

**Galveston County
Travel Policy
Effective 11/13/2012**

This policy as adopted by Commissioners Court (CC) is meant to provide guidance as to appropriate travel methods and reimbursable expenses while traveling on County business. Whenever unusual circumstances are involved or this Policy does not provide clear guidance, please secure a written opinion from the County Auditor prior to the trip.

Overview

County employees will utilize the most economical and effective means of transportation, housing and meals that are available. When evaluating travel costs, it is important to include employee costs. That is, savings from inexpensive travel agenda can more than be offset by excessive travel time that keeps the employee away from normal County duties. Saving a few dollars on airline tickets is not warranted if the employee must leave a day early and the cost of the employee's salary for that day exceeds the airline ticket savings. Nevertheless, whenever justifiable employees will utilize transportation that is the most economical in total trip cost. Hotel shuttles are preferred over taxis and taxis are preferred over rental cars, etc. Expense reports must be filed within 60 days of each trip.

Lobbying

Galveston County Commissioners' Court or the Court's duly appointed designee will address every member of the Texas and US legislature, no other lobbying is to be acknowledged as official policy of the County. Elected Officials, Appointed Officials, or their employees will expend no public funds for the purpose of communicating directly with a member of the legislative branch to influence legislation unless the effort has been preapproved by Commissioners' Court; otherwise, they must do so at their own expense and in their individual or elected capacity, not as a representative of Galveston County.

Budgeted Funds

All travel must include a properly approved travel request. Travel requests (Exhibit I) will include a brief justification for the trip and will identify the estimated cost for the trip. It will include estimates for:

- Registration fees
- Lodging
- Air fare
- Personal auto usage
- Parking
- Shuttle
- Meals
- Incidentals

All travel requests must be approved in advance by a department head and must include an assertion that adequate travel funds are available. The approved Travel Information Form should be sent to the Purchasing Agent who will create the Purchase Order to cover the cost of the travel and forward a copy of the Travel Information Form to the County Auditor for review. Upon completion of travel, a Travel Expense Report will be completed and submitted with proper approval to the County Auditor. If the actual expenses exceed the amount estimated on the travel request, payment for the excess charges will only be made if there are additional unobligated travel funds available for that department. Law enforcement operations do not require the completion of a travel request form.

Workflow

A Purchase Requisition supported by Exhibit 1 should accompany each travel request. The Exhibit 1 and any supporting documentation such as conference brochures and registration forms should be sent to the County Auditor. This information will be checked and then forwarded to Purchasing where hotel, airline and other reservations will be placed. Confirmation of reservation dates will be sent to the department that originated the trip request. Purchasing will complete the formal Purchase Order for the trip and send the Purchase Order back to the originating department. Upon completion of the trip, the originating department or the employee will complete an expense report which details the trip costs and will include the appropriate receipts. All costs paid for by a P-Card will be included on the expense report and will be reported.

Exhibit I

Travel Information Form

Requestor _____ **Department** _____

Date _____ **Destination** _____

From Date _____ **To Date** _____

Purpose _____

Requested Transportation _____

Preferred Hotel _____ **PEID** _____

Special Request (Rental Car, Extra Travel Days, Use of Private Vehicle) _____

IFAS Account Number _____

Purchase Request Number _____

Purchase Order Number _____ **County Auditor** _____

Comments _____

Estimated Trip and Conference Cost _____

Why is the travel required?

Is the training available on-line?

Is the training available locally?

Travel not secured through Travel Counselors approved by Purchasing?

Allowable Travel Expenses

Reimbursable expenses must be reasonable and normal for the area. County policy is to consider any trip which is Out-of-County and is less than 30 miles from the employee's regular place of employment or the employee's home to be local travel and reimbursable only for mileage, parking and tolls. Mileage will be determined using Mapquest (www.mapquest.com). Questions about qualifying for this limit should be directed in writing in advance of the trip to the County Auditor whenever there is any doubt about travel meeting the 30 mile requirement. Travel which is Out-of-County and more than 30 miles from the employee's regular place of employment or the employee's home, whichever is closer to the travel destination and for more than one day is eligible for per diem, hotel, and other travel reimbursement identified in this policy. Travel that meets this definition and does not require an overnight stay will be reimbursed at the per diem rate for the meals taken while out-of-the-County.

