

What is an Expense Report?

To get reimbursed for work-related purchases or travel expenses, you will need to create an Expense Report. The instructions below will guide you through the process. If you have any questions as you proceed, please contact the Financial Assistant at the Business Office of the Physics & Astronomy Department.

How to Submit a Request

To submit an Expense Report, you will need the following:

- All receipts pertaining to your trip or purchase. All receipts should be itemized.
- Written Justification of the trip or purchase and PI approval
- If the reimbursement is for a travel event – Documentation showing “Proof of Attendance”
- A computer with access to NUFinancials

Additional Notes:

- All Expense Reports should be submitted within 30 days of the date the expense took place. If you are submitting an Expense Report, the 30-day count-down starts the day after your trip ends.
- All documentation uploaded to NUFinancials should be compiled into a single PDF attachment. Receipts and Expense details should be in **chronological order (oldest to most recent)**.

Considerations before you travel:

If you are going to claim Automobile Mileage – for travel to points more than 300 miles beyond the point of origin:

- cost comparison for reasonableness should be made between the cost of the per-mile reimbursement plus tolls for car travel, and the least expensive round-trip air fare between the nearest commercial airport serving the origin and destination cities, plus associated transfer costs to and from the airport documentation of cost comparison should be included in travel expense report

If part of your trip involves Personal Travel – If your return trip is to a destination other than the point of origin for personal reasons:

- The cost of transportation to the destination should not exceed the cost to return to the point of origin.

- To be reimbursed, you must provide documentation of a price quote for the cost of the trip to the point of origin on the same date and time of travel. The quote for the cost should be obtained at the same time the personal travel is booked.
- For example: if you are travelling from Chicago to New York for a conference, and instead of returning to Chicago, you wish to fly to Florida for personal reasons, the cost of the flight to Florida would need to be less than or equal to the cost to return to Chicago for that same date and time in order to be reimbursed. You will need to provide documentation of this price comparison. The return flight from Florida to Chicago would be not reimbursable.

Preparing Receipts

- All receipts must show proof that **you** paid
- You must have a receipt for every expense - Per diem is the only exception
- On each receipt, highlight the expense total

REMEMBER: Sales tax is not reimbursable on purchased items (such as computer accessories, printed materials, grocery items)

- If you know in advance that you will need to make a purchase, you can obtain a tax-exempt letter in advance or you can request Purchasing assistance by contacting the Financial Assistant.
- Tax is allowed on restaurant or hotel bills, transportation costs, foreign purchases and some other rare cases.
- If not all the expenses on a receipt are reimbursable, please add a note that explains your calculation and shows the total you are requesting for reimbursement.
- Scan all loose receipts and save emailed receipts as PDF versions. Compile them chronologically into a single PDF.

*****PDFs for prepaid purchases such as flight and hotel bookings with itineraries must be included in the expense report as non-reimbursable expenses**

Claiming Per Diem:

- If you wish to claim Per Diem rather than turning in individual meal receipts, please include a PDF of the per diem rate for the destination in your Expense Report documentation
 - **Domestic Per Diem:** <https://www.gsa.gov/travel/plan-book/per-diem-rates>.
 - **Foreign Per Diem:** https://aoprals.state.gov/web920/per_diem.asp

Note: **When using per diem, you must do so for the full trip.** You cannot, for example, claim per diem for the first day and claim the full cost of an expensive meal on the second day.

- On the first and last day of a trip ("Travel Days") only 75% of per diem can be claimed.
- If a conference/meeting supplies some meals, you can only request Per Diem for the meals not provided by the conference/meeting.

- Using the links above: See the “Meals & Incidentals (M&IE) Breakdown” section at the bottom of the Per Diem for your city of travel. Attach such the breakdown to your receipts, if applicable to your reimbursement.
- **You may decide to claim a Per Diem *lower* than the official Per Diem amount**, if doing so better matches the actual amount you spent on meals. Doing this can save money for your grant or research budget and the University.

Proof of Attendance and/or Justifications

If your ER is for Travel, please attach proof of attendance to the conference / meeting. For example, this could be:

- A name badge
- A printout of an attendance list from conference website
- The conference agenda
- The Website or brochure listing of your talk at the conference
- Email correspondence confirming a collaborative meeting
- **If your ER is for Travel: Please write all of the following information in the Notes section of the ER on NUFinancials:**
 - Name of the Conference / Meeting
 - Where you went: city and state (country)
 - Dates of travel
 - Purpose of the trip, e.g. attend conference, participate in a collaborative meeting, etc.
 - Any other helpful explanations for approvers, in plain English, that clarify the expenses you are (or are not) requesting (e.g. if you arrived early and took a few vacation days, for which you are not requesting reimbursement, or flew into a different city, etc.)
- **If your ER is for a Purchase, please attach a justification for the expense.** For example, this could be:
 - Written approval from your PI
 - Email correspondence confirming need
 - A plain English explanation in the Notes section of the ER form, explaining what the item is/why you needed it and/or
 - why you choose to make the purchase independently.

