

MS 218 Trainee and Volunteer Travel and Use of Transit/Regional Houses

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MS 218 Travel Stipend Calculation Procedures

Attachments

Attachment A – Travel Stipend Memo – FY 2024

Attachment B – Travel Stipend Memo – FY 2023

Attachment C – Travel Stipend Memo – FY 2022

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1.0 Purpose

This Manual Section establishes Peace Corps policies and procedures for transportation of Trainees and Volunteers, both for domestic and international travel.

2.0 Scope

Section 5(b) of the Peace Corps Act, as amended, authorizes Peace Corps to provide travel and transportation for the following persons:

- (a) Applicants for enrollment in the Peace Corps, to and from places of enrollment and training;
- (b) Trainees and Volunteers during service; and
- (c) Trainees and Volunteers from places of termination to their homes-of-record in the U.S.

For purposes of this Manual Section the term Trainee includes an applicant who has received an invitation to serve as a Volunteer and needs to travel pursuant to invitation.

3.0 Authority

- (a) The following persons, or their designees may approve specific official travel for applicants, Trainees, and Volunteers at Peace Corps expense:
 - (1) Director of Peace Corps;
 - (2) Associate Director for Global Operations;
 - (3) Supervisory Training Specialist;
 - (4) Regional Directors;
 - (5) Country Directors;
 - (6) Associate Director, Office of Health Services; and
 - (7) Associate Director for Safety and Security.
- (b) The following persons, or their designees, may authorize specific official travel for applicants, Trainees, and Volunteers at Peace Corps expense:
 - (1) Chief, Transportation Branch;
 - (2) Chief Administrative Officer, Office of Health Services;
 - (3) Regional Chief Administrative Officers; and
 - (4) Country Directors.

4.0 Policy

Trainees and Volunteers traveling on official business will be provided transportation at Peace Corps expense via the most direct, economical, and advantageous means available in compliance with those Peace Corps regulations and procedures identified in this Manual Section.

4.1 Rail Transportation

A Trainee or Volunteer who travels via rail may purchase his or her own ticket. Reimbursement is based on ticket receipts and may not exceed the cost of the authorized direct travel by Peace Corps designated means.

4.2 Automobile Transportation

A Trainee or Volunteer who drives a private automobile for all or part of authorized travel within the United States will be reimbursed at the current GSA mileage rate for Federal employees, not to exceed the cost of the authorized direct travel by common carrier transportation or the mileage rate, whichever is less. Reimbursement will be based on the mileage determined by the approving official. Reimbursement will not be allowed for additional travel time or expenses, e.g., tolls, gas, food, or lodging. Reimbursement will be based on mileage for one automobile, regardless of the number of occupants. Reimbursement may not exceed the cost of the authorized direct travel by Peace Corps designated means.

4.3 Air Transportation

Trainees and Volunteers shall travel both domestically and internationally by economy or coach class.

Through-fares, special fares, excursion, government contract, and reduced rate tickets shall be used when available for all domestic and international official travel. Excursion, special or reduced fare tickets may be issued when it can be determined before the start of the trip that this type of service is practical and economical; and will result in a cost savings to the Peace Corps. Round trip tickets should be secured when it is known, or can be reasonably anticipated, that these tickets will be used.

4.4 First Class/Business Class Travel

It is Peace Corps policy that all official travel be performed by less than first-class accommodations, except as defined in MS 264 *Medical Evacuation of Trainees, Volunteers, and Dependents* and MS 812 *Staff Travel and Transportation*.

4.5 Travel by American Carrier

Section 5 of the International Air Transportation Fair Competitive Practices Act of 1974 requires that U. S. government travel be performed on U. S. flag carriers if available. The guidelines for determining "availability or unavailability" of U. S. flag carriers and the penalty for non-authorized use of foreign flag carrier are the same for Trainees and Volunteers as for Peace Corps staff. These guidelines are defined in MS 812 *Peace Corps Staff Travel and*

Transportation, including provisions related to medically necessary travel by non-American carrier.

