Australian National Audit Office



Official Travel

Insights: Audit Lessons

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Introduction

Audit Lessons aim to share insights from our audit work to make it easier for people working within the Australian public sector to improve performance.

Audit Lessons — *Official Travel* is aimed at officials who undertake, manage or oversee domestic and international travel arrangements in Australian Government entities.

Update

On 1 September 2026, the Australian Government Travel Policy (Travel Policy) commenced. The Travel Policy and Resource Management Guide (RMG 424) replaced the previous domestic and international travel policies (RMG 404 and RMG 405), consolidating them into a single framework for official travel.

The key changes include:

- new overarching 'Best Value Fare' concept across domestic and international travel, with booking codes;
- clearer expectations to consider accommodation rate thresholds and justify higher selections;
- clearer expectations for personal preferences not to influence booking decisions;
- restrictions relating to travel upgrades;
- ban on entities funding airline lounge memberships;
- clearer expectations for the appropriate consideration of gifts and benefits and conflict of interest;
- new sustainability considerations;
- requirement for employee identification numbers in travel bookings; and
- obligation on entities to consult with their Cabinet Minister on an appropriate approval threshold for significant international travel.

The lessons discussed below in this Insights product remain relevant.

Australian Government officials may need to travel domestically and/or internationally in the course of their duties. In most cases, the relevant Australian Government entity pays official travel costs, including airfares, accommodation, vehicle rental, and meals and incidentals. Effective travel arrangements help entities comply with the Whole of Australian Government Travel Arrangements (WoAG Travel Arrangements), achieve value for money, and manage integrity risks.

Benefits of having effective travel arrangements

- Instils public confidence and trust in the efficient, ethical, economical and effective use of public resources.
- Supports the objectives of the WoAG Travel Arrangements.
- Provides entity assurance of achieving value for money and meeting business objectives.

- Supports a strong integrity culture in the Australian Public Service (APS).
- Enables informed executive decision-making through oversight of travel risks.

Whole of Australian Government Travel Arrangements

The Department of Finance (Finance) introduced the WoAG Travel Arrangements in 2010. The WoAG Travel Arrangements are coordinated procurements under the Commonwealth Procurement Rules and are intended to streamline how travel is booked and managed across the Australian Public Service. Non-corporate Commonwealth entities must follow the WoAG Travel Arrangements. Corporate Commonwealth entities, Commonwealth companies and Authorised Organisations can elect to adopt elements via an agreement with Finance. The WoAG Travel Arrangements encompass five components outlined in the table below.

Whole of Australian Government Travel Arrangements — services and suppliers

Component	Services	Suppliers (as at May 2026)
Book	The Travel Management Services (TMS) supplier provides booking services for air travel, hotel, bus, sea, rail, car rental, ground transport services, and charter flights.	Corporate Travel Management (CTM)
Fly	Domestic and international air travel suppliers. The panel of airlines is not exclusive. Airlines included in the panel provide 'discounted airfares and beneficial fare conditions' to the Australian Government.	Panel of 18 airlines • three domestic airlines, and • 17 international airlines
Stay	All domestic accommodation must be booked through the sole supplier. Booking international accommodation through the supplier is encouraged but is not required.	CTM
Drive	Domestic vehicle rental services supplier. Bookings can be made via the TMS or directly with the supplier via a WoAG portal.	Hertz
Pay	Travel and Procurement Payments Services. For official travel booked via the TMS, entities are required to use a 'lodge card'. Commonwealth credit cards are utilised for other expenses associated with travel such as meals and incidentals.	National Australia Bank (NAB)

Finance supports the WoAG Travel Arrangements through guidance, including Resource Management Guide (RMG) 404 (Domestic Travel Policy) and RMG 405 (Official International Travel).

The RMGs set out guidance for travellers and approvers. Two key considerations for officials undertaking and approving domestic and international travel are value for money and necessity of travel.

- Value for money requires 'the use of Commonwealth resources in an efficient, effective, economical and ethical manner that is consistent with the policies of the Commonwealth and is reinforced through competitive decision making. Accordingly, when booking travel, officials must make decisions based on impartial consideration of fares available ... '

- Delegates, in approving official travel, 'must be satisfied there is a demonstrated business need for the travel' and that 'Air travel must only to be undertaken where other communication tools, such as teleconferencing and videoconferencing, are ineffective'.

