FAQ: Hotel and Lodging Tool (Hotel Engine) Contract 971-M1

State Agency travelers can now register their User profiles in the Hotel Engine platform to book lodging in Texas and globally. The Comptroller's Statewide Procurement Division (SPD) signed a contract (971-M1) in late September to replace the directory of State Travel Management Program (STMP) Hotel Rate Agreements that expired Sept. 30, 2018.

Prior to the platform's launch on Oct. 1, Agency Travel Coordinators were registered as Admins in the Hotel Engine platform and invited to webinars explaining how to invite their agency's travelers to set up User profiles, and designate Coordinators who can book lodging on behalf of other agency staff.

During implementation, STMP collated the responses below to questions posed by agencies, as well as links to additional information about Hotel Engine and STMP.

Contact Information:

- Contract: Lodging and Booking Tool (Hotel Engine) 971-M1
- To find hotels and make bookings online or by phone, contact the Hotel Engine 24-hour State of Texas Support Team to speak to a travel agent at 800-803-0452 or by email at support@hotelengine.com.
- For questions about STMP or the 971-M1 contract, contact Nicklaus Watson, STMP manager at 512-936-8458, or Gerard MacCrossan, Contract Development manager at 512-463-4468.

CONTRACT AND USE

- **What is Hotel Engine? How is it used?**
  Hotel Engine is a private hotel booking platform that connects State of Texas travelers to rates unavailable to the public and streamlines business travel management. With dedicated, 24/7 customer support services, a simple search and book process, and customized account management tools, Hotel Engine is the preferred vendor for the State of Texas. State travelers need to receive an invitation from their respective Hotel Engine account administrator. Please contact your agency's travel coordinator for more information.

- **Is Hotel Engine required for booking hotels?**
  Yes, state agencies are required by statute to use a statewide contract if one is in effect for commodities or services. The Hotel Engine booking application (contract 971-M1) replaces the legacy system for Hotel Rate Agreements which the Comptroller's Information Security Office has instructed STMP to retire due to the platform's identified information security vulnerabilities.
  Local governments and higher education institutions have the option of using this contract and any other SPD contract, but are not considered among state agencies required to use SPD's statewide contracts due to their different funding sources. Going forward, this contract will allow state travelers to book at contract rates year-round, and eliminate the gap that occurred each fall when HRAs expired and new contracts had not been signed by the hotels and loaded in the directory until mid-October.

- **Why didn't my agency receive advanced notification regarding the new hotel booking platform - Hotel Engine?**
  The Statewide Travel Management Program (STMP) hotel directory listings (in-state and out-of-state) expired on Sept. 30; state Travel Coordinators who are signed up with the STMP were notified via a GovDelivery message on Tuesday, September 25 of the new 971-M1 contract and invited to participate in Admin training. Hotel Engine will announce additional live trainings on a recurring basis, and recorded trainings are [available online](#).

- **Is Hotel Engine only for hotels that have a contract with the state?**
  The 971-M1 contract with Hotel Engine replaces individual Hotel Rate Agreements; Hotel Engine has discount rate agreements with thousands of hotels that are all available for travelers to select under the state contract and is actively establishing fixed rate contracts at or below GSA rate with hotels on the previous state contract. The local GSA reimbursement rate is provided as reference with every hotel for travelers when making a reservation for which they will be seeking reimbursement.

- **Are agencies going to receive audit findings if they do not use Hotel Engine for bookings?**
  The Comptroller's Fiscal Management division is granting an audit grace period for state agencies through November 30, 2018, to allow agencies time to transition their users to the Hotel Engine platform and the vendor actively adds properties at or below GSA rates. Agencies must still reimburse lodging at or below GSA rates during the grace period, or have valid exceptions. At time of audit, for FY18 and earlier contract rates, agencies may submit requests to the Comptroller's [Open Records Division](#); For bookings made after Oct. 1, 2018, agency Admins will be able to search previous booking records in Hotel Engine for any agency traveler to determine if a booking was made under the contract.

- **For state-agencies are we required to use this? What about current hotel contracted rates?**
  Yes, use of the 971-M1 managed state contract with Hotel Engine is required for state agencies just as any other statewide contract. Higher education institutions have the option of using this contract and any other SPD contract, but are not considered among state agencies required to use SPD's statewide contracts due to their different funding sources.

- **When did communication first go out to the agencies to use this state-mandated platform?**
  State Travel Coordinators who are signed up with the State Travel Management Program (SMTP) were notified on Sept. 25, 2018, of the new 971-M1 contract and invited to participate in admin training.

- **Why can't we simply go to the hotels and see if they offer state rates and book directly with hotels?**
  State agencies are required by statute to use a statewide contract if one is in effect for commodities or services. The Hotel Engine booking application (contract 971-M1) replaces the legacy system for Hotel Rate Agreements which the Comptroller's Information Security Office has instructed STMP to retire due to the platform's ISO vulnerabilities.

