



Ohio Administrative Code

Rule 3337-41-121 Reimbursement for official travel and entertainment.

Effective: March 16, 2026

The version of this rule that includes live links to associated resources is online at

<https://www.ohio.edu/policy/41-121.html>

(A) Overview

- (1) Section 126.31 of the Revised Code enables employees of the university to be reimbursed for actual and necessary travel and other expenses incurred while attending a gathering, conference or convention or while performing official duties related to university business inside or outside the state of Ohio if authorized by the university. This policy governs the travel of faculty, staff, non-employees and official guests. The university may pay for or reimburse individuals for reasonable, authorized and properly- documented travel and entertainment ("travel expense") as described in this policy.
- (2) This policy adheres to the internal revenue service (IRS) accountable plan rules that require employees and non-employees to properly document and account for all business and travel expenses within a reasonable period of time. The university uses the IRS standards for establishing the reasonable period of time for determination of the tax treatment of a reimbursement, as follows:
 - (a) If substantiation for the reimbursement is submitted within sixty calendar days of when the expenses were paid or incurred, and if all other requirements of the university's reimbursement for official travel and entertainment policy are met, the reimbursement will be treated as a nontaxable reimbursement of a university business expense.
 - (b) If substantiation for the reimbursement occurs more than sixty calendar days after the expenses were paid or incurred, the reimbursement must be reported to the IRS as taxable income paid to the individual. The amount of the reimbursement will be added to the employee's W-2, and taxes will be withheld from pay.
- (3) When booking international travel, it is necessary for travelers to abide by all federal travel guidelines, restrictions, and requirements (e.g., Fly America Act, OFAC (office of foreign assets control) Cuba license requirements, etc.). The university's international travel webpage contains links and references to current pertinent guidelines. Further, travel to OFAC restricted countries requires advance approval from insurance carriers.
- (4) Persons traveling on university business should incur the lowest practical and reasonable expense and complete the travel process in an efficient and timely



3337-41-121

2

manner. University travelers have the duty to avoid impropriety, or even the appearance of impropriety, in any travel expense.

- (5) Reimbursement shall not be claimed for items obtained through the use of university frequent flyer miles or other rewards/points programs, or costs which are reimbursable by any other source.
- (6) Any upgrades or additional costs (such as seat upgrades, hotel room upgrades) must be approved prior to booking travel. These expenses will only be covered as a reasonable accommodation for employees with a documented disability or accommodation need, as approved by the office for university accessibility. Any employee requiring an accommodation should submit a request to the office of university accessibility.
- (7) All travel must utilize the authorized university travel management company (TMC) unless a prior exception is obtained. Any exception to this requirement is documented under the relevant paragraph of this policy. All other exceptions are limited to very rare sets of circumstances and will be reviewed based on merits and substantiation of each scenario.
- (8) Following travel, all travel must be substantiated and submitted as required on the "Travel Expense Report" or TER ("substantiation process").
- (9) Planning units may choose to make more restrictive policies but will be responsible for monitoring and enforcing those restrictions.

(B) Spousal travel

As a general practice, spouse, domestic partner, and family travel will not be reimbursed by the university. A spouse's or domestic partner's travel may be reimbursed, at the university's expense, if the presence has a documented business purpose and pre-approval has been obtained in accordance with the policy. For vice president and deans, spousal and domestic partner travel requires prior approval of the president or provost; all others must obtain the prior approval of the appropriate dean or vice president. A copy of the approval must be submitted with the TER or attached to the university credit card transaction.

(C) Transportation

(1) University vehicles

University owned or leased vehicles are maintained for the use of employees on university business. University policies govern usage and rental procedures.



3337-41-121

3

Liability coverage while operating a university vehicle is the responsibility of the university.

(2) Rental vehicles - external

- (a) Rental vehicles should be procured through the TMC, utilizing an approved payment process. Rental vehicles can also be rented, in person, directly from a local office location of the university's preferred supplier(s). University employees may register for car-rental company membership cards that simplify rental procedures. Contact the purchasing office to apply.
- (b) Rental car reservations booked using university preferred supplier(s), must reference the business account number on the rental car contract for the university's driver protection coverage to apply domestically while traveling for university business. Under these circumstances, additional insurance should not be purchased, and will not be reimbursed . If purchasing from a non-preferred rental car supplier, insurance should be purchased when traveling domestically and will be reimbursed.
- (c) When renting vehicles outside of the United States of America (USA), rental car insurance for vehicles must be obtained, as available in country, and is reimbursable.
- (d) D. The minimum age for car rentals is determined by the university agreement with rental car preferred suppliers. All drivers must be either an Ohio university employee, an Ohio university student, or a guest on Ohio university business.
- (e) Vehicles for individual travelers shall be in the intermediate or smaller vehicle class unless a business purpose warrants a larger size. Prior approval by the traveler's "Chief Financial and Administrative Officer" (CFAO) or designee, of an upgraded vehicle is required and the approval must be attached to the transaction as part of the substantiation process.