Creating Expense Reports in NUFinancials:

- To enter a report go to My [Homepage](#) (NU Portal > NUFinancials)
 - If the system tells you that you are not authorized, or you have any other trouble logging in, please contact the [Financial Assistant](#).
 - Select **Expenses**
 - Click **Create Expense Report**
 - Choose a **Business Purpose**
 - **Note:** the BP options are limited. Please select the most applicable (and always feel free to ask the [Financial Assistant](#) if you are not sure what to choose).

- Enter a short **Description** (abbreviation of the name of the conference, dates...)
- If ER is for travel: Choose a default **Location** (If trip consisted of multiple locations, choose where the majority of time was spent)
- Click the magnifying glass to select your **Expenses Supervisor**
- Attach Documentation PDF by clicking on the **Attachments** link underneath the header – **again, please include all the receipts in one single PDF file.**
- Click **Accounting Defaults.**
 - Enter Fund and Dept Leave Program blank
 - Enter ChartField 1 (if you have one) Enter PC Bus Unit: “NWUNV”
 - Enter Activity: “01”
 - Leave Source Type, Category and Subcategory blank.
- Click Update Details and begin entering expenses.

Entering Expense Details:

- **Overview:**
 - Select **expense type.**
 - **Note:** Feel free to ask [Financial Assistant](#) if unsure what to select.
- **Detail:**
 - Enter **Description** of cost in detail tab (e.g. Taxi to O’Hare, AAS Conference registration, etc.).
- **Non-Reimbursable Expenses (most commonly: Egencia reservations):**
 - Any travel costs paid for in advance by Northwestern are “Non-Reimbursable.”
 - Even if you [booked your flight through Egencia](#), please include those expenses in your report, along with any other relevant documentation. This helps approvers to better understand the scope of your trip.
 - Click tab to “Non-Reimbursable.”

Tips for Entering Certain Expense Types

- **Hotels:**
 - Hotel expenses require you to designate the number of nights you stayed.
 - Expenses listed on a hotel bill that are not for lodging or associated taxes (e.g. food, parking, etc) should be separated out of the hotel category, and claimed as an independent line item, using the appropriate expense category and date (The receipt in the hotel bill is sufficient for such expenses).
- **Taxis:**

- Should be entered as “Domestic/Foreign Public Ground Transport.”
- **Foreign Travel:**
 - All expenses (even those paid in the US) should be entered as “Foreign”.
 - **Converting Foreign Currency:**
 - You will need a conversion print out for each individual expense you paid in a foreign currency. We recommend using: www.oanda.com.
 - The conversion should be done using the date of the purchase.
 - Please convert the entire amount spent—do not just provide the unit conversion rate. Please include the conversion calculation in your PDF attachment for the ER.
- Travel to Canada and considered “Domestic” (not “Foreign”).
- **Per Diem:**
 - You can claim a daily per diem rather than collecting individual meal receipts. review additional details in **Step 1** tab
- **Group meal:**
 - You will need to enter each attendee’s name, affiliation, and position. Select this symbol: “+” to add additional people.
- **Private Auto Mileage:**
 - **To claim auto mileage please include in your PDF attachment:**
 - Google maps showing the mileage to and from destination
 - If you opted out of flying, also attach comparison quotes of flight costs NU will reimburse up to the least expensive travel amount
- **Alcohol**
 - If Alcohol-related expenses appear on the receipt, please enter those expenses on the Expense Report as a separate category (“Domestic Alcoholic Beverages”).

PLEASE NOTE: Alcohol is *never*** reimbursable when submitting a reimbursement to a Federal grant or any other sponsored project.**

Review and Submit

- **Go to “Review and Submit” page.**
- **In the “Notes” section, Add a Note that details:**
- **Travel:** Purpose of Trip, Destination of Trip, Full dates of trip
- **Purchase:** Purpose of purchase
- **Membership or Conference Registration:** Organization, Duration of Membership, or Conference Dates If the expense is related to hosting a visitor, please included the visitor’s name.
- Make sure all receipts and backup documentation are compiled into one single PDF file. Please make sure all documents are legible and all receipts are in chronological order, and oriented vertically.
- Click **Check Budget**
 - If you encounter a ‘Budget Check Error’, there is most likely a typo in your chartstring. Make sure to double-check that all chartstring entries are correct.
 - If this trouble-shooting does not fix the issue, contact [Financial Assistant](#) for help.
- **Press Submit.** You’re done!
 - Approvals and the rest of the process will be handled electronically. Confirmation will be sent to you once approvals are complete.

Exceptions

If you need to request an exception to any University Policies (for example, you are accidentally missing a receipt), please note that you will need to complete some additional paperwork:

For expenses filed over the 90 day claim window, please fill out a [90-Day Justification Memo](#), and send it to the [Financial Assistant](#) for signature.

Note: Requests over 30 days should be very rare. Processing older transactions for events/purchases is generally more difficult and requires more work for everyone involved. If older transactions are charged to grants, they are also potential audit red flags.

For any other exceptions (ie. missing or non-itemized versions of receipts for expenses over \$40, etc.), please fill out an [Exception Request Form](#), and send it to the [Financial Assistant](#) for signature.

Please note: if your claim is over 90 days *and* needs additional exceptions, you will need to complete and get signatures on **both** forms.