

# HARRIS COUNTY HOUSING AUTHORITY

## Travel Policy

**Effective: August 15, 2012**

**Last Revised: August 15, 2012**

### **PURPOSE**

The purpose of this policy is to provide consistent travel regulations and reimbursement. It is the intent of the Harris County Housing Authority (the "Authority") Board of Commissioners to establish a policy that provides fair and equitable treatment to all individuals traveling on Authority business at Authority expense.

### **ENFORCEMENT**

The chief financial officer (CFO) of the Authority or the designee of the CFO shall be responsible for the enforcement of these travel regulations.

### **TRAVEL POLICY**

- A. In the interpretation and application of this policy, the term "traveler" or "authorized traveler" means any appointed Authority officer or employee, including members of the Authority's board of commissioners and committees appointed by the board, and the employees of such boards and committees who are traveling on official Authority business and whose travel was authorized in accordance with this policy. "Authorized traveler" shall not include the spouse, children, other relatives, friends, or companions accompanying the authorized traveler on Authority business, unless the person(s) otherwise qualifies as an authorized traveler under this policy.
- B. Authorized travelers are entitled to reimbursement of certain expenditures incurred while traveling on official business for the Authority. Reimbursable expenses shall include expenses for transportation; lodging; meals; registration fees for conferences, conventions and seminars; and other actual and necessary expenses related to official business as determined by the CFO.
- C. Authorized travelers can request either a travel advance for the projected cost of authorized travel, or advance billing directly to the Authority for registration fees, air fares, meals, lodging, conferences and similar expenses.  
Travel advance requests are not considered documentation of travel expenses. If travel advances exceed documented expenses, the traveler must immediately reimburse the Authority. It will be the responsibility of the CFO to initiate action to recover any undocumented travel advances.
- D. Travel advances are available only for special travel and only after completion and approval of the travel authorization form.
- E. The travel expense reimbursement form will be used to document all expense claims.
- F. To qualify for reimbursement, travel expenses must be:
  - Directly related to the conduct of Authority business for which travel was authorized;
  - Actual, reasonable and necessary under the circumstances;
  - Approved by the CFO, if the travel does not require an overnight stay; and

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- Approved by the Board of Commissioners, if the travel requires an overnight stay.

Expenses considered excessive will not be allowed.

- G. Claims of \$5 or more for travel expense reimbursement must be supported by the original paid receipt for lodging, vehicle rental, phone call, public carrier travel, conference fee(s), meals and other reimbursable costs.
- H. Any person attempting to defraud the Authority or misuse Authority travel funds is subject to legal action for recovery of fraudulent travel claims and/or advances.
- I. Mileage and motel expenses incurred within Harris County are not ordinarily considered eligible expenses for reimbursement, except that mileage within Harris County is a reimbursable expense if a pool car is not available for use.

### **TRAVEL REIMBURSEMENT RATE SCHEDULES**

Authorized travelers shall be reimbursed according to the federal travel regulation rates. The Authority's travel reimbursement rates will automatically change when the federal rates are adjusted.

The Authority may pay directly to the provider for expenses such as meals, lodging and registration fees for conferences, conventions, seminars and other education programs.

### **ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURES**

#### **TRAVEL REQUESTS**

To ensure reimbursement for official travel, an approved travel authorization form is required. Lack of pre-approval does not prohibit reimbursement, but it does assure reimbursement within the limits of the Authority travel policy. All costs associated with the travel should be reasonably estimated and shown on the travel authorization form. An approved authorization form is needed before advanced expenses are paid or travel advances are authorized. A copy of the conference program, if applicable, should be attached to the form. If the program is not available prior to the travel, submit it with the reimbursement form.

#### **TRAVEL DOCUMENTATION**

It is the responsibility of the authorized traveler to

1. Prepare and accurately describe the travel;
2. Certify the accuracy of the reimbursement request;
3. Note on the reimbursement form all direct payments and travel advances made by the Authority; and
4. File the reimbursement form with the necessary supporting documents and original receipts.

The reimbursement form should be filed with the finance department within 10 days of return or at the end of the month, whichever is more practical.

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### TRANSPORTATION

All potential costs should be considered when selecting the modes of transportation. For example, airline travel may be cheaper than automobile when time away from work and increased meal and lodging costs are considered. When time is important, or when the trip is so long that other modes of transportation are not cost beneficial, air travel is encouraged.

If the traveler goes outside the state by means other than air, the reimbursement will be limited to air fare at tourist or economy class, ordinary expenses during the meeting dates, and one day's meals and motel before and after the meeting. The traveler will be required to take annual leave for any additional time taken beyond the day before and the day after the meeting dates.

