

STRAIGHT TO THE SOURCE



TRAVELING OUTSIDE THE MEMBER'S CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT & RELATED ISSUES

GENERAL PRINCIPLES:

- Members and staff may travel outside of the district using the Members' Representational Allowance when the primary purpose of the trip is in support of official and representational duties.
- Members and staff may travel outside of the district using committee funds when that trip is related to committee business and approved by the Chairman of the committee.
- Members and staff may travel outside of the district on privately-sponsored, officially-connected travel only with prior approval of the Committee on Ethics. House rules require that the privately-sponsored, officially-connected travel relates to the Member's and staff's official and representational duties.
- Members and staff may travel outside the district for campaign or political party purposes using campaign funds. Contact the Federal Election Commission for requirements and restrictions on what is considered campaign or political party purposes.
- Members and staff may travel outside of the district on mixed purpose trips that potentially may use a mix of official, campaign, and/or private entity funds. Prior approval by the Committee on Ethics may be required for mixed purpose trips.
- Members and staff, of course, may travel outside of the district at any time on personal business using personal funds, though the Code of Official Conduct ([House Rule 23](#)) and restrictions on private aircraft are always in effect.
- Members and staff may never solicit a [gift](#), even if such gift would be acceptable under House rules.



PURPOSE OF TRAVEL

All travel paid with the Members' Representational Allowance requires that the purpose relates to the official and representational duties to the district from which the Member is elected. [Page 2](#)



TYPES OF TRAVEL OUTSIDE THE DISTRICT

Official, Private, Campaign-Funded, Mixed Purpose, Personal [Page 4](#)



FAQ

A list of commonly asked questions about Member travel. [Page 8](#)

***Straight to the Source** is a joint guidance document regularly produced by the [Committee on House Administration](#) and the [Committee on Ethics](#) designed to address pressing and important questions in congressional offices. The topics we will address have overlapping jurisdiction with House Administration & Ethics, and this document is intended to provide clarity on those items. This guidance does not announce any new standards or interpretations of existing standards, but instead provides an overview of key issues related to travel outside of the district and is a reminder to the House about commonly encountered issues.*

PURPOSE OF TRAVEL

Questions you should ask about the purpose of the travel prior to planning the travel

All travel paid with the Members' Representational Allowance requires that the purpose relates to the official and representational duties to the district from which the Member is elected. When the Member or staff travels to a meeting, event, training, conference, press appearance, roundtable, etc., the person should ask whether the purpose of the travel meets one of the following criteria:

- Does it relate to a policy matter before Congress?

EXAMPLE:

Attending a meeting outside the district on trade matters impacting farmers in your district.

- Will the Member be voting on the issue to be addressed?

EXAMPLE:

Member traveling to the border to better understand the issues surrounding their upcoming vote on border security.

- Will the Member secure funding for the district through the legislative process related to the purpose of the meeting? Does the purpose relate to the Member's constituents or communicating with the Member's constituents on official matters?

EXAMPLE:

Attending a meeting outside the district with state and local government officials on highway funding priorities.

- Is the purpose related to educating the Member or staff on issues related to the operational duties of the congressional office?

EXAMPLE:

Traveling to an educational seminar/conference on office management topics.

Members or staff should be able to answer affirmatively to at least one of these questions to justify use of official funds to pay for the travel.

Additional examples of official travel outside the district:

EXAMPLE:

Participating in a meeting with state officials in the state capital to discuss federal funding for the state's infrastructure expenses.

EXAMPLE:

Attending a conference on invasive species or water issues in a state with similar issues.

EXAMPLE:

Touring a plant or manufacturing facility in another state that may be dealing with problems or may educate the Member on policies which could benefit a similar facility in the Member's district.

EXAMPLE:

Touring a Veterans Administration hospital in a different state to view problems or solutions that would assist the Member in understanding how to address issues in these facilities both in their district and across the nation.

EXAMPLE:

Touring a solar cell plant outside a Member's district to learn about issues related to energy policies on which Members may be voting.

