

Caltech Travel Department FAQs

To whom does the Institute Travel Policy apply?

The Travel Policy applies to anyone who incurs travel expenses paid by the Institute, regardless of the source of the funds.

What is the P-Card and who can get one?

The P-Card (or Purchasing Card) is a MasterCard issued by Bank of America. It is the preferred method of payment for travel. The Institute makes direct payment to the bank for charges incurred by the cardholders. Division or Departmental administrators determine who is eligible to have a P-Card. To obtain a P-Card, contact the P-Card administrators: PCardServices@caltech.edu

What if I don't have a P-Card for travel?

You may use a personal credit card and request reimbursement after the trip is completed. Alternatively, you may continue to use the standard Payment Request and Travel Advance forms and procedures.

What about prepayments?

The travel department can prepay third party travel vendors or conference organizers at any time prior to travel. This will cover such expenses as conference registration, all manner of transportation (airline tickets, rail tickets, etc.) and lodging. The Institute cannot pay the traveler directly for any travel related expenses until after the trip is completed.

What about Travel Advances?

Non-P-Card users may submit a Travel Advance Request no more than 30 days prior to travel. Advances are issued only to cover the estimated cost of meals, incidentals and local transportation. (P-Card holders have a cash advance feature available and may not use the Travel Advance form to request an advance.)

What is the Fly America Act?

The Fly America Act states that all travel paid by federal funds must be on U.S. carriers. There are very specific exceptions (none of which is the cost of the transportation). For more information please see: [Use of United States Flag Air Carriers](#).

Call the Travel Department with questions prior to purchasing an International ticket to avoid payment issues later.

What is considered domestic travel?

Domestic travel is travel within the 50 United States and the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands and the possessions and territories of the United States (excluding Trust Territories of the Pacific Islands)

What is considered foreign travel?

Travel that is fully or partly outside of the 50 United States and DC, its possessions and territories.

Do I have to buy non-refundable tickets?

Travelers are encouraged to use non-refundable tickets where possible to reduce travel costs. Consideration should be given to the fees that apply to make changes to these tickets. Also be aware that airlines now treat non-refundable tickets (issued after 9/6/2002) much the same as theater tickets. You must change nonrefundable tickets prior to the scheduled flight or your tickets will be forfeited.

What do I do with unused tickets?	The issuing airline or travel agency should be contacted to determine whether there is any residual value on the ticket. If the ticket can be used in exchange for future travel, the traveler should retain the ticket until such time as it may be exchanged.
What about my Frequent Flyer awards?	Travelers may personally retain the rewards for frequent flyer plans or other bonuses that may accrue from business travel, provided that a higher priced mode of travel or lodging is not selected solely to acquire more plan credits
May I combine Per Diem and Actual Cost for meals in a single trip?	No. You must choose either per diem or actual cost as the basis for reimbursement for the entire trip.
Should I accept liability or other insurance when renting a car for Institute business?	For rentals within the 50 United States and DC, always <i>decline</i> additional insurance. When renting outside the 50 United States and DC, you should accept liability and/or collision damage (LDW/CDW) coverage if available.
May I use per diem to calculate my hotel reimbursement?	No. All hotel charges are reimbursed on the basis of actual cost. An itemized receipt must accompany any request for hotel reimbursement.
Can you tell me about gifts for hosted lodging?	Hosted Lodging is when a traveler stays with a sponsor, colleague, family member or friend instead of staying at a hotel. The IRS allows the traveler to be reimbursed if he or she purchases a gift for the host. (This is not allowed using federal funds.) If the value of the gift is \$25 or more, a receipt must be provided. One gift per stay is allowed, and the value of the gift should not exceed the typical hotel cost for that locale. (It is suggested that the US Government per diem for lodging be used as a benchmark). <i>*Cash gifts of \$600 or more will result in additional taxable income being reported to the IRS for your host.</i>
How have the per diem calculations changed?	On the first and last day of a trip, per diem is 75% of the rate that applies at the location of the temporary duty. All days between the first and last day of the trip are calculated at 100% of the applicable rate. If there is no overnight involved, per diem does not apply (use actual costs to reimburse approved meal expenses). A clock is no longer used to calculate per diem, just the calendar.
What if I claim per diem but the conference I am attending provides one or more meals?	Refer to the table on page 10 of the Caltech Travel Policy and deduct the appropriate amount from the per diem for the day(s) the meal(s) is/are provided.
May I combine personal travel with business travel?	Yes, provided the related time and expenses are those of the individual and the business objective for the travel are unaffected.
Do I have to have receipts for everything in order to be reimbursed?	The Institute prefers that receipts are provided whenever available. Receipts are mandatory, regardless of the dollar amount, for air, car, and lodging reimbursements. For all other categories, a receipt is required if the individual item cost is \$75 or more.

What about spouse or other dependent expenses?

These expenses are generally considered personal in nature and are not reimbursable, except on the infrequent occasions when attendance of a spouse or family member(s) furthers the business interests of the Institute. In these cases travel should be authorized in advance by the Provost or Vice President for Business and Finance. This written approval must be submitted with the Travel Expense Report or Payment Request Form and must document the business purpose served by the spouse's or family member's attendance.

How long do I have to turn in my expense report?

30 Days after the trip end date. This is particularly important when advances have been paid to the traveler or prepayments have been made on behalf of the traveler. Failure to submit expense reports by 120 days may result in advance or prepaid trip expenses being reported as taxable income to the traveler.

Can I get a travel advance to pay for my airline tickets?

No. Advances are given for meals, incidentals and local transportation only.

What if I want to use my personal credit card so I can get reward points?

You may use a personal credit card, but you will not be reimbursed until the trip is completed and an expense report is submitted. Interest and fees on the personal credit card account are the account holder's responsibility and may not be submitted for reimbursement.

What if I incur expenses in advance of a trip and my trip is then cancelled?

Report all travel-related expenses associated with the trip on an Expense Report, (either the P-Card Travel Expense Report or the Standard Business Travel Expense Report as appropriate.) Indicate on the expense report or an attached memo that the trip has been cancelled. Indicate the PTA(s) to be charged. The traveler and the authorizer must sign the report, then it may be submitted to travel for processing. Do not submit unused airline, rail, or other types of tickets to travel, unless they have no exchange value. It is acceptable to submit photocopies of tickets that you must retain for later exchange.

Can we address CT Expense Reports vs. Manual Expense Reports? Example: "Can I do both P-Card Travel Expense Reports and Manual Expense Reports?"

No. Once you become a P-Card holder, all expense reports must be done through PC Solutions.