

TRB’s Cooperative Research Programs Travel FAQ

Thank you for participating in the Cooperative Research Programs (CRP) division of the Transportation Research Board (TRB). TRB is part of the National Academy of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) and has implemented travel policies based in part on the Federal Travel Regulation (FTR). Please read this Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) for answers to the most commonly asked questions regarding your travel for CRP meetings.

| | |
|---|---|
| <u>Initial Qualifications</u> | 2 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the Travel Memo? • Do I need to pay for my travel expenses? • Who qualifies for travel and lodging reimbursement? • Do I need receipts for every nickel I spend? • Exemption for “Local” Travelers [especially residents of the Baltimore–Washington region] • Can I bring my spouse or other guest to the meeting? | |
| <u>Planes & Trains</u> | 2 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When should I make my travel arrangements? • Are there any restrictions on my flights? • I would like to book my own travel or use my own travel agent. • What is a “constructive cost”? • How can I be sure my expenses are “eligible”? • My airline charges a fee for checked bags. Is this fee reimbursable? • My airline charges a fee to select my seats in advance. Is this fee reimbursable? | |
| <u>Automobiles</u> | 3 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will I be reimbursed for a rental car? • Will I be reimbursed for expenses if I drive my own car to the meeting? | |
| <u>Hotels & Lodging</u> | 4 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will I need to pay up front for travel and hotel costs with my own money? • Can I arrive early or extend my stay for a day or two at my own expense? • Can I book my own hotel? • I have special needs that require accommodation. | |
| <u>Changes & Cancellations</u> | 4 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I need to change my flight and hotel reservation. • I need to cancel my trip—what do I do? | |
| <u>Meeting Agenda</u> | 4 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I need a meeting agenda to obtain travel approval from my employer. • What time does the meeting start? What is the meeting location? | |
| <u>After the Meeting</u> | 5 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My meeting ended early. Can I change my return flight? | |
| <u>Expenses</u> | 5 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do I submit my travel expense report? • What travel expenses will be reimbursed? • How are per diem rates calculated? • Meal per diem is \$74 per day (for example). Will I receive a check for \$74 for each day I travel? • How long will it take to get reimbursed? • I’m having difficulties submitting my expense report. • What if I’m prohibited from being reimbursed by a “third party”? | |
| <u>Travel Contacts</u> | 6 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vai Travel • Do I need to contact the hotel directly? • What if I have other travel-related questions not covered in this FAQ? | |

INITIAL QUALIFICATIONS [\[back to top\]](#)

What is the Travel Memo?

The Travel Memo is a 5-page instruction packet that details everything you need to know to begin planning your travel for the CRP Meeting in which you've been invited to participate. It contains: 1) general meeting details, 2) the Meeting Response Form, 3) instructions for making travel reservations, 4) hotel information, and 5) CRP Staff contact information. Please read the Travel Memo carefully and RSVP at your earliest convenience. Travel Specialists are available to coordinate and answer your travel-related questions. If you have questions about the content of your meeting, or the project itself, you should contact the Senior Program Officer (SPO), Senior Program Assistant (SPA), or Program Coordinator (PC)—whoever was your original or main point of contact.

Do I need to pay for my travel expenses?

Since you are volunteering your time as well as your expertise to the CRP, we will reimburse or direct-bill travel and lodging expenses for volunteer panel members according to Federal guidelines. Please see the "[Expenses](#)" section for further details.

Who qualifies for travel and lodging reimbursement?

CRP is allowed to reimburse our volunteer **panel members** for travel and lodging expenses. **Panel liaisons** (government or otherwise) and **research team members** (including principal investigators, unless otherwise indicated) are exempt from travel and lodging reimbursement due to how panels are funded and how subawards (research contracts) are issued. Panel liaisons and research team members cannot participate in the CRP hotel group because these names cannot appear on the master bill for auditing purposes and, therefore, cannot be guaranteed by CRP or NASEM on their behalf.

