

Travel and Expense Reimbursement Policy

- 1.0 Purpose** The purpose of this policy is two-fold. To establish procedures for authorization and reimbursement of travel and other expenses by the County employees, elected officials and appointed officials for the purpose of conducting County business; and to encourage and promote responsible, efficient, ethical and legal utilization of funds.
- 2.0 Applicability** To all regular full and part-time employees. This policy also applies to elected and appointed officials and all contract employees.
- 3.0 Policy**
- 3.1 The County is committed to minimizing travel cost while providing a reasonable balance between the needs of the County and the needs of the traveler. An employee or board member traveling on official business is expected to exercise the same care in incurring expenses that a prudent person would exercise if traveling on personal business and expending personal funds. Excess costs, circuitous routes, luxury accommodations, and services unnecessary in the performance of official business are not acceptable under this standard. Employees and board members will be responsible for unauthorized cost and any additional expenses incurred for personal preference or convenience.
- 3.2 The policy of the County is to reimburse the employee or county official traveling on authorized County business for all legitimate expenses incurred as a result of the travel as authorized per this procedure. The Finance Officer, the County Manager and the respective Department Head are responsible for monitoring the initial need for the travel, the availability of funds, and to insure that the cost of travel to the County is held to a reasonable minimum.
- 3.3 The same procedure for approval and reporting of travel expenditures apply to both in-County and out-of-County travel. Non-employees (i.e. board members) traveling on County business shall be subject to the same policies and requirements as employees if the county is paying the expenses.
- 3.4 Travel advances represent a payment of public funds to an employee or official for travel costs, which have not yet been incurred. Request for a travel advance must be presented and properly documented to the County Finance office at least ten (10) days prior to the scheduled travel date. Advances should be made for the minimum amount necessary, paid just prior to travel, and reconciled immediately at the conclusion of the travel. They are not to be used as interest free loans.
- 3.5 N.C.G.S. 14-247 states that it is illegal for a publicly owned vehicle to be used for a private purpose. In accordance with this Statute, vehicles owned by the county shall not be used for personal purposes.

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- 3.6 N.C.G.S. 159-181(a) states that any officer or employee of a local government or public authority who submits a written claim or approves a claim for funds that he/she knows to be false is guilty of a misdemeanor.
- 3.7 Violations of this policy, to include all applicable statutory laws will result in disciplinary action up to and including dismissal.

4.0 Unauthorized Costs

Employees and County officials will be responsible for unauthorized costs and any additional expenses incurred for personal preference or convenience.

5.0 Definitions and General Information

5.1 Definitions

- a. **Appropriation** – The amount needed for annual travel must be included in the annual budget request for each department. This total will include the estimated travel costs of anticipated training and conference trips and the estimated costs of routine travel.
- b. **Authorization** – Travel on official county business, both within State and out of state for conferences and educational purposes must be authorized in advance by the Department Head, with approval by the County Manager. When deemed necessary by the County Manager, the Board of Commissioners may be asked to authorize travel.

The Finance Office will receive and verify all expense reports and is responsible for determining that an unencumbered appropriation sufficient to cover the estimated cost of the approved travel remains in the appropriate expenditure item.

- c. **Employee's Duty Station** – "Duty Station" is defined as the job location at which the employee spends the majority of his or her working hours. For an employee in travel status, the duty station should be the point where traveling begins the majority of the time (home or office). The designation of an employee's home as the duty station requires prior approval by the department head and shall only be approved when leaving from one's residence would reduce travel costs.
- d. **Requesting Party** – The person who will be reimbursed for travel costs incurred while conducting County business.
- e. **Subsistence (Meals & Lodging)** – Subsistence is an allowance related to lodging, meal costs, and gratuities thereon.

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- f. **Travel** – Travel is defined as going to and from the normal duty station to a site located in / outside the County to conduct County business. Authorization of travel requests will be based upon need and cost / benefit of travel as determined by the authorizing party.

The requesting party will be reimbursed for actual cost incurred only, subject to the limitations established in this policy.

1. **Personal Vehicle** – A requesting party may use his / her personal vehicle for travel and be reimbursed for mileage if a County vehicle is unavailable or if car pooling is not available or practical. If a county vehicle is available and the employee chooses to drive his/her personal vehicle, he / she will be reimbursed at one-half of the current rate of reimbursement.
2. **IRS Rate** – The allowable IRS rate per mile will be paid to an employee or County official who uses his / her personal vehicle except when there is a county vehicle available and the employee chooses to use their personal vehicle. (See f 1 above).
3. **Rental Vehicle** – A receipt is necessary for reimbursement. Rental vehicles are to be used as a last resort. Use of a rental vehicle must be approved in advance by the Department Head and County Manager.
4. **Commuting** – No reimbursement shall be made for the use of a personal vehicle in commuting from an employee's home to his / her duty station.

