

41 CFR Parts 302-1 and 302-4

[FTR Amendment 63]

RIN 3090-AG19

Federal Travel Regulation; Fixed Amount Reimbursement for Househunting Trip Subsistence Expenses**AGENCY:** Office of Governmentwide Policy, GSA.**ACTION:** Final rule.

SUMMARY: This final rule amends the Federal Travel Regulation (FTR) to allow an agency to pay a fixed amount for househunting trip subsistence expenses instead of a per diem allowance under the lodgings-plus reimbursement method. This amendment will save the Government money by easing the processing of relocation claims and will increase employee satisfaction with the relocation process.

DATES: This final rule is effective March 22, 1997, and applies to an employee whose effective date of transfer (date the employee reports for duty at the new official station) is on or after March 22, 1997.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Robert A. Clauson, Travel and Transportation Management Policy Division (MTT), Washington, DC 20405, telephone 202-501-0299.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: A multi-agency travel reinvention task force was organized in August 1994 under the auspices of the Joint Financial Management Improvement Program (JFMIP) to reengineer Federal travel rules and procedures. The task force published 25 recommended travel management improvements in a JFMIP report entitled *Improving Travel Management Governmentwide*, dated December 1995. On September 23, 1996, the President signed into law the Federal Employee Travel Reform Act of 1996 (Pub. L. 104-201), which included 8 legislative changes recommended by the JFMIP to improve travel and the delivery of relocation services.

This amendment implements section 1711 of the Act which provides the General Services Administration (GSA) authority to issue regulations which authorize agencies to reimburse a transferred employee a fixed amount for househunting trip subsistence expenses. This amendment is written in the "plain English" style of regulation writing as a continuation of GSA's effort to make the FTR easier to understand and to use.

How does this amendment change the allowance for househunting trip expenses?

This amendment provides agencies the alternative to reimburse employees a fixed amount without requiring receipts for househunting trip subsistence expenses instead of paying a per diem allowance under the lodgings-plus reimbursement method. This amendment also replaces the term "travel to seek residence quarters" with the term "househunting trip."

Under what circumstances will I be reimbursed a fixed amount for househunting trip subsistence expenses?

Your agency determines whether to authorize you a househunting trip, and if so, whether to offer you a "fixed amount" reimbursement for your subsistence expenses or a per diem allowance under the lodgings-plus reimbursement method. If offered the fixed amount option, you will have the discretion to choose between it and the lodgings-plus reimbursement method.

What effect does using the term "househunting trip" have on the allowance for househunting trip expenses?

Using the term "househunting trip" instead of "travel to seek residence quarters" has no effect on the allowance for househunting trip expenses. Use of this common vernacular term simply makes the FTR easier to read and to understand. The term "househunting trip" is broadly defined to include a trip to seek permanent quarters in a rental facility.

What is the "plain English" style of regulation writing?

The "plain English" style of regulation writing is a new, simpler to read and understand, question and answer regulatory format. Questions are in the first person, and answers are in the second person. GSA uses a "we" question when referring to an agency, and an "I" question when referring to the employee.

How does the plain English style of regulation writing affect employees?

A question and its answer combine to establish a rule. The employee and the agency must follow the language contained in both the question and its answer.

GSA has determined that this rule is not a significant regulatory action for the purposes of Executive Order 12866 of September 30, 1993. This final rule is not required to be published in the **Federal Register** for notice and

comment. Therefore, the Regulatory Flexibility Act does not apply. This rule also is exempt from Congressional review prescribed under 5 U.S.C. 801 since it relates solely to agency management and personnel.

List of Subjects in 41 CFR Parts 302-1 and 302-4

Government employees, Travel and transportation expenses.

For the reasons set out in the preamble, 41 CFR chapter 302 is amended as follows:

PART 302-1—APPLICABILITY, GENERAL RULES, AND ELIGIBILITY CONDITIONS

1. The authority citation for part 302-1 is revised to read as follows:

Authority: 5 U.S.C. 5738; 20 U.S.C. 905(a); E.O. 11609, 36 FR 13474, 3 CFR, 1971-1975 Comp., p. 586.

Subpart A—New Appointees and Transferred Employees**§ 302-1.7 [Amended]**

2. Section 302-1.7 is amended by removing the phrase "trips to seek residence quarters in § 302-4.1(c)(4)" in paragraph (a) and adding in its place the phrase "househunting trips in § 302-4.3(c)".

3. Section 302-1.14 is amended by revising paragraph (a)(3)(ii) to read as follows:

§ 302-1.14 Use of funds.

(a) * * *

(3) * * *

(ii) Authorized househunting trips as set forth in § 302-4.16 of this chapter;
* * * * *

4. Part 302-4 is revised to read as follows:

PART 302-4—ALLOWANCE FOR HOUSEHUNTING TRIP EXPENSES**Subpart A—Employee's Allowance For Househunting Trip Expenses**

Sec.

302-4.1 What is a "househunting trip"?

302-4.2 What is the purpose of the househunting trip expenses allowance?