Do I need receipts for every nickel I spend?

No, but you are required to provide receipts for all major transportation (airfare, train, rental car) and lodging expenses and any individual expense over \$74.99.

Exemption for "Local" Travelers

Volunteer panel members who work and/or live within 50 miles of our meeting location are considered "local" and are not eligible for per-diem expenses reimbursement (i.e., meals, lodging, incidentals). TRB can reimburse local attendees for mileage (at prevailing GSA mileage rate) and taxi/transit fares between their home or workplace and our meeting location. We would still appreciate your RSVP so that the SPO may plan the meeting accordingly. If you are unsure of your eligibility/status, please contact your Travel Specialist.

Can I bring my spouse or other guest to the meeting?

CRP meetings are business events and as such are restricted to the participation of the appointed panelists. However, volunteers who invite guests, including spouses or partners, to join the meeting attendees for meals must pay for the meal. When your response form is received stating your intent to bring a guest, an administrative coordinator will be in touch with you regarding the cost for your guest and the payment procedure.

PLANES & TRAINS [\[back to top\]](#)

When should I make my travel arrangements?

You should return the Meeting Response Form (Travel Memo, page 2) and contact our travel agency (Vai Travel) at your earliest convenience and before the due date. This will result in the most economical airfares and help us manage our program costs. It will also guarantee your hotel room and at the negotiated rate; if you request your lodging too close to the meeting date, we may not be able to secure accommodations for you at the same hotel as the other attendees.

Are there any restrictions on my flights?

Air and train travel must be in Economy Class at the lowest **non-refundable** fare for a reasonable itinerary from your closest commercial airport. All exceptions must be approved in advance; first- or business-class travel generally is not reimbursable. **All air travel must be booked on U.S.-flag carriers only.**

I would like to book my own travel or use my own travel agent.

You may book your own travel, but you run the risk of incurring costs that may not be eligible for reimbursement. If you purchase your own tickets, you will be required to provide receipts for the same, clearly showing the purchase date and method of payment, and you will be subject to a constructive cost comparison if your itinerary deviates from the allowable travel period (1 day before/after the meeting date(s)). However, we encourage you to utilize the NASEM travel agent Vai Travel since these costs (air/train fare) can be billed directly to CRP and you will not need carry these costs until you can be reimbursed (generally 4 weeks after the meeting). Most volunteers choose this benefit.

What is a “constructive cost”?

A constructive cost is the cost of air transport between the traveler's permanent business location and the meeting location using U.S.-flag common carrier and the most direct round-trip (layovers < 4 hours each) itinerary available during reasonable traveling times.

- Air transport—*fastest mode of travel*
- Permanent business location (normal duty station)—*everyday work location*
- Meeting location—*impacts airport choices and fares*
- US-flag common carrier—*no private airlines or “ultra-regional” services*
- Most direct roundtrip—*non-stops often more costly than 1 or 2 layovers*
- Reasonable traveling times—*departures before 6am, arrivals after 11pm, and red-eyes are generally unreasonable*

Constructive cost estimates are only valid (for audit purposes) if they are produced by the NASEM preferred travel agency (Vai Travel)

How can I be sure my expenses are “eligible”?

The best way is to use the NASEM travel agency (Vai Travel) to book your flights and CRP Travel Specialists to book your hotel.

My airline charges a fee for checked bags. Is this fee reimbursable?

Yes, but CRP only will reimburse the cost of one (1) checked bag in each leg of your travel itinerary.

My airline charges a fee to select my seats in advance. Is this fee reimbursable?

No, optional airline fees like seat selection fees are not reimbursable.

AUTOMOBILES [\[back to top\]](#)

Will I be reimbursed for a rental car?

Rental cars are only authorized for *certain* locations. The Travel Memo will state whether or not rental cars are authorized. Any car rental larger than compact requires CRP approval in advance. Generally, the cost of taxi fares or ride-sharing services such as Uber or Lyft will be cumulatively less costly than a rental car plus parking.