(3) Privately owned vehicles - mileage rate

Reimbursement for travel using a privately owned vehicle is made to the university traveler using the IRS standard mileage rate applicable on the date of travel. The mileage rate covers all expenses incurred through the use of a privately owned automobile for university business, therefore, the university will not pay for or reimburse gasoline, insurance, maintenance or car washes.



3337-41-121

4

For university employees that receive an auto allowance, the allowance is provided in place of mileage reimbursement for all travel. When more than one university traveler is transported in a privately owned auto:

- (a) If the auto-owner is a university traveler, only the auto-owner can claim mileage.
- (b) If the auto-owner is not a university traveler, only one university traveler per auto can claim mileage.

(4) "Drive vs Fly" rule

Mileage is reimbursable regardless of the number of miles traveled, however, the "drive vs fly" rule will apply.

- (a) Travelers who choose to drive rather than fly to business destinations may be reimbursed per diem and lodging (if necessary) for a total of two full driving days (one day before and one day after the official business).
- (b) When two or more staff travel together in a personal vehicle, the mileage reimbursement can only be reimbursed to the driver of the personal vehicle. Each traveler is entitled to the allowable per diem and lodging.
- (c) The mileage reimbursement cannot exceed the best available method of transportation documented prior to the travel. To qualify for reimbursement when driving longer distances normally accomplished by flying, the business expense must be the lesser of the actual mileage and parking expense at the business location or the total of:
 - (i) Most economical and practical means of airfare (the traveler must supply a quote from the university TMC)
 - (ii) Roundtrip mileage to the airport
 - (iii) Airport parking (no higher than the contracted rate with the university preferred supplier)
 - (iv) Ground transportation (not rental car) to/from airport to business location

(5) Standard distances between travel points

- (a) The first point-of-origin on a travel expense should be the traveler's primary university work site (per payroll office records). If you begin your



3337-41-121

5

business travel from an alternate location, you should list that location only if the mileage to the destination is less than the mileage from your work site to the same destination.

- (b) If your home is not located in the same city as your primary work site and you begin your business travel from home, mileage between work and home cannot be included in the mileage reimbursement totals. In addition, travel from your home to a point between your home and your primary work site cannot be submitted for mileage reimbursement.

(6) Taxi, limousine, bus, and train

Travel via taxilimousine, bus, trains and other local conveyances will be reimbursed. If the total cost of a single expense is less than seventy-five dollars, a receipt is not required for transportation related costs. Such transportation must be limited to travel between official stations and transportation terminals, and/or places of lodging and places of university business. Tips for taxi or shuttle are reimbursable per customary tip rates for the location.

(D) Air travel

(1) Commercial airlines

- (a) Commercial air travel shall be purchased through the TMC utilizing an approved payment process.
- (b) Flights longer than five hours of continuous airtime, from point to point, qualify for a less than first class upgrade (e.g., business class).
- (c) Frequent flyer miles: The Ohio ethics commission's current guidance ("Advisory Opinion 2025-02,") permits public employees to use frequent flyer miles or similar reward points earned during official travel for personal use, provided the rewards are earned under the same terms available to the general public and their use does not impose additional cost on the university.

(2) University air transportation service

University personnel are encouraged to schedule university planes for business travel. Contact the university airport to make reservations.

(3) Private or leased aircraft



3337-41-121

6

Private aircraft expenses may be reimbursed if the pilot has a copy of an appropriate, current pilot certificate and proof of insurance (hull and liability) on file with the risk management office. Reimbursement will be made based on the U.S. general services administration (GSA) mileage rate in effect at the time of travel. The mileage rate is intended to cover all costs associated with the operation of the plane, including but not limited to, gasoline, insurance, and maintenance.

(4) Fly America Act

In accordance with the Fly America Act, when international air travel is funded by a federal grant, the university must use a U.S. flag carrier service except under certain circumstances. The TMC can assist university travelers in complying with this requirement.

(5) Small regional or remote airports

The TMC may be able to assist with booking small regional or remote air transportation services. If the TMC is unable to procure the booking, travelers may purchase their booking directly and provide documentation from the TMC of their inability to assist.

(6) Ancillary fees charged by airline

Ancillary fees charged by airlines, (e.g., seat assignments, baggage fees, excess baggage fees) are reimbursable with a reasonable business-related justification.

(E) Lodging

(1) Lodging shall be booked through the TMC and paid using an approved payment method.

(2) Itemized receipts are always required for lodging. If meals are included on a lodging bill, a separate itemized receipt is required for meals. Extra room costs such as movies, equipment or other personal or incidental costs cannot be paid or reimbursed unless specifically identified in policy (see paragraph (G) of this rule for additional guidance).