- **When does this take effect? We have to use this instead of going to the hotel's website?**
  The Hotel Engine platform for state travelers will be launched on Monday, Oct. 1, the day following the expiration of the existing hotel rate agreements. State agencies should roll out access to the Hotel Engine platform beginning Oct. 1. The 2018 Hotel Rate Agreements expire on 9/30/18 and will no longer be available to state agencies.

- **Is Hotel Engine only for hotels that have a contract with the state?**
  The 971-M1 contract with Hotel Engine replaces individual Hotel Rate Agreements; Hotel Engine has rate agreements with thousands of hotels and will be establishing contracts with hotels on the previous state contract.

- **Is this platform mandated for transient travel only or also for group reservations?**

As part of the 971-M1 contract, Hotel Engine can facilitate group reservations through the customer service line which can help agencies that previously may have had to issue an open market solicitation due to the value of the booking; this feature was not available on the previous Hotel Rate Agreement system.

- **Does Hotel Engine integrate with Concur?**
  Yes.

- **Is Hotel Engine for car rental, hotel reservations and flight?**
  No, the 971-M1 contract and Hotel Engine booking platform are only for lodging reservations. Travelers may choose to use the separate STMP contracts for hotel, car rental and air travel, or book through the State Travel Agency contracts with Shorts or NTS.

- **Is this platform only for hotels booked in the state of Texas?**
  Hotel Engine users may to book hotels in Texas, across the United States and internationally.

- **Are legislative agencies exempt?**
  Legislative agencies may use any statewide contract. For exemptions, please refer to Govt. Code 2155.203.

USER REGISTRATION AND RESERVATIONS

- **Can rooms be booked at above the GSA rate?**
  When you search on Hotel Engine, the results page shows both the Hotel Engine rate and the GSA rate next to every hotel. With both rates listed, you will be able to easily see the difference in rates. If the contract travel services are not available during the time or at the location necessary for the business purpose; or the contract travel service does not provide for the service required; or because the contractor is unable to provide the contract services due to a force majeure event, an exception letter is required.

- **Can I register an individual traveler and use Hotel Engine for personal leisure travel?**
  No. The Hotel Engine booking platform is only to be used for making business-related travel reservations. Any personal or leisure travel is strictly prohibited.

- **What training is available?**
  Hotel Engine's FAQs and Admin/User Guides are available on the State of Texas support page. A **video of the Admin webinar** from Thursday, September 27, which was updated to answer many of the additional questions submitted by coordinators attending the first session, is also available. A **User information video** is also available.

- **Can there be more than one Admin per agency?**
  Yes, each agency admin will set up their own Admin profile with access to all of their agency's Coordinator and User profiles, where they can run reports, set up or edit user profiles, or make bookings for themselves or other travelers.

- **Our agency does not have the travel coordinator book hotels for our travelers. Each individual makes their own reservations. How will those employees access this site?**
  Travel Coordinators will be provided on Monday with their agency-specific registration portal to send instructions by email to their agency's employees. Each traveling employee will use the link to set up their profile and can begin booking immediately. Admins have the option of creating profiles for travelers. Hotel Engine can assist Admins with bulk uploads to create profiles for large numbers of travelers.

- **Can travelers still book through state's travel agencies National and Shorts?**

The 971-M1 contract and Hotel Engine booking platform are only for lodging reservations. Travelers may book travel bundles through the State Travel Agency contracts with Shorts or NTS, or choose to use the separate STMP contracts for hotel, car rental and air travel.

- **Will State Employees still have the ability to use "Hotel.Com. or Travelocity"?**
  Hotel Engine is the preferred hotel vendor for the State of Texas. Fiscal Management is granting an audit grace period for state agencies to allow agencies time to transition their users to the Hotel Engine platform and the vendor actively adds properties at or below GSA rates. This grace period has been extended to run through Dec. 31, 2018.

- **We have travelers going into locations such as Boston, where if you are in the banking district you will not find a hotel under the GSA. Our Travelers can get special approval from our Executive Director to exceed the GSA. How will that work?**
  Travelers may reserve rooms through Hotel Engine above the GSA rate. Reimbursement or payment authorization is an agency decision.

- **How can we make certain they have approval to exceed the GSA? Or if they plan to use their meal allowance to cover the difference?**
  Reimbursement or payment authorization is an agency decision. Admins will be able to run reports from Hotel Engine when comparing traveler's reimbursement requests.

- **If the travelers are required to use Hotel Engine for booking hotels, how would I know if they are using Hotel Engine when they submit their travel reimbursements? Will Admins get notifications when hotels are booked?**
  Under configurations, an admin can set up notifications for themselves every time a user books a hotel.
  The trends tab in Hotel Engine will allow admins to view and print reports of all trips booked in Hotel Engine. Admins will be able to sort/filter by user and many other details.