Will I be reimbursed for expenses if I drive my own car to the meeting?

Yes, but only for the cost of your mileage—calculated by using the prevailing GSA mileage rate—plus related tolls and parking that is less than or equal to the maximum of the equivalent airfare (referred to as the “[constructive cost](#)”) plus ground transportation as determined by NASEM Travel Office.

HOTELS & LODGING [\[back to top\]](#)

Will I need to pay up front for travel and hotel costs with my own money?

Not necessarily. If you use the NASEM travel agency (Vai Travel) and you stay in the hotel that we have arranged for you, these costs can be directly billed to CRP. You will need to personally pay for meals and incidentals and request reimbursement after the meeting. Please do not contact the hotel directly unless you are already onsite or it is after business hours and you need immediate assistance from hotel staff. Your Travel Specialist is often working with hotel business staff and not with the front desk.

Can I arrive early or extend my stay for a day or two at my own expense?

Yes, but you should use the NASEM travel agency (Vai Travel) and make this request when you book your travel. NASEM will work out a “[constructive cost](#)”—the amount for transportation expenses from the day before the meeting to the day after the meeting. You will be responsible for the difference over and above that amount. Lodging is subject to hotel availability.

Can I book my own hotel?

Yes, you may book your own hotel, but you must book your lodging at the [prevailing government per diem rate](#) (or less) for the city in which the meeting is being held and only within the approved travel period (i.e., the day before to the day after the meeting). You will be required to provide receipts, clearly showing method of payment, and submit them with your expense report *after* the meeting. It will generally take 4 weeks to receive your reimbursement once you’ve completed the expense report after the meeting. It’s more convenient to use the hotel block CRP sets aside for the panel, since this expense will be direct-billed to CRP and you will not have to wait for reimbursement of that particular “big ticket” expense.

I have special needs that require accommodation.

If you have special needs that require accommodation (such as ADA requirements), please list them on the Meeting Response Form and your Travel Specialist will forward them to the hotel.

CHANGES & CANCELLATION [\[back to top\]](#)

I need to change my flight and hotel reservation.

If you need to revise your travel itinerary, you should contact **Vai Travel** immediately (have your Travel Code ready). Any change in cost must be pre-approved by CRP Finance staff (not the Senior Program Officer or Travel Specialist). Next contact your Travel Specialist to revise your **hotel room reservation** (subject to current availability), if you joined the room block. However, if you booked your own travel and/or lodging, you must contact your hotel and travel provider (or agent) directly. If you incur any additional costs or fees, contact CRPTravelAcct@nas.edu. This is a good reason to use the travel services provided by CRP.

I need to cancel my trip—what do I do?

If something unexpected has occurred and you need to cancel your plans to attend the meeting, you should contact **Vai Travel** immediately to cancel your itinerary (have your Travel Code ready). A credit (minus any applicable fees) *may* be applied to a future reservation. Next contact your Travel Specialist to cancel your **hotel room reservation**, if you joined the room block. However, if you booked your own travel and/or lodging, you must contact your hotel and travel provider (or agent) directly. If you incur any cancellation fees, contact CRPTravelAcct@nas.edu. This is a good reason to use the travel services provided by CRP.

MEETING AGENDA [\[back to top\]](#)

I need a meeting agenda to obtain travel approval from my employer.

Please request a meeting agenda from your Senior Program Officer (SPO), Senior Program Assistant (SPA), or Program Coordinator (PC). These are the CRP staff members who first contacted you about serving on the CRP Panel. They will be your main points of contact throughout the lifecycle of the project.

What time does the meeting start? What is the meeting location?

The meeting location and time are stated in the Travel Memo that accompanied this Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document. Alternatively, you may contact your SPO, SPA, or PC.

AFTER THE MEETING [\[back to top\]](#)

My meeting ended early. Can I change my return flight?

