

TRAVEL POLICY
EL PASO COUNTY
PRESENTED TO THE COMMISSIONERS COURT
November 8, 2010

This policy applies to all persons whose travel is subject to approval by the Commissioners Court.

Objective: To establish policies and procedures that will (a) ensure efficient and effective use of travel funds; (b) hold department heads responsible for enforcement of the policy; (c) provide accountability; (d) process requests for travel in a manner consistent with both efficiency and accountability; and (e) provide a means to take advantage of either state travel contract rates or internet rates, as the needs of County departments may warrant on a given occasion.

Terms:

Department Head, is used in several instances in this policy. If the reference involves signing documents, another person to whom the department head has assigned signature authority may affix their signature. The department head shall be responsible for the accuracy of any document signed on his or her behalf.

County Credit Card, refers to credit cards obtained by the County from a credit card vendor, through a State of Texas contract, and issued by the County to persons who travel frequently on County business. These cards may be used only for air travel, lodging, rental cars, and seminar registration fees. The person to whom the card is issued is responsible for obtaining Travel Committee and Commissioners Court approval for travel and forwarding receipts to the Auditor's Office.

Travel Justification and Authorization:

Approval of travel expenditures from County funds requires that the travel must benefit the County. All travel should be submitted to the travel committee, where it will be reviewed for compliance with this policy. Areas of review include:

- Funding requirements (reimbursable from another source)
- Statutory continuing educational requirement (relevant to dept. operations)
- Relevancy of training or certification (with supporting documentation)
- Cost reasonableness and travel efficiencies

Upon committee approval final travel vouchers must be authorized and approved by Commissioners Court and all requests are be subject to the availability of adequate budgeted funds.

All employees shall submit a Travel Request Form to the County Auditor's Office which will in turn submit requests to the travel committee on a weekly basis. Employees will no longer be required to submit an agenda item when requesting travel funds. The Travel Request Form shall include the following:

- Name of the Individual(s) traveling
- Destination and dates of trip
- Purpose of the trip
- Travel Estimate Amount with Itemized Breakdown
- Registration Form, Brochure or Invoice when applicable
- Funding Source
- Disclosure of Separate Funding Source when applicable
- Department Head Approval (or designee)

Travel expenses shall be limited to those expenses incurred in the performance of a public purpose authorized by Commissioners Court, and must be within the limitations prescribed in this policy. A Travel Justification form should be included with each travel request.

The Justification Form must include the following:

1. Statement of the purpose of the travel/training:
2. Reference statute and length of time to obtain required hours if continuing professional education is required.
3. Statutorily required training hours obtained to date;
4. Statutory hours to be obtained from this training;
5. The educational benefits expected to be derived from the training/function and how it will be utilized within the County;
6. Reason why the County should be represented.
7. Copies of the travel justification and an itemization of estimated travel expenses in support of the travel request should be forwarded to the County Auditor's Office and a copy retained by the individual requesting funds.
8. The employee salary offset form must be signed by employee authorizing the County Auditor's Office to garnish an employee's wages for monies due to the County.

Payments for travel/training will not be processed without the submission of a completed Travel Justification Form.