These policies also require travellers to select the Lowest Practical Fare (LPF) for domestic flights and the International Best Fare (IBF) for international flights.

- The LPF is 'the lowest fare available at the time the travel is booked on a regular service (not a charter flight), that suits the practical business needs of the traveller'.
- The IBF is 'the lowest fare on the day the travel is booked on a regular scheduled service (not a charter flight), that suits the practical business needs of the traveller and maximises overall value for money for the total cost of the trip'.

In 2024–25, $953 million was spent on travel through the WoAG Travel Arrangements.[1] For further WoAG Travel statistics, see the Department of Finance's website.[2] The further reading section provides links to additional Department of Finance resources and relevant ANAO Insights products.

ANAO performance audits on travel arrangements

In 2025–26, the Auditor-General presented for tabling five performance audit reports that examined the effectiveness of travel arrangements in selected Australian Government entities.[3] The audits examined if entities had appropriate: policies and procedures; internal controls; non-compliance arrangements; and monitoring and reporting arrangements.

The five ANAO performance audit reports found that the majority of entities had sound arrangements in place with some areas for improvement. Ten recommendations were made across the five audits.

- Four recommendations focused on monitoring and reporting, especially to support oversight of travel risks and to ensure value for money across the organisation.

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1 This figure includes air travel, vehicle rental, hotel, other modes of transport, and services fees, and is based on ANAO analysis of data extracted from the contracted TMS supplier system. Due to a lack of information captured during individual bookings and anomalies in aggregated data, there was limited information available to confirm the accuracy of figures.

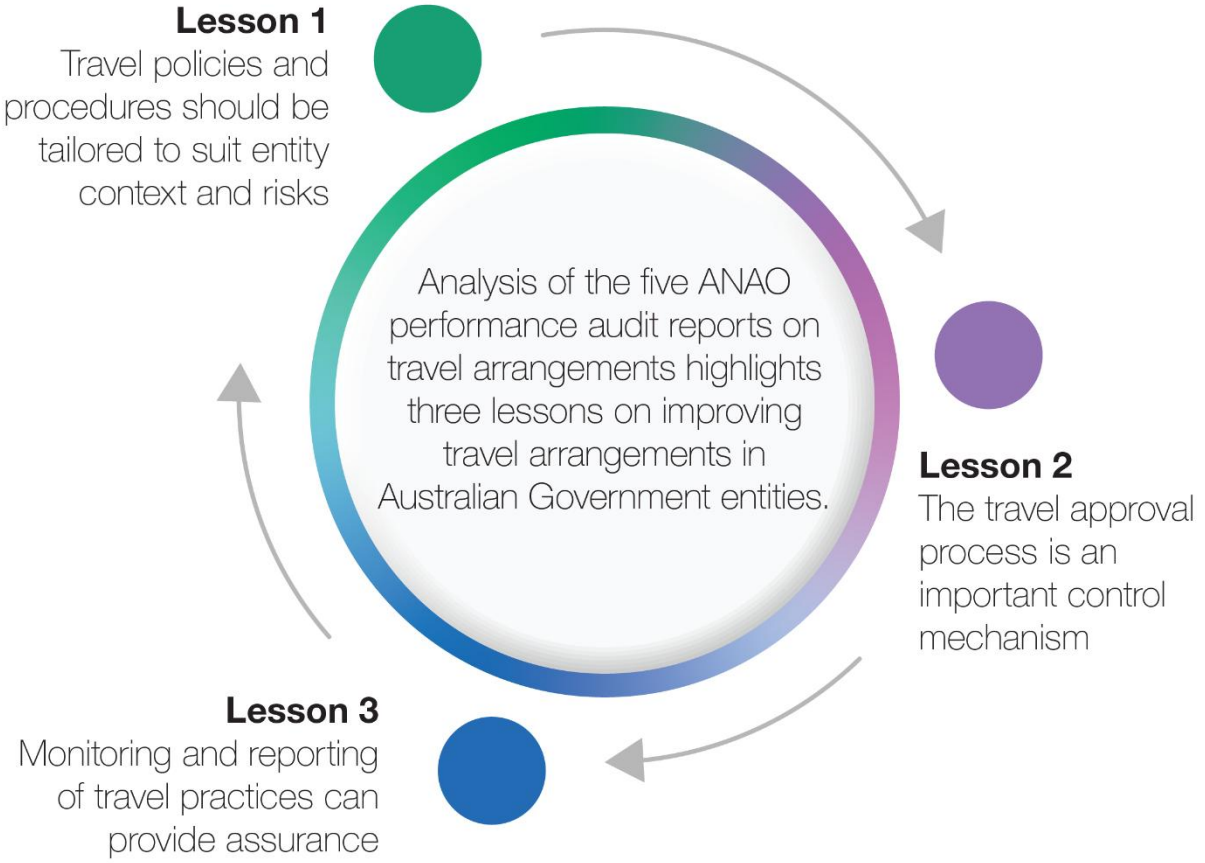
2 *Whole of Australian Government Travel Arrangements | Department of Finance*. The Australian Government announced in May 2026 that entities will be banned from purchasing airline lounge memberships for Australian Public Service officials. Budget 2026–27, Agency Resourcing Budget Paper No. 4.