- **Where are the star ratings sourced from?**
  The Star ratings are populated in the Hotel Engine application by the GDS hotel listing system.

- **If this site uses GSA rates, how is this vendor getting us lower prices without restrictions?**
  Hotel Engine already contracts for discount rates with thousands of Texas hotels and chains and 150,000 properties globally. In addition, Hotel Engine is negotiating rates on the State of Texas' behalf and offering them through the platform to offer a large selection of hotels. Any hotels with restrictions during that time will not show up.

- **Are there ways to filter upcoming trips?**
  Yes, Admins can filter trips by user and date from the Trends tab. A general User has the ability to search and book their own travel, within the rules set by the admin for that agency account

- **Can all the guests I setup have the same email?**
  Users cannot all have the same email. Each User needs their own email. Admins or Coordinators may book for "Guests" they set up that don't have their own User account, and changes or cancelations will be managed by the Admin or Coordinator.

- **What should an agency do that has board members who book their own travel, but do not have a state agency email address? How would they be set up as a user? They are traveling on state business and are allowed a tax-exempt status.**
  Hotel Engine can help set up users with special circumstances.

- **I would be an admin for two state agencies. Would I have one login or will there be two?**
  Each agency has their own account. Several Travel Coordinators have already been set up with two agency accounts. Contact Lisa@hotelengine.com directly with questions.

- **Does the Admin role have booking approval functionality?**
  Hotel Engine doesn't currently have an approval workflow and we will work with STMP to prioritize additional functionality needs.

- **What internet browsers are supported by Hotel Engine?**
  Hotel Engine supports the following browsers:

  - Firefox v65 and higher
  - Chrome v72 and higher
  - Edge v18 and higher
  - Safari v12 and higher
  - 1E v11 and higher

- **Sometimes the hotel rates on the first page are inconsistent with the second page of option in Hotel Engine, why is that?**
  That is because the technology system that is used to book hotel rooms first sends over a range of rates that could be available at the hotel and this is the estimated nightly rate that is shown to you on the search page. Most of the time this rate will be consistent with the next page where room selections are listed. However, this rate is subject to change based on the live availability given to Hotel Engine by the hotel's technology system.

BILLING, CREDIT CARDS AND RESERVATIONS

- **How will credit card information entered into the Hotel Engine website be used?**
  Every member must enter a credit or debit card number or have a credit card on file to reserve a room; this card will not be charged at the time of booking. Coordinators that are booking on behalf of other staff are recommended to use an agency-held card to make that reservation so that they are not handling cards belonging to individual employees. Cards are not charged at reservation; travelers will be required to present payment at the time of stay.
  Credit card information is never stored within the application. These are all encrypted to show only the last 4 digits. Payment profiles are specific to individual users. Only the user who uploaded the credit card information can see that credit card as an option.

- **Does the agency have to set up a centralized payment method, or must Admins upload a stored card for every agency traveler?**
  An Admin may input stored card for a User when making a hotel reservation, otherwise the card information should be inputted by the User in their profile when making their own reservation.

- **Does the payment option entered matter since the traveler can pay with whatever method they want?**
  The credit card on the booking is used to identify the traveler when contacting Hotel Engine Customer Support and is used for credit card authorization and could potentially be charged for no-cancellation, no-show.

- **I booked a Hotel Engine Direct Bill reservation and the front desk is insisting that I still pay for the room with my own card. Why is this happening and what do I do?**
  Hotel Engine uses a different process than other hotel direct bill situations. Please inform the hotel clerk that Hotel Engine is paying for the room and taxes on behalf of the traveler. The traveler credit card should only be used for incidentals and the card on file should be used for the room and tax charges.

Hotel Engine is working closely with hotel representatives to properly educate their staff on Hotel Engine Direct Bill payment procedures. In the meantime, if issues arise, please call customer support as soon as possible at 1-800-803-0452 so that we can assist.

- **Why are Hotel Engine reservations booked through Expedia?**
  Hotel Engine initially engaged with Expedia to ensure SOT travelers had booking options while they were negotiating with hotel partners to provide GSA or lower rates. Hotel Engine allowed hotels to offer rates based upon availability, so they used Expedia to supplement their inventory to ensure they could display viable options, even if the hotels were not on their program during those periods. Hotel Engine began turning off Expedia as a lodging option at the request of the department admins, and will continue to do so, except for the areas of limited inventory.

- **Will Users' personal credit card numbers be visible to Admins and Coordinators?**
  Credit card information is never stored within the application. These are all encrypted to show only the last 4 digits. Payment profiles are specific to individual users. Only the user who uploaded the credit card information can see that credit card as an option.

