



# Travel and Conference Guidelines

## Purpose

The Newport-Mesa Unified School District (district) Board of Education (Board) authorizes payment for actual and necessary travel and conference expenses incurred by district employees performing approved business on behalf of the district. Associated travel and conference expenses are reimbursed according to the following guidelines.

## Scope

The Board provides for the reimbursement of reasonable expenses incurred during the course of authorized business on behalf of the district. Reasonable expenses represent the use of public funds which are allowable under law, policy, and procedure and defensible when subjected to public scrutiny. Business for the district includes expenses incurred in connection with approved district representation from which the district will derive a specific benefit associated with approved employee attendance at trainings, conferences, hearings, or other meetings.

## Travel Authorization

A Travel Approval Request (TAR) form must be submitted, and Board approved before Travel and Conference costs are incurred. Absence of a TAR filed and approved in a timely fashion may make reimbursement of expenses difficult or even impossible.

## Registration

Registration requests should be made far enough in advance to take advantage of all available discounts. Provided sufficient monies have been budgeted, supervisory and Board approval obtained, Fiscal Services will prepay necessary expenses such as registration. If registration is paid upon arrival at the conference by the employee, an original receipt from the vendor must be submitted for reimbursement. In some instances, a copy of the employee's cancelled check or credit card receipt may be requested to support the amount claimed.

District employees are discouraged from attending out-of-state conferences, trainings, etc., as there may be similar events offered periodically within the State.

Please be cognizant of the constraints of fiscal (school) year budgeting; at fiscal year-end, registration requests for events in the subsequent fiscal year will only be processed to take advantage of available discounts or reservation guarantee which would not be available if the TAR was processed after the end of the fiscal year. Requests made just to expend prior year budgets will not be processed until the subsequent fiscal year as required by generally accepted accounting principles.

## Transportation

For travel outside the Southern California area, employees are anticipated to travel by air.

- Employees are required to make their own travel arrangements at least 21 days in advance to take advantage of available discounts.
- The maximum reimbursement for air travel shall not exceed the equivalent cost of the most economical option available for "economy or coach refundable/unrestricted fare." Employees opting for more expensive options may be required to pay the differential. If the carrier charges for one piece of luggage, the district will cover the cost of one piece of luggage.

Departure and arrival times are contingent upon flight schedules and fare discounts. However, travel scheduling should be coordinated to be non-circuitous and reasonably close to the start and end of the event. Choosing to stay in a host location beyond the event for non-district purposes may involve a lesser reimbursement.

If district employees wish to deviate from the reasonable arrival or departure time periods for personal reasons or due to alternative transportation, any excess time (that which is above the time required to fly) is subject to bargaining unit contract leave time provisions. Additional expenses, including meal and lodging costs, resulting from excess travel time are not reimbursable.

For travel outside the Southern California area via alternative transportation such as a personal vehicle, Supervisory authorization must be obtained in advance. Proof of automobile insurance may be required to be submitted with the TAR form. Permission to drive shall not be construed to mean “on district time.” Mileage reimbursement will be based on actual miles driven from the applicable district site to the event in a non-circuitous manner at the approved IRS standard mileage reimbursement rate in effect at the time of travel. The maximum reimbursement paid for mileage to areas outside Southern California shall not exceed the equivalent cost of “economy or coach refundable/unrestricted” air fare, plus the cost of other necessary ground transportation at the destination. For employees traveling by personal vehicle, departure and arrival times for meal and lodging expenses shall be based on air travel time.

### **Administrative Mileage Stipend**

Some administrative personnel receive a mileage stipend as reimbursement for business travel via their personal automobile. As part of their salary package, the stipend covers all destinations within the following counties: Imperial, Los Angeles, Orange, San Bernardino, San Diego, Santa Barbara, Riverside and Ventura.

### **Car Rentals**

The use of rental cars is discouraged, if merely for point-to-point transportation. Courtesy shuttle service, buses, or limousine services should be utilized between airports and hotels or meeting locations.

A car rental must be approved in advance by the applicable division head (Executive Cabinet level). Employees should check availability and cost and make their own car rental arrangements.

- Additional optional liability insurance offered by the rental company is not reimbursable.

### **Lodging**

Lodging reimbursement is provided when travel is outside of Orange County and attendance is for two or more consecutive days. Reimbursement for lodging within Orange County is allowed only when it is a requirement of the event. Lodging shall be obtained at the most economical rate available for good quality. Employees are required to make their own reservations.

Lodging reimbursement for the night prior to the beginning of a conference may be allowed when time and/or travel schedules necessitate travel at unreasonable hours or risk an untimely arrival on the first day of the event. Lodging expenses will not be reimbursed for the night following the event, except under circumstances beyond the control of employees, such as the cancellation of a flight. Exceptions to lodging reimbursement as noted above are approved by the Assistant Superintendent, CBO.

