BENTON COUNTY TRAVEL POLICY

1.0 DEFINITIONS

“Authorizing Individual” shall mean the appropriate Elected Official, County Administrator, Department Manager (or designee) who has fiscal responsibility for the travel budget in question.

“BOCC” shall mean the Board of County Commissioners.

“Day Travel” shall mean travel to location(s) outside of the “elected official only exclusion zone” or “exclusion zone” when the “traveler” does not stay in lodging away from their home for one or more nights.

“Elected Official Only Exclusion Zone” shall mean the area inside the oval depicted and illustrated in Exhibit “A” to this Policy.

“Exclusion Zone” shall mean the area inside the boundaries of Benton and Franklin Counties.

“Overnight Travel” shall mean travel to location(s) outside of the “elected official only exclusion zone” or “exclusion zone” when the “traveler” does stay in County reimbursed, employee paid, or free lodging away from their home for one or more nights.

“Travel Expense Reimbursement” shall mean County financial responsibility for certain registration, transportation, lodging, and meal costs related to travel for County business. This may be in the form of authorizing Travelers to use County credit cards or “P-cards” or in the form of financially reimbursing Travelers for expenses that they advance on behalf of County.

“Traveler” shall mean a person (not organization) meeting the criteria of Sections 1.2.1-1.2.2.

1.1 PURPOSE

Benton County hereby adopts a policy to establish official procedures and guidelines for travel approved related costs and reimbursement of ordinary and reasonably necessary expenses of the Traveler, including; registration, transportation, lodging, and meal expenses incurred in performance of County related business.

It is the policy of Benton County that business travel and expenses are restricted to those activities that are reasonably necessary and clearly in the best interest of the County. All Travelers need to remain sensitive to the potential negative public perceptions regarding business expenses incurred by local government employees and to use prudence and good judgment when traveling at the County’s expense.

1.2 REIMBURSEMENT AUTHORIZATION/APPROVAL

Travelers’ authorized/approved to receive travel expense reimbursements within budgetary restraints are restricted to the following:
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1.2.1 Elected Officials, County Administrator, Department Managers, County employees and volunteers.

1.2.2 Members of Benton County Boards and/or Commissions.

No travel expense reimbursements will be made under any circumstances to any organizations.

1.3 TRAVEL AUTHORIZATION/APPROVAL

1.3.1 Authorizing Individual is responsible for pre-approving travel as required in this Section 1.3 even if some entity other than the County funds part or all of the expenses related to travel. In the case of Elected County Commissioner travel outside the “elected official only exclusion zone”, the BOCC, shall, by majority action, approve travel even if some entity other than the County funds part or all of the expenses related to travel.

Following BOCC’s approval to travel and subsequent review of the reimbursement document(s), per RCW 36.32.310, the document(s) shall be filed with the Clerk of the Superior Court, be approved by a Superior Court Judge, and returned to the Commissioners’ Office for payment. All originals will then be sent to the Clerk of the Superior Court for filing purposes.

1.3.2 Pre-approval by an Authorizing Individual is required for all travel under the following circumstances:

1.3.2.1 Out-of-state travel; or

1.3.2.2 If within the State of Washington, to destinations outside the “exclusion zone”.

1.3.3 Authorizing Individual approving travel shall ensure that each Traveler has provided sufficient information about the proposed travel such that a determination can be made that travel pertains to official County business. To the extent available, pre-approval requests or reimbursement requests shall include a travel itinerary and/or printed material indicating the overall agenda or content of the subject of travel.

1.3.4 Authorizing Individual shall ensure availability of budgeted funds to pay travel expenses.

1.3.5 Authorizing Individual may approve reimbursement to Traveler for attendance at job-related seminars, conferences, conventions, training or other appearances so long as they pertain to County business.
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1.3.6 Both BOCC and Auditor shall administer and announce the current published rates:


The BOCC shall approve these rates by resolution.

1.4 REGISTRATION COSTS

1.4.1 Authorizing Individual shall reimburse Traveler or prepay registration for the meeting, conference, convention or work session for official County business.