3 These audits were:

- Auditor-General Report No. 7 2025–26 *Compliance with Domestic and International Travel Requirements in the Department of Industry, Science and Resources*;
- Auditor-General Report No. 8 2025–26 *Compliance with Domestic and International Travel Requirements in the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry*;
- Auditor-General Report No. 14 2025–26 *Compliance with Domestic and International Travel Requirements in the Civil Aviation Safety Authority*;
- Auditor-General Report No. 18 2025–26 Compliance with domestic and international travel requirements in the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission; and
- Auditor-General Report No. 21 2025–26 *Compliance with domestic and international travel requirements in Services Australia*.

- Three recommendations related to evidence and documentation, of which two related to approval of travel under the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013* (PGPA Act).
- Two recommendations focused on travel policy non-compliance.
- One recommendation related to monitoring of mandatory training.

Audit lessons



Lesson 1: Travel policies and procedures should be tailored to suit entity context and risks

Entities must ensure their travel policies and procedures support appropriate expenditure of money, reflect their specific context and risk profile, and (for non-corporate Commonwealth entities) comply with the WoAG Travel Arrangements.

Entities should regularly review and update travel policies to manage risk and reflect changes in operations. Policies should also align with related guidance, such as gifts and benefits, credit cards and conflicts of interest.

Lesson 1 questions for consideration

Does our entity have appropriate travel policies and procedures?

- For non-corporate Commonwealth entities: Do our policies and procedures comply with WoAG Travel requirements?

- For corporate Commonwealth entities and Commonwealth companies: Have we considered which WoAG Travel Arrangements elements to follow, what entity-specific arrangements need to be established and how our arrangements achieve value for money?
- Have we tailored our travel policies/procedures to suit our entity context, including travel patterns, risks and systems?
- Have we ensured there is alignment and cross-referencing (where relevant) to our other related policies, such as those for gifts and benefits and conflict of interest?
- Do we evaluate and review our policies to ensure travel arrangements achieve value for money and address changes in circumstances and requirements, and in response to non-compliance trends?

Entities need to determine travel policy settings and procedures relevant to their operations and risk settings. This includes, for example: approval and acquittal processes; and whether travel allowance or payment of actual costs for meals and incidentals via credit card is appropriate. Policies, procedures and processes should be clearly set out in easily accessible documents and guidance material and be supported by training.

Entities should review and update travel policies and procedures to reflect changes in an entity's approach, operations and risk settings, and to support continuous improvement. Reviews may reveal opportunities to improve policies where appropriate, for example:

- updating roles and responsibilities, which may be required due to a substantial change in structure, functions, or activities, including a machinery of government change;
- updating thresholds, such as maximum travel expenditure limits and approval levels; and
- improving transparency and assurance, such as level of detail provided to delegates in the approval process.

Corporate Commonwealth entities and Commonwealth companies may elect to adopt some or all of the arrangements. Corporate Commonwealth entities and Commonwealth companies should ensure their travel arrangements are informed by an evidence-based value for money proposition and periodically assess whether their arrangements achieve value for money, including if they elect to use elements of the WoAG Travel Arrangements.