- **How do I delineate which coordinators and/or users are allowed to use which card or no card (user must use their own)?**
  All users will have to present a form of payment to the hotel. The card information used to reserve the hotel booking will never be transferred to the hotel for payment.

- **Is the rate automatically limited to the GSA?**
  The maximum GSA rate for each hotel's location is listed under the booking rate for the requested night. The user has the option of booking a room higher than the GSA rate, but will not be guaranteed full reimbursement above that rate by their agency unless prior approval has been granted.

- **Are Hotel Engine reservations prepaid bookings or are credit cards used only to guarantee reservations?**
  The reservations are guaranteed by the credit or debit card; payment is not completed until a payment of the traveler's choice is presented at the hotel when the traveler checks in. The first time a card is used it may be charged $1 to reserve, then $1 refunded. There is no difference in booking rate for a credit or debit card.

- **Will traveler receive detailed receipt breaking out taxes and fees, parking, etc.?**
  Travelers need to get the receipt from the hotel for seeking reimbursements as that will be the most accurate invoice for the stay.

- **CIty/County/State and taxes on parking have always been allowable and separate from State Sales Tax on goods/services — how are these identified?**
  Travelers should get the itemized folio from the hotel at time of checkout.

- **Is the room purchased from the hotel or Hotel Engine?**
  The room is reserved through Hotel Engine, but the payment transaction is directly with the hotel.

- **Will I get my Reward Points from the hotel?**
  The traveler should always provide their rewards number at check in. It is at the discretion of each hotel property to grant rewards points for each stay.

- **I can't find the hotel I am used to using, why isn't it there?**
  Hotel Engine is working aggressively to renegotiate rates directly with the hotels so that we are securing the best hotel rates while meeting your diverse set of requirements. If there is a specific hotel you are interested in, please email Support@HotelEngine.com.

- **Can I book outside of the United States, Mexico and Canada?**

Yes, Hotel Engine offers many international hotel options. A state employee is entitled to be reimbursed for actual lodging and meal expenses incurred while conducting state business at a duty point in a foreign country other than Canada and the Mexico. Prior approval by the agency's chief administrator or chief administrator's designee is required. Please consult your travel coordinator for more information.

CUSTOMER SERVICE

- **We have multiple travelers unable to connect outside of state computers and must phone hotels. How will they access the contract?**
  The Hotel Engine platform may be accessed from any computer, not just a state system. If travelers do not have computer access, they may call the Hotel Engine 24/7 customer service line to make bookings or cancellations.

- **Can cancellations be made directly with the hotel?**
  Cancellations should be made through the Hotel Engine application or by calling free 24/7 Hotel Engine State of Texas customer service line at 1-800-803-0452. Travelers should not cancel bookings directly with hotels. To cancel online, follow these instructions:
  1. Log in to hotelengine.com.
  2. Click on the "Trips" tab.
  3. Select the booking you want to cancel.
  4. Click "Cancel Reservation" and confirm the cancellation request in the popup window.
  5. You will receive an email confirmation once it is completed.
  If you miss the cancellation deadline, please contact the Hotel Engine 24/7 customer service line. They are happy to assist you.

- **What is the cancellation policy?**
  Hotel Engine never charges for cancellations. However, the hotel may charge a fee per its own cancellation policy. Before you complete a booking, you can view the hotel's cancellation policy under "Terms & Conditions" on the checkout page. You can also find the hotel's cancellation policy under "Important Information" on your booking's confirmation page.

- **Can I add or reduce rooms to my hotel reservation?**
  You cannot add or reduce the number of rooms on an upcoming reservation once you complete the booking process. If you need additional rooms, you can simply cancel and rebook a new reservation. If you require assistance with cancelling, rebooking, or changing a reservation, please call the Hotel Engine State of Texas support line at 1-800-803-0452.

- **Can I change the name on my hotel reservation?**
  If you need to change the name on your hotel reservation, you have two options:
  1. Cancel your current reservation online and rebook a new reservation under the new name.
  2. Call the Hotel Engine State of Texas support line at 1-800-803-0452.

- **Is each reservation automatically exempted from state hotel occupancy tax if booked through this tool?**
  When reserving a room for a tax-exempt employee, you must indicate this on the checkout page of the booking process. You need to manually select "YES" under "Tax-Exempt Stay?" every time you complete a booking on Hotel Engine. The traveler will handle tax exemption with the hotel directly.

- **Will agencies be required to give an exception code if they do not use this site?**
  Agencies that claim exemptions from statewide contracts should use appropriate exemptions codes. For more information about exemptions, see the Texas Procurement and Contract Management Guide Appendix 31.

- **What do we do about October that was booked in September before this became available?**
  Hotels reservations completed prior to the Hotel Engine application going live may be honored.