

## Part 311 – Guidance for Details in to National Headquarters

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#### 311.0 Purpose

To provide guidance regarding NRCS employee details to National Headquarters (NHQ), located in Washington, DC (including those detailees to the Department); Beltsville, MD; and associated areas for 30 days or longer.

#### 311.1 Background

Details to NHQ are to be handled consistently and in the most efficient manner to ensure agency resources are used wisely and employees are treated equitably. In the past, many employees were on their own to locate reasonably priced lodging and to understand the applicable travel regulations. This national instruction establishes the framework for providing clear and consistent guidance related to details to NHQ.

#### 311.2 Scope

This national instruction provides guidance for detailees to NHQ. It also includes roles and responsibilities, guidance on temporary quarters to ensure cost efficiency, policy on the extended travel associated with a detail, personnel actions to initiate and terminate a detail, and local transportation options.

#### 311.3 References

Existing regulations and policies that relate to details are as follows:

- A. National Instruction 360-310, Subparts B and C, "Personnel Action Guidance for Supervisor and Hiring Manager"
- B. Title 360, General Manual, Part 409, Subpart A, Section 409.8F
- C. Intraoffice Instruction 120-402.1, "Facilities Services"
- D. Federal Travel Regulations (FTR), Chapter 301, Subchapters B and C
- E. Departmental Manual 2300-001, "Agriculture Travel Regulations (ATR)"

#### 311.4 Implementation

Effective immediately.

#### 311.5 Roles and Responsibilities

##### A. Associate Chief for Operations

Approves, on a limited basis, with support from the Deputy Chief for Management and Chief Financial Officer, any business justification for exceptions to this national instruction that is within statute, regulation, or policy.

##### B. Deputy Chief for Management

1. Manages implementation of detail guidance across NHQ.
2. Recommends approval for exceptions (i.e., developmental details) related to human resources management or acquisitions policy to the Associate Chief for Operations.
3. In coordination with the Chief Financial Officer, ensures there is one central system implemented that tracks all NHQ details and associated metrics, as well as all financial management and travel metrics related to NHQ details.

##### C. Chief Financial Officer

1. Reviews, verifies, and approves cost comparisons.
2. Recommends approval of exceptions to financial management and travel policy to the Associate Chief for Operations.

##### D. Selecting Official

1. Identifies a temporary detail needs and ensures availability of funds to

support details.

- a. In accordance with National Instruction 360-310, Subpart B, "Nonrecruitment Actions," the selecting official in the requesting office will initiate the detail process for all employees to NHQ by preparing a Standard Form 52 (SF-52), "Request for Personnel Action." Funding of detailee's salary will remain with the originating office and, as a general rule, *temporary promotions will not be authorized for details in NHQ*. However, in limited situations where NRCS is seeking individuals with a unique skill set, a temporary promotion may be authorized. Any such promotion must be requested and approved in advance of the detail through the Deputy Chief for Management and Associate Chief for Operations. Temporary promotions may only be authorized when the detail assignment occurs at the employee's official duty station. Detail assignments away from the official duty station are ineligible for temporary promotion opportunities because per regulation employees may not receive a temporary promotion and travel per diem concomitantly.
- b. The selecting official must include the following supporting documentation with the SF-52:
  - i. Position description (PD) and Form AD-332, "Position Description Cover Sheet," with a classifier's signature and date.
  - ii. If the series has an educational requirement and the employee is currently assigned to the same series, a copy of the employee's current SF-50, "Notification of Personnel Action," is required. If the employee is not currently assigned to the same series as that for the detail assignment and the series has an educational requirement, then the employee must provide a copy of his or her college transcript to determine qualifications.
  - iii. If the position has not been classified, the selecting official must prepare a statement of work (SOW), which is a written description of the work to be performed that will achieve the desired results and expectations. This situation is also referred to as a detail to "unclassified duties".
2. The selecting official must be at the division director or above level.
3. Obtains approval for the detail from the appropriate Deputy Chief; agency Chief of Staff; Associate Chief; or Chief, based on supervisory chain.
4. Receives the list of qualified candidates and makes a selection.
5. Notifies the employee's supervisor of the selection and the start date, and notifies the selected employee of the start date. The selecting official completes and provides an SF-52 and an approved PD or a description of duties to the appropriate Human Resources Management Division (HRMD) liaison.
6. Serves as the NHQ point of contact for the employee being detailed. As the point of contact, the selecting official is responsible for the following:
  - a. Workspace:

