



## EL PASO COUNTY

### Travel Policy and Procedures

**Adopted Date: November 8, 2010**

**Revised Date: July 9, 2018**

County employees are periodically required to travel on behalf of the County in an official capacity based on their position, or to participate in training and development opportunities.<sup>1</sup> The intent of this policy is to outline the general terms that shall be used when traveling in such capacity.

This policy applies to employees and non-employees who travel on authorized County business regardless of the funding source. Travelers are expected to be prudent and exercise good judgment when incurring travel costs. Travel advances are the preferred method of payment when approving covered travel costs.

#### I. Request Process

Approval of travel expenditures from County funds requires Department Head approval which certifies and authorizes the purpose of the travel. All relevant travel forms shall be submitted to the County Auditor's Office at least 45 days prior to the date of travel, where they will be reviewed for compliance with this policy. Travel that is not submitted timely may result in the travel advance being denied, and travel reimbursement being sought upon return from such travel may also be denied. Exceptions to this may be made directly to the County's Chief Administrator. Incomplete packets shall not be accepted. All forms can be found on the County's Intranet site within the [County Auditor's page](#).

Approved travel expenditures not already paid by County credit card or directly paid will be processed in the form of a travel advance made payable to the traveling employee. All travel must be reconciled and substantiated within 10 business days of the return date.

The request of such travel shall include the following forms:

##### A. Travel Request Form

1. The purpose of this form is to gather the basic information on the traveling employee, and the purpose of the travel. Instructions for completion can be found within the form itself.
2. Section 2 of this form requires a breakdown of expected travel expenses associated with this particular travel. As a result, the following supporting documents shall be attached to the Travel and Training Request Form:
  - Copy of airfare quote for dates of travel
  - Copy of auto rental quote, shuttle quote, taxi estimate, share ride estimate for dates of travel (if relevant)<sup>2</sup>
  - Copy of hotel quote for covered stay
  - Copy of training conference registration quote (for travel associated with training ONLY)
  - Copy of Employee Training and Professional Certification Agreement (for travel associated with training ONLY)
  - Copies of other necessary equipment as a result of County travel (i.e. rental scooters, etc.)
3. All relevant sections of the form must be completed in accordance with the guidelines as stated within Section III of this policy, and must be signed off by the Department Head, or designee. (During election years, sitting elected officials who have either lost the primary election or have decided not to run again must have the initial Travel Request Form signed off by the Commissioners Court for any travel occurring after the election results are final.)<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See the County's Professional Development Policy for additional guidelines.

<sup>2</sup> All auto rental quotes must be submitted through the Purchasing Department.

<sup>3</sup> See the County's Use of County Funds by State, County, and Precinct Officials When They Have Not Sought or Secured Re-Election Policy for additional guidelines.

## **B. Travel Justification Form**

1. The purpose of this form is to illustrate the relevance the requested travel has on the County's overall benefit, and to show the funding source that will be used. It is important that all relevant sections be completed based on the instructions within the actual form.
2. The County Funded Justification Form requires disclosure if County funds are requested, and further requires the traveling employee to select the appropriate category based on the purpose of the travel. This section must be completed by all traveling employees.
3. The Non-County Funded Justification Form seeks disclosure only if County funds are not requested. The purpose of this section is to designate when a County employee travels for work related purposes utilizing funds not paid for by the County, yet the coding of the time for the traveling employee will still be coded in KRONOS and paid for by the County. Ex) Association funds, private funds, and other public funds which are not subject to Commissioners Court authority. See Section I-C below.
4. All relevant sections of the form must be completed in accordance with the guidelines as stated within **Section III** of this policy, and must be signed off by the Department Head, or designee.

## **C. Travel Expenditure Voucher**

1. The purpose of this form is to document the actual expenses of the travel once the travel is completed. It is important that all relevant sections be completed based on the instructions within the actual form.
2. Travel Expenditure Vouchers are required to be submitted to the County Auditor's Office within 10 business days of return. Copies of receipts shall be attached to the voucher for airfare, lodging, registration and car rentals or shuttles. Meal receipts, however, are **not** required to be submitted.
3. When the Voucher is completed, the County may owe additional funds to the employee, or the employee may need to submit a reimbursement to the County for funds not used.
  - If the County owes additional funds, after verification with this policy and after approval by the County Auditor's Office, the County Auditor's Office will process the reimbursement and notify the employee when the check is ready for pickup.
  - If the employee owes funds to the County, the employee should be sure to attach a personal check or money order for that amount to the Travel Expenditure Voucher when submitting initially. Failure to comply with this policy may result in a salary offset of the employee/official's wages to satisfy the amount due.
4. All expenses shall be justified in accordance with the guidelines set forth in Section III of this Travel Policy. Failure to submit the Travel Expense Voucher within the required deadline will prevent subsequent travel advances from being issued until the employee is in compliance, and can also result in corrective action.

## **D. Travel Disclosure Report**

All travel expenditures approved by the County for employees who are FLSA exempt shall be posted on the County's website within 45 days after approval or completion of travel.