Case study 1. Developing and reviewing travel policies and procedures

Observed examples from ANAO performance audits include:

- ✓ All five entities (see footnote 1) had policies that aligned with WoAG Travel requirements and established their travel practices.
- ✓ The Department of Industry, Science and Resources updated its policies throughout the audit period. For example, the department revised its Official Overseas Travel Policy three times during the audit period, including to introduce a dual approval process and provide additional detail on considerations for officials in selecting the international best fare.

- ➢ There were instances where policies did not align with practices or were not updated with changes to external approval requirements. For example, the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission's travel policy cited a need to notify the Attorney-General about non-operational travel above $20,000, even though the relevant minister had changed to the Minister for Home Affairs after a machinery of government change. In addition, the policy did not reflect that the notification threshold had changed from $20,000 to $50,000. On 16 June 2026, the Commission informed the ANAO that it plans to update its travel policy and associated documents by the end of July 2026.

To read more, see paragraphs 2.11–2.18 of Compliance with Domestic and International Travel Requirements in the Department of Industry, Science and Resources; paragraphs 2.2–2.33 of Compliance with Domestic and International Travel Requirements in the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry; table 2.1 of Compliance with Domestic and International Travel Requirements in the Civil Aviation Safety Authority; paragraphs 2.2–2.21 of Compliance with Domestic and International Travel Requirements in Services Australia; and table 2.1 and 2.46–2.47 of Compliance with domestic and international travel requirements in the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission.

Where there are multiple entity policies that contain travel information, the content across them should be consistent and complementary, e.g. across corporate credit card and travel policies or records management. Entities could review whether guidance they provide on memberships of airline loyalty programs, lounges or status credits (including personal memberships) are reflected in conflict-of-interest policies and/or their gifts and benefits policy. Entities could also review their credit card policy so that it aligns with travel approval requirements, timeframes, requirements for acquittals and endorsements of transactions.

Case study 2. Alignment with other policies

Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF)

- ✓ DAFF's gifts and benefits policy identified travel-related gifts and benefits.
- ➢ DAFF's Travel Regulation Manual did not reference its gifts and benefits policy. Cross-referencing could have helped ensure travel gifts and benefits were captured in the gifts and benefits register.
- ➢ DAFF's conflict of interest policy did not provide guidance in relation to memberships of airline loyalty programs, lounges or status credits.

To read more, see paragraphs 3.49–3.59 of Compliance with Domestic and International Travel Requirements in the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry.

Lesson 2: The travel approval process is an important control mechanism

Delegates approving travel expenditure serve as an important control. Effective approval processes provide assurance that travel is necessary, represents value for money, and complies with entity policy and the WoAG Travel Arrangements.

Lesson 2 questions for consideration

Do delegates approving travel in our entity have visibility of appropriate information to assure themselves that travel is necessary, represents value for money and complies with entity policy and the WoAG Travel Arrangements?

- What do delegates do to ensure they receive relevant information?
- Do our systems, templates, checks and approval flows support delegates receiving this information as part of the process for approving trips and any variations?
- Do acquittal processes for travel expenditure ensure the delegate approving the acquittal has visibility of the original expenditure approval?

Under subsection 23(3) of the PGPA Act, accountable authorities can approve commitments of relevant money and may delegate this power to officials.

Delegates should receive adequate information to exercise professional judgement and assure themselves that approval of the travel is appropriate and meets value-for-money and necessity requirements.

Entities should have risk-based procedures to determine if approval processes are being followed. Further, the point in the travel process when approval should be recorded needs to be clearly documented in entities' travel policies. ANAO audits identified variation in the quality and timing of travel approvals across entities.

Case study 3. Delegate approvals

Services Australia

- ✓ Officials recorded trips in Services Australia's IT system 'ESS'. ESS has automated process steps, including for sending trip plans to delegates for approval. ESS includes mandatory free-text fields for travel 'reason' and 'business case'.
- ✓ A travel reason (purpose) was provided for all domestic trips that the ANAO randomly sampled (73 trips).
- ➢ A business case with a clear rationale for travel, as required by SA's guidance, was not provided for 41 (56%) of the sampled domestic trips.

Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

- ➢ For domestic travel, there was insufficient evidence of the need to travel and appropriate approvals. A travel request was not created in the department's IT system for 58 per cent of trips. Travel was not approved in line with departmental policy for 57 per cent of trips.

To read more, see paragraphs 3.3–3.6 and 3.26–3.30 of Compliance with Domestic and International Travel Requirements in Services Australia; and paragraphs 3.6–3.13 of Compliance with Domestic and International Travel Requirements in the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry.