Exceptions: When the traveler extends the trip with personal time to take advantage of discount fares, the reimbursement will be limited to the lesser of the:

1. Actual expenses incurred; or
2. Amount that would have been incurred for the business portion only. The calculations for the business portion of the trip must be made using the least expensive rates available.

All expenses and savings associated with extending the trip must be submitted with the expense reimbursement form.

#### A. Air

When possible, the traveler should make full use of discounts for advance airline reservations and registration. The traveler should request conference, government, or weekend rates, whichever is cheaper, when making lodging or rental car reservations. The Authority will pay for tourist or economy class air travel. The traveler should get the most affordable, least expensive and reasonable fare and take advantage of discount fares. Airline travel can be paid by direct billing to the Authority.

Mileage credits for frequent flyer programs accrue to the individual traveler. However, the Authority will not reimburse for additional expenses — such as circuitous routing, extended stays, layovers to schedule a particular carrier, upgrading from economy to first class — for travelers to accumulate additional mileage or for other personal reasons. The Authority will not reimburse travel by private aircraft under any circumstances.

#### B. Rail or Bus

The Authority will pay for the actual cost of a rail or bus fare ticket.

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### C. Vehicles

Automobile transportation may be used when a common carrier cannot be scheduled, when it is more economical, when a common carrier is not practical, or when expenses can be reduced by two or more Authority employees traveling together.

The use of a personal, Authority, or rental vehicle is governed by the HCHA Vehicle Use and Driver Responsibilities Policy.

- Fines for traffic or parking violations incurred by an authorized traveler using a personal, Authority, or rental vehicle will not be reimbursed by the Authority.
- Reasonable tolls will be allowed when the most direct travel route requires them.

### D. Taxi, Limousine and Other Transportation Fares

When an individual travels by common carrier, reasonable fares will be allowed for necessary ground transportation. Bus or limousine service to and from airports should be used when available and practical. The Authority will reimburse mileage for travel to and from the local airport and parking fees, provided such costs do not exceed normal taxi/limousine fares to and from the airport. Receipts are required and shall be submitted with the Authority's travel reimbursement form.

For travel between lodging quarters and meetings, conferences, or meals, reasonable taxi fares will be allowed. Remember, original receipts are required for claims of \$5 or more. Transportation to and from shopping, entertainment, or other personal trips is the choice of the traveler and not reimbursable by the Authority.

Reimbursement claims for taxis, limousines, or other ground transportation must be listed separately on the expense form, claiming the destination and amount of each fare.

### **Lodging**

The amount allocated for lodging shall not ordinarily exceed the maximum per diem rates authorized by the federal or state rate schedule, whichever is chosen by the Authority.

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- A. If the Authority reimburses using the federal rates, the Government Services Administration provides guidelines for determining the maximum that can be reimbursed for lodging. These amounts are available on line at <http://www.gsa.gov>. The rates are the maximum reimbursable rates for hotel rooms plus appropriate taxes.
- B. Original lodging receipts must be submitted with the reimbursement form. Photocopies are not acceptable.
- C. If a traveler exceeds the maximum lodging per diem, excess costs are the responsibility of the traveler.
- D. If the best rate is secured, and it still exceeds the maximum lodging per diem, the CFO may authorize a higher reimbursement amount.

Even if it costs more, travelers may be allowed to stay at the officially designated hotel of the meeting; however, more moderately priced accommodations must be requested whenever possible. It will be the traveler's responsibility to provide documentation of the "officially designated meeting site" room rates, if these rates are higher than the normal reimbursable amounts.

- E. If two or more Authority employees travel together and share a room, the lodging reimbursement rate will be the maximum of two single rooms. If an employee shares a room with a non-employee, the actual cost will be allowed up to the maximum reimbursable amount. The receipt for the entire amount must be submitted with the expense form.

#### **Meals and Incidentals**

Receipts are not required for meals and incidentals. The authorized traveler may be reimbursed the daily amount based on the rate schedule and the authorized length of stay. The per diem meal amounts are expected to cover meals, tips, porters and incidental expenses. The authorized traveler will not be reimbursed more than this.

Whether meals may be claimed depends on when the traveler leaves and returns to the official station. The traveler's official station is home or work, whichever produces the least cost to the Authority. Under the state travel regulations, reimbursement for meals is not permitted for one-day travel status with no overnight stay.

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Regardless of which reimbursement rate the Authority uses, the amounts include tip, gratuity, etc. The hour and date of departure and return must be shown on the expense reimbursement form.