4.6 Miscellaneous Expenses

Miscellaneous expenses incurred by Trainees and Volunteers, which are not covered by other travel allowances, while traveling on official Peace Corps business may be authorized for reimbursement upon presentation of proper documentation. Examples of such expenses are as follows:

- (a) Airport/visa fee;
- (b) Photos for passports and visas; (in extraordinary or extenuating circumstances). Receipts and reimbursement claim must be submitted at staging;
- (c) Departure taxes;
- (d) Unavoidable overnight delays necessitating hotel and food costs, with the exception of such expenses incurred during travel via private automobile; and
- (e) Checked bag fees for two bags totaling no more than 100 pounds; neither bag can weigh more than 50 pounds. *See MS 214 Volunteer/Trainee Baggage.*

4.7 Pre-Training Travel

4.7.1 Authorized Points of Travel

Peace Corps will provide travel via the most expeditious route from an applicant's home-of-record or authorized temporary address to the staging site (for purposes of this Manual Section, the staging site includes any staging or initial training site).

The home-of-record or authorized temporary address is limited to one of the following (*See MS 219 Volunteer and Trainee Home-of-Record*):

- (a) Applicant's permanent residence;
- (b) Parents' residence;
- (c) School address; or
- (d) Business address.

Both overseas and U.S. applicants will receive tickets from their residence to the staging site.

4.7.2 Transportation from Home-of-Record to Staging

Each applicant is provided with a ticket for travel from the home-of-record or authorized temporary address to the staging site.

Applicants who purchase their own tickets on a commercial carrier in order to travel early, via an indirect route, or from an address other than their home-of-record or authorized temporary address, will be reimbursed only for the authorized direct travel costs from the home-of-record to the staging site. Reimbursement may not exceed the cost of the authorized direct travel by Peace Corps designated means.

When applicable, Peace Corps will issue applicants special, reduced, or contract fare tickets which are lower in cost than normal economy or coach fare tickets. If an applicant elects to travel to the staging site by some means other than those designated by Peace Corps, reimbursement will be limited to the cost of the Peace Corps' designated means.

Applicants who elect to travel to the staging site utilizing personal "frequent flyer mileage" will not receive reimbursement for travel costs since no cost was incurred for the travel.

If special discount coupons are used to purchase a ticket, the applicant must provide evidence of actual cost of the coupon when claiming reimbursement.

4.7.3 Unofficial Travel to Staging Site

An applicant who proceeds to the staging site before the authorized travel date and whose program is canceled, invitation is subsequently withdrawn, or staging site is changed, is personally liable for the costs of the unauthorized travel.

4.7.4 Travel within a 30 Mile Radius of the Staging Site

Invitees residing in the immediate vicinity of the staging site (within a 30-mile radius) are expected to use the staging allowance to cover their travel expenses (*see MS 222 Trainee Allowances* for amounts).

4.7.5 Travel Expenses before Overseas Departure

Peace Corps provides invitees and Trainees with travel expenses if authorized by the Behavioral Health and Outreach Unit (BHO) for emergency leave and Office of Health Services for medical hold status (*see MS 220 Leave for Volunteers/Trainees*).

4.7.6 Trainee Travel Following Separation

Trainees who do not continue in a program will be furnished with a ticket (bus, rail, or airplane) for direct travel from the training or staging site to the home-of-record.

4.8 Travel from U.S. to Host Country

4.8.1 Arrangements for Travel to Host Country

The Peace Corps Transportation Management Center will make all arrangements for Trainee and Volunteer travel to the host country.

4.8.1.1 Passports and Visas

The Peace Corps Transportation Management Center will provide Trainees with no-fee forms and visa instructions, obtain necessary visas, and provide tickets, passports and visas prior to time of departure.

4.8.1.2 Immunization Cards

Trainees and Volunteers are responsible for having their immunization records and passports accessible while traveling. The Office of Health Services is responsible for ensuring that all immunizations for Trainees and Volunteers are obtained. The Office of Health Services is responsible for ensuring that all immunizations for Trainees and Volunteers are obtained prior to travel to the host country or third party country, if training takes place outside the host country.

4.8.1.3 Travel Schedules

The Peace Corps Transportation Management Center will provide the Office of Staging and Pre-Departure and the Regions with international travel schedules for each program group. This information is included in the "reporting instructions" which is sent to each Trainee in the program.

