

Tame your agency's travel and expense reporting — and improve transparency, efficiency and employee satisfaction

How state and local government agencies can improve employee productivity and financial transparency using widely-adopted travel and expense tools.

By StateScoop Staff

Finding practical ways to make government employees more productive is one of the many challenges facing state and local agencies.

One approach delivering quick results for agencies large and small — and leading to greater workplace satisfaction among employees and their supervisors — is the adoption of well-established, cloud-based tools to provide tracking, control and insight for employee initiated spending, also referred to as “travel, expense and invoice.”

This approach reduces total operating costs for most agencies and increases job satisfaction for employees and managers alike by making the submission, approval and reimbursement of employee initiated expenses and invoices quickly and easily.

For financial and IT officials, the use of modern, more automated travel, invoice and expense management tools provide financial transparency, reduce risk of expense errors and abuse, lower long-term IT costs and ultimately allow greater control over the use of taxpayer dollars.

So how do I get started?

“Employee initiated spend” is any transaction where an employee is authorized to spend money and the agency is obligated to pay. It is the largest budget-line area in government spending and can be notoriously difficult to identify. Spending includes mileage, airline, train and bus tickets, taxi rides, meals, supplies and virtually any purchase made by an employee on behalf of the agency, department or office.

Another factor is the inherently time-consuming and frustrating nature of documenting expenses and submitting reports. A **2017 research brief** of how state and local agencies handle employee reimbursements, released by GovLoop, found the top three issues with existing expense reporting systems were employee frustration (30 percent), lack of automation (28 percent), and lengthy reimbursement times (22 percent).

At the heart of that frustration is the disconnect with the submission and reimbursement process workers experience today. For many, filing expense reports the old-fashioned way leads to increased time, effort, errors and ultimately poor job satisfaction. Current methods require employees to carefully retain and submit receipts; record expenses according to specific accounting codes; wait for their supervisors to approve their

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expenses; wait to be reimbursed; and wait to see if the reimbursement check arrives in time to pay out-of-pocket expenses.

There is a better way

Imagine the ability to request, approve, spend, track, reimburse and report from any device, anywhere, anytime.

Today's automated tools streamline travel expense reporting, approval and reimbursement processes. Fortune 500 and commercial firms of every shape and size have discovered how to save time and money while increasing employee satisfaction.

With a few simple steps, you too can improve existing employee's quality of life while looking more attractive to tech-savvy workers who have become accustomed to a digital world.

Finance and IT – A partnership that makes sense

The benefits of adopting modernized travel, expense and invoice management systems go much deeper for both the chief financial officer and the chief information officer at virtually every agency.

For financial departments, having a suite of modernized tools that track and control expenses at a granular level and in aggregate represents significant opportunities to improve their agency's financial management. Current users report automating travel, expense and invoice reporting can cut down on expense errors by up to 60 percent and help spot potential areas of expense abuse.

These same users report deploying modernized, cloud-based systems such as SAP Concur cut down on the long-term costs of maintaining proprietary systems, a key initiative for many IT departments.

SAP Concur offers the advantage of allowing employees to use their smartphones, or any device, to capture and file receipts digitally to a robust cloud-based system for processing reports on the backend.

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“This results in a win-win for finance, IT, the agency and their employees,” says Paul Borrer, SAP Concur senior director for state and local government sales. “Our technology combined with an agency’s process provides streamlined employee expense management, greater visibility, fewer errors and increased employee productivity and satisfaction.”

What agencies gain through expense report automation

Government agencies, perhaps even more than many enterprises, have an additional reason to consider automating their travel, expense and invoice systems, according to Borrer. Work processes that involve the use of taxpayer money require compliance mechanisms for spending on a hotel, car rentals and other expenses along with accurately reporting and predicting future spending.

Technology automates processes and increases visibility into spending categories, creating efficiency and reducing costs, means that supervisors and employees alike have more time and budget dollars to invest in their agency’s mission.

SAP Concur produced a **case study** in which a state agency wanted greater control over two of the primary spending areas, mileage and per diem. Mileage was being self-reported by employees, creating the opening for human error and fraud, while per diem required employees to self-report trip departure and arrival times to calculate the appropriate per diem, again leaving room for error and fraud.

The state agency implemented the SAP **Concur Travel and Expense** solution, which allowed employees to use their smartphones to track their travel expenses and file them electronically while on the go.



“The travelers no longer have to worry about coding expense types. The system is already mapped with the correct code,” the statewide travel director said. “The traveler experience has also improved because they always know the status of their expense report. With no manual data entry to PeopleSoft, the expense report can be approved quicker, resulting in speedy turnaround times.”

In addition, the state accounting agency incorporated specific audit rules into the tool, which helps with policy compliance and governance.

Mobile tools keep employees on the go

The agency, and its employees also benefitted from using SAP Concur’s receipt tool, which captures images of receipts and automatically includes them with expense reports. This helps employees recover all their expenses, lowers the risk of losing a paper receipt, and streamlines the processing of the expense report by providing an electronic copy of the receipt.

There is also a built-in mileage tool to capture and report the distance between start and end points automatically, then includes the resulting mileage directly in the report saving time and reducing error.

“Commercial businesses are further along the evolutionary path to seeing the benefits of resolving complexities inherent to employee initiated spend,” said Borrer. For state and local agencies, wrestling with ways to improve the employee initiated spend process, adoption in the commercial sector has effectively lowered the risk for agencies regardless of their size to modernize their travel and expense systems.

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For more information, [download Concur Travel and Expense](#) or visit Concur.com/sap.

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