

SECTION 17

TRAVEL POLICIES & PROCEDURES

The purpose of this document is to establish and communicate equitable standards and effective procedures for reducing travel expenditures, and to ensure consistent and fair treatment of all members of the County whose travel will be reimbursed or paid for by the County. This policy applies to all travel regardless of the source of funds.

This policy should help employees:

- Identify reimbursable versus non-reimbursable expenditures;
- Clarify responsibility for controlling and reporting travel expenditures;
- Identify required documentation for reimbursement of travel expenditures.

1. Introduction

Travel expenditures incurred on official County business will be paid by the County if the expenditures are properly approved reasonable, and documented. County approved travelers who incur such expenditures should neither lose nor gain personal funds as a result of the travel. Travel shall be defined as traveling outside the Jefferson County area.

This document covers reimbursement for transportation, auto mileage, auto rentals, hotel lodging, meals, tolls and parking, telephone calls, meeting registration fees, and other miscellaneous expenditures. It also details the documentation required, as well as describing travel cash advance procedures and the authorizations needed for reimbursement.

The County will reimburse travelers for the cost of accommodations and services that meet reasonable and customary standards for convenience, safety and comfort. Travelers should incur expenditures prudently to assist in controlling their department's travel budget.

If travel expenditures are to be changes to a grant, sponsored by an outside agency, the requirements of the outside agency prevail.

2. Approvals

Each person who is to travel on official business for the County is required to obtain prior approval by the appropriate department head or his/her designee.

All out-of-state travel must be placed on the agenda and approved by Commissioners' Court whether previously approved in the budget or not.

3. Reimbursable Expenditures

For authorized trips, the actual reasonable expenditures will be reimbursed subject to the limits set forth in this policy document.

The following items are reimbursable within the limits explained in the supporting sections:

- a. Use of personal automobile
- b. Cost of car rental
- c. Airplane travel
- d. Lodging
- e. Meals
- f. Business related telephone calls
- g. Registration fees for meetings

4. Use of Personal Automobile

A County vehicle must be used if available.

Personal vehicle travel shall be reimbursed at the official IRS rate for the effective calendar year. Plus parking and tolls (with original receipt). Mileage will be calculated using the “Official Mileage Guide for the State of Texas.” For two or more persons traveling together in the same vehicle, only one person will be reimbursed for mileage.

Reimbursement should not exceed the cost of commercial transportation, where available. For any round trip, where County vehicle is not available, and a person decides to drive his/her personal vehicle, the County will pay the lesser of the cost of one plane ticket (provided air service is available) or the current reimbursable rate per mile.

An employee involved in an auto accident while on County business is covered by his/her own automobile insurance policy for damage to his/her own vehicle. An employee involved in an accident using his/her own automobile for County business will not be reimbursed for any out-of-pocket deductible expense to repair his/her automobile.

5. Rental Cars

Automobile rentals should be limited to situations where other means of transportation are not practical, economical or available, and to emergency situations. Reimbursable costs include the daily rental fee of a mid-sized car, mileage fees, gasoline charges, parking expenditures, and tollway fees. In order to get reimbursement for the above items, original receipts and the original rental agreement or check-in receipt must be turned in with the Travel Expenditure Claim Form. Automobile rental companies offer various forms of insurance. It is important when renting automobiles on County business to purchase the correct type of Insurance offered by rental companies.

a. Insurance You Should Take:

The insurance coverage called variously “collision,” “loss Damage Waiver,” or “Damage Waiver.” This type of insurance covers damage to or theft of the rental vehicle.

b. Insurance you should NOT take:

Insurance offered as “Personal Accident” or “Personal Injury” insurance covers the medical bills of the driver of the rental car and any passengers. This is redundant coverage for persons covered under the County’s health insurance plan.

Coverage variously titled “Additional Liability” or “Liability” or “Excess Liability” pays for damage to other people or their property. The County has a policy covering this exposure. If you have an accident please file a report with the rental company, the Auditor’s Office and the Risk Management Department

c. Insurance You Can Take If You Want To (But The County Won’t Pay For it):

Another type of insurance is variously called “Personal Effects” or “Personal Belongings” insurance. This add-on provides coverage for the personal belongings of the driver or passengers in the rental car.

6. Travel by Air

When the most efficient travel is by air, reimbursement will be limited to coach fare except for the instances noted below:

- In the event of medical necessity;
- In an extreme emergency.

An employee may upgrade his/her travel class at any time by personally paying the incremental cost. A letter of explanation will be required for any exceptions. The County will reimburse travelers for the use of his/her personal airplane at the official State of Texas rate for the effective calendar year. The current effective rates are as follows:

- Single engine aircrafts - \$.40 per highway mile;
- Twin engine aircrafts - \$.55 per highway mile.

Highway miles will be calculated using the “Official Mileage Guide for the State of Texas.”

Note: The last page of the ticket showing the itinerary and costs, usually called the “passenger receipt,” is required for reimbursement. Also, cab fares or shuttles to destination will be reimbursed with original receipt.

