Air Travel: When to get a Comparison Air Fare Quote

A comparison airfare quote is required when:

- Combining Business and Personal Travel
- Additional day for cost savings purposes
- Driving a vehicle out-of-state instead of flying
- Use of a non-direct route

You may wish to combine business and personal travel, either by adding personal days at the business location or by traveling to other destinations. This is acceptable as long as it does not add additional cost to the University. To prove that additional costs were not incurred, you must document the cost of the “business only” travel. This must be done at the same time that the actual travel is booked to insure an accurate comparison. **You cannot pay for airfare with a Pcard when personal days or detours are included in the itinerary.** Reimbursement will be made for the lesser of the actual cost of the trip or the business only comparison cost. This also applies to situations where the traveler is adding an additional day to save the University money.

Airfare Quote Instructions

When you purchase airfare for the trip, obtain an airfare comparison for the business only itinerary. This airfare should be based on the least expensive and most reasonable means of transportation available. Use a travel website that provides airline comparisons such as Orbitz, Travelocity, Expedia, Matrix Flights. Do not use airline specific websites, as they may not provide the most economical flights for the destination.

Print out one or two pages showing the comparison fares. Include a copy of this printout with your Travel Authorization and with your Expense Reimbursement request.

Lodging, per diem and other transportation costs are limited to the business portion of the trip.
Planning Business Travel

Generally, the dates of the conference or meeting and one travel day before and after are allowable for reimbursement. However, if the conference ends in the middle of the day, it may be possible to return the same day to avoid additional costs, if a reasonable flight can be found. This decision is complicated by hotel checkout times and transportation arrangements to get to the airport. Your department management is responsible for this decision. Any additional days paid by the university must be documented with a business purpose.

Example 1: A traveler is attending a conference in Washington DC. Dates of the conference are Monday at noon – Wednesday at noon.

• Generally, travel time would be limited to Sunday - Thursday. If a reasonable flight can be found on Wednesday afternoon, this would be preferred. However, there is no expectation that travelers would select a redeye flight.
• If there is not a sufficient business purpose for extra time at the destination, the associated costs will not be reimbursed.
• An airfare quote must be obtained to determine if there is an additional airfare cost due to including personal days.

Example 2: A traveler is presenting a paper at a conference in Portland, OR. The conference begins on Monday at 8 a.m. and ends on Thursday at 1 p.m.

• Travel time would likely be Sunday evening to Thursday evening, if flights were available. These flight times would meet the business needs of the traveler to attend the conference without incurring extra costs for staying over until Friday.
• If there is not a sufficient business purpose for extra time at the destination, the associated costs will not be reimbursed.
• An airfare quote must be obtained to determine if there is an additional airfare cost due to including personal days.

Pcard cannot be used to pay for transportation that combines personal and business on the same trip. Travelers are required to pay for the transportation using their own funds. Travel related reimbursements are made after the entire trip has concluded, per University Travel Policy # 6180.

Driving a vehicle out-of-state

If you choose to drive either a personal vehicle or rental vehicle out of state, a comparison of the cost of driving versus the cost of flying must be provided at the time the TA is created and be included with the request for reimbursement. Determine the cost of flying by obtaining an airfare quote as outlined above. If flying is more economical than driving, the traveler will be reimbursed only for the cost of flying.
If you are driving either a personal vehicle or rental vehicle out of state for a business reason, document the reason with the travel reimbursement. For example, you may be transporting a large amount of equipment, or two or more employees will be traveling to the same location.

Example 3: At the last minute, you are asked to attend a meeting in Reno, NV.

- Flights are averaging $485.00 to meet your business needs.
- It's approximately 850 miles roundtrip to Reno, so mileage would be $386.75
- Driving time is 7 hours; flying time is 3 hours, including reporting to the airport in time for your flight. Driving could possibly result in extra per diem of an estimated $38.40.
- Consult with your department to decide if the cost savings is sufficient to warrant the use of your time in this manner.
- If the decision is made to drive, you can be reimbursed for actual cost, since it would be less than flying.
- If the decision is made to purchase the airfare, the business needs must support the extra cost. The responsibility to determine this lies with your department management.

Example 4: Your conference is in Los Angeles. You decide to drive to L.A. so you can take your kids to visit your sister and go to Disneyland.

- Flights that meet the business needs are averaging $420.00 when purchased 3 weeks out.
- Roundtrip mileage to L.A. is 1800 miles @ .455 per mile, $819.00
- Your decision to drive is based on personal preference.
- You can only be reimbursed for mileage up to the cost of airfare, in this case.
- Your per diem allowance must be based on departure and return times of the flight.
- Any extra lodging due to the decision to drive is a personal expense and cannot be reimbursed.

Use of a non-direct route

If a non-direct route is selected for personal reasons, follow the instructions under Combining Business and Personal Travel.

If you select a non-direct route for cost savings purposes, the cost savings must be documented by obtaining an airfare quote for the direct route. All cost factors must be included in determining if there is an actual cost savings.

Example 4: Flights into Phoenix are higher than normal, so you decide to fly into Tucson and drive to Phoenix by rental car.
• The cost of the flight into Tucson plus the cost of the rental car and gasoline should be compared to the cost of flying directly into Phoenix.
• This comparison should be documented in writing and included with the travel authorization and travel reimbursement and/or the airfare purchase records.
• Travel Authorization approvers should not approve any trips for which the cost comparison is not provided at the time the TA is created.

Comparison quotes after travel

What should you do if your traveler included personal time or an indirect route and they did not get a comparison airfare quote at the time the ticket was purchased?

Obtain two quotes for comparison fares after travel has taken place: 1.) Business Only airfare and 2.) Airfare duplicating the route the traveler actually flew, including the personal travel. This will allow you to compare the two itineraries to calculate the allowable reimbursement. Expense reimbursement requests should never reach the travel services department without the cost comparison being attached.

You can use your favorite online booking site like Orbitz or Travelocity but make sure it shows low to high pricing of all the airlines. Be sure to select the days of the week that travel took place, and use dates that are the at least two or three weeks out to get the least expensive fares. Avoid holidays as these can skew rates and avoid airline specific sites as these do not necessarily show the best prices in that airfare market.

Print a page showing the pricing grid/matrix for both the business only dates and for the itinerary including the personal time. Include these with your reimbursements and you are finished. Remember, we can only reimburse for the less expensive of the two airfares.