EXAMPLE:

Traveling to another state to view an innovative and successful educational entity to learn how public policies can facilitate improvements in educational facilities in their districts and across the nation.

EXAMPLE:

Traveling to a media outlet's facility outside the district to attend a press interview concerning an agriculture issue important to farmers in the Member's district.

TYPES OF TRAVEL OUTSIDE THE DISTRICT

Official Travel Outside of the District

Members and staff may travel outside of their district using the Members' Representational Allowance under the following conditions:

- The primary purpose of the travel must be in support of official and representational duties to the district from which elected; and,
- All travel must occur within the U.S.

Official & Representational Duties

Guidance in defining what is considered "official and representational" duties as it relates to travel

The following broad categories of official and representational duties are not intended to be an exhaustive list:

1. Activities relating to the legislative process;

EXAMPLE:

Attending an educational seminar on health care policy.

2. Activities facilitating interaction between constituents and the federal government (including, but not limited to information or services on laws, government programs and regulations, funding, decisions, and other actions by the federal government);

EXAMPLE:

Traveling to the state capital to discuss with federal/state/local officials recent regulations passed by a federal agency.

3. Actions taken as a representative of the district from which the Member is elected;

EXAMPLE:

A meeting regarding invasive species among Members of Congress in the Great Lakes Region is occurring at a location outside your district; the Member or staff may attend to represent the district's interests at this meeting to ensure there is an advocate for the district's perspective.

4. Activities involving issue areas or programs established by the House through legislative action.

EXAMPLE:

Traveling to a state university outside the district to discuss STEM education with university professors, and how the government can partner with educational institutions to promote a greater number of students in these areas.

Privately-Sponsored Travel

Members and staff may travel at the expense of a private organization in connection with their official duties only with prior approval from the Committee on Ethics.

Members or staff may travel at the expense of a private organization in connection with their official duties only with prior approval from the Committee on Ethics. Members and staff must submit required privately-sponsored travel request forms to the Committee on Ethics at least 30 days before the start of your trip. You must receive pre-approval from the Committee on Ethics before leaving for a trip. Please call the Committee on Ethics for more information.

If someone is offering to pay for your travel that is not related to your official duties, you are seeking to use campaign funds to pay for your travel, or you are being offered travel paid for by a foreign government, please call the Committee on Ethics at (202) 225-7103.

- Participating in a fact-finding mission.

EXAMPLE:

A private organization that runs medical centers in Africa invites Members who work on healthcare policy to see how federal funds are used to support these programs.

- Participating in a conference.

EXAMPLE:

A private organization offers to pay travel expenses for a Member who will be speaking at the organization's conference.

Campaign Funded Travel

Members and staff may travel using the Member's principal campaign committee funds.

Members may travel outside the district for campaign, political party, and official purposes using campaign funds. Please contact the Committee on Ethics to determine whether principal campaign committee funds may be used. Additional communication with the Federal Election Commission may be necessary.

- Travel to political party events.

EXAMPLE:

A Member pays for his or her travel to an event where the focus is on upcoming elections, whether or not the event is a campaign fundraiser.

- Travel to an event that is related to official or representational duties.

EXAMPLE:

A Member pays for his or her official staff's travel expenses to participate in a fact-finding mission that is organized by a private organization where the private organization either does not offer to pay travel expenses or the Member decides not to accept their offer.

Mixed Purpose Travel

Mixed purpose trips typically involve travel that includes official, campaign or political party, and/or privately-sponsored, officially-connected activities. Often this travel is funded by a mix of official, campaign, and/or private funds. If the primary purpose is for a non-official event/purpose, the office cannot schedule official activities around the non-official event/purpose to make the travel eligible for congressional offices to be reimbursed. Mixed purpose trips may need to be approved by the Committee on Ethics.

For mixed purpose travel, there are two initial questions your office needs to be prepared to answer:

1. What is your primary purpose for being at the location?
2. If not for the official reason, would you be at the location?