The County agrees in general that frequent flier points accumulated by employees traveling on County business belong to the individual, not the County. The traveler, in turn, has the responsibility to the County never to elect more expensive travel alternatives in order to accrue frequent flier mileage credit.

a. Cost Savings Considerations

When planning your airline itinerary, consider the following cost saving strategies. Make reservations in advance. Discounted fares are available when purchased thirty days before departure. Most of these fares are non-refundable but the fare paid can be applied to a future non-refundable ticket on the same airline upon payment of a fee (usually \$50). Be flexible in selection of airlines and times of travel. One airline may have a promotional fare not offered by competing carriers.

7. Lodging

Reimbursement shall be allowed for accommodations up to the single room rate unless two or more County employees are sharing a room.

Note: The actual hotel bill is required for reimbursement.

8. Meals

Reimbursement shall be allowed for meals as follows: \$6.00 breakfast, \$8.00 lunch, and \$16.00 dinner. Time of departure must be on or before 7:00 am to receive reimbursement for breakfast, or on or before 11:00 am to receive reimbursement for lunch. Time of return must be on or after 1:00 pm to receive reimbursement for lunch, or on or after 6:00 pm to receive reimbursement for dinner. Room service will be allowed if meal is the same or less than per diem amount outlined above. Meals included in the costs of registration fees or when served by airlines at no additional charge to the traveler shall not be submitted as reimbursable items.

9. Telephone

The County will reimburse all “County business” telephone calls.

10. Registration Fees

Registration fees will be paid directly to the sponsoring organization upon submission of a properly completed debtor form to the Auditor's Office. Since most travel is budgeted a year in advance, and dates and times are known, there should be no problem submitting for registration fees at least a month in advance of a meeting.

If registration fees are not prepaid, the County will reimburse travelers for registration fees and conference materials when receipts are submitted with the Travel Expenditure Claim Form. If a receipt cannot be obtained, conference brochures listing costs or other documentation for the expenditure should be submitted.

11. Non-Reimbursable Expenditures

Reimbursement shall not be made for expenditures incurred for the sole benefit of the traveler such as valet service, entertainment, movie rentals, etc. Other expenditures not reimbursable include:

- Traffic fines for parking or speeding violations;
- Lost or stolen cash or other personal property;
- Repairs to personal vehicles used for County travel;
- Cancellation fees for unreasonable failure to cancel hotel or transportation reservations;
- Spouse or family member expenditures;
- Commuting costs between home and the office;
- Laundry service.

Travel with companion

The County will not reimburse personal, spouse, or companion travel and other related travel expenditures. The employee is responsible for allocating only his/her portion of expenditure on the Travel Expenditure Claim Form and for identifying them in the hotel and other receipts. The County will pay only up to the single room rate at hotels unless two or more County employees are sharing a room.

12. Travel Cash Advance

Travel cash advances for hotel fees, per diem meals, known mileage, known parking fees, rental car fees, etc. should be submitted to the Auditor's Office for approval and presented to the Treasure's Office for payment no more than one week before the trip. Use the standard, Cash Advance Form as indicated in Exhibit II.

13. Personal Travel

The County does not provide reimbursement for personal expenses incurred while on official County business. If, for other than County business, a traveler takes an indirect route, reimbursement for transportation costs will be that which have been incurred by traveling the most direct route.

14. Travel Expenditure Claim

The key to prompt reimbursement is proper documentation. This includes a clear statement of the business purpose of the trip, a copy of the meeting/conference agenda, and receipts. The points from which, and to which, the claimant travels, with the hour and date of departure and arrival; towns visited; object of each visit; and the specific expenditures incurred are to be clearly shown.

To receive reimbursement for authorized travel, please submit a Travel Expenditure Claim Form and attached documentation in duplicate to the Auditor's Office. All Travel Expenditure Claim Forms should be submitted within one week from return of trip. Travel Expenditure Claim Forms are available in Printing and can be requested at any time. One form is included with this policy. A separate Travel Expenditure Claim Form is to be submitted for each trip taken. Original documents (not photocopies) such as receipted bills for all hotel charges, the last page of the airline ticket showing the itinerary and costs, usually called the "passenger receipt" and receipts for other expenditures whenever possible must be attached to the Travel Expenditure Claim Form for documentation. Credit card charge slips will not serve as adequate documentation for transportation, room or car rental expenditures. In the event a receipt is lost, please provide a written explanation. If a Travel Cash Advance was acquired for a trip, this should be noted on the Travel Expenditure Claim Form, and a copy of the Cash Advance (in duplicate) should be attached.

The traveler is required to sign the Travel Expenditure Claim Form certifying that the amounts included on the report are actual and reasonable; the purpose of the trip must be indicated. The Travel Expenditure Claim must be approved by the department head or his/her designee. Elected officials' and department heads' Travel Expenditure Claim Forms will be reviewed for propriety by the Auditor's Office.

The Auditor's Office is responsible for the review of all Travel Expenditure Claim Forms. During the review of these reports, the Auditor is authorized to return any questionable or incomplete reports to the employee in order to obtain additional approval or documentation to support expenditures.

Although the Auditor's Office has 'final review' of documentation before payment of these expenditures, it is the responsibility of each employee, as well as the person approving the Travel Expenditure Claim Form to ensure that there is neither appearance nor occurrence of extravagant unsupported expenditures for travel.

Refunds of unused travel cash advances should be submitted to the Treasurer's Office. A copy of the receipt should be submitted with the Travel Expenditure Claim Form.