City of Newcastle Travel/ Training Policy

Effective May 21, 2025
Resolution 2025-1039

1. Purpose

This policy establishes guidelines for travel-related expenses incurred by City of Newcastle staff and Councilmembers while conducting official city business. The policy ensures responsible stewardship of public funds while supporting professional development and operational needs.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all City employees and elected officials who travel for city business and seek reimbursement for expenses.

3. Travel Authorization

3.1 Staff Travel

- All travel shall be pre-approved by the department director and City Manager.
- All training must be budgeted for in advance.

3.2 Council Travel

- Any training or travel expenses exceeding $500must receive prior approval by a majority of the City Council or consensus of the Council before staff proceeds with bookings.
- All training must be budgeted for in advance.

4. Transportation / Parking

4.1 Employees and officials must select the most economical mode of transportation.

4.2 If a personal vehicle is used, mileage will be reimbursed at the IRS-approved rate.

4.3 If air travel is required, reservations should be made as far in advance as possible to secure the lowest fare. The City of Newcastle currently has no negotiated air discounts with any airline; thus, air travel should be booked with the carrier that offers the best fare and routing for the destination. Any costs for deviation from the most economical and direct route possible are the responsibility of the employee. All air travel shall be at coach class.

4.4 Any travel requiring airfare must include a statement justifying the necessity of out-of-area travel, demonstrating that similar training or meetings are not available locally or virtually.

4.5 When choosing to drive instead of flying for distances exceeding 300 miles, reimbursement will be based on the lower of the mileage rate or the lowest available airfare.

4.6 Mileage will be calculated by using the distance from the employee's official workstation or their home to the business destination, whichever is less.

4.7 For daily travel or overnight travel, a City fleet vehicle is the preferred method of travel, if available and appropriate. No employee shall use a City owned vehicle for personal use or convenience. Use is restricted to the conduct of official city business. The City recognizes some level of *de minimis* personal use of a City owned vehicle while on official business.

4.8 A city employee may use their own personal motor vehicle for city business upon approval from their department manager or the City Manager. In such cases, the employee must carry automobile insurance for bodily injury and property damage in the limits required per Washington State minimum. The employee assumes responsibility for any accidents when using their personal vehicle for City business.

4.9 Reasonable costs for taxi/ ride share transportation will be reimbursed when clearly identified that they were required to conduct official City business.

4.10 The cost for parking while conducting official city business will be reimbursed with sufficient receipts. If parking costs were paid in a lot which does not offer receipts, those costs must be documented including the reason for the parking, date, time and location of the lot.

4.11 Actual costs for any incurred tolls will be reimbursed. Proof of payment will be required.

4.12 Should more than one employee travel in the same vehicle, only the employee owning the vehicle shall be entitled to reimbursement for transportation.

5. Lodging

5.1 Lodging will be reimbursed at actual cost.

5.2 Itemized receipts are required for reimbursement.

5.3 Lodging costs must be reasonable. Lodging discounts are typically offered through the conference and should be used. Alternative lodging may be acceptable, if reasonable and not more than the cost the city would have incurred based on GSA approved or negotiated group rate.

5.4 Employees may choose to upgrade the room at their own cost. The cost difference between the upgraded room rate and the standard rate must be submitted for approval.

6. Meals

6.1 Employees and officials will be reimbursed for actual meal costs up to the approved GSA per diem rate for travel that requires an overnight stay.

6.2 Meal expenses will not be reimbursed when business travel does not require an overnight stay.

6.3 Itemized receipts are required for all meal reimbursements.

6.4 Meals included in conference registration or event fees will not be reimbursed.

6.5 Gratuities for meals are included in the per diem rates and are not reimbursed separately. Any gratuities shall not exceed 15%.

6.6 If you are only gone part of a day, you will be allotted no more than the meals that would be eaten during that time.

7. Incidentals

7.1 Incidental expenses such as baggage fees, and transportation costs (taxis, ride-shares) will be reimbursed if they are necessary and reasonable.

7.2 All miscellaneous expenses must be itemized separately. They must be clearly identified as necessary costs of business travel that are not expenses one would incur whether traveling or at home.

8. Reimbursement Procedures

8.1 Requests for reimbursement must be submitted using the City's Travel Expense Claim form.

8.2 Receipts must accompany all expense claims unless otherwise specified. Airfare reimbursements should also include the boarding pass to confirm the travel occurred.

8.3 Claims shall be submitted within 30 days of travel completion. If an employee cannot meet the 30-day threshold, an extension must be approved in advance by the Department Director and Finance Director. Any extension must include a new due date, not to exceed 60 days.

8.4 Employees must complete the estimated cost matrix before registering for training and update actual expenses post-travel.

8.5 If actual expenses exceed the approved estimate by more than 10%, Department Director or City Manager approval is required.

8.6 Any items not listed in the cost matrix and pre-approved will not be considered for reimbursement.

9. Travel Advances

9.1 Under limited circumstances, employees and officials may request an advance for estimated travel costs, subject to Finance Director and City Manager approval.

9.2 Justification for the advance of funds must be submitted in writing.

9.3 Advances must be reconciled with actual expenses within 30 days after returning from travel. No extensions to remit receipts will be approved for travel advances.

9.4 Any overpayments and/ or failure to remit receipts per 9.3, will result in the city garnishing wages from the next feasible payroll cycle.

10. Cancellation

10.1 It is the responsibility of any person engaged in official City business to adhere to all cancellation deadlines when canceling conferences, seminars, regional meetings, hotel and airfare, or any other advanced payment or obligation made on behalf of the employee.

10.2 Except in the case of a personal or family emergency, all expenses incurred by the City resulting from failure to conform to cancellation deadlines shall be the responsibility of the employee or official.

10.3 In circumstances noted in 10.2, the employee will be required to seek fee reimbursement from the training provider or vendor before the city deems the cancellation valid.

10.4 A written explanation demonstrating the emergency may be required.

11. Policy Compliance

11.1 Employees and officials are expected to adhere to this policy when incurring travel expenses.

11.2 Any exceptions must be pre-approved by the City Manager or City Council.

11.3 Non-compliance may result in denial of reimbursement or additional review by the Finance Department.

11.4 If an employee or official chooses to be reimbursed for expenses, the employee cannot claim the expenses on their tax return.

11.5 Travelers who combine personal travel with business travel must identify and pay for the personal segment of the trip. Reimbursement for car rental and airport parking must be prorated to allow reimbursement for only those costs associated with City business.

11.6 All employees are expected to adhere to the adopted City-issued Credit Card Administrative Policy & Procedures.

11.7 The following will **not** be paid or reimbursed

- Alcoholic beverages
- Expenses of a spouse or other persons not authorized to receive reimbursement under this policy
- Theft, loss, or damage to personal property
- Costs associated with damage caused by employee/official's actions
- Airline or other trip insurance
- Personal entertainment
- Personal telephone calls
- Personal care services (reading material, barber, hair salon, personal toiletries, laundry/valet service, and other similar services)
- Fines for parking or traffic violations

11.8 Where discrepancies between this policy and any other adopted policy and/or procedure occur, the City Manager will determine which document prevails.

11.9 Any exceptions or deviations to this policy must be approved by the City Manager or City Council, in writing, before the travel/ training commencing. After-the-fact exceptions or deviations shall not be approved under any circumstances.