### **Per Diem Meals and Incidental Expenses**

The district reimburses meals and incidental expenses up to the approved Federal per diem rate for the city of travel in effect at the time of travel. Incidental expenses covered by per diem include fees and tips for porters, baggage handlers, and other service providers. The per diem method does not require receipts for reimbursement. If a conference registration includes meals as part of the fee, then per diem for associated meal(s) is not claimable.

The per diem is calculated at 75 percent of the applicable full day per diem rate for Employees in travel or partial day status on the first and last day of the trip.

With approval of the Assistant Superintendent, CBO, actual costs may be submitted; however, original receipts substantiating the expenditure are required for reimbursement. Approval for reimbursement of actual costs applies to all meal and incidental expenditures associated with the TAR; utilizing both per diem and actual cost methods for reimbursement of meal and incidental expenditures on the same TAR is not allowed.

### **Out-of-Pocket and Miscellaneous Costs**

Original receipts for out-of-pocket and miscellaneous costs are required for reimbursement.

Private automobile use (whether being dropped or leaving the car in airport parking) to and from the airport is reimbursed for actual miles driven at the current IRS standard mileage reimbursement rate in effect at the time of travel. Parking at the airport is reimbursable subject to Supervisory approval.

Reasonably priced services for certain unknown costs, such as taxi, shuttle, bus, parking, etc., must be advanced by the employee. In addition, business communication inclusive of phone, fax, mail, and internet are reimbursable.

### **Other Unauthorized Expenses**

Reimbursement is not allowed for items of a personal nature such as alcoholic beverages, movies, entertainment, premium television, snacks, dry-cleaning, spas, gyms, barber, magazines, shoeshine, travel insurance, toiletries, traffic violations, excess baggage, lecture tapes or books, and costs for spouse or guest accommodation.

Airlines currently offer a variety of upgrades associated with seating, boarding priority, airline mileage points etc. Sometimes these upgrades are wrapped into the cost of a reimbursable “economy/coach refundable/unrestricted” fare; however, upgrades, beyond the cost of the “economy/coach refundable/unrestricted” fare, are not reimbursable expenditures.

If unauthorized expenses have been paid by the district (i.e. via district credit card) the individual will be required to immediately reimburse the district.

### **Advance and Reimbursement Payment Procedures**

Advance requests for not less than \$75.00 and not to exceed 75% of the TAR amount, less any expenses prepaid by the district, such as registration may be processed. Advances must be submitted to accounts payable at least two weeks prior to the conference. Advance funds are generally not released more than five days prior to the event or trip departure date. The release of an advance is also contingent upon Board approval of the TAR.

Travel Expense Claim (TEC) forms are used to document travel and business expenses, and to support requests for reimbursement. Original itemized receipts (not photocopies) are required for all items other than per diem meals and incidentals, and must be submitted even if no reimbursement is necessary. The completed TEC form, along with any unspent advance, must be submitted to Fiscal Services within 10 working days following the event. Employees with delinquent TEC forms will not be allowed to obtain future travel advances until outstanding TAR balances are resolved.

### **Exceptions**

It is the district’s desire to adhere to these guidelines. However, there may be occasions when events prevent employees from complying. It is the responsibility of the employee to prepare a written request for an exception to these guidelines and obtain approval from the Assistant Superintendent, CBO before submitting the associated TEC.

## Travel and Conference FAQ

1. If my Per Diem allowance for meals and incidentals is \$71 per day and I only spent \$57, is it appropriate to claim \$57?

Yes. The Per Diem allowance is the maximum allowable reimbursement. Claims below the Per Diem allowance are appropriate.

2. What if my costs exceed the Per Diem allowance?

Any costs above the Per Diem allowance are the employee's responsibility. With approval of the Executive Director/CFO, actual costs may be submitted; however, original receipts substantiating the expenditure are required for reimbursement.

3. Can I claim both Per Diem and Actual Costs for the same trip?

Submitted claims must utilize the same method of reimbursement. Therefore, a claim cannot include both Per Diem and Actual Costs for Meals and Incidental expenditures.

4. What is considered an incidental expense?

Incidental expenses are tips or fees given to porters, baggage carriers, hotel staff, etc.

5. The conference I am attending is providing lunch. Can I claim Per Diem for the lunch?

Per Diem allowances are broken out by breakfast, lunch and dinner; Per Diem allowances associated with any meals provided by the conference are not eligible for reimbursement. Daily Per Diem totals are adjusted accordingly to deduct meals provided by the conference.

6. I am driving to the conference. How is my mileage calculated?

Mileage should be calculated from the lesser of home or work site to venue.