Policy on Official Travel within Australia and Overseas

August 2013
Policy Overview

This Policy covers all official air travel by public officials using public money.

Unless otherwise stated in this Policy, it is mandatory to book official travel through the NSW Government’s approved supplier under Contract 1008 Travel Management Services.

Definitions

"Official travel" means where a public sector organisation or service responsible to a Minister uses public monies to pay for the travel of a public official or any other person.

This Policy relates specifically to air travel, but the general principles should be applied to surface transport.

"Public official" means an officer or employee of a public sector organisation or service reporting to a Minister, or any other person remunerated by and performing duties under the direction or auspices of such an organisation or service.

Applicability

The Ministers’ Office Administration Handbook, maintained by the Department of Premier and Cabinet, is the authoritative source of guidance in respect of travel by Ministers and their staff. The Handbook is developed taking into account the principles set out in this Policy. The Handbook is published on the Department’s website at: http://www.dpc.nsw.gov.au.

This Policy applies to public service departments, other public sector organisations, and services reporting to a Minister. In the case of organisations that are not public service departments, the approval of the responsible Minister should be obtained for any departure from the provisions of this Policy.

This Policy should be adopted by State Owned Corporations (SOCs) and Public Trading Enterprises (PTEs) as it contains sound guidance regarding official travel within Australia and overseas.

This Policy does not cover individuals or employees of organisations who provide services under contract to a public sector organisation or service. Where necessary, travel provisions in respect of such contract personnel should be set out in the relevant conditions of the contract.
Minimising Travel

Alternative methods of communicating over long distances should always be explored prior to considering travel. Technologies such as teleconferencing and video conferencing are suitable alternatives.

Air Travel Bookings

All domestic and international official travel bookings must be made through the NSW Government’s approved supplier under Contract 1008 Travel Management Services. Further information can be obtained from the Department of Finance & Services at: http://www.procurepoint.nsw.gov.au.

The approved supplier provides travel agency-type services through a variety of methods: the Internet using the approved supplier’s online booking tool, a dedicated booking centre via telephone and email, and appointed travel agents in regional NSW.

Use of the approved supplier’s online booking tool is highly recommended to reduce transaction costs and increase efficiency.

There may be exceptional circumstances where private travel occurs as an adjunct to official travel by a public official (e.g., where a period of private leave is approved as set out in this Policy), or private travel by another person (such as a spouse) in conjunction with travel by public officials. Circumstances such as these are rare and are not to be encouraged.

Contract 1008 must not be used to book private travel, whether for public officials or any other person.

However, if it is appropriate and necessary to arrange private travel as an adjunct to official travel, a public official may choose to use the services of the supplier approved under Contract 1008 in a private capacity subject to conditions. In such cases, it is the responsibility of the public official to ensure that:

  a) “NSW Government rates” under Contract 1008 are not applied to the private travel;
  b) The private travel is paid for separately at the time of the booking from the public official’s private accounts; and
  c) The private booking is made at the same time as the booking for official travel.

A government-issued credit card or other account must not be used to make a private travel booking in any circumstances even if it is intended that reimbursement will be made by the public official at a later date.
Official Travel within Australia

1. Approval for official travel within Australia
Ministers may approve of Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) and the person in charge of any other public sector organisation or service reporting to a Minister, approving their own official travel within Australia, subject to any conditions set by individual Ministers.

If there is any doubt about whether this provision applies to a public official, the Minister responsible should be consulted.

For the purposes of this Policy, official travel to Lord Howe Island, Norfolk Island and other external Australian territories is regarded as ‘Official Travel Overseas’. Rules that apply are covered in the next section of this document.

All other official travel within Australia must be approved in writing by the CEO or the person in charge of any other public sector organisation or service reporting to a Minister, or by a delegate exercising an appropriate delegation to cover the expenditure proposed. Approval is to be given prior to any official travel being undertaken.

2. Class of travel
Economy class travel is to be used for all official travel in Australia. CEOs, Senior Executive Service Officers, Statutory Officers, Senior Officers and Chairpersons of NSW Government boards and committees may fly business class or premium economy to Western Australia and the Northern Territory.

3. Domestic Airfare Policy
For all official travel, the lowest logical fare of the day must be used for all domestic flights. This is the cheapest fare available that meets the Agency traveller's logistical needs.

Public officials cannot specify a desired airline they wish to use. They can only nominate their destination and desired date and time of departure to the approved supplier when booking air travel. The approved supplier will book a flight in accordance with the traveller's specified needs, and can search 20 minutes either side of the specified time of departure for the cheapest fare.

To reduce cost, restrictive fares will be sought where possible. For example, the initial leg of the journey should be a restrictive fare as it is less likely this will be required to change.

The NSW Government appointed supplier has in place systems to capture and manage credits arising from changes to restrictive fares to reduce any possible wastage. These credits are reported on a monthly basis.
Official Travel Overseas

1. Approval for official travel overseas
The portfolio Minister must approve all official overseas travel by public officials, including to New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Norfolk Island and Lord Howe Island. Subject to the Premier’s agreement, Ministers may delegate this function to CEOs and the person in charge of any other public sector organisation or service reporting to the Minister. Such delegations are to be exercised in accordance with the rules in this section of the Policy.

The Premier has asked Ministers to exercise the strictest economy in approving this travel and ensure that it can be funded within the budget allocation for the organisation concerned. Significant benefits to the Minister’s own administration and/or the State should be demonstrated before approval is given. Ministers are asked to maintain close scrutiny of official travel overseas in their portfolios.