A. Basic Policy Requirements:

1. All Lodging paid by the County **shall** be in accordance with the State of Texas travel guidelines:

<https://fm.x.cpa.state.tx.us/fm/travel/travelrates.php>

- Automobile mileage **shall** be reimbursed at 40 cents a mile. Reimbursement for mileage may not exceed reasonable costs of airfare, if applicable.
 - The most reasonable cost for ground transportation is required. If taxi or shuttle are available and will not interfere with travel itinerary it is required to be utilized, otherwise if a rental car is the most economical method it will be authorized. Rental cars may not be used for personal purposes at the Counties expenses. 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 employees. Employees are now required to obtain rental car insurance under the drivers and County's name when the use of a rental car is required.
 - There will no meal per diem if travel is completed (depart and return) in the same day. Meal per diem is limited to \$36 a day or \$9.00 for breakfast and lunch and \$18.00 for dinner. There will be no per diem advance for meals that are provided by the event.
2. All use of County Credit Cards and all travel charged to them must be in accordance with the policies and procedures of the County and this policy.
 3. Both the department head and the individual traveler are responsible for the proper use of all travel funds and County Credit cards. **(A County Credit Card may only be used for official County business)**
 4. If travel must be cancelled for legitimate reasons, any credit for air travel must be returned to the travel committee to be applied within the stipulations provided by the airline company.
 5. Travel credit cards will be deactivated 90 days prior to an elected official leaving office.
 6. Advances and reimbursements may only be based on actual costs

B. Travel may be approved for any of the following reasons:

1. Statutorily required continuing professional education for the position;
2. To obtain training not available locally;
3. To obtain required continuing education for elected officials and others who must maintain licenses or certification;
4. To testify before legislative bodies, regulatory agencies and commissions, and other forums that may make decisions affecting the County and its affiliated organizations and operations;
5. To participate in professional organizations related to the employee or official's job assignment;

6. To conduct essential research and information-gathering for improvement of county operations or compliance with the law;
7. To conduct interviews of prospective county department heads or employees;
8. To transport potential employees to El Paso or other sites convenient to those conducting interviews for County positions;
9. To monitor and/or influence the development of state or federal legislation or implementation of legislation that might affect the County;
10. To participate in forums, coalitions, and discussions relating to the policy, legislative and regulatory interests of the County;
11. To pursue the County's interests in litigation or criminal justice;
12. To promote the economic development interests of the County;
13. To promote increased use of revenue-producing County facilities;
14. To carry out other purposes determined by Commissioners Court to be in the interest of the County.
15. Preference may be given for the allocation of funding that is the most cost effective (local, webinars, DVD's , etc.)

C. Procedure for travel approval:

1. All travel requests will be reviewed for prudent use of travel funds, including choices of hotel, car rentals, etc.
2. 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. Officials and employees should schedule travel well in advance when possible in order to take advantage of the best rates.
3. The County Auditor's Office will present a separate paid claims schedule to Commissioners Court listing all travel/training funding requests for the Court's approval, once approved by the committee.
4. All employee travel requires approval by the Travel committee and then by Commissioners Court, and the County is not obligated to pay for travel if prior approval is not obtained. Approval should be obtained in advance and must include an estimated cost of all expenses. In that case the employee may obtain advance payment for all or part of the estimated travel costs. Upon return, the employee **shall** provide a completed Travel Voucher and all required travel receipts to the County Auditor within ten working

days of return from the trip. Actual receipts must be provided for airfare, lodging, registration and car rentals. Employees may be responsible for the incurrence of travel costs that exceed approved estimates, if deemed unreasonable or unnecessary. If the County Auditor's records reflect that an individual has at least one outstanding travel voucher in excess of the tenth working day return settlement date requirement, a subsequent travel advance **SHALL NOT** be processed until such time as the individual complies with county travel policy,

