

ALEXANDER COUNTY GOVERNMENT TRAVEL POLICY

- I. Purpose – The intent of this policy is to make uniform provision for reimbursement of necessary expenses of County employees or officials of the County who are required to travel within or without the County boundaries in the performance of their duties and in the interest of County affairs.

- II. Policy Administration - The respective department heads are responsible for the administration of the provisions of this policy. Department heads are authorized to approve travel reimbursements for the employees under their supervision except where otherwise stated.

- III. General Policy
 - A. Travel - Alexander County recognizes that employees and officials are required to travel both within and without the State of North Carolina for the purpose of representing the County at meetings and professional associations, as well as for training to enhance their skills regarding the performance of their various positions within the County Government.

It is inherently understood in this policy that an individual traveling on official County business is expected to exercise the same care in incurring expenses that a prudent person would exercise if traveling on personal business and expending personal funds. Excess costs, circuitous routes, delays, or luxury accommodations and services unnecessary, unjustified, or solely for the convenience or personal preference of the traveler in the performance of official County business are not acceptable under this standard, and travelers will be held responsible for unauthorized costs and additional expenses incurred for personal preference or convenience.

 - B. Mileage Allowance – The amount authorized to be paid on a per-mile basis for travel by privately owned vehicle will be determined and/or revised as part of the annual budget ordinance as necessary.

- C. Meal Reimbursement Rates – Reimbursement for the cost of meals in connection with County business shall be at the following rates:

Breakfast \$10.00

Lunch \$15.00

Dinner \$30.00

Reimbursement is on a per-meal basis rather than an amount to be reimbursed per day. Itemized receipts must be turned in for reimbursement. Tips should be included in the above meal reimbursement rates.

Meal reimbursements will only be made for trips with overnight travel.

- D. Trip Sheet – A form provided for the traveler to fill out upon completion of a specific trip, or trips, within a given time period prescribed by the department head. This form lists all mileage, private or public transportation, lodging, meals, registration, and other travel expenses which are reimbursable. Receipts for lodging, meals, registration, and private or public transportation are to be attached to and made a part of the trip sheet. For taxis, airport shuttles, and buses, receipts may not be available or provided; therefore, attach, if possible. The trip sheet must be approved by the department head. Before being presented to the Finance Department for reimbursement, the trip sheet must bear the approving signature of the appropriate department head and the requesting employee.

See Exhibit A at the end of the Policy for the Trip Sheet form.

- E. Transportation Cost of Employee – Payment of mileage allowance for employee vehicle or actual cost of other transportation as applicable. If rental vehicles are used for both business and non-business purposes, reimbursement to the county for the non-business portion will apply.

IV. Authorized Travel Modes

- A. County-owned Vehicle – This method of transportation is to be used whenever a county vehicle is available. The department head may authorize reimbursement to the employee for operation expenses in circumstances where direct credit charges cannot be made to the county and county gas, etc., is not available.
- B. Private owned Vehicle – When no county vehicle is available, this mode may be used if authorized by the appropriate department head. Reimbursement for operation expense shall be limited to the mileage allowance.

C. Transportation by Common Carrier – Reimbursement for air, rail, or bus fare is limited to business or coach fare, substantiated by a receipt.

D. Rental Vehicles – Reimbursement of rental vehicle expenses shall be approved by the Finance Director or County Manager. If approved, the rented vehicle should be secured at the lowest practical cost.

V. Travel Destination

A. Local Travel – County employees who, by the normal nature of their duties, are required to travel regularly within the county and are individually authorized by the appropriate department head, are eligible for reimbursement of transportation expense.

Meals are not eligible for reimbursement if there is no overnight travel.

B. Travel outside the County – Approved travel expenses outside the county for county purposes or purposes in the best interest of the county, such as training, conferences, professional meetings, etc., may be reimbursed to the limits of the policy for:

1. Transportation cost
2. Lodging
3. Meals (only with overnight travel)
4. Registration costs
5. Necessary incidental expenses (parking, tolls, etc.)

C. Lodging – Reimbursement of lodging expenses incurred in counties contiguous to Alexander County will not be authorized without prior approval by the Finance Director or County Manager. If more than one employee occupies the same lodging accommodations, the total lodging expense should be reported on only one employee's trip sheet. To receive reimbursement for lodging expenses, an itemized bill must be attached to the trip sheet.

D. Registration Cost – Registration costs should be paid directly by the County when possible. When an employee personally pays a registration fee, a receipt for payment should be obtained and is preferable to a canceled check for reimbursement purposes. Additional registration costs for recreational and entertainment activities will not be paid by the County. Meal functions are not included in this requirement, and are eligible for payment by the County in lieu of the meal reimbursement payment.

