals are not reimbursable.