

Part 400 – International Conservation Programs

Subpart D – International Travel

400.60 Temporary Duty Travel (TDY) Purpose

A. NRCS shares its knowledge of natural resource conservation with foreign counterparts by assigning specialists to provide services, such as technical assistance (TA) or exchange of scientific and technological information.

B. TDY travel provides the employee opportunity to engage in TA and leadership to foreign institutions for the joint mutual benefit of USDA, the U.S. Government, foreign country, or an international organization. TDY activities may include:

- (1) International meetings, conferences, and workshops.—This activity provides opportunities in person or online for NRCS employees to share conservation technology with colleagues from other countries, exchange information and enhance communications to foster the growth and application of innovative technologies, establish contacts for long-term collaboration, support U.S. foreign policy goals, and enhance the professional and personal skills of scientists to promote personal development.
- (2) Scientific and Technical Exchange activities.—This activity promotes the management and conservation of natural resources globally. Specialists work with their foreign counterparts to share data and new technologies for soil and water conservation to improve the prudent use of natural resources in the United States and in the foreign country.
- (3) TA.—This activity supports technical specialists overseas working with host country government to provide technical leadership for assessing natural resource problems and recommending solutions.

C. The International Programs Division (IPD) maintains an International Assignment Candidate Database showing the interest and qualifications of interested employees.

D. TDYs are integrated into the employee's full-time position. When appropriate, employees who serve on TDYs will be identified from the database or detail opportunity announcement.

E. Employees are selected with the concurrence of their supervisor, based on the staff workload and benefits to NRCS from the employee's professional development.

400.61 Financing

A. Employee participation in projects financed through reimbursable agreements between USDA and the organization requesting TA shall specify the scope of work, personnel requirements, and funds required to complete the projects. If NRCS agrees to provide assistance, the requesting agency shall issue appropriate interagency agreement forms authorizing funds for NRCS to carry out the requested services. NRCS, for example, enters into such agreement with the Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) on behalf of another U.S. government agency.

B. Other projects may be financed by appropriated funds as required by Public Law 99-239, the Compact of Free Association Act of 1985; Public Law 99-658, the Compact of Free Association Act of 1985, as amended; or other applicable laws.

C. Financial arrangements vary for TDY projects. USDA and the organization requesting TA will determine whether a reimbursable agreement or directly paying travel expense will be used to carry out the TDY.

400.62 Clearances

A. Travel to foreign countries require all of the following:

- (1) Department of State clearance through the U.S. embassy.
- (2) Medical clearances for the employee and family if over 30 days.
- (3) Successful completion of the required background investigation by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM). See [Title 270, General Manual, Part 421, 421.3, "Policy,"](#) for more information.
- (4) Official or diplomatic passports and visas for the employee and family.
- (5) Medevac insurance.
- (6) Completed and current on Department of State required security trainings. See Section 400.68.

B. Contact the Farm Production and Conservation (FPAC) Business Center, Homeland Security Division for more information on personnel security clearance process.

400.63 Medical Evacuation (MEDEVAC), Medical Clearances, Medical Treatment, and Death

A. Medical facilities at many international posts are limited. Treatment for chronic illnesses and some medications are often unavailable, and living conditions may not be conducive to the improvement of many ailments.

See USDA Department Regulations 2340-001, "Payment of MEDEVAC and Medical Expenses of Employees on Overseas Temporary Duty Assignment," which covers MEDEVAC and medical expenses.

B. Medical Clearances

- (1) Medical clearance is necessary only if the duration in a foreign country is more than 30 days. Before employees and their dependents are transferred to an international post for an overseas limited appointment or other TDY longer than 30 days, a thorough medical examination is required. The Department of State's Office of Medical Services must approve health qualifications of the employee and family members.
- (2) Immunizations are required for travel to most locations. The traveler is responsible for obtaining the necessary immunizations. The traveler should consult the Centers for Disease Control (<http://www.cdc.gov>), as well as a local health facility or his or her physician for a list of required and recommended immunizations for entry into foreign countries.
- (3) Employees or eligible family members may need to carry a health card to show that they have the required immunizations, and they should be prepared to present the card when they arrive at the airport in the foreign country.
- (4) Employees or eligible family members should carry a letter from their physician attesting to the need if a medication is unusual or contains narcotics. and wear an identification chain or bracelet if chronic ailments or allergies exist.

