

GAO Topic of the Month – November 2022

Travel - Conferences, Conventions & Meetings



Background

The State of Arizona Accounting Manual (SAAM) Topic 5040, covers *Conferences, Conventions & Meetings*. While most travel came to a halt during the height of the COVID pandemic, discretionary in person meetings have resumed and travel has increased. This has also included a return to in-person conferences. With an increase in individuals traveling after an extended period of little to no travel, we have seen evidence that there are many who are not current with travel policy and processes. This Topic of the Month is to remind travelers, those who make travel arrangements, and those who approve travel of the travel policy regarding conferences.

General Conference Guidelines

- Attendance should be limited to minimize the cost to the State while still accomplishing the State's objectives
- Webinars/teleconferencing should be considered if that option is available
- Conference registrations should be paid by P-Card or Purchase Order (SAAM 4535-1.15.2)
- Agencies sponsoring conferences should review SAAM 5040 for additional guidance.

Conference Lodging

- Lodging may not exceed the least expensive single room rate **published** in the conference brochure or official event publication.
 - **This does not mean the "lowest available" at the time of booking.**
- **Documentation of the published conference lodging options must be maintained and attached to the travel claim.** The online version of the conference brochure may disappear or change after the conference has passed or as rooms fill and options are no longer available. Documentation can be in the form of screenshots or print to pdf. Copies of the agenda should also be maintained and attached to the travel claim.
- To be reimbursed for any amount over the least expensive published lodging option, an approved GAO-515 must be attached to the travel claim. See SAAM 0015, *Exceptions to Policy*, for more information.
- Those arranging travel should inquire if other lodging options are available lower than the conference rate. Often times there are options within walking distance of the conference location that are not conference designated lodging.
- SAAM 5040 allows for reimbursement up to the least expensive option without an approved exception, even if this amount is over the State rates listed in SAAM 5095. If a rate is obtained

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that is higher than the State rates but still lower than the least expensive published conference rate, no exception is required.

Conference Meals

- The reimbursement of meals must be reduced by any meals provided to the traveler, whether or not they were consumed. (SAAM 5025-3.2.2)
- Reimbursement of meals in excess of the State rates are allowed when all of the following conditions are met:
 - The meal is not included in the conference fee, and
 - The meal features a speaker, panel or other activity integral to the conference, and
 - The activity and meal take place on the conference premises, and
 - The cost of the meal that accompanies the presentation is \$50 or less.
- To reimburse a cost of more than \$50, the agency must obtain an approved travel exception from the State Comptroller. See the SAAM for additional requirements.

Tips for Success

- Plan in advance as much as possible. This helps ensure that the lowest cost options are obtained.
- If the travel is out-of-state, remember to complete a GAO-509. Use this form to discuss expectations (e.g. mode of transportation, maximum amount of reimbursement, dates and payment method of travel, special considerations, limitations, etc.) with the individual before travel.
- If an exception is needed, it is strongly encouraged to make the request before travel. If the request is made after the fact, GAO is no longer able to determine if other options were available.
- Exception requests **may** be approved after travel has occurred; however, additional documentation is necessary. See SAAM 0015 for additional information on the process for requesting an exception.

If you have any questions about this topic, reach out to your agency contact who can provide assistance or contact your agency's AFIS Liaison or GAO Travel, at GAOtravel@azdoa.gov, if any questions remain.