302-4.3 Am I eligible for a househunting trip expenses allowance?

302-4.4 Who is not eligible for a househunting trip expenses allowance?

302-4.5 Must my agency authorize payment of a househunting trip expenses allowance?

302-4.6 Under what circumstances will I receive a househunting trip expenses allowance?

302-4.7 Who may travel on a househunting trip at Government expense?

302-4.8 How many househunting trips may my agency authorize in connection with a particular transfer?

302-4.9 May my spouse and I perform separate househunting trips at Government expense?

302-4.10 How soon may I and/or my spouse begin a househunting trip?

302-4.11 Is there a time limit on the duration of a househunting trip?

302-4.12 When must my househunting trip be completed?

302-4.13 What methods may my agency use to reimburse me for househunting trip expenses?

302-4.14 What transportation expenses will my agency pay?

302-4.15 Must I document my househunting trip expenses to receive reimbursement?

302-4.16 May I receive an advance of funds for househunting trip expenses?

302-4.17 Am I in a duty status when I perform a househunting trip?

SUBPART B—AGENCY RESPONSIBILITIES

302-4.100 How should we administer the househunting trip expenses allowance?

302-4.101 What governing policies must we establish for the househunting trip expenses allowance?

302-4.102 Under what circumstances may we authorize a househunting trip?

302-4.103 What factors must we consider in determining whether to offer an employee the fixed amount househunting trip subsistence expenses reimbursement option?

Authority: 5 U.S.C. 5738; 20 U.S.C. 905(a); E.O. 11609, 36 FR 13474, 3 CFR, 1971-1975 Comp., p. 586.

SUBPART A—EMPLOYEE'S ALLOWANCE FOR HOUSEHUNTING TRIP EXPENSES

Note to subpart A: Use of the pronouns "I" and "you" throughout this subpart refers to the employee.

§ 302-4.1 What is a "househunting trip"?

The term "househunting trip" refers to a trip made by the employee and/or spouse to the new official station locality to find permanent living quarters to rent or purchase. The term "living quarters" in this part includes apartments, condominiums, and cooperatives in addition to townhomes and single family homes.

§ 302-4.2 What is the purpose of the househunting trip expenses allowance?

The allowance for househunting trip expenses is intended to facilitate and

expedite the employee's move from the old official station to the new official station and to lower the Government's overall cost for the employee's relocation by reducing the amount of time an employee must occupy temporary quarters. The allowance for househunting trip expenses provides the employee and/or spouse a period of time to concentrate on finding a suitable permanent residence at the new official station and thereby expedites the employee's relocation.

§ 302-4.3 Am I eligible for a househunting trip expenses allowance?

You are eligible for a househunting trip expenses allowance if you are an employee who is authorized to transfer, and in addition:

(a) Both your old and new official stations are located within the United States;

(b) You are not assigned to Government or other prearranged housing at the new official station; and

(c) Your old and new official stations are 75 or more miles apart (as measured by map distance) via a usually traveled surface route.

§ 302-4.4 Who is not eligible for a househunting trip expenses allowance?

New appointees and employees assigned under the Government Employees Training Act (5 U.S.C. 4109) are not eligible for a househunting trip expenses allowance.

§ 302-4.5 Must my agency authorize payment of a househunting trip expenses allowance?

No. Your agency determines when it is in the Government's interest to authorize you a househunting trip and the procedures you must follow if it is authorized.

§ 302-4.6 Under what circumstances will I receive a househunting trip expenses allowance?

You will receive a househunting trip expenses allowance if:

(a) Your agency authorized you to perform a househunting trip in advance of the travel (the agency authorization must specify the mode of transportation and the period of time allowed for the trip);

(b) You have signed a service agreement;

(c) Your agency has established, and informed you of, the date you are to report to your new official station; and

(d) You meet any additional conditions your agency has established.

§ 302-4.7 Who may travel on a househunting trip at Government expense?

Only you and/or your spouse may travel on a househunting trip at Government expense.

§ 302-4.8 How many househunting trips may my agency authorize in connection with a particular transfer?

Your agency may authorize only one round trip for you and/or your spouse in connection with a particular transfer.

§ 302-4.9 May my spouse and I perform separate househunting trips at Government expense?

Yes. However, your reimbursement will be limited to the cost that would have been incurred if you and your spouse had traveled together on one round trip.

§ 302-4.10 How soon may I and/or my spouse begin a househunting trip?

You may begin your househunting trip as soon as your agency has notified you of your transfer and issued a travel authorization for a househunting trip. To take maximum advantage of your trip, however, it is very important that you become familiar as quickly as you can with your new official station area (e.g., housing market conditions, school locations, etc.). If you are selling your residence at your old official station, you should not begin your househunting trip until you have a current appraisal of the value of the residence so that you can more accurately determine the appropriate price range of residences to consider during your househunting trip.

§ 302-4.11 Is there a time limit on the duration of a househunting trip?

A househunting trip should be for a reasonable period, not to exceed 10 calendar days, as authorized by your agency under § 302-4.101(d).