1. In an effort to keep the public informed, FLSA exempt employees who are traveling on non-County funded travel shall publicly disclose their travel connected to their duties as a county employee, or their official duties as an officeholder. As mentioned in Section B(3) of this policy, the Non-County Funded Justification Form should be completed to authorize such disclosure.
2. If authorized, non-County funded travel expenditures shall be posted on the County's website within 45 days after the form is received by the Auditor's Office.

## **II. Approval Process**

All relevant travel forms mentioned above shall be submitted to the County Auditor's Office at [auditorstravel@epcounty.com](mailto:auditorstravel@epcounty.com) at least 45 days prior to the date of travel, where they will be reviewed for compliance with this policy. Incomplete packets shall not be accepted.

### **A. The County Auditor's Office**

1. Once packets have been reviewed for policy compliance, the County Auditor's Office will analyze the requests to determine business interest, cost effectiveness of such request, and overall travel necessity.
2. Should the County Auditor's Office approve the request, the item will be placed on the next available Commissioners Court meeting for the Court's approval of the expense.
3. If the County Auditor's Office does not approve the request, notification shall be made to the Department Head within 5 days of such denial. Appeals may be made directly to the County's Chief Administrator.
4. Travel advances which are fully funded by a third party will not be considered or approved. However, if the County pays for the travel in advance, and is reimbursed by the third party at a later time, those funds shall be remitted back to the County as soon as possible, but no later than 10 days of receipt by the employee from the third party. All travel costs that are reimbursed from a third party, and not remitted to the County, may be subject to the County's Fraud, Waste and Abuse policy.
5. Travel that occurs between October 1<sup>st</sup> and November 15<sup>th</sup> of the subsequent fiscal year may be considered using current fiscal year funds if the travel request is submitted prior to the end of the fiscal year.
6. Travel requests made by persons who are not County officers or employees (ie. Members of a board appointed by Commissioners Court) shall be made directly to the County's Chief Administrator. If the travel request is approved, the Chief Administrator will properly notify the County Auditor's Office to ensure appropriate policies and processes are followed.

### **B. Commissioners Court Approval**

1. Requests initially approved by the County Auditor's Office will be submitted via a separate paid claims schedule to Commissioners Court listing all travel funding requests for the Court's approval.
2. The County is not obligated to pay for travel if prior approval is not obtained.
3. Should the Commissioners Court approve the paid claims schedule as proposed by the County Auditor's office, checks will be issued in the name of the traveling employee.

### **C. Notifications**

1. Once approval by the Commissioners Court is made, the County Auditor's Office will notify the traveling employee of such approval so they may pick up their check directly from the County Auditor's Office.
2. The County Auditor's Office shall also notify the Department Head, or designee, of such approval to ensure they are made aware the travel request was approved.

## **III. Guidelines**

- A. The following guidelines shall be considered when making a travel request:

1. In an effort to be fiscally responsible regarding County funds, no more than five (5) employees from the same department, or 50% of the department's employees, whichever is **lower**, shall attend the same training or conference when County funds are being utilized. Exceptions shall not be made without prior written approval by the County's Chief Administrator. If the County's Chief Administrator does not approve an exception after a written request is made, the department may appeal this directly to the Commissioners Court.
2. All travel requests will be reviewed for prudent use of travel funds, including choices of hotel, car rentals, etc.
3. In booking air travel, officials and employees should compare state rates and those available over the internet to assure the best price available at the time of scheduling. Tickets should be purchased over the internet in most instances, and as early as possible to ensure the best rates.
4. All lodging paid by the County shall be reasonable. Lodging reservations must be secured as early as possible to ensure best rates. Conference rates should be requested and used when available. If hotel hosting the conference or training is not used, a written explanation may be requested.
5. Automobile mileage shall be reimbursed at the federal GSA rate, which may be found at <http://www.gsa.gov/portal/content/100715>. Reimbursement for mileage may not exceed reasonable costs of airfare, if available.
6. **Rental Cars** - The most reasonable cost for ground transportation is required. If taxi, ride share or shuttle is available, and will not interfere with the travel itinerary of the traveling employee, it is required to be utilized. Otherwise, if a rental car is the most economical method of transportation, it may be authorized.
  - All rental cars must be secured through the El Paso County Purchasing Department based on their reservation procedures.
  - Unauthorized or uninsured drivers will not be permitted to utilize rented vehicles and if permitted by the traveling employee, any liability that occurs will be the responsibility of that employee.
  - Written explanation justifying the need for a rental car may be requested.
7. **Meal Per Diem** - Meal per diem will not be paid if the travel is completed (depart and return) within the same day. Meals and incidental per diem is based on the federal GSA meals and incidentals (M&IE) rate for the primary destination which may be found at <http://www.gsa.gov/portal/category/100120>. If the primary destination or its county is not listed within the GSA chart, the standard rate for that State will be used.
  - When meals are provided by the event, including continental breakfast, meal per diem advances shall not be provided for those covered meal times and will be deducted in accordance with the [GSA guidelines](#).
8. **Trip Cancellations** – If a trip is cancelled and an advance has been issued, the employee is responsible for returning the funds within 5 business days to the County Auditor's Office. Failure to comply may result in funds being garnished from the employee's paycheck.
9. **Vacation in Conjunction with Business Travel** – In cases in which vacation time is added to a business trip, any cost variance in airfare, car rental or lodging must be clearly identified on the Travel Request Form. The County will not authorize travel expenses for travel not associated with a County purpose.
10. **Limitations** – Each County employee is limited to \$6,000 in cumulative travel funds during the course of each fiscal year. Exceptions shall not be made without prior written approval by the County's Chief Administrator. If the County's Chief Administrator does not approve an exception after a written request is made, the department may appeal this directly to the Commissioners Court.
11. **Prohibited Expenses** – Prohibited expenses include but are not limited to the following:
  - Alcoholic drinks;