The Country Desk Officer will email the Country Director a group's anticipated arrival. If the number of Trainees and Volunteers arriving in-country does not correspond with the number stated in this email, the Country Director must inform the Country Desk Officer regarding this discrepancy within 24 hours.

4.8.2 Administrative Hold Status

A Trainee whose overseas departure is delayed for the convenience of the Peace Corps is placed on "administrative hold" status by the Regional Director upon the recommendation of the Country Desk Officer (*see Attachment A of MS 222 Trainee Allowance* for administrative hold allowances and *MS 220 Leave for Volunteers/Trainees* for Peace Corps policy on administrative hold). The Regional Director will provide the Peace Corps Transportation Management Center with a written authorization when a Trainee is cleared to travel. Upon receipt of the authorization, the Transportation Management Center will make travel arrangements and the Country Desk Officer will inform Post of arrival information.

Trainees on "administrative hold" status may not proceed to Post until authorized by the Region.

EXCEPT: Trainees on "administrative hold" status due to passport or visa problems do not require written authorization from the Regional Director when ready to travel to Post. The Peace Corps Transportation Management Center will document in the project file the reason for delay and make travel arrangements, as appropriate, for the Trainee and provide arrival information to the Office of Staging and Pre-Departure.

4.8.2.1 Extraordinary Circumstances

Trainees on "administrative hold" status who are authorized travel to home-of-record may request travel to any of the points authorized in subsection 4.7.1 above. Trainees who elect to travel to a location other than these authorized points of travel may do so provided the cost is less, or the Trainee pays any additional cost. In extraordinary cases, exceptions may be granted by the Regional Director.

4.8.3 Medical Hold Status

A Trainee whose overseas departure is delayed for medical reasons is placed on "medical hold" status by the Office of Medical Services (*See Attachment A of MS 222 for medical hold allowances*).

The Office of Medical Services will provide the Peace Corps Transportation Management Center with a written authorization when the Trainee or Volunteer is cleared to travel. Upon receipt of the authorization, the Transportation Division will make travel arrangements and the Office of Health Services will send an arrival email to Post.

Trainees or Volunteers on "medical hold" status may not proceed to Post without this authorization from the Office of Health Services.

4.8.4 Missed Flights

Trainees and Volunteers scheduled to depart on Peace Corps arranged charter flights or special group rates, who miss the flight for reasons of personal convenience or negligence, must provide their own transportation to the host country (if travel was to be performed via a charter), or pay any additional travel costs (if travel was to be performed on a special group rate). Trainees and Volunteers who are prevented from departing by circumstances beyond their control (e. g., personal illness, serious family emergencies, or unforeseen airline delays such as strikes or mechanical breakdowns) will be provided transportation by Peace Corps from the U. S. to the host country. A new Travel Authorization must be issued and approved by the Regional Director and the Chief of Transportation Division.

4.8.5 Lost Tickets

Trainees and Volunteers are responsible for the safe-keeping of all tickets issued to them by the Peace Corps for official travel. In the event a ticket is lost or stolen, the Region, or Office of Health Services during non-official duty hours, may authorize the issuance of a new ticket for the portions of authorized travel.

The Regional Director may authorize a new ticket to be issued either by the Peace Corps Transportation Management Center, the Country Director or the American Embassy, depending on where the loss occurred. The Region will also notify the issuing Peace Corps office regarding the lost ticket and advise Peace Corps to request a refund for the lost ticket from the issuing carrier.

If for any reason Peace Corps cannot receive a refund for the lost ticket, the cost of the replacement ticket will be deducted from the readjustment allowance of the Trainee or Volunteer. If the cost of the replacement ticket exceeds the cost of the original ticket, the difference in cost will be deducted from the readjustment allowance. When a Trainee or Volunteer elects to purchase his or her own replacement ticket, reimbursement may be authorized only after Peace Corps has received a refund for the value of the original ticket. If the Trainee or Volunteer has purchased the replacement ticket, reimbursement will be authorized only in the amount of the refund; any additional cost will be the personal responsibility of the Trainee or Volunteer. When claiming reimbursement, ticket receipts will be required.

Peace Corps will not authorize the issuance of a new ticket when a Volunteer loses a ticket while traveling on annual leave or for other personal travel.

An applicant whose ticket is lost en route to a staging site will be required to purchase a new ticket and claim reimbursement for only the value of the Peace Corps issued ticket, ticket receipts will be required.

