

31.000 COUNTY TRAVEL POLICY

PURPOSE: To inform management and employees of the provisions of the County travel policy

STATEMENT OF POLICY

This policy establishes guidelines and procedures for the amount and type of travel expenses eligible for reimbursement. For purposes of this policy, "employee" includes all County employees, elected officials, and appointed members of boards, commissions, and councils.

Scope

This policy is applicable to all County departments and entities. Departments may apply additional requirements as long as they are equal to or more restrictive than these standards. Law enforcement officers participating in extraditions or multi-state investigation related travel are governed by departmental policy for multi-state investigation related travel.

Limitations

Travel expenses must have a public purpose and serve the public interest. All travel expenditures must be reasonable and necessary, and reimbursement for expenses solely for the benefit of an individual is not allowable. The County will pay travel costs for someone who is not an employee if the person: 1) is traveling at the specific request of the County, 2) is serving as a volunteer to a County program, or 3) is providing services under a County contract, which includes provision for reimbursement for travel related costs.

Administration

Department heads are responsible for: the implementation of the policy within their departments; employee compliance with travel policy; prior authorization of travel; approval of travel advances, settlements and reimbursement requests; and management of expenditures within budgetary constraints.

The Board of County Commissioners has final authority for administering, interpreting, and applying the terms of this policy.

Employee travel time is governed by the federal Fair Labor Standards Act and the state of Montana wage and hour laws. Human Resources should be consulted prior to travel to determine appropriate compensation rates.

Except as noted, original receipts are required to support requests for travel reimbursement.

Policy

31.100 Allowable Expenses/Modes of Travel

Air: All commercial air travel should be by the least expensive service available. The traveler is responsible for class upgrades and itinerary or booking changes which are not the result of an emergency or required to satisfy the business needs of the County.

When a lower airfare can be obtained with an additional overnight stay, the County will pay the extra day's meals and lodging, if cost effective.

If an employee chooses to use a personal vehicle over a common carrier, mileage reimbursement may not exceed the cost of airfare.

Rail: Coach or tourist class is reimbursable; however, long distance rail travel should be avoided.

County Vehicle: All business travel should be done using a County owned vehicle as the most economical option.

Personal Vehicle: If a County owned vehicle is not available for business use, the reimbursement rate will be for map miles only at the rate established by the Internal Revenue Service.

If a County owned vehicle is available, and the employee elects not to use the County owned vehicle, the mileage rate would be 48.15 percent of the current IRS mileage rate. The Board of County Commissioners may authorized reimbursement at the IRS mileage rate for travel when the use of a personal vehicle is considered to be in the best interest of the County. This must be approved prior to the travel.

If a personal vehicle is used, the driver must possess a valid Montana Drivers License and carry liability insurance which meets or exceeds the requirements cited in MCA 61-6-103. The County reserves the right to require proof of insurance for any personal vehicle used for county business. Any employee who chooses to drive a personal vehicle when one is available from the County fleet should be aware that the County does not provide coverage for loss or damage to personal vehicles.

Rental Vehicles: A rental vehicle is a justifiable expense if it is cheaper than other forms of transportation; anyone requesting use of a rental vehicle must demonstrate that it is the least cost alternative. All rental vehicle requests must be approved by the Board of County Commissioners. Employees traveling outside of the state of Montana shall purchase a Loss Damage Waiver (Sometimes also called a Collision Damage Waiver or Physical Damage Waiver). If Liability Insurance is not provided in the rental contract, the employee shall purchase such insurance from the rental car company.

Taxis, Airport Limousines, Shuttle Buses, Parking, Tolls: Such expenses are reimbursable, and receipts are required (parking meters excepted). Taxi fares, including gratuities of 15% or less, are allowable with receipts. Valet parking, unless the only parking option available, and parking tickets are not eligible for reimbursement.

Public Transit (Buses, Subways, and Street Cars): Fares are reimbursable without receipts if the total for such expenses is less than \$10 for the entire trip.

31.200 Lodging

All County employees are authorized the actual cost of lodging at a conference site. However, less expensive accommodations frequently are available within walking distance of the conference, and employees are encouraged to select a lower cost option. Lodging unrelated to attendance at a conference may not exceed the maximum quoted for per diem rates on the US General Services Administration website, www.gsa.gov. In any event, employees are reminded to inquire if a government rate is available.

If an employee is accompanied by a spouse or family member, the lodging invoice must bear a notation, signed by an authorized representative of the establishment, as to the

single room rate, including tax. The employee is responsible for the difference between the single and double occupancy room rates.

31.300 Meals

To claim a travel meal, an employee must be in “travel status”, which is identified as that period beginning with the time of departure from the employee’s regularly assigned workplace and ending upon the return to that site. Actual time in travel status will be used for computing this allowance. The following chart shows allowable per diem, which represents the maximum for any meal (including tip) or series of meals.