(a) Conference hotels

Conference hotels can be booked during the conference registration process using an approved payment method. Travelers should check to see if the TMC has the conference rates or better.



3337-41-121

7

(b) The sixty-mile rule

Overnight lodging is allowable only if the destination is further than sixty miles from the traveler's primary university work site. The sixty-mile minimum does not apply to faculty teaching at regional campuses or when attending a multi-day conference.

(c) Cost of lodging

Allowable cost is the single room rate plus tax, unless the other party is also on authorized university travel. Please refer to the tax office website for states providing tax exempt status to the university.

(d) Reduced rate options

Almost all hotels and motels have significant rate reductions for government employees, though the number of rooms at the discount may be limited. Be prepared to show a university ID upon arrival.

(e) Non-traditional lodging

Non-traditional lodging is allowable in accordance with the risk management process.

(F) Meals

(1) Business meeting meals or entertainment

(a) Business meeting meals or entertainment must have a business purpose and must include two or more persons (at least one non-university employee).

Costs should be reasonable and customary for the location. Itemized receipts are required. Business meals must be deducted from the claimed per diem for any employees attending.

(b) Alcoholic beverages: Regardless of the payment method used, alcoholic beverages are permissible only when associated with a business meeting meal or official university entertainment. Alcohol must be charged to a foundation account whose guidelines permit the expense.

(2) Same day travel

University travelers do not qualify for personal meal reimbursement during same-day travel. IRS regulations require that an employee be away from home substantially longer than an ordinary day's work and during the time away from



3337-41-121

8

home, need sleep or rest (referred to as the "overnight rule" - i.e., overnight stay is required). Please see "IRS Publication 463 Chapter 1 - Traveling Away from Home."

(3) Overnight travel

- (a) The university provides per diem reimbursement to faculty, staff and guests while traveling on official business per federal per diem rates based on location of the travel destination. The per diem allowance is a daily fixed dollar amount provided for meals and incidentals. It can include up to three meals per day, and the following incidentals: laundry, dry-cleaning, and gratuities (tips) to waiter/waitress, porters, bellhops, stewards, etc. and is paid to the traveler after the trip. Regardless of departure and arrival times on the first and last day of travel, per IRS guidelines, travelers can receive seventy-five per cent of the per diem rate for the first and last day of travel.
- (b) If circumstances warrant, travel may begin the day prior to business and end the day after the last day of business travel. An additional day of travel is allowable at the beginning and the end when traveling internationally.
- (c) When meals are provided, the per diem must be adjusted by deducting the appropriate meals on the TER.

(G) Miscellaneous travel expenses

- (1) Ordinary and necessary expenses related to business travel may be reimbursed. Each expense must have a clear business purpose. This includes, but is not necessarily limited to, parking charges, ferry or water taxi fees, network and data charges (no data and network charges will be allowed when on personal travel), necessary laundry (if traveling more than five consecutive days to help avoid excess packing), and bridge, highway, or tunnel tolls. Traffic fines, personal vehicle towing charges (towing charges for a disabled university registered and owned vehicle are allowable), and like expenses are not allowable.
- (2) Change and cancellation fees will only be allowable if there is a bona fide business purpose or medical emergency which necessitates the change or cancellation fee as determined by the planning unit. Changes or cancellations due to personal preference or needs will not be covered by the university.
- (3) A registration fee may not include extraneous activities (golf-outings, museum tours, yoga class, etc.) if they can be reasonably separated from the total cost



3337-41-121

9

of the registration fee. When such costs are not reasonably separable and are included as part of the overall registration (e.g., welcome events or incidental activities), the registration fee may be charged to university funds.

- (4) Charges for catering, meeting rooms and related expenses should be procured prior to travel and processed through purchasing to ensure proper insurance and contract requirements have been met.
- (5) If it is known that a third party reimbursement will occur, no such charges should be incurred by, or submitted for reimbursement to the university. If a third party pays the traveler's expense after the university has made payment, the traveler must prepare a reimbursement to "Ohio University" for the amount.

(H) Mixed business and personal travel

- (1) If airfare, hotel or car rental is purchased for a trip that includes both personal and business purposes, the amount paid by the university will only be the fare directly attributed to the university business purpose.
- (2) When combining a business trip with a personal trip, the TMC will accept university payment for the business portion of the trip and will charge a personal card for the personal portion of the trip.

(I) Substantiation /receipts

Original receipts are required for substantiation of all expenses unless otherwise noted in the policy or procedure. Traveler should attach all related materials to the travel report to document the business purpose/need (e.g., conference or meeting agenda).

Reimbursement policies and procedures for grants and contracts take precedence over this policy and may require more comprehensive documentary evidence for expenses.

The version of this rule that includes live links to associated resources is online at

<https://www.ohio.edu/policy/41-121.html>