

## TRAVEL AND MEALS

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## Travel and Meals

### 1. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidelines regarding authorization and reimbursement for necessary and reasonable travel and meal expenses while conducting county business.

### 2. General Travel Policy

#### Prudent Judgement

Officers and employees are expected to exercise prudent judgment in incurring travel expenses on official county business. Excessive or unnecessary expenses will not be approved or reimbursed. **To pay for food and drink, other than when in overnight travel status, with public money is prohibited unless authorized by the County Manager for departments or Elected Officials for their respective offices and shall not exceed County per diem rates.**

The number of employees attending a particular meeting should be the minimum necessary, consistent with the benefit to be derived therefrom.

#### Travel Plan

Prior to being on reimbursable travel status, an employee shall obtain approval for the trip and the mode of travel from the elected official, department director or designee.

#### Travel Restriction

The Board of Thurston County Commissioners may place additional requirements or restrictions on travel in conjunction with the adoption of Thurston County's Budget.

#### Volunteers and Board Members

Volunteers, board members and others authorized to be reimbursed for travel expenses shall be reimbursed consistent with this policy.

### 3. Eligible Travel Expenses

#### a. Registration

Registration fees required in connection with attendance at conventions, conferences, and official meetings.

b. Meal & Incidental Expenses (M&IE)

An overnight stay is required to be eligible to receive or use the M&IE per diem.

Eligible M&IE shall be allowed in accordance with current Federal Per Diem rates. See Appendix A for current rates.

M&IE rates shall be based on the primary destination of the traveler. Allowances for the first and last day of the overnight travel assignment will be 75% of the base per diem rate of the primary destination.

Meals, (excluding continental breakfasts) that are included in a convention seminar, lodging payment, or other registration fee are not eligible travel expenses.

Tips are considered an incidental expense and are allowed only as part of an eligible M&IE.

***Exceptions for Meals and Refreshments:***

Meals and Refreshments for ***Thurston County Employees***

Meals and refreshments for Thurston County employees without an overnight stay cannot be purchased with County funds nor can they be reimbursed with county funds except in the following cases:

- Required training at a conference or seminar attended by an employee that includes meals and refreshments as part of the approved cost.
- Official county business that requires attendance of county personnel at a meeting where meals and refreshments are integral part of the meeting. Normal staff meetings of county offices or departments do not qualify.
- Annual employee recognition events at which county employees are invited to celebrate the outstanding contributions and accomplishments of staff.
- Extraditions, authorized transport of inmates, or in county emergent law enforcement incidents where the employee's involvement in the incident requires him or her to remain at the scene for five (5) hours or longer.
- A natural disaster occurs which results in activation of the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) when staff is required to be at the center around the clock and meals are brought in to the EOC for those on duty.
- Other circumstances within the spirit of the policy may be approved on a case by case basis by the County Manager for departments or Elected Officials for their respective offices.

Meals and refreshments for **volunteers**

County offices and departments may provide meals and refreshments of nominal value to recognize volunteers.

Meals and refreshments for **customers and general public**

County offices and departments may provide meals and refreshments of nominal value for customers and general public.

c. Lodging

All lodging expenses must be supported by an itemized receipt showing actual authorized costs.

Lodging allowances are based on the current maximum General Services Administration (GSA) Federal Per Diem rate of the final destination. See <http://www.gsa.gov/perdiem>.

**An exception rate of up to 150% of the maximum lodging rate shall be approved by the County Manager or Elected Official or designee within a county office or department prior to departure for overnight travel assignment.**

**Rates beyond the 150% GSA rate for the destination shall be approved by the County Manager in county departments and the Elected Official in county offices prior to departure for the overnight travel assignment. Should the County Manager or Elected Official be the traveler, an appointed designee within the county office or department shall approve the exception.**

**The County must be reimbursed for rates beyond 200% of the maximum allowable of the General Services Administration (GSA) Federal Per Diem rate.**

d. Transportation

**Employees are encouraged to reserve and use a pool car as much as possible.** Check availability of pool cars before use of personal vehicles. Pool cars can be scheduled in Outlook. There are pool cars at the courthouse and Tilley Road campus.

