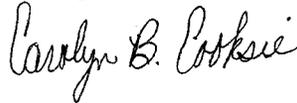


For: FSA Employees

FSA Access to Lower Cost and Nonrefundable Airfares Through GovTrip

Approved by: Associate Administrator for Operations and Management



1 Overview

A Background

Nonrefundable fares are now available to FSA travelers through GovTrip. These fares allow significant reduction in airfare costs, but also carry financial risks in terms of fees or unused tickets if the traveler changes or cancels travel plans. These fares are especially useful for travelers with firm travel plans and/or regular travel to the same location. Nonrefundable fare tickets are nontransferable and **must** be tracked so that they do not expire or become worthless to FSA

Note: With a much tighter FY 2010 travel budget, each office should prioritize and manage the travel requirements as efficiently as possible. This includes encouraging travelers to complete travel during their normal working hours including travel back to their Official Duty Station (ODS) and, when possible, travel should be completed in as few days as possible to ensure fiscally responsible use of per diem.

USDA is a mandatory user of the GSA Travel Management Center (TMC) Program; therefore, it is **mandatory** that **all GS and CO** employees use the established TMC's to arrange common carrier transportation, booking of hotel/motel accommodations, and rental cars. GovTrip is the means by which to contact the USDA designated GSA TMC. There are only 3 exceptions to this mandatory use:

- any travel for which advance reservations are impractical, such as when a traveler is on the road and does not know where lodging will be needed
- for travel situations where only a rental car is needed, travelers may deal directly with the appropriate company

Disposal Date	Distribution
March 1, 2011	All FSA Employees; State Offices relay to County Offices

1 Overview (Continued)

A Background (Continued)

- hotel accommodations for a conference, seminar, etc., where the sponsoring organization has arranged for a special rate and ensured that the facility complies with the standards of the Hotel and Motel Fire Safety Act.

No other travel agencies may be used to purchase travel services for official government travel. Using sources other than the established TMC is a violation of TMC's contract with the Federal Government and subjects the government to a law suit for damages for breach of contract.

B Purpose

This notice provides FSA travelers the following:

- policy on using nonrefundable air transportation
- information on changes in viewing air fares in GovTrip
- instructions on how to request approval to purchase nonrefundable air transportation
- examples of justification memorandums to use when requesting approval to purchase nonrefundable air transportation for:
 - National Office, Kansas City, St. Louis, and APFO (Exhibit 1)
 - State and County Offices (Exhibit 2).

2 FSA Nonrefundable Fare Use

A Policy

All requests to purchase nonrefundable airfare tickets must be submitted in writing using either Exhibit 1, or Exhibit 2.

According to USDA OCFO policy (Department policy) USDA travelers are allowed to use nonrefundable airfare tickets only when at least 1 of the following Federal Travel Regulation (FTR) exceptions is met:

- space is not available on the contract carrier
- the flight is available to the general public and at lower cost than the contract carrier
- the contract carrier's schedule is inconsistent with explicit written policies related to scheduling travel during normal working hours.

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2 FSA Nonrefundable Fare Use (Continued)

A Policy (Continued)

Department-FSA policy also requires that:

- travelers should be confident that travel plans are firm when making the decision to choose a nonrefundable fare ticket
- authorizations for travel that include nonrefundable airfare tickets are reviewed and approved quickly since nonrefundable airfare tickets normally require purchase and payment within 24 hours of making the reservation, and are often less expensive the earlier they are purchased

Note: GovTrip does not allow any transportation tickets to be purchased until the GovTrip travel authorization is fully approved, therefore travel approvers will need to act quickly to capture the low fares

- travelers voucher for the cost of nonrefundable tickets in a manner so that the travel charge card does not become delinquent.

FSA is also charged with fully reimbursing travelers' additional costs because of official travel being curtailed, canceled, or interrupted for **official purposes** or for other reasons beyond the employee's control, if they are acceptable to the FSA travel approving official.

If travel is curtailed, cancelled or interrupted for reasons **not deemed official purposes**, the traveler will be responsible for the total cost of the nonrefundable transportation and associated fees and will **not** be reimbursed for those costs.

B Process for Requesting Approval to Purchase Nonrefundable Transportation

Request approval to purchase nonrefundable transportation according to the following.

- **All** requests for approval to purchase nonrefundable transportation **must** be submitted to the first line travel approving official in writing.
- National Office travelers must obtain approval of written request from their first line travel approving official **and** their Deputy Administrator. After the Deputy Administrator's approval, the approved written request shall be FAXed into GovTrip.
- State and County Office travelers must obtain approval of written request from their first line travel approving official, SED, **and** DAFO. If SED approves the request, SED shall sign by their name at the top of the memo, then the approved written request shall be FAXed into GovTrip for DAFO approval.

Note: See Exhibits 1 and 2 for a sample format that may be used to request written approval to purchase nonrefundable transportation.