1.4.2 Authorizing Individual may reimburse Traveler for any educational courses taken, including seminars, classes, trainings, etc. if it is deemed that the training will benefit the County, that it pertains to a County-related purpose, and the appropriate budget authority has been already established for this purpose.

1.5 TRANSPORTATION COSTS

1.5.1 Authorizing Individual shall reimburse Traveler the actual and reasonably necessary costs of transportation to conduct official County business as follows:

1.5.1.1 The method of transportation is by the most economical and safest mode, primarily by air, rail, and vehicle, available and the route most direct or advantageous to the County.

1.5.1.2 Unless less expensive fares unavailable, reimburse the cost of coach class fare for a given mode of travel.

1.5.1.3 Necessary taxi or public transportation costs.

1.5.1.4 To ensure cost efficiency, if the department has an assigned County vehicle, this vehicle shall be the primary method of travel, to the extent available. Authorizing Individual is responsible for arranging the use of a County vehicle or may approve the use of a leased/rented third-party vehicle for travel. When approving leased/rented third-party vehicles for Traveler conducting official County business:

1.5.1.4.1 Traveler shall obtain a government rate whenever possible.

1.5.1.4.2 Traveler shall lease/rent the standard third-party vehicle that adequately carries the person(s) and equipment needed for conducting County business.
1.5.1.4.3 Authorizing Individual shall not reimburse vehicle insurance offered by the leasing/rental agency per Risk Management’s recommendation.

1.5.1.4.4 If a County vehicle or a leased/rented third-party vehicle is available, and the Traveler nevertheless chooses to use a personal vehicle, mileage will not be reimbursed.

1.5.1.5 When a County vehicle or a leased/rented third-party vehicle is not available for Traveler’s use; the Authorizing Individual may approve the use of a personal vehicle and shall reimburse Traveler at the current approved mileage rate by resolution from the BOCC.

1.5.1.5.1 Mileage will not be reimbursed for that portion of a trip, which would be part of the normal commute.

1.5.1.5.2 If a non-bargaining employee is temporarily re-assigned to another office for the day, their travel to the new location is considered their commute time and will not be reimbursed. If a bargaining employee is temporarily re-assigned to another office for the day, follow their Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) regarding their travel.

1.5.2 Travelers driving a County vehicle or leased/rented third-party vehicle on County business shall follow the regulations of Resolution 86 104, the Policy regarding use of County vehicles.

1.5.3 Reimbursement shall be available for reasonably necessary parking and toll costs if detailed receipts are submitted.

1.5.4 Valet parking costs may only be reimbursed when no reasonable parking alternative is available or when it is the least expensive parking service available.

1.5.5 The Traveler shall provide a copy of vehicle insurance when using a private vehicle.

1.5.6 Only authorized/approved Travelers may ride in County vehicles or leased/rented third-party vehicles.

1.6 LODGING COSTS

1.6.1 Lodging within the “elected official only exclusion zone” will not be approved or reimbursed for Elected Officials and within the “exclusion zone” for the County Administrator, Department Managers, County employees, and volunteers.
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1.6.2 Authorizing Individual may approve reimbursement request for actual lodging costs, plus tax, incurred for single occupancy up to the current lodging rate approved by resolution from the BOCC.

1.6.3 Lodging costs that are greater than the lodging limits approved by resolution from the BOCC may be approved if supported by a proper cost analysis. Such proper cost analysis should include the following factors:

1.6.3.1 Travel logistics.

1.6.3.2 Distance from event.

1.6.3.3 Availability of transportation.

1.6.3.4 Risk management, safety and security considerations.

1.6.4 Travelers approved to travel on County business may claim lodging costs from the night before the approved event starts through the night it ends if the cost analysis indicates it is cost efficient due to travel logistics, distance from the event, availability of transportation, and risk management, safety and security considerations or no available reasonably priced and timely return transportation exists. Proper cost analysis is required to be submitted with reimbursement.

1.6.5 If Traveler does not show for a hotel room, or conference, training, etc., they shall be responsible for all costs, except under documented exigent circumstances (e.g. severe illness, death in the family, hazardous weather conditions).