Mileage

- The maximum mileage reimbursement allowed to county employees and officers when using their personal cars in connection with county business shall be the allowable Internal Revenue Service standard mileage rate.
- The Board of County Commissioners may approve different mileage reimbursement rates for positions and/or employees who are required to

drive their personal cars in connection with County business and as a result incur reasonable expenses in excess of the standard rate.

- Reimbursement for mileage shall not exceed the sum of the round trip coach airfare of a common carrier, needed local mileage/ground transportation, and other related costs for the destination.
- Reimbursement for mileage shall be prohibited for travel between the usual place of residence and the usual place of work for normal commuting purposes.

#### County Vehicles

County vehicles shall be used in accordance with the Thurston County Vehicle Use policy.

#### Airfare, Trains, Etc.

Air or other transportation shall be at the most economical class.

#### Miscellaneous

Taxi fares, car rentals, parking fees, and ferry and bridge tolls are reimbursable.

#### e. Non-Work Activities and Personal Expenses

Mileage, taxi fares, car rental, and other transportation costs to places of entertainment and other non-business facilities are not reimbursable.

Tobacco and alcoholic beverages are not eligible travel expenses.

#### f. Telephone

Personal telephone calls are not reimbursable, except one brief call per day is allowed to the employee's family/home when the employee is away from home overnight on County business.

#### g. Fines

Fines, penalties, and/or forfeitures are not reimbursable.

### 4. Documentation of Expenses

#### a. Receipts

Each claim for reimbursement must be accompanied by a travel reimbursement form prescribed by the Auditor's Office Financial Services Division. Travel costs

must be supported by an original receipt or acceptable substitute, **except** for the following employee reimbursement expenses:

- Meals
- Transit fares, ferry fares, bridge and road tolls, and taxi and limousine fares
- Parking fees; and
- Telephone calls

b. Lodging

Lodging receipts must clearly identify the amount paid, room rate and other itemized charges.

c. Expenses Incurred on Behalf of Another

When an official or employee claims reimbursement for travel or other expenses incurred on behalf of another, in addition to other requirements, a detailed accounting must be attached to the reimbursement claim which includes at least the following:

- Name of the person on whose behalf the expenses were incurred;
- Whether the person is a County employee and, if not, the nature of his or her connection with County business.
- A breakdown of each type of expense for each person, including the claimant, for whom reimbursement is claimed.

5. Travel Reimbursement Procedures

Detailed procedures for reimbursement of travel expenses are set forth in the Financial Policies and Procedures Manual: Policy 4400 - Individual Expenditure and Travel Reimbursement and Policy 4260 – Credit Cards, <http://share/dept/auditor/finance/Pages/pnp.aspx>.

6. References

- Office of the Attorney General Memorandum - Eating & Drinking at Public Expense (May 14, 1987)  
<http://www.mrsc.org/govdocs/w3ageating.pdf>
- RCW 42.24.090
- US General Services Administration (GSA) Website – Per Diem Rates  
[http://www.gsa.gov/portal/content/104877?utm\\_source=OCM&utm\\_medium=print-radio&utm\\_term=HP\\_01\\_Requested\\_perdiem&utm\\_campaign=shortcuts](http://www.gsa.gov/portal/content/104877?utm_source=OCM&utm_medium=print-radio&utm_term=HP_01_Requested_perdiem&utm_campaign=shortcuts)

## APPENDIX A

### Federal Per Diem Rates for Lodging and Meal & Incidental Expenses

- An overnight stay is required to qualify for meal allowances.
- On the first and last day of travel, meal rates are at 75% of the allowable per diem for the primary destination.
- Meal rates include incidentals such as tips for meals and luggage handling.
- The appointing authority or designee within a county office or department may authorize a lodging beyond per diem rate prior to travel.
- Lodging rates beyond 200% of the per diem rate will not be reimbursed.

Reference for current rate information: <http://www.gsa.gov/portal/category/21287>