C. Medical Treatment

- (1) All NRCS employees and families with medical clearances are covered in the Department of State's Office of Medical Services medical program while serving on official international travel.
 - (i) The Department of State will provide or help the traveler obtain the best possible medical care possible at post. This covers any medical emergency, such as a serious illness, injury, or medical condition that requires hospitalization or similar treatment.
 - (ii) Although the Department of State does not actually pay the medical costs, it provides assistance and coordination to allow the medical situation to be handled immediately. The Department of State guarantees payment, acting only as a facilitator of the bill, since a hospital in a foreign country may not accept the employee's insurance card.
 - (iii) After the employee's insurance carrier has processed claims, the unpaid balance may be paid by NRCS. See U.S. Department of State, 16 Foreign Affairs Manual (FAM) 520, "Responsibility for Payment of Medical Expenses," for details on the responsibility for payment of medical expenses.
- (2) Employees should verify that their personal health insurance policy will cover the costs of medical services incurred while abroad, including emergency evacuation (medical evacuation insurance may be required by the U.S. embassy).
- (3) In the case of emergency, employees should contact the U.S. embassy in the host country and follow embassy procedures for medical attention.
- (4) Employees and eligible family members should contact the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate for a list of local physicians and medical facilities. If the illness is serious, consular officers can help the traveler find medical assistance and, at the traveler's request, will inform family or friends. Payment of hospital and other medical expenses is the traveler's responsibility.

D. Medical Travel

Medical travel may be authorized only for medical and dental treatment that cannot be postponed until the individual's next scheduled travel (e.g., transfer, home leave, rest and recuperation, or post-funded TDY travel). See Department of State, 16 FAM 300, "Medical Travel," for more information.

E. Death Abroad

- (1) The Department of State Bureau of Consular Affairs will locate and inform the next-of-kin of the U.S. citizen's death and provide information on how to make arrangements for local burial or return of the remains to the United States. Upon issuance of a local death certificate, the nearest embassy or consulate may prepare a "Consular Report of the Death of an American Abroad." Copies of that report are provided to the next-of-kin or legal representative and may be used in U.S. courts to settle estate matters. For more information, see "Death Abroad" on the Department of State's website.
- (2) An officer from the Department of State takes possession of personal effects (apparel, jewelry, personal papers, etc.), prepares an inventory of the items, and then carries out instructions from the legal representative or next-of-kin concerning the effects. If there are no family members traveling with the employee, the next-of-kin is notified of minimum cost of local burial, cremation (if available), embalming, and preparing remains for shipment, air and surface shipment of embalmed remains, air and surface shipment of cremated remains, and maximum period of time before local burial is required.

400.64 International Travel Request Form (ITRF), Travel Authorizations, Country Clearance, Passports, and Visas

- A. An ITRF is used to initiate all international travel of NRCS employees to participate in official foreign travel. The form must provide a clear statement of the purpose and document specific benefits

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of the trip to NRCS. Trips are approved by first- and second-line supervisors through the appropriate chain of command to the Regional Conservationist or Deputy Chief.

B. In accordance with USDA travel regulations, when conducting official U.S. Government business, the employee must have a U.S. Government official or diplomatic passport to depart or enter the United States and to enter or depart foreign countries. Employees are not permitted to use their personal passport to travel overseas (except when traveling to Taiwan), including to Canada, to conduct official Government business.

C. IPD is responsible for obtaining official and diplomatic passports and visas for all NRCS international travelers. At least 45 days are needed to obtain the travel authorization, passport, and visa.

D. Travelers are responsible for returning all official and diplomatic passports to IPD within 5 business days of completing travel. The only exception is for employees who have been placed on the NRCS Intermittent Traveler List. Travelers are encouraged to use the FAS website for guidance when taking an international trip at <https://www.fas.usda.gov/international-travel>.

E. A first-time applicant must first work with their immediate supervisor to see if an official passport is needed for future international travel as they carry out their position duties. If their supervisor approves, the employee appears in person at a passport agency, Federal or State courthouse, U.S. post office, or U.S. embassy authorized to accept passport applications. Renewal of official passport will also require immediate supervisor approval sent to IPD. All of the following documents must be submitted:

- (1) Memo from FAS Travel Office, which will be sent to the employee by IPD.
- (2) Form DS-11, "Application for a U.S. Passport," completed but unsigned.
- (3) Proof of U.S. citizenship, such as certified birth certificate with raised seal and date of filing.
- (4) Two color passport-size photographs (2 inches by 2 inches) that have been taken within the past 6 months.

F. A visa is an endorsement or stamp placed on a passport by officials of a foreign country to grant entry into their country for a limited time period. Visas are required for travel to certain countries and are provided by embassies and some consulates located throughout the United States. IPD keeps abreast of current visa regulations to comply with the requirements of foreign governments and will provide instructions, as appropriate. Depending on the specific requirements, employees may be asked to complete a visa form or to submit additional photographs to IPD. IPD will ensure that all appropriate visas are issued within 30 days of receiving the completed paperwork from the traveler. Some embassies may charge a processing fee; this fee is reimbursable.

G. The Department of State through the U.S. embassy must grant country clearance for all international travel of NRCS employees. IPD will request this clearance through electronic country clearance to the U.S. embassy after the traveler provides a copy of travel authorization and flight itinerary. This will ensure that clearance is granted prior to the traveler's departure date. Employees will not be in official travel status if they do not receive country clearance from the U.S. embassy.