5.2 General Information

- a. **County Credit Card** – Where practical, county credit cards will be issued to administrative County employees and Board of County Commissioners as a tool to help minimize the personal financial impact of conducting County business. Detailed documentation is required of all County credit card use. Inappropriate, unauthorized or unreported use of County credit cards will be grounds for disciplinary action.
- b. **Transportation** – Transportation expenses include personal automobile, taxi, bus, train, airplane, motor pool charges, auto rentals, tolls and parking fees. All travel expenses must be incurred by and for employees, Board Members, or other eligible travelers while conducting official County business or in order to be eligible for reimbursement.
- c. **Lodging** – In general, most lodging will be arranged in advance and charged to the County credit card. When traveling with family, if there is a difference between the single and double rate, which is usually shown on Internet

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advertisements, the County will only reimburse the employee or County official for the single rate.

- d. **Mileage** – The County will pay employees on the basis of actual mileage for the use of their private vehicle. Mileage is measured from the determined point of departure (as agreed upon by the Department Head or designee and the employee) to the destination (and return). The County allowance is based on current IRS regulations. All mileage must be reasonable and may be disallowed if determined to be otherwise. Parking fees will be reimbursed. However, any parking tickets received while on County business are the responsibility of the employee.
- e. **Meals** – Employees are entitled to the Standard Daily Meal per diem or reimbursement of actual meal expenses if traveling on official business to attend a meeting of a Board, Commission or other gathering subject to the following schedule:

	<u>In and Out of State</u>
Breakfast	\$13.00
Lunch	\$15.00
Dinner	<u>\$26.00</u>
Total Meals	\$54.00

Gratuities are included in the per diem rates. Meals included as part of a conference or registration fee will not be included in the daily meal reimbursement. For example, if dinner for one day of the conference is included in the conference registration fee, the requesting party cannot claim the dinner reimbursement for that day. Also, a hot breakfast provided at conference or hotel will not be included in the daily meal reimbursement.

During overnight trips, employees may receive allowances for meals for partial days of travel when the partial day is the day of departure or the day of return. Supporting documentation (agenda, dates, time) must be attached for reimbursement.

Breakfast – Depart duty station prior to 6:00 A.M.

Lunch – Depart duty station prior to 10:00 A.M. or return to duty station after 2:00 P.M. If stopping for lunch would cause the employee to return after 2:00 P.M., when he / she would otherwise have returned before 2:00 P.M., lunch will not be reimbursed.

Dinner – Return to duty station after 8:00 P.M. If stopping for dinner would cause the employee to return after 8:00 P.M., when he / she would otherwise have returned before 8:00 P.M., dinner will not be reimbursed.

The County will not reimburse for Day Trips. The IRS states if no overnight stay is necessary for trip, then untaxed meal reimbursements are not allowed.

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- f. **Miscellaneous** – The County does not reimburse for alcoholic beverages, in-room movies, room service or tips associated with room service (i.e. bellhop, maid, etc.).
- g. **Telephone** – One reasonable personal long distance phone call (not to exceed \$5.00) is allowed for every three nights away on business.

6.0 Procedures

Steps for Submitting Travel/Expense Reports

1. Upon completion of any travel or reimbursable expenditure, the employee shall complete and submit a Travel/Expense Report within 10 working days of expenditure.
2. No reimbursement will be paid without a written travel claim signed by the employee and approved by the Department Head. All required documentation (verification of the event) and receipts for the cost of hotels and related travel expenses must be attached to the “Claim for Travel Expenses Form”.
 - a. Lodging, hotel guarantees, or any other expenses charged to the County credit card should be noted on the Travel/Expense Report. These amounts will be paid directly to the Card Company and not reimbursed to the employee or County official.
 - b. Travel/Expense Reports are to be submitted to the Finance Officer who will review all travel related transactions and advise the County Manager or Department Head of any apparent deviations from these procedures.
 - c. The Finance Officer will issue payment for balances due the traveler. A copy of the approved Travel/Expense Report will be provided to the employee or County official.
 - d. In the event of a disallowed or excess expense claim, the Finance Officer will return the Travel/Expense Report for modification and, if needed, collect payment due the County. The County Manager will assist in collecting such amounts from the employee or County official, if necessary.
 - e. The Finance Officer will maintain a chronological file of outstanding travel reports in order that proper disposition may be made of delinquent or other unsettled items.
 - f. Any employee or County official who willfully misstates his travel expense and is duly reimbursed for such will be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal and may be liable for criminal prosecution as provided by law.
 - g. The Travel/Expense Report must be used to report any travel expenses (in County, out of County and out of State) or for requesting reimbursement of meal expenses.

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3. The County Commissioners shall rule on any differences of opinion in the interpretation of the terms of this procedure that cannot be resolved to the mutual satisfaction of the employee or County official and the County Manager.
4. Before the reimbursement is made, the Finance Officer will determine that an amount sufficient to pay the request has been encumbered for payment or that there is a sufficient unexpended appropriation in the expenditure item. The Finance Officer will immediately inform the County Manager, Department Head and the requesting party if payment cannot be made.

A requesting party submitting a falsified reimbursement form will be subject to disciplinary action and / or criminal prosecution. An authorizing party or Finance Officer who knowingly approves a falsified reimbursement form will be subject to disciplinary action and / or criminal prosecution. Violations of the County's travel policy may result in disciplinary action up to and including dismissal from County employment.

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