Because mixed travel is so nuanced and specific, please contact the Committee on House Administration (202) 225-8281 (Majority) - (202) 225-2061 (Minority) with any initial questions you have when starting to plan the trip/event.

Personal Business

Personal business is when a Member or staff attends a personal event (example: birthdays, weddings, funerals, graduation, etc.) The Committee on House Administration is happy to advise on whether something is official or not.

EXAMPLE:

Member A would like to travel from Washington, D.C., back to the District. On the way to the District, the Member needs to travel to an intervening destination to attend a wedding before arriving in the District. Official funds may be used in accordance with the combined travel regulations as outlined in the [Members' Congressional Handbook](#) - *see Travel - Combined*.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: How do Members determine the primary purpose of a trip?

A: The primary purpose of a trip will determine what funds should be used to pay for that trip. In order to determine the primary purpose of a trip, consider the following:

If the official event did not exist, would the Member be at that location because of the non-official purpose or event? For example, a Member is invited to a college reunion in Chicago. While in Chicago, the Member decides to schedule a meeting with local VA hospital officials to discuss the administration of health care services. If the Member would have gone to Chicago for the personal event (i.e., reunion) regardless of whether the VA hospital meeting was taking place, the Member cannot use official funds to pay for that travel merely because the official meeting was scheduled as a part of the trip.

Similarly, a Member cannot have a campaign or political party event and plan an official event for the purposes of paying for the travel from official funds.

Q: Can Members co-mingle official and non-official resources?

A: No. Official and non-official resources may not be co-mingled and official resources may not be used to subsidize outside organizations, campaign, or political party activities. If you are seeking to use unofficial funds to subsidize official activity, please call the Committee on Ethics. If you are seeking to use official resources to subsidize activities benefiting private entities, please contact the Committee on House Administration (202) 225-8281 (Majority) - (202) 225-2061 (Minority).

Q: Is my Member allowed to host a meeting outside the district?

A: No, a Member may not host an event outside the Member's district. There is a distinction to be made between "hosting" versus "participating in" a meeting. As noted earlier, Members and staff may travel to a meeting outside the Member's district when appropriate. Please call the Committee on House Administration (202) 225-8281 (Majority) - (202) 225-2061 (Minority) for guidance on planning your events.

Q: How do I reimburse for mileage on a trip involving official activity and campaign or political party activity and can that travel occur outside the district?

A: As a general rule, Members or staff can reimburse for mileage outside your district so long as previously noted conditions are met, but you cannot use official funds to travel either to or from a location for which the primary purpose is a campaign or political party event. A Member should think in terms of completing a round-trip to any campaign or political party event. The campaign should reimburse to and from that event until the Member arrives at a location where the Member is conducting official business. Once you return to an official location, you may start reimbursing official mileage so long as the next destination is official.

EXAMPLE:

Member has multiple events in a day A, B, C, and D in order. A, C, and D are official events and B is a campaign or political party event. The initial travel from the residence or congressional office to A may be reimbursed officially. Travel to B and from B to location C must be paid with campaign funds. Travel from C to D, and from D back to the residence or congressional office may be reimbursed with official funds.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS *continued*

Q: Can I use the Members' Representational Allowance to link up with another official or privately-sponsored, officially-connected trip when that travel occurs outside the Member's district?

A: Yes, Members and staff may use official funds to travel to or from a destination for the purposes of connecting to or from another official or officially-connected trip. Privately-sponsored, officially-connected trips are trips not paid with official funds, but are approved by the Committee on Ethics. Any of the connecting/linking travel must occur within the U.S. to be reimbursed with official funds, and the primary purpose of the other trip must relate to official business.

Q: Can I travel on a non-commercial flight?

A: House Rule 23 governs travel on non-commercial flights. If you would like to pay for a non-commercial flight out of official funds, please contact the Committee on House Administration for guidance. If non-commercial flights are offered as a gift, or you would like to use unofficial funds to pay for that travel, please contact the Committee on Ethics (202) 225-7103.