- E. Out-of-State Travel – Out-of-state travel begins when the employee leaves North Carolina and remains in effect until the employee returns to North Carolina. Out-of-state travel for employees must be authorized by the appropriate department head.

Virtual/online options should be considered as an alternative to out-of-state travel when practical for meetings and training courses.

- F. Credit Card – Employees and officials authorized to use a County credit card may elect to use them instead of reimbursement; however, meals are still subject to the meal rates listed in Section III. C. of the Policy and are only reimbursable for trips with overnight travel. Itemized receipts must be submitted with the credit card bill to the Finance Department in order for the expenditures to be approved.
- G. Travel with Others - When two or more employees are traveling to the same destination, maximum use shall be made of special group travel discounts and joint use of the transportation including taxi cabs, County-owned, or privately owned vehicles. Travel with representatives of other government units is encouraged whenever possible.
- H. Commuting – No reimbursement shall be made for use of a personal vehicle in commuting from an individual’s home to his/her office.
- I. Other Costs - Reasonable parking fees, tolls, taxi and ride-share (Uber, Lyft, etc.) charges, and expenses of a similar nature, when appropriate to the travel, are reimbursable upon submission of appropriate documentation of the same. The Finance Director or County Manager shall approve or disapprove all other expense reimbursements not clearly defined in the Policy or those which have been questioned.
- J. Telephone Calls – Employees are not allowed to charge long distance telephone calls to the County for calls of a personal nature, except as stated below. Long distance calls to be paid by the County are those made pursuant to the employee conducting official County business. An employee traveling to a location outside the local calling area is allowed one (1) “safe arrival” call upon arriving at the destination. Additionally, employees may properly be reimbursed for emergency calls approved by the department head. An example of such is a call made when an employee calls home to inform someone that the travel period has been extended beyond original plans due to unforeseen reasons.

VI. Extraordinary Travel or Cost

In instances of travel not covered by this policy, or where the actual necessary costs exceed the maximum reimbursement allowed and the travel is in the best interest of the county, the Finance Director or County Manager may approve reimbursement of actual cost beyond the maximums stated herein. However, the terms of reimbursement must be determined before the travel occurs or before the cost is incurred. The Finance Director or County Manager shall approve or disapprove all other expense reimbursements not clearly defined in the Policy or those which have been questioned.

VII. Travel Expenses not Addressed by this Policy

Any travel expenses falling outside the realm of this policy must be approved by the Finance Director or County Manager.

VIII. Travel Advances

For “Travel Outside the County” and “Extraordinary Travel,” County employees may receive advances for travel expenses to avoid personal inconvenience or hardships. Using the approved travel advance form, the employee must submit a request in writing, to the department head estimating the travel cost. The department head will review the request and forward approved travel advance forms to the Finance Department for payment.

See Exhibit B at the end of the Policy for the Travel Advance form.

Travel advance checks will not be issued for estimated expenses less than \$100.00. Each employee traveling must obtain his/her own travel advance to facilitate easier reconciliation of travel advances and trip sheets, except in cases where more than one employee occupies the same lodging accommodations and the entire lodging cost will be advanced to one employee. Travel advances will be issued through the weekly accounts payable process, so plan ahead to meet the accounts payable cutoff deadline.

Immediately upon completion of the travel, the employee will present an approved trip sheet to the Finance Department and return any money advanced in excess of the actual approved expenses within ten (10) working days to the Finance Department. Any amount advanced and subject to return to the County, not promptly refunded, may be deducted from pay due the employee.

IX. Travel Procedure

- A. The trip sheet and supporting receipts will be submitted to the Department Head for approval. After approval by the Department Head, the form should be forwarded to the Finance Department.
- B. The Finance Department will determine that the trip sheet and receipts have been properly approved, that they are mathematically correct, and that requested reimbursements agree to submitted receipts, when required, and are within the limits set by the Policy. If an error in the reimbursement request is found, the requesting party will be informed and the error will be corrected before payment is made.
- C. Trip Cancellation – When an employee cancels an approved trip and the County has paid airfare, registration and other related fees or issued a travel advance, a memo must be sent to the Finance Department explaining the cancellation.
- D. The following items are not reimbursable:
 - (1) Any miscellaneous expense not supported by a receipt
 - (2) Meals included in registration
 - (3) Meals for trips that do not include overnight travel
 - (4) Travel to and from work place
 - (5) Souvenirs from the trip
 - (6) Items purchased to be used as door prizes or raffle items
 - (7) Non-employee expense
 - (8) Alcoholic beverages
 - (9) Movie rental
 - (10) Any traffic fines

This list is not all-inclusive. The Finance Director or County Manager shall approve or disapprove all other expense reimbursements not clearly defined in the Policy or those which have been questioned.

Attachments:

Exhibit A, Trip Sheet form

Exhibit B, Travel Advance form