

METROPOLITAN LIBRARY SYSTEM

Travel & Expense Policy

FY 2006

I. Purpose:

This document ensures that employee travel is consistent with the business objectives of the Metropolitan Library System. It also ensures fair and equitable treatment of employees by defining procedures for authorized business travel and guidelines for expense reimbursement.

II. Overview:

A critical balance must be sought when requesting travel. This is the System's need for cost effectiveness and the employee's need for quality services and support. Employee travel should be via the lowest cost alternative, consistent with good business practices. Neither luxury, nor sub-standard modes of transportation and accommodations should be used.

Employee travel and the expenses associated with it, will be authorized only in circumstances which are clearly consistent with the mission of the System. It will be the responsibility of each System department director to ensure that all employees' travel meets this objective and that reimbursement is made only for actual, reasonable business expenses in connection with authorized travel as defined in this document. In order to maintain control over expenditures, any expense submitted which does not comply with the guidelines of this procedure will not be reimbursed, unless accompanied by a valid exception by management. Expense reports must be submitted in a timely manner.

All travel must be requested using the official System "**Travel Authorization Form**" (hereafter referred to as a **T/A.**), signed by the appropriate department director. Subsequent to approval; travel arrangements, including airfare, rental car, lodging and planning of meetings can be coordinated through the appropriate departmental support staff or by the employee themselves.

III. Implementation & Responsibility:

Department Director's Responsibility:

- Department directors should know current travel policy and inform their departmental staff of System policy and procedures.
- Determine if travel is really necessary to achieve goal.
- Approve expenses in accordance with policy.

Employee's Responsibility:

- Choose the most cost effective way to make travel arrangements (i.e. self or support staff).
- Notify support staff as early as possible of necessary travel arrangements. If you notify the support staff of your travel plans or make your own travel arrangements seven (7) days or more in advance, your trip will, in most cases cost considerably less.
- Notify your supervisor of, and receive approval for, travel requests in sufficient time to take advantage of any "early-bird" rates for registrations, etc.
- Incur only expenses that are consistent with the business needs, and exercise care in determining appropriate expenditures.
- Submit expense reports as outlined in the expense reporting section of this policy, on a timely basis (within 30 days).

IV. Travel Authorization & Approval:

Upon determination that a trip is necessary, a "Travel Authorization" (T/A) form must be filled out and signed by department director. This form should be forwarded to the Executive Director for final approval. The Executive Director will then forward a copy of the form to the Finance Department for their records.

V. Air Travel:

- Air travel will be via the most direct and economical means, accommodating the comfort, needs and preferences of the employee. **Deviations from the lowest fare must have department director approval.**
- Use of "Non-Refundable" airfares is recommended. These fares are usually considerably less expensive than refundable un-restricted fares. In most cases, if the travel must change or the trip canceled all together, the funds can be used as a credit toward future travel, less a service charge imposed by the airline.
- Business class travel is not permitted. All employees will fly the least expensive economy class.
- Ground travel to and from the airport will be reimbursed. The employee should choose the most cost effective method available.
- Employees may retain all benefits from frequent flyer club memberships. All dues for such clubs must be paid by employee.
- Employee choosing to use personal modes of travel between cities serviced by regularly scheduled airlines will be reimbursed based on the least expensive airfare or actual expenses, whichever is less.

VI. Auto Use:

System Vehicles

- When an automobile is required for System business or travel, the System cars should be used if available. **Reimbursable use of a rental car or personal car is only allowed if a System car is not available.** If you choose to use a rental car or personal car when a System car is readily available you will not be reimbursed for the related expense.
- Whenever possible employees must refill gasoline prior to returning the System car if the gas tank reads half empty or less.
- All employees using a System car must hold a valid drivers license to operate a vehicle in the State of Illinois and be included under the System's automobile insurance coverage.

Personal Vehicles

- Employees are only authorized to use his/her automobile if they have both a valid driver's license and current comprehensive auto insurance, including liability. If not, the employee is not authorized to travel for the System.
- When an employee uses his/her personal automobile on approved System business, the System will pay the current IRS mileage rate. The System will also reimburse all auto tolls and, with a receipt, parking fees.
- Mileage from employee's home to regular assigned work location is not a reimbursable expense. However, if the employee goes directly from home to another work assignment other than the regular work location, and the distance to the work assignment is greater than the distance to the regular work location, the employee can expense the difference.
- In order to receive reimbursement for mileage, the employee must complete an expense report specifying purpose of trip, point of origin, destination and time of trip.
- The employee assumes the responsibility for all parking and traffic fines.