Q: Am I allowed to combine privately-sponsored travel with personal travel?

A: Yes, Members and staff wishing to extend their privately-sponsored, officially-connected travel for personal reasons may do so if the number of days of personal travel do not exceed the number of days of officially-connected programming with the private sponsor. Please call the Committee on Ethics (202) 225-7103 to determine how long you may extend any particular trip.

Q: Am I allowed to participate in campaign or political party activities while on privately-sponsored, officially-connected travel?

A: No, you may not participate in campaign or political party activities while on privately-sponsored, officially-connected travel. Although the primary purpose of the trip may remain the same, this is considered an impermissible campaign donation. If you wish to participate in campaign activities around the same time as a privately-sponsored, officially-connected trip, please call the Committee on Ethics (202) 225-7103 to determine the best way to "stack" these trips.

Q: When am I eligible to use the government rate for air travel expenses?

A: Travelers are eligible to use the government rate when the costs of their air travel will be reimbursed with funds of the House of Representatives or held by other agencies in trust for the House of Representatives. Unless specifically noted otherwise, this is reserved only for Members and paid staff. The government rate may not be used for spouses or other family members, any campaign or political party travel, private organizations, or the travel expenses of unpaid staff such as unpaid interns, fellows, or other volunteers. Discounts offered for government employees on personal travel may be acceptable if they fit within an exception to the gift rule. Please call the Committee on Ethics (202) 225-7103 for any questions related to the gift rule.

Q: Can the Member pay for the travel of a speaker at a Townhall Meeting?

A: Members may not use the Members' Representational Allowance to pay for the travel expenses of a speaker at an official event. If a Member would like to pay for those travel expenses, Members may use their travel

promotional rewards, principal campaign committee funds (subject to the guidance of the Committee on Ethics and must be consistent with Federal Election Commission regulations), or their own personal funds for this expense.

Q: Can a Member invite another Member to participate in a Townhall Meeting and pay for the visiting Member's travel expenses using the Members' Representational Allowance?

A: Yes. Members may invite other Members to participate as a guest at their Townhall Meetings. All costs, including the guest Member's travel, may be paid by the host Member's official funds. However, the host Member may not pay for staff travel expenses of the visiting Member using the Members' Representational Allowance.

If the host Member wishes to pay for visiting staff's travel expenses, that Member may use travel promotional awards, principal campaign committee funds (subject to the guidance of the Committee on Ethics and must be consistent with Federal Election Commission regulations), or their own personal funds.

If the visiting Member would like to use his or her MRA, please contact the Committee on House Administration (202) 225-8281 (Majority) - (202) 225-2061 (Minority).

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

COMMITTEE ON HOUSE ADMINISTRATION

Majority - (202) 225-8281 cha.house.gov

Minority - (202) 225-2061 democrats.cha.house.gov

Contact the Committee on House Administration for any questions regarding the use of official resources, the Members' Representational Allowance or committee funds, or anything for which official reimbursement will be sought (e.g., paid staff, travel, leasing congressional vehicles or district offices, town hall meetings, equipment, etc.)

COMMITTEE ON ETHICS

Main Office - (202) 225-7103 ethics.house.gov

Contact the Committee on Ethics for questions regarding any other sources of funds, including privately-sponsored, officially-connected travel, travel paid with principal campaign committee funds, and travel offered by a foreign government. Guidance regarding events and travel is usually fact specific.

Please call the appropriate committee when you are planning travel.

FEDERAL ELECTION COMMISSION

Office of Congressional, Legislative and Intergovernmental Affairs – (202) 694-1006 fec.gov

Contact the Federal Election Commission for questions regarding appropriate uses of principal campaign committee funds. The Committee on Ethics has overlapping jurisdiction regarding the use of principal campaign committee funds for official purposes; therefore please contact the Committee on Ethics first if you would like to use principal campaign committee funds to offset certain official expenses.