4.8.6 Advance Travel to Post

Trainees and Volunteers will not be authorized travel to Post prior to the scheduled departure of the group.

If a Trainee or Volunteer requests an exception for advance travel, the Regional Director must approve the request and the Trainee or Volunteer will be required to purchase all or part of their ticket to Post. Trainees and Volunteers should forward a request for reimbursement to the Region and must have receipts attached. Reimbursements will be limited to the cost of the Peace Corps issued ticket.

4.9 Extraordinary Travel Overseas

4.9.1 In-country Travel

In-country Volunteer travel that is part of a Volunteer's assignment or incidental to it will be paid in the country of assignment by the Peace Corps, the host country, or the project donor.

4.9.2 Extraordinary Travel

Extraordinary or long-distance travel, including travel to the U. S. or a third country, will be provided under a separate travel allowance granted by the Country Director. Volunteers authorized extraordinary travel will receive economy or coach class transportation, or the equivalent.

4.9.2.1 Travel Allowance Qualifiers

Travel allowances are provided when:

- (a) Trainees travel from port-of-entry to in-country training sites and from training sites to project sites unless all the travel and incidental costs are borne by the Peace Corps, the host country, or a project donor.
- (b) Volunteers must travel because of Peace Corps business such as attending conferences or obtaining medical treatment.
- (c) Volunteers are asked to engage in unusual travel in connection with a work assignment, and the costs of such unusual travel are not borne by the host country or a project donor; or Volunteers are requested by the Peace Corps Director to perform other work related official travel.

4.9.2.2 Travel Allowance

For each day of authorized extraordinary travel outside country of assignment, Volunteers may receive a travel allowance as specified in MS 221 *Volunteer Allowance*, subsection 8.2. The allowance for extraordinary travel within the country of assignment will be determined by the Country Director.

A Volunteer in travel status for more than two weeks will receive a living allowance sufficient to meet on-going rent and utility costs.

4.9.3 Emergency Leave

Volunteers and Trainees will be authorized emergency leave travel in accordance with the policies prescribed in MS 220 *Leave for Volunteers/Trainees* and in accordance with the provisions of subsection 4.5 above.

4.9.4 Medical Evacuation

Volunteers and Trainees will be authorized medical evacuation travel in accordance with the policies prescribed in MS 264 *Medical Evacuation* for Trainees, Volunteers and their dependents.

4.9.5 Early Termination

Volunteers and Trainees will be authorized early termination travel in accordance with the policies prescribed in MS 284 *Early Termination of Service*.

4.9.6 Special Leave Travel for Extending Volunteers

Extending Volunteers will be authorized special leave travel in accordance with the policies prescribed in MS 220 and MS 281 *Completion of Service Date Advancement and Extension of Service*.

4.10 Travel to Home-of-Record following Completion of Service

Volunteers who complete their terms of service are entitled to return transportation at Peace Corps expense to their homes-of-record. (*See MS 219 Volunteer and Trainee Home-of-Record.*)

4.10.1 Peace Corps Issued Ticket

Return transportation to a Volunteer's home-of-record will generally be accomplished via a Peace Corps-provided air ticket. Before providing this ticket, appropriate Peace Corps staff shall review available through-fares, special fares, government contract fares, and reduced rate fares and shall provide the Volunteer with a ticket using whichever fare type or combination of fare types is most practical and economical for the Peace Corps. Excursion fare tickets and other round trip tickets, however, should not be used. Return transportation tickets should cover travel only for the most direct and expeditious route from country to the Volunteer's home-of-record. Peace Corps issued tickets are subject to subsection 4.5, Travel by American Carrier.

4.10.2 Travel Stipend

Upon completion of service, Volunteers may elect to receive a cash payment in the form of a travel stipend (Travel Stipend) instead of a Peace Corps issued ticket. The Travel Stipend will be the same amount for each Volunteer in a country, regardless of the home-of-record of the Volunteer.

The Office of Management, in consultation with the Office of Global Operations, will establish the amount of Travel Stipend for each country at least annually under the MS 218 *Travel Stipend Calculation Procedures*.

