

## Persons With Disabilities

This chapter describes the challenges that disabled employees may face in any of NASA's career development programs (LDP, NASA Administrator's Fellowship Program, SESCDP etc.) and the kinds of accommodations available under the Federal Travel Regulations that do allow disabled people to fully participate in these programs. I am writing this chapter because I am legally blind and cannot drive and as a participant in the NASA Administrator's Fellowship Program I faced some difficult situations. I want other disabled employees to know what to expect and to have some ideas about how to overcome these obstacles. My contact information is [Paul.Mogan@nasa.gov](mailto:Paul.Mogan@nasa.gov) and I currently work at Kennedy Space Center. Feel free to contact me with questions. I also encourage other employees with disabilities to contribute to this chapter.

### BACKGROUND

People with the following kinds of disabilities are the ones who will be effected most by these issues: blindness, profound deafness, disabilities requiring use of a wheelchair or scooter, disabilities requiring use of a personal assistant or disabilities limiting a person's ability to drive. Barriers for people who have these types of disabilities are mostly encountered when relocation is required. *Some employees whose assignments under career development programs are local (not requiring relocation) may not encounter these issues.*

Fortunately for disabled employees, the Federal Travel Regulations, FTR, (which NASA must follow) allow accommodations for disabled employees that can help overcome obstacles. The specific part of the FTR applicable to persons with disabilities is Part 301-13—Travel Of An Employee With Special Needs. The text of section 301-13 is included in Appendix A for reference.

In this chapter I will first discuss the challenges disabled employees may face in career development programs (some issues are specific to disabled employees but some are ones everyone will face). Next I discuss what disabled employees can do to overcome these situations.

### HOW THE ISSUES ARE TRIGGERED

The issues covered here are triggered by relocation and are an artifact of NASA's travel regulations. I have broken down these issues as best I can in order to help people understand them.

### DISCUSSION OF THE ISSUES

Buried within the NASA regulations that are applicable to these TDY relocations are several things that may hinder disabled employees, depending on the nature of their disabilities who are unaware of NASA's ability to accommodate their needs. These

issues may increase travel expenses for the employee as well as increasing the personal difficulties they face.

## I. Travel

### *Travel Background*

When an employee relocates during developmental programs, the relocation falls under the NASA travel regulations covering extended TDY (not a Permanent Change of Station). The travel regulations are based on the employee moving a small amount of personal items to the TDY location and renting an apartment and furnishings. The employee is provided some coverage of moving expenses and long-term per diem in order to support the additional household at the TDY location. Travelers on extended TDY are authorized a trip home every 3 weeks, not to exceed 17 trips per a one year assignment or the prorated equivalent rounded down for trips of a lesser duration (Note that specific developmental programs will have their own policies as to how many trips they will pay for).

### *Initial Site Visit*

Under developmental programs the employee is given one initial trip to the new location in order to “meet and greet” personnel at the TDY location and plan work activities. Employees also use this trip to look for housing. The short duration of the trip typically allowed may be inadequate to find housing for a person with disabilities. The reasons are as follows:

1. Any requirement for access to public transportation for those unable to drive severely restricts options for areas in which they can live, requiring additional time to understand the public transportation system and what housing options are viable. Researching your options prior to selecting housing is essential.
2. Requirements for wheelchair access or other special features of a residence may severely restrict the selection of available housing and thus require additional time to locate a place to live.
3. When searching for housing, getting transportation to potential housing areas in order to see them may require taking cabs or hiring a driver for the day. Be prepared to show that the option you selected is the most cost effective and be sure it is authorized on your orders.
4. A disabled person may require a personal assistant in order to guide them, transport them or perform certain tasks.

These factors may mean the employee needs a much longer trip to the TDY location or even a second trip.

## II. Moving

The temporary change of duty location pays for either an airline ticket (and covers the cost of several extra pieces of luggage) or pays for driving mileage in a Personally Owned Vehicle and the cost of moving up to 350 pounds. For a couple or an employee with children, of course, this implies being away from spouse and family for a long

period except for occasional visits. The family may move with the employee, however the cost above those reimbursable by NASA are covered out of the employee's pocket.

While most TDY payments are made in a timely manner, many employees have experienced delays in long-term per diem payments. Employees are required to submit a copy of their rental agreement as well as copies of utility bills along with submission of the voucher in the Travel Manager system. If utilities are not available they can be submitted when they are received. This process can cause delays. In addition, if an employee begins the extended TDY in the autumn near when the fiscal year changes, this may create the potential for additional delay in processing vouchers. This situation can be mitigated if the employee files 2 – 2 week vouchers over the shut down of SAP for the fiscal year turn over. Employees are encouraged to get a line of credit to off-set payment issues. When you use a line of credit a fee is charged by the Credit Union or bank. Currently you can claim that fee on your travel voucher. If a line of credit is not an option, employees should plan to be able to sustain the expenses for two households for several months at a time until reimbursement is received.

As an example, although my travel vouchers for August, September and October 2006 were submitted before NASA's financial system cutoff date, due to "problems with the system" and "funding issues" these vouchers were not yet paid as of January 29, 2007. This may be a "one of a kind" event and NASA Travel stated that they are taking steps to remedy the situation.