1.7 MEAL EXPENSES

1.7.1 Any meal expenses within the “elected official only exclusion zone” for Elected Officials and within the “exclusion zone” for the County Administrator, Department Managers, County employees, and volunteers, including meals associated with community functions, shall not be approved or reimbursed unless:

1.7.1.1 A grant or contract approved by signature from the BOCC that includes language for the provision of meals or snacks.

1.7.1.2 Proper cost analysis documenting specific situations in which there is a savings in overnight lodging and meals with an approval signature from the Authorizing Individual.

1.7.2 All requests for reimbursements require establishment detailed receipts. The detailed receipt will list at a minimum the name of the establishment, date, itemized description of the meal and associated tax and tip, along with the total
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amount expensed as shown in Exhibit “B”.

Failure to produce an establishment
detailed receipt (otherwise known as a summary receipt shown in Exhibit “B”) will
result in a reimbursement for actually incurred costs up to the following amounts
below listed or whichever is less:

• Breakfast: $ 5.50
• Lunch: $ 7.00
• Dinner: $10.50

Failure to produce any receipt will result in the reimbursement amounts listed
above.

1.7.3 Reimbursement rate for meal expenses shall follow the Office of Financial
Management (OFM) State and Administrative & Accounting Manual (SAAM)
Section 10.90.20 fixed allowance for each meal consistent with the appropriate per
diem rate for the host County or city located at http://www.ofm.wa.gov. These
maximum rates include taxes and tip and such tip may not exceed 15% even if a
higher tip amount will not exceed OFM per diem limits.

1.7.4 Authorizing Individual may approve reimbursement for actually incurred costs up
to the current per diem limit rate approved by resolution from the BOCC. Traveler
may not claim a “per diem” if amount is not spent.

1.7.5 Authorizing Individual may approve reimbursement for actually incurred costs up
to the current per diem limit rate in the case of a group meal. The names and
positions of other authorized/approved travelers to receive travel expense
reimbursements shall be included. Authorizing Individual may not pay for or
reimburse meal expenses for persons not covered by this travel policy.

1.7.6 For meals included in a registration fee, airfare, lodging (e.g. continental breakfast)
or other County expense, the Traveler shall not be eligible for reimbursement for
that particular meal whether or not the Traveler actually consumes the provided
meal or not.

1.7.7 On either “day travel” or first and last days of “overnight travel” outside of the
“elected official only exclusion zone or “exclusion zone”, reimbursement eligibility
is based on the following times unless otherwise pre-approved by Authorizing
Individual:

• Breakfast: departure prior to 6:30 AM qualifies an employee for breakfast.
• Lunch: during the person’s regular lunch period.
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• Dinner: arrive after 6:30 PM qualifies an employee for dinner.

1.7.8 All per diem meal expenses for “day travel” will be taxed as a non-cash fringe benefit per Internal Revenue Service regulations.

1.8 NON-REIMBURSEABLE MEAL COSTS

1.8.1 Authorizing Individual shall not reimburse meal costs when:

1.8.1.1 Included in another County expense, regardless of whether the person partakes in the meal; or

1.8.1.2 Incurred for recreational or social events such as office, going away, and retirement parties, or other personalized social events; or

1.8.1.3 A violation of The State Constitution, Article VIII, Section 7, i.e. when a gift of public funds, would occur; or

1.8.1.4 For the purchase of alcoholic beverages.

1.9 NON-REIMBURSABLE EXPENSES

1.9.1 Authorizing Individual shall not reimburse ineligible expenses, including:

1.9.1.1 Expenses incurred without prior approval from Authorizing Individual, unless bona fide emergency occurred preventing prior approval.

1.9.1.2 Travel and miscellaneous expenses not approved under this policy

1.9.1.3 Miscellaneous travel expenses not directly related to conduct official County business or expenses that are unreasonable, excessive or unnecessary.