The Travel Stipend may be used to cover the cost of transportation or for any other purpose elected by the Volunteer. The Travel Stipend is not subject to subsection 4.5, Travel by American Carrier.

4.10.3 Health Insurance

Volunteers are encouraged to purchase a health insurance policy if accepting the Travel Stipend.

4.10.4 Travel on No-Fee Passport

Unless permitted in accordance with MS 213 *Volunteer No-Fee Regular Passports*, subsection 3.2.1, Volunteers may not use a no-fee passport. Volunteers must use a personal passport for all personal travel during Peace Corps service and for all personal travel following completion of service or early termination per MS 284 *Early Termination of Service*.

4.10.5 Peace Corps Response Volunteer (PCR) Assignment

A Volunteer who is transferring to a Peace Corps Response (PCR) assignment in a different country may be authorized a Peace Corps issued ticket to the Volunteer's home-of-record or is eligible for a Travel Stipend upon completion of the Volunteer's original service.

At the completion of the Volunteer's PCR service, the Volunteer may be authorized a Peace Corps issued ticket to the Volunteer's home-of-record or is eligible for a Travel Stipend. (*See* Peace Corps Response's Standard Operating Procedures for further guidance.)

4.11 Travel by Indirect Route

When a Trainee or Volunteer elects to travel via an indirect route, either domestically or internationally, for personal convenience, expenses paid by Peace Corps shall be limited to the charges which would have been incurred for travel by the most direct and expeditious route (*see* subsection 4.3). Any extra expense will be borne by the Trainee or Volunteer. If traveling internationally, regulations regarding U.S. flag carriers will apply (*see* subsection 4.5 above).

4.12 Trainee and Volunteer Purchase of Airline Tickets during Leave

In some cases Trainees and Volunteers purchase their own tickets from the Post of assignment to the home-of-record in the U.S., e.g., vacation travel. Trainees and Volunteers will be entitled to reimbursement for this travel should they decide to terminate while in the U. S. Reimbursement will be limited to the most direct travel costs. Trainees and Volunteers should be cautioned that if travel is performed by non-authorized foreign flag carriers, reimbursement may be denied for the entire cost of the ticket.

Trainees and Volunteers should be cautioned that if travel is performed utilizing "frequent flyer points" or other special discount coupons, reimbursement may be denied, as no cost was incurred for the travel; or reimbursement will be limited to the actual travel costs which must be supported by evidence of payment to a transportation carrier.

4.13 Country Director's Responsibility to Trainees and Volunteers on Official Travel Status

The Country Director is responsible for determining that funds are available to cover transportation and per diem costs (with the exception of medical evacuation travel), and for providing travelers with a Peace Corps issued ticket to the Volunteer's home-of-record or a Travel Stipend, if the Volunteer elects, instead of a Peace Corps issued ticket; and for notifying them of American Carrier rules where applicable.

The Country Director will assist all Volunteers in the host country who are traveling on official business. When travelers find themselves in difficulty, the Country Director may, if necessary, advance them small amounts of money against an official travel order that authorizes per diem in lieu of travel allowances, and make return travel arrangements to country of assignment if necessary.

The Country Director is also responsible for preparing travel authorizations at overseas Posts for Volunteers or Trainees who travel outside their countries of assignment for emergency leave, medical evacuation, special leave, transfer or termination.

4.14 Country Director's Responsibility to Former PCVs and Staff

Country Directors have no official responsibility for persons formerly associated with Peace Corps whose service has been terminated.

5.0 Procedures

5.1 Filing for Reimbursement

Applicants and Trainees (other than those residing within a 30 mile radius) who pay their own costs or additional costs for official travel may file for reimbursement upon arrival at the staging site. Documentation should be sent to the Region for approval prior to final processing.

Because applicants receive an allowance intended to cover incidental travel expenses at Staging, Region will not process claims or portions of claims of less than \$5.00.

5.2 Travel Authorization

Travel authorizations should contain the following:

- (a) Name of traveler;
- (b) Purpose of travel;
- (c) Date(s) of travel;
- (d) Origin and authorized destination of travel and authorized stopovers (transit stopovers to change planes need not be shown);
- (e) Statement authorizing applicable per diem;
- (f) Fiscal information identifying how costs are to be charged;
- (g) Date travel authorization is prepared;
- (h) Title and signature of person approving travel; and
- (i) Title and signature of person authorizing travel.