Moving may become a financial barrier to the disabled employee. Depending on the nature of the person's disability, there are a variety of additional expenses that the employee may incur. These include:

1. The need to transport an increased amount of possessions due to assistive technology devices, customized furnishings or other items required to accommodate the disability.
2. People with disabilities restricting physical activity may incur expenses paying for assistance required to pack and unpack boxes/suitcases.
3. The cost of orientation and mobility instruction that may be required by a disabled person in a new location.

Disabled employees should ensure that their special needs are identified and authorized on their orders and if needed a waiver is requested.

### III. Housing

The selection of housing can be problematic for disabled persons due to the need for wheelchair access or other devices or the person's inability to drive. Many cities have very poor public transportation systems. Due to these restrictions the employee may be forced to live in an area that is either inconvenient or more expensive than other areas.

One extremely important housing selection criterion for employees unable to drive is availability of public transportation. Even where public transportation is available the travel time may become prohibitive if it requires changing vehicles (several buses, or

buses and trains etc). Excessively long commutes may interfere with taking full advantage of a work assignment's opportunities. In addition, public transportation (especially long-haul commuter buses) may have limited hours of operation. This should be considered by the employee also.

#### IV. At The Duty Location

For the reasons mentioned above, transportation expenses to the duty location may be higher for disabled employees. Persons with certain disabilities may also need non-standard office furniture or assistance (for example, a sign language interpreter). Depending on the work assignment location, these things may present difficulties.

#### WHAT CAN DISABLED EMPLOYEES DO?

The first and most important thing an employee can do is to identify themselves as having special needs to the Program Manager for the developmental program. This includes helping the Program Manager understand what additional budget may be required to be planned for travel and any personal assistance required. The Program Managers are willing to help, but in this day of shrinking budgets it would be very inconsiderate to "blind side" them with these things.

Employees should consider whether the initial site visit may have to be extended, whether they will need to hire a driver for a day or two and whether any personal assistance will be needed while traveling. NASA will pay transportation and per diem expenses incurred by a family member or other attendant who must travel with you to make the trip possible.

If the disabled employee is required to live in a place that is more expensive a waiver can be granted by the Office of the CFO.. The normal weight limit on what NASA will pay to ship can also be waived.

Some of the accommodations available are:

- They will pay transportation and per diem expenses incurred by a family member or other attendant who must travel with you to make the trip possible
- They will cover additional transportation expenses
- They will pay for additional baggage charges
- They will pay for special transportation at TDY locations
- With advance approval from the OCFO, they will waive the normal limits on how much stuff they will pay to ship for extended TDY relocations
- With advance approval from the OCFO, they will pay for housing that costs more than the normal limits if it is needed

I'd also advise working closely with your supervisor at your home institution in order to arrange to take with you any assistive devices you may need. In my experience, NASA supervisors have been very helpful in this regard.

In addition, work with the host institution (the folks at the TDY location). Let them know your needs up front and work with them to see what help they may provide.

One thing I found very useful is a website <http://emove.com/>. At this site you can hire packing/unpacking help, moving truck load/unload help and drivers for the moving truck. Various company listings are given and a lot of customer feedback is on the site to help you choose a reliable company.

Some realtors specialize in housing for people with disabilities. In addition, some apartment finding services are helpful in this regard.

Do a lot of up-front research about the TDY location, public transportation, carpools that may exist, etc.

### CONCLUSION

NASA can accommodate many of the special needs of its employees. The biggest barrier that exists is probably ignorance of just how much can be done in this regard.

Disabled employees will face more challenges while participating in NASA's developmental programs. However, with a little extra work up front and an understanding of the applicable travel regulations, disabled employees can successfully participate in these excellent opportunities.

APPENDIX A EXCERPT FROM FEDERAL TRAVEL REGULATIONS  
PART 301-13—TRAVEL OF AN EMPLOYEE WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

**Authority:** 5 U.S.C. 5707.

**§301-13.1 What is the policy for paying additional travel expenses incurred by an employee with a special need?**

To provide reasonable accommodations to an employee with a special need by paying for additional travel expenses incurred.

**§301-13.2 Under what conditions will my agency pay for my additional travel expense(s) under this part?**

When an additional travel expense is necessary to accommodate a special physical need which is either:

- (a) Clearly visible and discernible; or
- (b) Substantiated in writing by a competent medical authority.

**§301-13.3 What additional travel expenses may my agency pay under this part?**

Your agency approving official may pay for any expenses deemed necessary by your agency to accommodate an employee with a special need including, but not limited to, the following expenses:

- (a) Transportation and per diem expenses incurred by a family member or other attendant who must travel with you to make the trip possible;
- (b) Specialized transportation to, from, and/or at the TDY duty location;
- (c) Specialized services provided by a common carrier to accommodate your special need;
- (d) Costs for handling your baggage that are a direct result of your special need;
- (e) Renting and/or transporting a wheelchair;
- (f) Premium-class accommodations when necessary to accommodate your special need, under [Subpart B of Part 301-10](#) of this subchapter; and
- (g) Services of an attendant, when necessary, to accommodate your special need.

**Note to §301-13.3(g):** For limits on the amount that may be paid to an attendant, other than travel expenses, see 5 U.S.C. 3102 and guidance at [http://www.opm.gov/disability/mngr\\_6-01-B.asp](http://www.opm.gov/disability/mngr_6-01-B.asp).

---

Back to [Chapter 7](#) | [Table of Contents](#)