College of the Environment COVID-19 Response Guidance:
Nonrefundable Travel Reimbursements

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Relevant UW Guidance:
- UW Travel Services memo on Travel Reimbursement Guidelines due to COVID-19 (28 February 2020)

I want to alert you to the fact that there is currently a gap in policy guidance with respect to travel reimbursements. Specifically, if you review the FAQ #11 in the NSF link that Rob Wood just sent, you will note that they do not yet confirm that they will allow nonrefundable travel reimbursements to be charged to an NSF grant. They also note they are working with other federal sponsors to resolve a number of proposal and award-related issues pertaining to COVID-19.

At the same time, we have also received guidance from the UW Travel Office letting us know that “we understand there are travel arrangements that have been made and expenses already incurred for upcoming travel. Any corresponding travel expenses may be reimbursed if the traveler and/or department deem it unsafe to conduct travel for UW business as a result of concerns related to COVID-19.”

What the UW Travel Office does not provide guidance on is what budget to use to cover these reimbursements. They are agnostic on this particular detail and are only providing the policy guidance that dictates an individual UW employee/student/etc. should be reimbursed for nonrefundable travel expenses if their travel plans have been cancelled as a result of concerns related to COVID-19.

So – until we have specific guidance from individual funders on whether these will be considered allowable expenses, please make sure to keep track of these reimbursements and confirm that a comment is added to the expense report noting when expenses are from a cancelled trip due to COVID-19 concerns. You may also want to consider using a non-grant budget to carry these expenses until we hear they are allowable. While we do hope that most funders will be flexible in this regard, we cannot guarantee that this will happen.

While we wait for further guidance from our many, many funders, please let Stephanie Harrington know if you have any questions.