CRP staff have made every effort to plan our meetings so that there's sufficient time to complete the work that needs to be done; however, this does not preclude the possibility of finishing that work "early". CRP is not permitted to expend sponsor funds on ticket exchanges (except in emergencies). If your meeting ends early, you are welcome to undertake itinerary changes/ticket exchanges on your own resources, but CRP will not be able to direct-bill nor reimburse you for those expenses.

EXPENSES [\[back to top\]](#)

How do I submit my travel expense report?

You will receive instructions on how to complete your Travel Expense Report (eTER) online via Workday from your CRP Staff contact shortly after the meeting. Please contact CRPTravelAcct@nas.edu for assistance. Provide the project number and/or the travel code as reference (see your Travel Memo).

What travel expenses will be reimbursed?

For eligible meeting participants, transportation costs, meals, and lodging expenses limited by Federal per diem rates and for the allowable travel period that includes the day before and the day after the meeting.

How are per diem rates calculated?

The rates for hotel and meal expenses are established by the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA). They vary by city and in some cases by time of year. The rates that apply to your meeting can be found anytime on the GSA website at <https://www.gsa.gov/travel/plan-book/per-diem-rates>.

Meal per diem is \$79 per day (for example). Will I receive a check for \$79 for each day I travel?

CRP now reimburses fixed meal per diem reduced by the cost of meals provided by NAS—typically lunch. You are limited to 75% of the meal per diem on the days you travel.

How long will it take to get reimbursed?

Generally, reimbursement takes 4 weeks after you've completed entering your expenses and notified the CRP Finance staff (after the meeting has concluded). You may have a check issued or sign up for direct deposit.

I'm having difficulties submitting my expense report.

Once you are done entering your expenses online in Workday, click the Submit button and notify the CRP Finance staff at CRPTravelAcct@nas.edu that you are done. The finance office will review the report and submit it for approval. If you receive any confusing error messages, please make note of them and inform CRPTravelAcct@nas.edu.

What if I'm prohibited from being reimbursed by a "third party"?

We can issue the reimbursement check to your employer if you provide us with a complete mailing address (send an e-mail with that information to CRPTravelAcct@nas.edu). An IRS Form W-9 is required if your agency is not already set up in our system.

TRAVEL CONTACTS [\[back to top\]](#)

Vai Travel

Calling Vai Travel initially is generally faster and more direct than email. For fastest response, please contact them Monday through Friday during normal business hours (8:30a – 5:00p ET). After-hours representatives are available with limited access to travel resources (888-565-9174).

Phone: 1-301-948-2448

Email: nas@VaiTravel.com

Travel Code: TRByy0xxx (see your Travel Memo)

Do I need to contact the hotel directly?

If you have returned the Meeting Response Form (RSVP) and elected to join the room block which CRP has set aside for the volunteer panel members, please do ***not*** contact the hotel unless you are already onsite or it is after business hours and you need immediate assistance from hotel staff. Your Travel Specialist is often working with hotel business staff and not with the front desk.

What if I have other travel related questions not covered in this FAQ?

CRP Travel Specialists are available to explain the travel services provided for full voting panel members for all CRP meetings. While they are *not* a travel agency, they can guide you through the NASEM travel process. It is highly recommended that you utilize the travel and lodging services provided to ensure a smooth trip and prompt reimbursement. Please include your Travel Code (i.e., TRByy0xxx) in all correspondence and messages.

For additional travel assistance, contact your TRB Travel Specialist—either Dan Magnolia (dmagnolia@nas.edu or 202.334.1892) or Robert Turner (rturner@nas.edu or 202.334.2012) during normal business hours (Mon-Fri, 8:30a – 5:00p ET).

For finance approvals or constructive cost estimates, contact CRP Finance Office at CRPTravelAcct@nas.edu.

For meeting agendas or additional meeting details, contact your Senior Program Officer, Senior Program Assistant, or Program Coordinator.