H. New employees must notify IPD if they transfer into the Agency with an official passport.

400.65 Travel

A. For TDY:

- (1) To help with the communication on the Travel Program, FPAC employees may access the TDY Travel Team website for travel information and updates.

- (2) For overseas limited appointment, stopovers, rest and recuperation, and emergency visitation travel, NRCS will follow the following where applicable:
 - (i) U.S. Department of State Foreign Affairs Manual
 - (ii) U.S. Department of State Standardized Regulations (DSSR)
 - (iii) Federal Travel Regulations
 - (iv) Agricultural Travel Regulation
 - (v) DR 2300-001, Government Travel Charge Card Regulation.
- (3) All travel (airfare, hotel, rental car) must be booked through USDA's travel system (Concur). Employees are not authorized to use a third-party travel arranger (e.g., Expedia, Trivago, or Travelocity) to make any travel arrangements, including air or hotel reservations. Employee hotel reservations must be booked through Concur unless there is a group rate that requires direct contact with the hotel.
- (4) Law requires mandatory use of the travel charge card by all employees unless the account was closed for misuse or abuse, or in the case of a new employee or other invitational travelers. The use of the travel charge card is limited to expenses incurred in conjunction with official travel. The provisions of this regulation apply to all employees, supervisors, and managers of USDA who were issued or are applying for a travel charge card. Cardholders are personally responsible for all items billed to the travel charge card unless the card was reported lost or stolen.
- (5) Employees shall pay the contractor in accordance with the contractor payment terms. These responsibilities are explained in the Cardholder Agreement that each employee signs during the application process. Furthermore, employees are not relieved of their obligation to pay the travel charge card bill in those rare instances when the agency has not reimbursed the traveler within 30 days of a timely submitted travel voucher.

B. For travel arrangements related to transitioning to a new, foreign duty location, the Agency has a counseling program in place to help ensure that relocating employees receive the guidance they need to make informed decisions throughout the move process. A relocation coordinator will discuss all aspects of the move, including timelines, entitlements, and processes with the affected employee. The employee is not to incur any relocation expenses until they have completed the counseling process and have a signed Travel Authorization.

C. Contact the FPAC Business Center, Financial Management Division, Financial Operations Branch, Travel TDY Section for additional information or questions through myFPAC Services.

400.66 Ethics

NRCS may accept travel reimbursement from non-Federal sources. The USDA Office of Ethics must review the travel reimbursement via form AD-1101. The employee's administrative supervisor and the approving agency official must also approve using funds from non-USDA sources to pay for travel and transportation expenses while on TDY. See USDA Ethics Issuance 99-2, "Acceptance of Travel from Non-Federal Sources."

400.67 Diplomatic Contacts

When traveling to a foreign country on official business, the employee must comply with all the following requirements regarding U.S. diplomatic contacts abroad:

- (1) Work with IPD on information regarding any additional requirements for entry into a foreign country
- (2) Contact the U.S. embassy agricultural counselor or attaché upon arrival in the foreign country for in-country security briefing.

- (3) Cooperate with instructions given by U.S. representatives during the visit.
- (4) Consult the U.S. embassy or consulate if itinerary changes occur after arriving in the country.

400.68 Security Training

- A. Employees traveling overseas are required to undertake mandatory security training. Training requirements will vary depending on the duration in the country.
- B. If the combined TDY durations throughout the year is 89 days or less, then the Counter Threat Awareness Training is required. Mandatory completion of the course is required for travel to all posts. This training is available in AgLearn.
- C. If the combined duration overseas 90 days or more, then the Foreign Affairs Counter Threat Course (FACT) (CT-650) will be required in addition to the Counter Threat Awareness Training. FACT is available through the Foreign Service Institute.
- D. Travelers overseas on official U.S. government orders for 45 or more cumulative days in a 12-month period are required to take Security Overseas Seminar (MQ911) through the Foreign Service Institute.
- E. Travelers overseas on official U.S. government orders for 30 or more cumulative days in a 12-month period overseas are required to complete the distance learning course, Introduction to Working in an Embassy (PN113). This course is available through the Foreign Service Institute.
- F. Travelers should also consider security protocol for use and transporting of their electronic devices, such as phones and laptops. In some cases, equipment ownership documents may need to be obtained from the Customer Experience Center. Additionally, the National Counterintelligence and Security Center provides some general guidelines on traveling with electronic devices at <https://www.dni.gov/index.php/ncsc-how-we-work/ncsc-know-the-risk-raise-your-shield/ncsc-travel-tips>.
- G. The employee should complete the USDA, Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Coordination, Personnel and Document Security Division Foreign Contact Questionnaire upon the completion of overseas travel.