
Tips from the Auditors – Travel and Hospitality

GENERAL TIPS

1. ***Treat it like it's your money***

Whether you are the person filing the reimbursement claim or the one reviewing/approving it, consider whether you would spend your own funds for the expenses. We have fiduciary responsibility for spending taxpayer and donor funds appropriately. Consider how those stakeholders would view the expenditures.

2. ***Optics***

Remember that the California State University (CSU) system is transparent in its financial transactions. Consider how you would feel if the expense you claimed or approved was scrutinized as part of a Public Records Act request or how it might appear as a headline in the media.

3. ***Assess whether the expenses claimed are logical/reasonable***

Take a step back from the actual rules and consider whether the actions/claims are logical. A few examples of things that may be questionable:

- An employee who lived in Long Beach drove 25 miles north to LAX to fly to San Diego, incurring mileage, airport parking, airfare, and rental car costs when they could have just gotten a rental car and driven from Long Beach.
- In 37 instances, that same employee claimed that it took longer than two hours to get home from LAX, giving them a return time that allowed them to claim dinner. In several instances, they claimed it took more than five hours to go the 25 miles to their home.
- The duration of the trip was extremely short or occurred over a weekend.
- Child's meals were listed on dining receipts.

4. ***Reviewers can say no***

If a claim or aspects of a claim are unsupported, inappropriate, or violate CSU policy, it's ok to request additional information or to deny those parts of the claim you are concerned about. Per the CSU Travel and Business Expense Reimbursement Policy, "The University assumes no financial responsibility for expenditures incurred by individuals who fail to adhere to policy."

5. ***Ask Questions***

Don't fall into the "I'm sure it's ok" trap. If you don't know if a particular expenditure is appropriate, ask someone who does. If you're reviewing something and don't understand the business reason for the expenditure, get clarification.

6. ***Miscellaneous***

A few other things to pay attention to:

- Frequent travelers
- Individuals always claiming at or near the limits
- Vague descriptions of business purpose

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TRAVEL REMINDERS

- For domestic travel, travelers are allowed reimbursement only for actual costs incurred, and no per diem amounts are allowed.
- Transportation expenses shall be reimbursed based on the most economical mode of transportation and the most commonly traveled route consistent with the authorized purpose of the trip.
- All expenditures for a single trip should be reported on one travel expense claim. Supplemental claims may be submitted if necessary but must be clearly marked “supplemental” and must identify the original claim submitted in connection with the travel.
- Hotel costs should not be prepaid and claims should only be reimbursed with clear proof of payment (i.e., a “zero balance” receipt). A hotel confirmation cannot serve as a receipt for payment.
- Dates and locations of receipts should be reviewed and reconciled with where employees claimed they were.
- Individuals who receive an automobile allowance are precluded from claiming mileage reimbursement for university-related travel when using their personal vehicle.
- Business- and first-class airfare cannot be approved without documented justification.