The excess cost of an official banquet may be allowed provided proper documentation or explanation is submitted with the expense reimbursement form. If a meal is included as part of a conference or seminar registration, or is included with the air fare, then the allowance for that meal should be subtracted from the total allowance for the day. For example, if a dinner is included as part of the conference fee, the maximum meal allowance for the day should be reduced by the allowed dinner amount.

### **PLEASE NOTE:**

The Authority has selected to reimburse travelers at the federal travel regulation rates. The Authority's rates will automatically change when the federal rates are adjusted.

### **Miscellaneous Expenses**

- A. Registration fees for approved conferences, conventions, seminars, meetings and other educational programs will be allowed and will generally include the cost of official banquets, meals, lodging and registration fees. Registration fees should be specified on the original travel request form and can include a request for pre-registration fee payment.
- B. A \$5 allowance will be reimbursable for hotel/motel check-in and baggage handling expenses.
- C. Laundry, valet service, tips and gratuities are considered personal expenses and are not reimbursable.
- D. For travel outside the United States, all expenses claimed must be converted to U.S. dollars. The conversion rate and computation should be shown on each receipt.

### **Entertainment**

The Authority may pay for certain entertainment expenses provided that the:

- A. Entertainment is appropriate in the conduct of Authority business;
- B. Entertainment is approved by the CFO;
- C. Group or individuals involved are identified; and
- D. Documentation is attached to the expense form to support the entertainment expense claims.

To request reimbursement for authorized entertainment expenses, be sure to include with the expense reimbursement form:

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- A. Required receipts. All requests must be supported by original receipts from the vendor (restaurant, caterer, ticket office, etc.) Reasonable tips and gratuities included on the receipt by the vendor are reimbursable.
- B. A disclosure and explanation statement, explaining the purpose of the entertainment and identifying the group and the number of people entertained (or individual names listed if not a recognized group).

#### **TRAVEL RECONCILIATION**

- A. Within 10 days of return from travel, or by the end of the month, the traveler is expected to complete and file the expense reimbursement form. The reimbursement form must be certified by the traveler that the amount due is true and accurate. Original lodging, travel, taxi, parking and other receipts must be attached. If the Authority provided a travel advance or made advanced payment, the traveler should include that information on the expense form. In the case of advances, the form should have a reconciliation summary, reflecting total claimed expenses with advances and Authority prepayments indicated. The balance due the traveler or the refund due the Authority should be clearly shown below the total claim on the form or in a cover memo attached to the front of the form.
- B. If the traveler received a travel advance and spent less than the advance, the traveler should attach a check made payable to the Authority for that difference.
- C. The CFO will address special circumstances and issues not covered in this policy on a case-by-case basis.

#### **DISCIPLINARY ACTION**

Violation of the travel rules can result in disciplinary action for employees. Travel fraud can result in criminal prosecution.

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**Authorization for Travel**  
**Harris County Housing Authority**

I hereby request authority for travel on official Authority business to the destination on the dates and for the purpose indicated below.

Date	City & State	Hotel Address	Purpose of Trip

Accompanied By

APPLICANT

Department Account

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Total Estimated Cost of Travel \$

**SPECIAL FUNDING REQUESTS** (Select items requested.)

- Registration Prepayment
- Prepaid Airline Tickets
- Travel advance of \$

**APPROVAL** (Please note: Approval of travel requests by the signatory below indicates that adequate funding is provided in appropriations to cover the estimated costs of this travel.)

Signature

Department Head

Signature

Chief Financial Officer

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### Harris County Housing Authority

**STATEMENT of EXPENSE CLAIMS** incurred while traveling on Authority business

NAME:	ADDRESS:
SOCIAL SECURITY NO:	
AMOUNT TO PAY:	ZIP CODE

DATE Mo Day Year	DESCRIPTION	AMOUNT		ACCOUNT NAME	ACCOUNT NUMBER	OBJECT CODE	AMOUNT
	Travel		1				
			2				
			3				

<b>Object of Trip:</b>
Departure Date: _____ Hour: _____ Return Date: _____ Hour: _____

Date Mo	Day	Where Incurred	Lodging	Breakfast	MEALS			Transportation	Other Expenses	Total each line
					Lunch	Dinner				
Total each column										

<p>If an adjustment is made a supplemental expense account may be filed when proper documentation has been obtained. The original reimbursement check number should be referenced when filing a supplemental claim. Check No.</p>	<p>I certify that the above stated expenses were incurred by me while traveling on Authority business.</p>
<p>Approved _____ Head of Department      Date</p>	<p>Signature</p>
<p>Approved _____ CEO/Manager              Date</p>	<p>Title</p>

**PLEASE STAPLE RECEIPTS TO THIS FORM**