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2 FSA Nonrefundable Fare Use (Continued)

C Reporting

Each of the following offices will monthly track and report the use of nonrefundable airfare tickets to William Willer, Chief DMTPO, FMD at william.willer@wdc.usda.gov on the 5th of each month, all unused tickets and ensure that tickets are used at the earliest possible opportunity. Negative reports are not required.

Note: As required by the Department, FMD will provide a report to the Department within 30 days after each quarter on any tickets that expired, were lost, or which USDA cannot use because the traveler departed from Federal service, and on all costs incurred as a result of transportation tickets not being used.

FSA Official or Their Designate	Areas Reporting On
Associate Administrator	Immediate Office of the Administrator
Director of Office Budget and Finance	All Director of Office Budget and Finance Offices
Director of Office of Chief Information Officer	All Director of Office of Chief Information Officer Offices
Director of Strategic Performance and Evaluation Staff	All Director of Strategic Performance and Evaluation Staff Offices
Director of MIDA Project	All Director of MIDA Project Offices
Deputy Administrator for Management	All Deputy Administrator for Management Offices
Director of Office of Civil Rights	All Director of Office of Civil Rights Offices
Director of Office of External Affairs	All Director of Office of External Affairs Offices
Director of Economic & Policy Analysis Staff	All Director of Economic & Policy Analysis Staff Offices
Deputy Administrator for Farm Programs	All Deputy Administrator for Farm Programs Offices
Deputy Administrator for Farm Loan Programs	All Deputy Administrator for Farm Loan Programs Offices
Deputy Administrator for Field Operations	Deputy Administrator for Field Operations Management Offices
State Executive Director	State and County Offices

Each State Office:

- SED will monthly track and report for their State and County Office, to William Willer, Chief DMTPO, FMD at william.willer@wdc.usda.gov on the 5th of each month, all unused tickets and ensure that tickets are used at the earliest possible opportunity.
- State Office Federal Agency Travel Administrator will run and use the "Unused Ticket" Report from the GovTrip Report Scheduler to assist them in their monthly tracking and reporting that will be submitted to FMD by their SED.

2 FSA Nonrefundable Fare Use (Continued)

D Department Action

The Department will:

- perform periodic reviews of FSA nonrefundable fare use to determine that applicable FTR travel policy is being followed
- also use agency reports, along with reports from the travel system and General Services Administration to calculate the net costs and/or savings achieved from FSA's use of nonrefundable fares.

E Changes to Viewing Air Fares in GovTrip

In addition to changing the nonrefundable fare policy, the Department has changed how airfares are displayed on the GovTrip Flight Options Screen. The lower-cost, unrestricted government "capacity controlled" fares are shown as the first option available to the traveler. Air transportation will now be shown in the following order:

- capacity controlled city-pair fares (shown in yellow)
- regular city-pair fares (shown in green)
- unrestricted noncontract fares (shown in grey)
- restricted noncontract fares (shown in white).

F Accessing Nonrefundable Air Fares in GovTrip

To access nonrefundable fares, travelers must click on the "Non Government" tab under "Air" on the Travel page of GovTrip. Once there, a warning will appear stating "You are about to view flight options that contain restricted fares. Restricted fares usually have an advance purchase requirement, do not allow changes, and are almost always nonrefundable. Please familiarize yourself with the fare rules associated with their selection."

Traveler shall click "OK" before going any further.

GovTrip will move to Non Government fares. At that time the traveler will see a statement highlighted in pink which reads "Non Government Travel (Restricted). Additional fees, penalties, and restrictions may apply."

Traveler must then click "Search Availability" for Non Government fares.

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2 FSA Nonrefundable Fare Use (Continued)

G Fare Rules

Each ticket in GovTrip has a “Fare Rules” statement. **Traveler shall read the “Fare Rules” and convey the “Fare Rules” to the approving official before tickets are purchased.**

Fare Rules include important information about the specific ticket to be purchased which may include such information as:

- “Advance Reservations/Ticketing ...ticketing must be completed by **11:59 p.m. 1 day after reservations are made**
- Surcharges
- Sales
- Penalties
- Cancellations...Ticket is Non-refundable.

Any unused ticket segment will have no value unless passenger cancels/changes ticketed flight reservation on/before ticketed departure date. Ticket is nontransferable. Fares are subject to change and are not guaranteed until ticket is purchased.”

“Most restrictive rule policy. When refundable and nonrefundable fares are on the same ticket, the entire ticket becomes nonrefundable.

Changes ...Charge USD 150.00 for reissue. Any unused ticket segment will have no value unless changed on / before ticketed departure date. Ticket must be reissued and service fee plus any additional fare must be paid at time of change ... if voluntary changes by the passenger results in a higher fare applied to the ticket and difference in fare will be collected at the time of reissue in addition to the applicable service fee ... if voluntary change requested by passenger results in a lower fare applied to the ticket refund of the difference in fare is not permitted. The applicable service fee will be collected at the time of reissue and any fare difference will be forfeited by the passenger.”