Rental Vehicles

- When a rental car is necessary, employees may choose a company that is closest to the travel departure point.
- Employees can request either compact or intermediate size cars. Rentals for other types of cars are not permitted except with department director approval. Luxury, premium and specialty car rentals will be reimbursed only at the intermediate car rate.
- Wherever possible employee must refill gasoline prior to returning rental car for drop off. Gas charges at the rental locations average 50% more than independent filling stations.

VII. Lodging:

- All System authorized accommodations must meet with industry accepted business travel standards with reference to comfort, convenience and cost. Holiday Inn, Hampton Inn, Fairfield Inn, type overnight accommodations have been set as an acceptable standard for all System employees. You are free to make other arrangements, however **MLS will NOT reimburse for more than \$185.00 per night** base rate, unless approved by a department director. If the destination location indicates a higher rate for lodging, information on what is an acceptable rate for that location can be found at <http://www.gsa.gov/Portal/gsa/ep/channelView.do?pageTypeld=8203&channelPage=%2Fep%2Fchannel%2FgsaOverview.jsp&channelId=-15943>.
- The employee is responsible for confirming that the rate being charged is also the rate listed on the travel itinerary.
- All hotel reservations will be guaranteed to either the MLS business credit card or your personal credit card. It is the employee's responsibility to cancel hotel reservations within the hotel cancellation policy time frame. This can be done by contacting the travel agency or the hotel directly. You must obtain a cancellation number when canceling a hotel reservation. **The System will not reimburse hotel "no-show" fees**, unless approved by a department director.

VIII. Meals and Entertainment:

- A per diem for meals will be provided to employees for each day of travel. Information on what is an acceptable rate for a location can be found at <http://www.gsa.gov/Portal/gsa/ep/channelView.do?pageTypeld=8203&channelPage=%2Fep%2Fchannel%2FgsaOverview.jsp&channelId=-15943>.
- Entertainment expenses are reimbursable only with Executive Director approval, and must meet the following conditions:
 - The employee's specific assignment requires the entertainment of others.
 - The entertainment expense is fully receipted (original receipts required).
 - Expenses are authorized by the System's Executive Director.
 - The persons entertained, the place and the purpose of the entertainment must be clearly specified.

IX. Expense Reporting:

The following conditions apply when submitting expense reports:

- Actual and reasonable expenses are reimbursed in accordance with the provisions of this policy and procedure.
- Employee must submit expense reports during the week after incurring the expenses, or upon returning to the office. Failure to submit expense reports within thirty (30) days could disqualify the employee from receiving reimbursement for expenses incurred while traveling on System business.

- Include the following items in, or attached to, the expense report when submitting it for payment:
 - Copy of Travel Authorization form signed by department director
 - Original or copies of receipts for lodging, air or auto transportation, gasoline, and any other business expenses.
 - Explanation of any deviation from policy, unauthorized vendors, lodging or transportation, and/or charges submitted "in lieu of" normal expenses.
 - Check made payable to the System, if repayment of travel expenses and/or advance is due.

X. Expense Reimbursement:

Employees will be reimbursed for expenses according to the check processing schedule established and publicized by the Finance Department for each fiscal year. In order for timely reimbursement to be made to the employee, the employee must have submitted an expense report to the Finance Department at least 7 working days prior to the next regular check run.

Non-reimbursable expenses include, but are not limited to: Alcoholic beverages, airline club dues, rental car club membership fees, in-room movies, fines for traffic violations, insurance on life or personal property while traveling, purchase of clothing and/or other personal items, expenses for family, child, pet, home and property care while on a trip.

XI. Cash Advance:

Employees may request a cash advance. Requests for an advance should include the total amount requested and the intended use of the cash. This request is made on the T/A form. Receipts to substantiate the cash advance may be required. The need for the employee to provide receipts for any cash advance will be determined by the Finance Department and details of required receipts will be provided to the employee with the cash advance.