

Travel Procedures

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I. Purpose

The Mid-Atlantic Region Commission on Higher Education (MARCHE), doing business as the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE or the Commission), seeks to ensure a clear, consistent, and transparent policy for individuals who incur expenses while conducting official Commission business (Commission representatives). The purpose of these procedures is to implement the Commission's *Travel Policy*.

II. Procedures for Making Travel Arrangements

- A. Commission representatives will typically make travel arrangements independently. Institutions occasionally may make some arrangements on behalf of the Commission's representatives, such as local hotel accommodations, transportation, and meals, and they may pay for such arrangements directly.
- B. Commission representatives will exercise fiscal conservatism and responsibility by selecting cost-effective options for lodging, meals, and transportation.
 - 1. Commission representatives will use available public transportation such as airport buses, trains, or taxis rather than private car or limousine services.
 - 2. Commission representatives will travel at coach rate fares for domestic flights, and will purchase tickets as soon as possible, but preferably not less than 30 days in advance of the date of the visit. The Commission will not reimburse for non-essential transportation expenditures including but not limited to TSA Pre-Check®, upgrades, priority boarding, or excess baggage.
 - 3. Commission representatives going to an overseas location on official Commission business may request an upgraded seat (i.e. business class) as long as prior written approval from the institution is secured before making arrangements.
 - a. Failure to secure written approval may result in the traveler's paying the difference between coach and business class fares.
 - b. Written approval must be uploaded to the *Travel & Expense Report* through the secure MSCHÉ portal.
 - 4. Commission representatives may travel by personal vehicle .

- a. When travel by personal vehicle exceeds 500 miles, reimbursement will be based on either the flat mileage rate or the air coach fare rate, whichever is less.
- b. Mileage expenses are reimbursed at a flat mileage rate set by the Commission and consistent with the standard mileage rates set by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). The flat rate is intended to cover all operating expenses, including depreciation, insurance, and fuel.
5. Commission representatives may purchase rental vehicles at competitive rates.
6. Drivers of personal or rental vehicles must have automobile liability and collision insurance. It is the responsibility of the Commission representative to verify and ensure appropriate coverage.
 - a. The individual renting the vehicle must be the Commission representative or peer evaluator assigned by the Commission to a review (and not a spouse or assistant).
 - b. Commission representatives must ensure that *Mid-Atlantic Region Commission on Higher Education* is listed on the contract in order to be covered under the Commission's insurance coverage policy.
 - c. The Commission does not carry automobile liability or collision insurance for individuals traveling in their own personal vehicles.
7. Expenses incurred in the preparation for international travel (e.g., passport or visa fees, required immunization costs, etc.) when they are required for an approved, upcoming MSCHE visit are considered reasonable and necessary, therefore, they are reimbursable. Such expenses must be reported on the Commission representative's *Travel & Expense Report*, accompanied by itemized receipts.

III. Procedures for Travel Warnings and Advisories

- A. The Commission staff will exercise due diligence in identifying possible risk including but not limited to severe weather conditions, concerns about health, safety or welfare, or civil or political unrest in a location.
- B. Commission representatives will assess their personal risk of travel by ascertaining and reviewing information about the destination, including but not limited to potential severe weather events and local laws and customs, especially before traveling abroad. See the U.S. Department of State Department of Consular Affairs website for travel advisories and information by country.
- C. If a security or safety risk is identified, the Commission staff will consult with the institution and with the Commission representatives in deciding how to ensure that teams remain safe while meeting the goals of a thorough and objective review.
 1. The Commission may consider whether the due date for the accreditation activity needs to be delayed.
 2. If a visit is delayed, the Commission will take action in accordance with *Accreditation Actions Policy and Procedures*.

- D. If conditions change after a visit has been scheduled or while a visit is underway, the Team Chair may consult with the Commission staff and the institution in considering the following options:
1. Adjust the visit schedule or the participation of individuals in meetings and interviews in light of local conditions; consider early departures or extended stays.
 2. Supplement the on-campus, in-person, interactions with video conferencing during or after the visit.
- E. If an incident involving the safety of a Commission representative occurs while conducting official Commission business, the individual should complete the attached *MSCHE Incident Report*.

IV. Procedures for Reimbursement of Travel Expenses

- A. Each Commission Representative is required to submit a *Travel & Expense Report* through the secure MSCHE portal.
1. If a Commission representative has not incurred any expenses, the individual must indicate that they are not submitting any expenses and still submit the form.
 2. The Commission will offer honoraria to offset any personal expenses that may be incurred during an accreditation activity.
 - a. Any peer evaluator that is restricted from accepting an honorarium for any reason must indicate that on the *Travel & Expense Report*.
 - b. The Commission reserves the right to adjust honoraria.
 3. The Commission representative must submit the *Travel & Expense Report* as soon as possible but not more than 90 calendar days after the travel event.
 4. Failure to submit the *Travel & Expense Report* within this timeframe could result in the forfeiture of reimbursement and/or honoraria.
- B. Commission representatives must submit itemized receipts or invoices for each expense reported in the *Travel & Expense Report* in order to comply with the reporting standards and practices as established by MSCHE through policy and procedure.
- C. If the Commission staff has notified the Commission representative that a travel event is postponed or canceled, the Commission representative may submit a request for reimbursement for expenses already incurred.
1. The Commission representative should cancel all arrangements and attempt to obtain refunds as permitted.
 2. Appropriate documentation related to expenses already incurred and not refundable should be submitted along with the *Travel & Expense Report* and itemized receipts.
 3. The Commission staff may request additional documentation at their discretion.
- D. The Commission staff will verify reasonable and necessary expenses against itemized receipts. The Commission staff may reject unreasonable, unnecessary, or personal expenses at their discretion.
- E. Reimbursement checks will be mailed directly to Commission Representatives or to a

designated payee if indicated on the *Travel & Expense Report*.

V. Definitions

The following definitions are used in this policy and/or procedure.

- A. **Commission representatives.** Individuals who represent or serve the Commission in any capacity including but not limited to peer evaluators, Commission staff, and Commissioners.
- B. **Peer evaluators.** Individuals selected and assigned to an accreditation activity by the Commission staff. This individual is part of the multi-level accreditation decision-making process and will participate in the proposal of an accreditation action. Peer evaluator is not intended to include a Commissioner serving in an official Commissioner capacity on a committee or the Commission. Peer evaluator is not intended to include an assistant or any other observer of an accreditation activity.
- C. **Personal expenses.** Non-business expenses for items not required for an accreditation activity. Personal expenses are not reimbursable. Examples of personal expenses are alcoholic beverages, personal or vacation travel, entertainment (movies), dry cleaning, seat upgrades, insurance deductibles, child-care expenses, and tickets or fees incurred by an individual because of moving or non-moving traffic violations.
- D. **Travel expenses.** Reasonable and necessary expenditures that a Commission representative incurs while conducting official Commission business which can include transportation, lodging, gratuity/tips, meals, and other incidental expenses directly related to the travel event.

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