5. Travel advances which are reimbursable from a third party will not be considered or approved. All travel advances will be for non-reimbursable cost only. Any travel costs that are reimbursed from a third party and not remitted to the County may be subject to the County of El Paso fraud policy.
6. If meals are included and available in the cost of registration for a conference meal per diem of \$36 per full day must be reduced by the following:
 - Continental breakfast (\$0.00) Full breakfast (\$9.00)
 - Lunch (\$9) Dinner (\$18)
7. **The employee may apply for reimbursement after completing a trip.** However, if the Committee and/or Commissioners Court denies the payment, the employee is solely responsible for all costs.
8. **If an employee does not obtain advanced approval for a trip,** upon return, a travel request shall be submitted with a signed **Travel Request Form** to the County Auditor for committee and commissioners Court approval **within ten working days of return from the trip.** Pursuant to Commissioners Court, **THERE WILL BE NO EXCEPTIONS OR GRIEVANCE PROCEDURES.** Any requests for reimbursements older than 10 working days will not be reimbursed.
9. **If an employee obtains an advance payment for travel, upon return final** vouchers and all receipts will be forwarded by the County Auditor's Office to within ten working days of return from the trip. Failure to submit the supporting documentation to the County Auditor's Office within the ten working days may result in disallowance of expense and will result in salary offset of the employee/official's wages to satisfy the amount due.
10. **If an employee obtains an advance payment for travel,** but incurs allowable travel expenses in excess of the amount received, approval is required in order to be reimbursed. The employee shall submit a travel request to the county auditors' office within ten working days from the date of return. The Travel Voucher, with receipts, should accompany the submission to the County Auditors office. Vouchers and all receipts will be forwarded by the County Auditor's Office to the travel committee for consideration. Failure to submit the supporting documentation to the County Auditor's Office within the ten working days may result in disallowance of expense and will result in salary offset of the employee/official's wages to satisfy the amount due.
11. **If the employee obtains an advance payment** that exceeds the actual allowable costs of the trip, the Travel Voucher and receipts, along with a check for the balance, shall be

submitted to the Auditor's Office within ten working days after the trip. Failure to comply with this policy will result in salary offset of the employee/official's wages to satisfy the amount due.

12. **If a trip is cancelled and an advance has been issued**, the employee is responsible for immediately returning the funds to the County Auditor's Office, but in no circumstance more than **5** working days after the cancellation of the trip. Failure to comply will result in funds being garnished from the employee/official's paycheck.
13. **All travel advances from current year funds must be approved prior to the adoption of the subsequent fiscal year's budget. Furthermore, only travel advances for dates subsequent to fiscal year end and utilizing current year funds must relate to travel that will be taken no later than November 15, of the new fiscal year.**
14. **Employees requesting travel/training funds for certification purposes for the benefit of the employee must enter into an Employee Training Agreement with the County that is approved by Commissioners Court as a separate agenda item prior to the payment of travel/training funds for said purpose.**
15. **The County Auditor's Office will provide the travel committee a monthly listing of employees/officials who are not in compliance with the County's Travel Policy.**
16. **Continuous failure to comply with the travel policies and procedures can result in disciplinary action by the employee's department head.**

E. Procedure for Using Travel County Credit Cards

1. **County Credit Cards** will be issued only to persons whose duties require frequent travel.
2. **County Credit Cards** may be used **ONLY** for the purchase of airfare (including advanced purchase on the internet), lodging, car rental and conference or seminar registration and is restricted solely for use by the Credit Card Holder unless otherwise authorized.
3. **County Credit Cards** will be issued upon approval by the purchasing agent. Approval requires submission of a form, signed by the department head and the employee. This form may be obtained from the Purchasing Office. The form shall include an agreement that the cost of any charges not approved by the Commissioners Court **shall** be the sole responsibility of the individual and failure to settle the debt **shall** authorize the Auditor's Office to deduct the amount from the employee's subsequent pay.
4. Misuse of the **County Credit Card** will result in the immediate cancellation of the person's card, and could result in further disciplinary action.
5. Deactivation of credit cards will take place 90 days prior to an elected official leaving office.

F. The following travel shall be approved in advance by the Commissioners Court:

1. Any travel at County expense by persons who are not County officers or employees (e.g., members of a board appointed by Commissioners Court), except witness, inmate and investigative travel.
2. Any travel by personnel of a department or program determined by Commissioners Court to have abused the travel policy or to habitually file travel receipts late. Commissioners Court reserves the right to vote at any time to require a department or program to secure advance approval for all travel if the Court deems the department has not adhered to the adopted travel policy.

G. Commissioners Court expectations of department heads:

Department heads are expected to communicate the travel policy and procedures to their employees and will be held responsible for approving travel by their employees according to this travel policy.