Ensuring work space for the detailee. Selecting official is to complete:  
Attachment A, <http://directives.sc.egov.usda.gov/33819.wba> and  
Attachment B, <http://directives.sc.egov.usda.gov/33820.wba> and submit via to email or call the Supervisor, Facilities Service Team, Business Services Division, at (202) 720-9034.
  - b. Ensuring computer availability for the detailee, which may include employee bringing laptop from regular duty station.
  - c. Ensuring employee reserves a one-bedroom apartment or efficiency unit with a kitchen at a facility listed in the General Services Administration (GSA) schedule prior to the effective date of the detail. Cost must be a consideration, not convenience and amenities.
  - d. Ensuring that the employee's travel authorization includes meals and incidental expenses (M&IE) reduced to 55 percent. If an employee knows in advance that lodging will be less than the per diem rate, the lowest authorized per diem rate must be stated in advance on the employee's travel authorization.
  - e. Ensuring functional LincPass (HSPD-12 Card).
    - f. Monitoring performance and deliverables. If the detail is to last 90 days or more, the selecting official will ensure that the supervisor of the detailee establishes a formal performance plan within 15 days of the beginning of the detail and completes an interim rating within 15 days of the end of the detail (see exhibit 1). If the detail is to last less than 90 days, the selecting official will ensure that the supervisor of the detailee establishes informal documented performance expectations within 15 days of the beginning of the detail and prepares an advisory assessment of the detailee's performance within 15 days of the end of the detail (see exhibit 2). If a detail which is originally less than 90 days is extended for a total period of 90 days or more, the supervisor of the detailee must establish a formal performance plan for the detailee within 10 days of the decision to extend and complete an interim rating within 15 days of the end of the detail. In all cases, all documents must be provided to the detailee's permanent supervisor within 15 days of the end of the detail.
    - g. Submitting SF-52 to human resources liaison to terminate detail two weeks prior to completion of detail.

## E. Human Resources Management Division

1. Receives the following information (provided on SF-52) from the selecting official:
  - a. Major job duties
  - b. Length of detail
  - c. Series and grade level
  - d. Position location (Washington, DC, or Beltsville, MD)
  - e. Closing date of detail announcement
  - f. Any other pertinent information (e.g., open only to NRCS employees in local commuting area; open to all NRCS employees nationwide; travel expectations; etc.)
2. Posts the detail announcement to the USDA Connect Community (see exhibit 3).
3. Director, HRMD, or designee, sends out an email announcement to NHQ division and center directors and above; State Conservationists; NRCS presidents of employee organizations; and NRCS national special emphasis program managers, directing their attention to the USDA Connect Community as new detail announcements are posted.
4. After the closing date, compiles all applications for the announcement and determines applicants' eligibility based on criteria defined by supervisor and a review of the employee's resume (and transcript as needed)
5. Provides a list of eligible applicants to selecting official.