1.9.1.4 Expenses considered personal including, but not limited to:

1.9.1.4.1 Hosting meals or entertaining of others for promotional activities.

1.9.1.4.2 Personal telephone calls.

1.9.1.4.3 Entertainment (i.e. TV, radio, games, outdoor fun), clothing, personal sundries and services.

1.9.1.4.4 Transportation to places of entertainment or similar personal activities (tour bus, sightseeing).
1.9.1.4.5 Personal trip insurance.

1.9.1.4.6 Medical, dental or hospital services.

1.9.1.4.7 Tobacco products.

1.9.1.4.8 Fines and penalties.

1.9.1.4.9 Dependent care.
1.9.1.4.10 Travel paid for by any other organization.

1.9.1.4.11 Meals or hotel/motel accommodations for spouse or guest.

1.9.1.4.12 Mileage if traveling as a passenger in either a County vehicle or private vehicle other than Traveler’s own.

1.9.1.4.13 Moving expenses unless Resolution 08 534, the Policy regarding relocation expenses, is referenced.

1.9.1.4.14 Excess costs and additional travel expenses as a result of taking an indirect route or a delayed return trip for personal preference or convenience, except that for approved travel expenses when an indirect route or delay reduces the County’s total costs.

1.9.1.4.15 Any tips or gratuities associated with personal expenses.

1.9.1.4.16 Out of pocket charges for vehicle service calls caused by the negligence of the traveler. Examples include service charges for the deliveries of fuel, retrieval of keys from locked vehicles, jump starting vehicles when the lights have been left on, etc.

1.10 TRAVEL EXPENSE REIMBURSEMENT FORM

1.10.1 Travelers requesting reimbursement for expenses under this policy must submit a Travel Expense Reimbursement Form to the Authorizing Individual.

1.10.2 Procedures:

1.10.2.1 Travel expense reimbursement form shall cite the time, place, business purpose and participants.

1.10.2.2 Attach applicable conference, convention, seminar brochure, or agenda and airline itinerary to the travel expense reimbursement form.
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1.10.2.3 Attach all required detailed receipts prepared and issued by the service provider.

1.10.2.4 A copy of vehicle insurance for the time period traveled.

1.10.2.5 Authorizing Individual shall review Traveler’s request for reimbursement to ensure:

1.10.2.5.1 Travel appropriately approved and County purpose documented.
1.10.2.5.2 Required information and detailed receipts included.

1.10.2.5.3 Appropriate reimbursement rates requested.

1.10.2.5.4 Non-reimbursable items not included.

1.10.2.5.5 One political subdivision does not pay expenses properly attributed to another in violation of RCW 43.09.210.

1.11 REPAYMENT OF UNAUTHORIZED/UNAPPROVED REIMBURSEMENTS

The County, through the appropriate Authorizing Individual, shall seek repayment of expenses from the person who was reimbursed whenever an audit or subsequent review of travel expense reimbursements finds that such expenses were reimbursed contrary to the provisions of this policy unless such expenses were incurred in reasonable reliance on the pre-approval of an Authorizing Individual.

1.12 ELECTED OFFICIALS OR EMPLOYEES WHO SERVE ON OTHER NON-COUNTY BOARDS

Departments shall reimburse Elected Officials or County employees for travel expenses, including registration, lodging, transportation, and meal expenses at the current rates in this policy when traveling on non-County board’s official business unless the board they serve on pays those expenses.

1.13 ADVANCE TRAVEL

Elected Officials, County Administrator, Department Managers, County employees, and volunteers may request advanced travel funds per Resolutions 90 239 and 05 686. Travel expense advances shall only defray the Traveler’s reimbursable expenses incurred in the performance of County related business.

At the discretion of the Elected Official, County Administrator, or Department Manager, a County credit card or “P-card” may be provided.
EXHIBIT B

Establishment Detailed and Summary Receipt Examples

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**Actual Incurred Costs**

**Up to Per Diem**

**Actual Incurred Costs**

**Up to Maximum**

**Amounts Listed per Section 1.7.1**
Actual Incurred Costs
Up to Per Diem

Actual Incurred Costs
Up to Maximum
Amounts Listed per
Section 1.7.1