Lesson 3: Monitoring and reporting of travel practices can provide assurance

When entities actively monitor official travel arrangements, they can identify trends, assess risks and inform continuous improvement. Travel risks should inform the level of executive oversight, with observations reported periodically to appropriate levels of management.

Lesson 3 questions for consideration

Does our entity monitor and report travel information to provide assurance and inform continuous improvement?

- Do we monitor travel practices and risks, including non-compliance with travel policies and procedures?
- Do our systems and processes support the recording of the right information to enable effective monitoring?
- Do we provide reports to executive management at a frequency and scope that is proportionate to our entity's travel risks and meaningful for oversight and inquiry?
- Does our monitoring and reporting inform updates to policies and procedures to address non-compliance and support the achievement of value for money, where required?

Monitoring and reporting of travel practices helps entities identify risks, assess compliance, and inform executive oversight. These insights support continuous improvement and responses to emerging issues, including the need to refine existing arrangements, or provide further training and guidance to officials.

Entities should design monitoring and reporting arrangements that are proportionate to risk, meaningful for oversight, and fit for purpose. Depending on their specific circumstances, entities should:

- Set up procedures and systems enabling officials to consistently record, and track and analyse travel practices, including types, approvals, expenditure and non-compliance.
- Provide periodic reports to executive management and relevant committees with the appropriate content and detail for the audience and proportionate to risk.
- Establish suitable monitoring and reporting, such as:
  - non-compliance related to travel practices, including the types and reasons;
  - travel budget and expenditure;
  - emerging risks;
  - completion of mandatory training related to travel; and
  - the rate of the cheapest fare compared with other LPF and IBF booking codes and how these represent value for money for the entity and are appropriate in the context of its business operations.

Case study 4. Monitoring and reporting for assurance

Services Australia

- ✓ In January 2025, Services Australia began recording all official travel non-compliance in its central system for recording non-compliance. Previously, some instances of official travel non-compliance were recorded separately. This positioned it to more effectively track and analyse travel compliance trends across the agency.
- ✓ Services Australia reported travel non-compliance to its Audit and Risk Committee.

Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission (ACIC)

- ✓ ACIC provided reporting to governance committees on travel expenditure and non-compliance.
- ➢ ACIC changed its travel approval process during the audit period. The new process resulted in some non-compliance no longer being detected and reduced the ability for ACIC to determine if value for money was being achieved in booking practices post travel approval. ACIC could have reviewed its approach to detecting and managing travel non-compliance following the change to the travel approval process.

Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

- ✓ DAFF reported on non-compliance with PGPA Act approval requirements, including details for official travel, to governance committees, the Chief Finance Officer and division heads.
- ✓ DAFF provided its Executive Board with international travel proposal reports.

Department of Industry, Science and Resources (DISR)

- ✓ DISR reported on non-compliance with PGPA Act approval requirements to governance committees. Reporting could have separately identified travel non-compliance.
- ➢ DISR reported on international travel to its executive management. No other travel reporting was provided to the Secretary, executive or committees to help inform whether travel policies and risk settings remained appropriate.

To read more, see paragraphs 3.88 and 3.110 of Compliance with Domestic and International Travel Requirements in Services Australia; paragraphs 2.74–2.82 of Compliance with Domestic and International Travel Requirements in the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission; paragraphs 3.91–3.96 of Compliance with Domestic and International Travel Requirements in the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry; and paragraphs 2.29–2.32 and 3.100– 3.108 of Compliance with Domestic and International Travel Requirements in the Department of Industry, Science and Resources.

Further reading

ANAO links

Management of Corporate Credit Cards | Australian National Audit Office (ANAO)

Gifts, Benefits and Hospitality | Australian National Audit Office (ANAO)

External links

Legislation

Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013 - Federal Register of Legislation

Department of Finance

Accountable Authority Instructions (AAIs) - (RMG 206) | Department of Finance

Australian Government Travel Policy | Department of Finance

Applying the Australian Government Travel Policy (RMG 424) | Department of Finance

Commonwealth Procurement Rules | Department of Finance

Non-Corporate Commonwealth Entities - key information (for RMG 400) | Department of Finance

Whole of Australian Government Travel Arrangements | Department of Finance