Written approval is to be given prior to any official travel being undertaken internationally. Essential information in support of the proposed overseas travel includes the objectives, scope and expected benefits of the trip, estimated cost, and the destinations and organisations being visited.

2. Class of travel
Economy class travel should be used for all official overseas travel.

There are limited exceptions to this:

- CEOs, SES, Statutory Officers, Senior Officers and Chairpersons of NSW Government boards/committees may fly premium economy or business class.
- An official travelling with a Minister may, if required, travel in the same class.
- An official travelling with a Government delegation may, with approval of the CEO, travel in the same class as other delegates.
- Ministers may waive the requirement to fly economy class for medical reasons.

3. Negotiated rates
Rates have been negotiated with various airlines, which can only be accessed by booking air travel through the approved supplier. The cheapest of these negotiated rates is to be used if available. Choice of airline is not permitted unless a cheaper alternative is found. Travel cannot be undertaken with an airline listed as unsafe by the consultancy firm Flight Safe Limited. Where there is no alternative to an airline listed as unsafe, special permission must be sought from the portfolio Minister to use it.

4. International Flight Quoting
Public officials may choose to obtain quotes from alternative travel providers. However, these quotes must be provided to the approved supplier when
requesting quotes from the approved supplier, so that it can match or better the alternative quotes.

5. **Payment**
The travel industry requires payment in advance at point of sale. This is in line with the following Treasury policies: Treasury Circular *Credit Card Use – Best Practice Guide* TC05/06 205.01; *Treasury Policy and Guidelines Paper* TPP 05-01 *Credit Card Use – Best Practice Guide* and Treasurer’s Direction 180.05 regarding payment in advance.

6. **Private leave**
Requests to take private leave while undertaking overseas trips, or conversely extending private trips for official purposes, should not be encouraged. Each application should be considered on its merits via written submission to the portfolio Minister for consideration.

7. **Records**
Public sector organisations or services within a Minister’s portfolio should retain a centralised record of official travel overseas.

Each occasion of overseas travel, its date and duration, the officer(s) (and any companions) travelling, purpose, the cost and funding source, need to be justified and recorded by agencies for audit purposes. Any associated private leave approved by a Minister for a public official should be recorded.

8. **Protocol**
Correct protocol should be observed in connection with official visits overseas and relations with foreign governments. This information is available from the Commonwealth Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). The current information as advised by DFAT is very useful in the planning of official overseas visits.


9. **Health**
It is the official’s responsibility to obtain proper medical advice prior to undertaking any long distance or overseas travel.

It is recommended that public officials familiarise themselves with the content of the Travel Health section of the DFAT website called Smart Traveller: [http://www.smartraveller.gov.au/tips/travelwell.html](http://www.smartraveller.gov.au/tips/travelwell.html).
10. Security
All travellers are advised to visit the DFAT Smart Traveller website for travel advice about the countries they are planning to visit:

11. NSW Government Agencies Covered by the Treasury Managed Fund (TMF)
The TMF is the NSW Government’s self-insurance scheme. The TMF provides protection to NSW Government agencies, Parliamentarians, employees, officers and other approved persons against the insurable exposures and losses faced by Government. Protection includes but is not limited to workers compensation, liability, property, motor vehicle and miscellaneous (volunteer and overseas travel) cover.

For overseas travel medical or security emergencies, The Department of Finance & Services (NSW SICorp) has contracted the Overseas Travel and Emergency Services Provider. This organisation has doctors available to assist in most capital cities throughout the world and can arrange both pre-travel advice and 24 hour emergency medical assistance including advice, treatment and medical evacuations where necessary. It will also arrange for evacuation where civil security is threatened. The approved supplier under Contract 1008 will provide details on how to register with the overseas travel and emergency services provider prior to your departure and also arrange travel insurance on your travel itinerary. The TMF workers compensation or general lines service provider is also available to provide advice of overseas travel protection prior to departure.

12. Other Matters

Loyalty Schemes and Airline Lounges

Organisations should decide whether to meet the cost of staff having membership of airline lounge facilities or similar services. Public officials may join and maintain membership of such lounges at their own expense irrespective of the nature and extent of their official travel.

Public officials, including other people travelling at Government expense, are not to seek, or accept loyalty or frequent flyer points from any airline in respect of official transport and this has been in effect since 1 July 2002 (DPC Circular 2002-29). This includes collecting loyalty points at the time of travel and post travel.

Benefits from airline, car or hotel loyalty schemes or lounge memberships are not to influence travel decisions.
Processing of Travel Claims

Claims for official travel expenses incurred by public officials should be forwarded to the officer who processes travel claims within one month. Travel expense claims should be supported by, for example, air tickets, boarding passes, receipts and approvals.

Documentation Supporting Official Travel within Australia and Overseas

Public officials are responsible for ensuring that they maintain all documentation with regards to the travel request, travel approval and all supporting documentation for travel expenses. This documentation must be in accordance with the requirements of the Australian Taxation Office (ATO) in regards to travel.

For example, the ATO requires officers to keep a travel diary for official domestic and international travel beyond five consecutive nights for Fringe Benefits Tax substantiation requirements.


Further Information


Information on meal, travelling and other allowances under the Crown Employees (Public Service Conditions of Employment) Award are adjusted annually. Circulars are issued by NSW Industrial Relations and can be found at: [http://www.industrialrelations.nsw.gov.au](http://www.industrialrelations.nsw.gov.au).