§ 302-4.12 When must my househunting trip be completed?

You and/or your spouse must complete your househunting trip as indicated in the following table:

For	Your househunting trip must be completed by
You	The day before you report to your new official station.
Your spouse	The earlier of:
	(a) the day before your family relocates to your new official station; or
	(b) The day before the maximum time for beginning allowable travel expires (see § 302-1.6 of this chapter).

§ 302-4.13 What methods may my agency use to reimburse me for househunting trip expenses?

Your agency will reimburse your househunting trip expenses as indicated in the following table:

For	You are reimbursed
You and/or your spouse's transportation expenses.	Your actual transportation costs.
You and/or your spouse's subsistence expenses.	One of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) A per diem allowance for you and/or your spouse as prescribed under part 302-2 of this chapter; or (b) If you accept your agency's offer of the fixed amount option, and: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Both you and your spouse perform a househunting trip either together or separately, a single amount determined by multiplying the applicable locality rate (listed in appendix A to chapter 301 of this subtitle) by 6.25, or (2) Only one of you performs a househunting trip, an amount determined by multiplying the applicable locality rate (listed in appendix A to chapter 301 of this subtitle) by 5.

§ 302-4.14 What transportation expenses will my agency pay?

Your agency will authorize you to travel by the transportation mode(s) (e.g., airline, train, or privately owned automobile) it determines to be advantageous to the Government. Your agency will pay for your transportation expenses by the authorized mode(s). If you travel by any other mode(s), your agency will pay your transportation expenses not to exceed the cost of transportation by the authorized mode(s).

§ 302-4.15 Must I document my househunting trip expenses to receive reimbursement?

To receive reimbursement for househunting trip transportation expenses you must itemize your transportation expenses and provide receipts as required by § 301-11.3(c) of this subtitle. For fixed amount househunting trip subsistence reimbursement, you do not document your subsistence expenses. For per diem househunting trip subsistence expense reimbursement, you must itemize your lodging expenses and you must provide receipts as required by § 301-7.9(b) and § 301-11.3(c) of this subtitle.

§ 302-4.16 May I receive an advance of funds for househunting trip expenses?

Your agency may authorize an advance of funds, in accordance with § 302-1.14(a) of this chapter, for your househunting trip expenses. Your agency may not advance you funds in excess of the sum of your anticipated transportation costs and either the maximum per diem allowable under part 302-2 of this chapter for the location and duration of your househunting trip or your fixed amount househunting trip subsistence expenses payment, whichever applies.

§ 302-4.17 Am I in a duty status when I perform a househunting trip?

Yes.

Subpart B—Agency Responsibilities

Note to Subpart B: Use of the pronouns “we” and “you” throughout this subpart refers to the agency.

§ 302-4.100 How should we administer the househunting trip expenses allowance?

You should administer the househunting trip expenses allowance to minimize or avoid its use when other satisfactory and more economical arrangements are available.

§ 302-4.101 What governing policies must we establish for the househunting trip expenses allowance?

You must establish policies and procedures governing:

- (a) When you will authorize a househunting trip for an employee;
- (b) Who will determine if a househunting trip is appropriate in each situation;
- (c) If and when you will authorize the fixed amount option for househunting trip subsistence expenses reimbursement;
- (d) Who will determine the appropriate duration of a househunting trip for an employee who selects a per diem allowance under part 302-2 of this chapter to reimburse househunting trip subsistence expenses; and
- (e) Who will determine the mode(s) of transportation to be used.

§ 302-4.102 Under what circumstances may we authorize a househunting trip?

You may authorize a househunting trip on an individual-case basis when the employee has accepted the transfer and his/her circumstances indicate that a househunting trip actually is needed. You may not authorize a househunting trip when the purpose of the trip is to assist the employee in deciding whether he or she will accept the transfer.

§ 302-4.103 What factors must we consider in determining whether to offer an employee the fixed amount househunting trip subsistence expenses reimbursement option?

You must consider the following factors:

(a) *Ease of administration.* Payment of a per diem allowance under part 302-2 of this chapter requires you to review claims for the validity, accuracy, and reasonableness of each expense amount, except for meals and incidental expenses. Fixed amount househunting trip subsistence expenses reimbursement is easier to administer because you do not have to review expense amounts.

(b) *Cost considerations.* You must weigh the cost of each reimbursement option on a case-by-case basis.

(c) *Treatment of employees.* The employee is allowed to choose between a per diem allowance under part 302-2 of this chapter and fixed amount househunting trip subsistence expenses reimbursement when you offer the fixed amount reimbursement method. You therefore should weigh employee morale and productivity considerations against actual cost considerations in determining which method to offer.

Dated: March 18, 1997.

Thurman M. Davis, Sr.,

Acting Administrator of General Services.

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41 CFR Part 302-1

[FTR Amendment 64]

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Federal Travel Regulation; Temporary Change of Station

AGENCY: Office of Governmentwide Policy, GSA.

ACTION: Final rule.