- Nonbusiness related long distance and local telephone calls;
- Supplies, books or other items must be purchased by the Purchasing Agent;
- Utilization of travel agency; and
- Non-required airline fees (early bird fees).

#### **IV. Travel County Credit Cards**

At the discretion of the Purchasing Department, departments who travel frequently may be issued a County credit card for the purpose of travel. County credit cards will be issued upon approval by the Purchasing Agent. Approval requires the submission of a request form which can be obtained on the County intranet, found within the Purchasing Department section.

A County credit card may only be used for official County business. Department Heads, and traveling employees, retain the responsibility to ensure all use of County credit cards must be done in accordance with this policy.

##### **A. Guidelines**

1. Travel request packets shall be submitted and approved before expenses are charged to a County credit card.
2. County credit cards may be used ONLY for the purchase of airfare (including advanced purchase on the internet), lodging, car rental or ground transportation, and conference or seminar registration.
3. County credit cards are restricted solely for use by the Credit cardholder, unless otherwise authorized.
4. Misuse of the County credit card will result in the immediate cancellation of the credit card, and could result in disciplinary action.
5. Travel credit cards will be deactivated 90 days prior to an elected official leaving office, or immediately after the November general election results have been canvassed and accepted by the County, whichever is sooner.

##### **B. Cancellations**

1. If travel must be cancelled for legitimate reasons, any credit for air travel must be returned to the County to be applied within the stipulations provided by the airline company.
2. If the airline cannot reimburse the County, the employee must reimburse the County, and may apply the airline credit for personal use at a later date.

#### **V. Travel Reimbursement Procedures**

Travel reimbursements are typically discouraged, as prepared travel is encouraged and should be used by all departments when at all possible. However, due to uncontrollable situations, emergency situations, or last minute travel necessities, this section will outline the procedures required to submit for a travel reimbursement during these instances alone.

If an employee does not obtain advanced approval for travel, employees may submit the Travel Expenditure Voucher, the County Funded Justification Form, the Employee Training and Professional Certification Agreement (if applicable), and receipts for all expenses except meals, as mentioned in Section I of this policy, within ten (10) working days upon the return of their travel.

Travel Reimbursement requests must contain the approval of the department head.

Reimbursement requests submitted after ten (10) working days shall not be considered. There will be no exceptions made, nor is this provision subject to appeal by the Chief Administrator or the Commissioners Court.

## **VI. Emergency Travel**

Emergency travel is defined as travel that is required by County employees to further advance good County governance, protect and serve other communities, or other imperative travel that cannot be pre-approved in accordance with the guidelines set forth in this policy.

- A. In the event of an emergency, the Department Head of the travelling employee(s) shall notify the Chief Administrator as soon as reasonably possible.
- B. Upon written approval of the Chief Administrator, travel costs to include airfare, rental cars, gasoline, lodging and meal per diem rates shall be authorized up to \$2,000 total per travelling employee.
- C. The Chief Administrator will coordinate with the County's Purchasing Agent to complete the appropriate transactions via a County credit card.
- D. Any request in excess of \$2,000 per travelling employee must be made by the Commissioners Court.

## **VII. Supervisor Responsibilities**

Department Heads are expected to communicate this policy and its procedures to their employees, and shall be responsible for approving the initial travel requests according to this policy.

- A. Management
  - 1. By signing travel forms, Department Heads certify the travel/training is consistent with the department's duties and responsibilities.
  - 2. Department Heads shall manage the number of employees being sent to any particular training at the same time based on impacts to the operation and within these policy guidelines.
  - 3. Department Heads are required and authorized to execute the Employee Training and Professional Certification Agreements between their department and their traveling employees in accordance with the County's Professional Development policy. Department Heads shall submit their own Training and Professional Certification Agreements directly to the Chief Administrator for authorization. (Elected Officials are not subject to such agreements.)
- B. Discipline
  - 1. The County Auditor's Office will provide the Chief Administrator's Office a quarterly listing of employees who are not in compliance with the County's Travel and Training policies. However, as employees become non-compliant, the County Auditor's Office shall notify the Chief Administrator's Office immediately.
  - 2. Continuous failure to comply with this policy may result in disciplinary action by the employee's Department Head.