The Trainee or Volunteer should receive the original of the authorization. A single travel authorization may be prepared for groups of travelers (list the travelers' names and authorized points of travel on an attached page of the authorization).

Travel authorizations for terminating Trainees or Volunteers should include the authorized amount of baggage and indicate whether there is accompanied, excess or unaccompanied freight. (*See MS 214 Volunteer/Trainee Baggage.*)

6.0 Volunteer Use of Transit/Regional Houses

6.1 Definitions

The term "transit/regional house" refers to any Peace Corps facility that provides short-term accommodation to Volunteers, including Regional Offices and PCVL residences if established

for that purpose. Peace Corps Training Centers and Medical Unit Sick Bays are not considered transit houses.

6.2 Purpose

It is the policy of the Peace Corps that Volunteers participate fully in the culture of their host communities. Accordingly, they are expected to be at their sites unless they are on official Peace Corps business or on leave. Experience has shown that Volunteer use of transit/regional houses can be at cross-purposes with this policy.

The Peace Corps' policy on the use of transit/regional houses by Volunteers is intended to ensure that:

- (a) Volunteers are safe when away from their sites;
- (b) Transit/regional houses used by Volunteers are not venues for excessive, illegal, or potentially dangerous behavior;
- (c) Transit/regional houses are neither overused by Volunteers nor become magnets that unduly draw Volunteers from their sites and the local culture; and
- (d) Transit/regional houses are well managed (e.g., secure, guarded, clean).

6.3 Policy

- (a) Peace Corps Volunteers are expressly prohibited from establishing their own hostels, transit/regional houses, or similar shared temporary accommodations. All transit/regional houses must be established and managed by the Peace Corps Post.
- (b) Transit/regional houses may only be established by Post and approved by the Regional Director when the following conditions are met:
 - (1) The Country Director has determined that the transit/regional house is or will be safe and well-managed;
 - (2) The Country Director is committed to the strict enforcement of this policy and those policies governing a Volunteer's travel away from his or her site;
 - (3) The Country Director and the Volunteer Advisory Council will closely monitor occupancy and behavior at the transit/regional house; and
 - (4) Lists must be maintained detailing names of Volunteers and the length of each Volunteer's stay (If the lists are not maintained, the Country Director must send warning notes to applicable Volunteers and, if that fails, approval for use of the transit/regional house must be withdrawn).

- (c) The Safety and Security Coordinator, as well as other staff, will review use of the transit/regional house on a continuing basis and immediately report any safety and security incident involving Volunteers or staff to the Country Director.

6.4 Approval

6.4.1 Initial Approval

The Country Director must submit a request to establish a transit/regional house to the Regional Director for approval. The request must include statements ensuring that all of the conditions necessary for approval have been met.

6.4.2 Annual Review

The Country Director must submit an annual report to the Regional Director addressing compliance with the policies set out in subsection 6.3 above, and request Regional Director approval for the continued use of each transit/regional house.

7.0 Implementing Procedures

The Chief of Administrative Services is responsible for the development of MS 218 *Travel Stipend Calculation Procedures*. The Travel Committee established in MS 812 *Staff Travel* also has authority to review and recommend revisions of this Manual Section and to review and make changes to the MS 218 *Travel Stipend Calculation Procedures*, provided that they are consistent with this Manual Section.

8.0 References

- (a) MS 213 *Volunteer No-Fee Regular Passports*
- (b) MS 219 *Volunteer and Trainee Home-of-Record*
- (c) MS 220 *Leave for Volunteers/Trainees*
- (d) MS 221 *Volunteer Allowances*
- (e) MS 222 *Trainee Allowances*
- (f) MS 223 *Volunteer and Trainees Readjustment Allowances*
- (g) MS 264 *Medical Evacuation*
- (h) MS 265 *Death of Volunteers/Trainees*
- (i) MS 281 *Completion of Service Date Advancement and Extension of Service*
- (j) MS 341 *Non-Emergency Post Closing*
- (k) MS 812 *Staff Travel*

(1) Section 5(b) of the International Air Transportation Act of 1974

9.0 Effective Date

The effective date of this Manual Section is the date of issuance.