## F. Detailee

1. Coordinates with selecting official the start and end dates and the logistics (office space, equipment needs, etc.) for the assignment.
2. Provides selecting official with emergency contact information.
3. Completes travel authorization and submits for approval at least threedays prior to reporting to NHQ.
4. Locates and reserves a one-bedroom apartment or efficiency with kitchen facility at the recommended GSA schedule facility options to achieve cost savings for the agency (*lodging recommendations are located in the lodging section of this national instruction*).
5. Reduces M&IE to 55 percent due to being in lodging with kitchen. Where an employee knows in advance that lodging will be less than the per diem rate, the lowest authorized per diem rate must be stated in advance on the employee's travel authorization.
6. Submits travel voucher at least once per month to prevent late payments and to minimize outstanding amounts on credit card.
7. Participates in required performance management activities referenced in section 349.5D6(vii).
8. Signs up for the transit subsidy program (if detail is more than 30 days), which provides a monthly subsidy for the employee's commute (*other modes of commuting must be warranted, supported by proper business rationale and approved by the Deputy Chief for Management in advance*). Detailees are reminded of the requirement to cancel any transit subsidy that may be received at their official duty station for the duration of the detail so no employee is receiving duplicate transit subsidies
9. Provides a cost comparison and justification for any exceptions to selecting official and Deputy Chief for Management.

## 311.6 Procedures

### A. Telework

Telework will not be authorized for individuals who are on extended travel associated with a detail in NHQ unless it is an extraordinary situation, such as an extreme weather event or a specific emergency. For individuals not on extended travel while on a detail in NHQ, telework may be allowed based on the requirements of the position and must fall within NRCS and departmental policy.

### B. Travel Authorization

1. In accordance with Departmental Manual 2300-001, detailees are required to complete their own travel authorization in the automated travel system and obtain proper approval from the appropriate management official. *It is recommended that the authorization be submitted at least three days prior to departure to ensure the authorization's approval. Travel cannot occur without an approved authorization in advance of the travel.*
2. Detailee will reduce meals and incidental expenses (M&IE) rate to 55 percent due to utilizing lodging with a kitchen facility. Where an employee knows in advance that lodging will be less than the per diem rate, the lowest authorized per diem rate must be stated in advance on the employee's travel authorization.

C. **Travel**

1. Detailees will book airline flights utilizing the Government contract fares or the best offered fare that will result in a lower trip cost to the Government. If another method of transportation is used, a cost comparison will be required to verify the lower trip cost to the Government.
2. It is recommended that the Government-issued travel card default limit of \$2,500 be raised to ensure the coverage of all initial cost arrangements.

D. **Vouchering**

Reimbursement expenses should be claimed at least once per month to prevent late payments and outstanding amounts on travel cards.

E. **Eligibility to Travel Home**

1. Detailees to NHQ are allowed one return trip home, at Government expense, for each successive 30-day period of the detail.
2. If more than one trip is requested within a 30-day period, the detailee must submit a cost comparison justification to the Deputy Chief for Management for consideration. In order to be approved, the trip must be cost effective to the Government.

F. **Lodging**

1. Upon commencement of the detail, employees must seek temporary living quarters with kitchen facility and reduce per diem to 55 percent of the M&IE. Where an employee knows in advance that lodging will be less than the per diem rate, the lowest authorized per diem rate must be stated in advance on the travel authorization.
2. If the detailee chooses to research his or her own location for housing, he or she may do so; however, the agency expects the detailee to arrange lodging rates equivalent to or less than the rate of the sample vendors listed below. If other lodging arrangements are used, a cost comparison will be required to verify that the alternative rate is equivalent to the sample vendors. It is strongly recommended that individuals utilize the sample of vendors listed below.
3. The detailee may stay with friends or relatives, with or without charge. If this is the case, the individual may be reimbursed for justified additional costs that his or her host incurs in accommodating the detailee if the individual is able to substantiate the costs and that the agency determines them to be reasonable. The individual will not be reimbursed the cost of comparable conventional lodging in the area or a flat "token" amount.
4. The temporary housing options for the sample vendors are in Virginia and Maryland areas **only**, due to the significantly higher tax rate in Washington, DC. The sample of vendors (table 1) is on the GSA schedule and is not an exhaustive listing. Rates have already been negotiated with these vendors. When utilizing the sample of vendors, in order to receive the already negotiated rate, he or she must state that they are calling from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service.

[Table](#)

[Exhibits](#)