H Labor-Management Obligations

Where exclusive representation exists, bargaining may be requested to the extent allowed by applicable statutes. Where contract language already addresses these policies and procedures for bargaining unit employees, contract language prevails.

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2 FSA Nonrefundable Fare Use (Continued)

I Contact

If there are questions about this notice, contact the appropriate office as follows.

Office	Contact
County Offices	State Office Federal Agency Travel Administrator (FATA)
State Offices	
Kansas City and St. Louis complexes	Lois Dick by e-mail to lois.dick@kcc.usda.gov
State Office FATA, National Office, and APFO	FMD, Debt Management and Travel Policy Office by e-mail to poc_travel@wdc.usda.gov

Example of a Justification Memorandum for National Office, Kansas City, St. Louis, and APFO

The following is an example of a justification memorandum for National office, Kansas City, St. Louis, and APFO.



**United States
Department of
Agriculture**

Farm and Foreign
Agricultural
Services

Farm Service
Agency

1400 Independence
Ave, SW
Stop 0581

Washington, DC
20250-0581

TO: Jonathan Coppess
Administrator

THROUGH: William Willer
DMTPO

FROM: Name
Deputy Administrator of

SUBJECT: Request for Approval to Purchase Nonrefundable Airfare

This correspondence is a request for approval to purchase nonrefundable airfare in accordance with USDA travel policy (via GovTrip).

Employee:	Employee's name
Purpose of Travel:	Training
Dates of Travel:	Enter travel dates
TDY Location:	Somewhere, Ohio
Type of Transportation Circle all that apply	Air Train Bus
Transportation Costs:	\$385.00 plus GovTrip fee
Additional Fees/Costs (which include reissue fee if ticket must be reissued.)	\$150.00 change fee plus service fee
Reason for Use of Nonrefundable Fare: Circle all FTR exceptions	space is not available on the contract carrier the flight is available to the general public and at lower cost than the contract carrier the contract carrier's schedule is inconsistent with explicit written policies related to scheduling travel during normal working hours.

Example of a Justification Memorandum for National Office, Kansas City, St. Louis, and APFO
(Continued)

Contact Person:
Telephone Number:

By signing this memo the traveler and approving official are acknowledging that if the travel that the nonrefundable ticket is purchased for is curtailed, cancelled, or interrupted for **official purposes** the traveler will be reimbursed for cost of the nonrefundable transportation. **However** if the travel is curtailed, cancelled or interrupted for reasons NOT deemed **official purposes** the traveler will be responsible for the total cost of the nonrefundable transportation and associated fees and will NOT be reimbursed for those costs.

Required Signatures:

Date _____
Traveler _____

Date _____
First Line Travel Approver _____ Approved ___ Denied ___

Date _____
Deputy Administrator _____ Approved ___ Denied ___

Next Step - Fax into GovTrip for nonrefundable transportation purchase approval

Example of a Justification Memorandum for State and County Offices

The following is an example of a justification memorandum for State and County Offices



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Farm and Foreign
Agricultural
Services

Farm Service
Agency

1400 Independence
Ave, SW
Stop 0581

Washington, DC
20250-0581

TO: Jonathan Coppess
Administrator

THROUGH: Karis Gutter
DAFO

FROM: SED's Name
(Name of State) SED

SUBJECT: Request for Approval to Purchase Nonrefundable Airfare

This correspondence is a request for approval to purchase nonrefundable airfare in accordance with USDA travel policy (via GovTrip).

Employee: Employee's name

Purpose of Travel: Training

Dates of Travel: Enter travel dates

TDY Location: Somewhere, Ohio

Type of Transportation Air
Circle all that apply Train
Bus

Transportation Costs: \$385.00 plus GovTrip fee
Additional Fees/Costs \$150.00 change fee plus service fee
(which include reissue fee if ticket must be reissued.)

Reason for Use of Nonrefundable Fare: space is not available on the contract carrier
Circle all FTR exceptions the flight is available to the general public and at lower cost than the contract carrier

the contract carrier's schedule is inconsistent with explicit written policies related to scheduling travel during normal working hours.

Example of a Justification Memorandum for State and County Offices (Continued)

Contact Person:
Telephone Number:

By signing this memo the traveler and approving official are acknowledging that if the travel that the nonrefundable ticket is purchased for is curtailed, cancelled, or interrupted for **official purposes** the traveler will be reimbursed for cost of the nonrefundable transportation. **However** if the travel is curtailed, cancelled or interrupted for reasons NOT deemed **official purposes** the traveler will be responsible for the total cost of the nonrefundable transportation and associated fees and will NOT be reimbursed for those costs.

Required Signatures:

Date _____
Traveler _____

Date _____
First Line Travel Approver _____ Approved ___ Denied ___

Next Step - Fax into GovTrip for nonrefundable transportation purchase approval