	In State	Out of State
Morning allowance (if in continuous travel status for 3 hours or more between 12:01 am and 10 am):	\$5	\$7
Mid-day allowance (if in continuous travel status for 3 hours or more between 10:01 am and 3 pm):	\$6	\$11
Evening allowance (if in continuous travel status for 3 hours or more between 3:01 pm and midnight):	\$12	\$18
If in travel status for a continuous 24 hours, any combination of the above not to exceed:	\$23	\$36

Meals provided by the conference, seminar, or other event cannot be claimed separately for reimbursement or per diem, unless the employee has a medical condition with special dietary restrictions. Continental breakfasts, refreshments during breaks, and hors d'oeuvres served during social hours or receptions are not considered meals.

If an employee is in travel status for less than 24 hours, any meals are considered taxable income by the IRS. A properly approved reimbursement claim showing departure and return times must be submitted to payroll with the employee’s timesheet. An employee who receives a midday meal allowance for routine travel outside of Stillwater County must also obtain reimbursement through the payroll process.

31.400 Other Allowable Expenses

Business telephone calls, faxes, or other necessary business expenses are allowable if documented by receipts. Internet access for reviewing and sending County email should be obtained through WI-FI (wireless) access that many hotels offer for free. (A list of hotels and airports that provide free wireless service can be obtained through www.wififreespot.com; users should be aware that although email connection is automatically encrypted, web browsing can be viewed and captured.) Hotel long distance charges for internet access should be avoided.

31.450 Unallowable Expenses

Alcoholic beverages and expenditures of a personal nature are not allowable. For example: hotel/motel room service charges (actual meal cost is allowable with receipt),

mini-bar and amenity charges; porter service for personal luggage; laundry service; in room movies; transportation expense for dining out (unless the hotel/motel does not have dining facilities or there are none within walking distance); personal telephone calls; optional valet parking; and fees at a conference or meeting for social events such as golf, sightseeing, or the entertainment of a spouse or guest. Other expenditures, otherwise allowable may be rejected if proper travel authorization or expenditure documentation is lacking.

31.500 Combining Personal Travel with County Business

When an employee combines personal travel with an official County business trip, reimbursements and payments will be made only for those costs necessary for the County's portion. Transportation costs and per diem will be allowed only for the most direct route to the destination of the County trip, and reimbursement and payment for meals and lodging will be allowable only during the time the employee is in County travel status. No costs will be reimbursed for vacation or personal days.

31.600 Travel Advances

Advances may be obtained on a Travel Advance form signed by the appropriate department head. The advance should be based on the allowable per diem for the number of travel days, exclusive of meals provided by a conference, and reasonable estimates for the costs of lodging and ground travel. Advances must be submitted one week prior to departure. In no event will per diem or other travel money be advanced without a properly completed Travel Advance form.

A travel advance must be settled within 7 days of returning to work. The employee must complete a travel claim and provide original receipts or other supporting documentation. If the claim is more than the advance, the employee will be issued a check. If the claim is less than the advance, the employee must reimburse the County for the difference using either a personal check or cash.

Travel Advances which have not been settled within 7 days will be referred to the Finance Office and the employee will be notified that the entire advance will be deducted from the next paycheck if settlement is not received.

31.700 Expenses Charged to County Credit Cards

On occasion, elected officials and senior County management may use a County credit card for allowable travel expenses. This is an option for the convenience of the employee and is subject to compliance with applicable County policy. Appropriate documentation must accompany claims for payment of monthly credit card statements. Such documentation must provide sufficient information to verify the appropriateness of the claim including statement of business purpose of the charge if not evident from the (original) invoice or receipt.

31.800 Reimbursement Procedures

Travel claims must: be submitted for all requests for reimbursement; provide an explanation for the trip; be signed by the employee and approved by the appropriate

department head; be submitted per trip or monthly. No one may authorized his or her own claim for reimbursement. Amounts spent in excess of maximum per diem allowance will not be reimbursed.

31.900 Travel Expenses Paid by Outside Entity

Entities outside the County may pay for authorized employee travel, and this policy should be followed as a guide to allowable costs. The payment from the external agency must be made to the County and not to the employee or vendors providing services related to the travel. Such transactions should be documented for audit purposes. The following exceptions apply: 1) an employee who is a member of a professional association attending an association function as an association official (elected or appointed or invitee) may be reimbursed directly by the association for those travel expenses; 2) travel expenses chargeable to a grant or contract awarded to the County should be consistent with this policy, unless the grant provides otherwise, and recorded according to the requirements of the grant or contract and the County's fiscal procedures; and 3) an employee traveling on behalf of another government agency may have their travel plans arranged and reimbursed directly by the sponsoring agency.

Other

Employees are encouraged to make every effort to minimize travel expenses. When more than one employee is traveling to the same destination on the same date, every effort should be made to coordinate the activities, including carpooling and sharing motel accommodations.

EFFECTIVE: Immediately

DATE: March 19, 2002

APPROVAL:

LAST REVISED: July 1, 2011