The following examples are representative of allowable expenses:

- Hotel rooms including the night before where morning travel is not reasonable
- Per diem meals up to \$45 per day without receipts (\$10 - breakfast, \$13 - lunch and \$22 - dinner). Meals provided by conferences and airlines must be utilized and per diem will be reduced accordingly.
- Travel completed before noon will receive \$23 and travel completed after noon will receive a full day's per diem. Travel beginning before noon will receive a full day's per diem and travel beginning after noon will receive \$23.
- Incidental expenses for telephone calls and cleaning where justified
- Reasonable long distance calls. Employees are requested to use phone cards rather than charge calls to the room at hotel rates. Cards should be kept by the department for future use whenever significant prepaid time is remaining.
- Out-of-town travel utilizing public airport hotel shuttle buses. Where airport shuttle busses are not available, a taxi or rental vehicle may be utilized when justified.
- Baggage storage fees
- Long-term airport parking
- Mileage from employee's home to airport and return
- Tolls
- Regular hotel guest parking

If the trip is being paid for by another government agency, the County will not pay for the trip.

Travel Advances

Employees are encouraged to pay for their trips using their personal credit cards or may utilize approved County P-Cards. Whenever P-Cards are utilized for travel expenses, all travel costs should be charged to the P-Card. Mixing personal payments and P-Card payments makes processing expense reports very difficult. Timely filed travel expense reports should be processed so that the reimbursement checks are sent to the employee before personal credit card payments are due. Whenever an employee cannot utilize a personal credit card for travel, the County may provide a special Travel P-Card for paying travel expenses. Refer to the County P-Card Procedure for specific instructions. In some circumstances where travel by the employee is infrequent, a travel advance check may be utilized instead of a P-Card for the expenses other than airline and hotel costs.

Hotels

The County encourages the use of clean, comfortable and safe hotels but expects that the employee will be frugal in selecting a hotel. Government rates should be utilized whenever available. The use of discounted conference hotels is acceptable; but use of other more economical hotels is encouraged whenever available within walking distance of the meeting or conference. The use of hotels other than discounted conference hotels should be justified. The use of room service is not allowed. Liquor, movies and spa charges will not be reimbursed. The use of concierge to store baggage is encouraged in order to avoid late checkout charges at the hotel. Use of hotel shuttles or buses is also encouraged in order to minimize transportation costs. Long-distance calls using the hotel phone are discouraged. Phone cards, which can be purchased at most convenience stores or the hotel gift shop, are the preferred method to pay for long distance calls. Phone cards should be filed with the expense report. Collect calls will be used only in emergency situations. Arrival one night before morning meetings or conferences is acceptable whenever same day travel is not reasonable. Arrival the day of the meeting or conference is encouraged whenever the meeting or conference does not begin before 10:00 AM. Return the same day that the conference or meeting ends is expected except where reasonable connections will not assure arrival at a Houston area airport before 10:00 PM. Valet parking will not be reimbursed.

Air Fare

Travel by air is acceptable whenever travel by car is longer than three hours or air travel is cheaper than travel by car. Air reservations should be placed through Purchasing so that state rates can be utilized. It is acceptable, however, for the individual to make reservations directly where the individual can secure a rate lower than the state rate. An employee wishing to make personal reservations must verify the state rate with Purchasing and attach this estimate to the expense report. Employees are encouraged to book flights at least two weeks in advance so as to be able to take advantage of early flight discounts. The County will not reimburse costs in excess of the state rate. Travel should be scheduled to allow for the most economical fares but should not force an employee to travel after 10:00 PM. It is acceptable to travel a day early in order to receive a discounted air fare; however, the savings in air fare should exceed any hotel, meal and incidental expenses incurred due to early travel. Please note that the County Travel Agent has agreed to secure the least expensive available fares including Fun Fares from Southwest Airlines if the Travel Information Form is processed in sufficient time to allow for posted weekly specials to be utilized. Although not refundable, these type fares can be redeemed for other Southwest travel by any County employee. Approval for early travel should be received in advance from the County Auditor and the requestor should include details such as the following exhibit:

Exhibit II

Costs for Monday through Wednesday conference:

Air Fare Sunday and return on Wednesday to Los Angeles	\$ 750.00
Hotel 3 days at \$120	360.00
Meals 4 days at \$45	180.00
Mileage to airport	30.00
Parking airport 4 days at \$7.50	30.00
Conference	800.00
Incidentals	<u>40.00</u>
Total trip costs	<u>\$2,190.00</u>

Costs for Saturday stay over:

Air Fare Saturday and return on Wednesday to Los Angeles	\$ 289.00
Hotel 4 days at \$120	480.00
Meals 5 days at \$45	225.00
Mileage to airport	30.00
Parking airport 5 days at \$7.50	37.50
Conference	800.00
Incidentals	<u>50.00</u>
Total trip costs	<u>\$1,911.50</u>
Net savings to County	<u>\$ 278.50</u>

While early travel outside of normal work hours is allowed, it is at the employee's option and is not mandatory. Travel time outside normal work hours is not compensated time.

Rental Cars

Hotel shuttle buses and taxis, in that order, are the preferable means of transportation when out-of-town. Where these options are impractical or uneconomical, use of a rental car may be justified. A Rental Car Request (Exhibit III) shall be completed by the employee and approved by the County Auditor prior to making a rental car reservation. The County self-insures and therefore the employee should waive the extra vehicle insurance. The County will not reimburse the employee for this insurance charge. The employee should ensure that the vehicle is returned with a full tank of gas. Fuel and other receipts should be retained along with the vehicle receipt for reimbursement. The use of an economy car for one person, a mid-size for two and a full-size for three or more is the recommended vehicle. The use of SUV, vans or other specialty vehicles requires special justification. The employee should make the rental car reservation through the County travel agent. The employee can make personal reservations whenever a better rate can be obtained. A quote must be obtained from Purchasing and included on the Travel Expense Reimbursement in order to validate the lower rate. The County will not pay more than the rate quoted from Purchasing.

Exhibit III

Rental Vehicle Justification

Date of Request _____ **Date of Trip** _____

Number of Days _____ **Destination** _____

Type of Vehicle _____ **Number of Occupants** _____

Rate _____ **Rate Verification** _____

Justification: _____

Requestor _____ **Department** _____

County Auditor _____ **Approved** **Disapproved**

Comments _____

Meals

The County has determined that out-of-town meals and associated gratuities should be paid on a per diem basis at a rate established by the Commissioners' Court during the annual budget approval process. Currently, that rate is \$45 per day. This is composed of \$10 - breakfast, \$13 - lunch and \$22 - dinner. The employee is not required to keep receipts to document the cost of these meals. The allowance will be prorated for partial days. Trips beginning before noon will receive a full per diem; trips beginning after noon will receive \$22. Return trips completed before noon will receive \$23 and return trips completed after noon will receive \$45. Meal tips are included in the per diem rate and should not be reported separately. Occasionally travel may include cities where \$45 is inadequate to cover cost. The employee should get advance approval from Commissioners' Court to raise the per diem rate to an acceptable level.

Whenever meals are included in a conference or event, employees are expected to use the furnished meals and the per diem rate will be reduced by the applicable per diem amount for each event meal. Meals will not be paid for travel within the 30-mile radius and must be outside the County. Meals included in professional meetings where the meal is not billed separately from the registration will be reimbursed. Business meals where County business is conducted will be reimbursed. All business meal reimbursement requests must identify the business partners in attendance and provide an explanation of the County business that was conducted. Alcoholic beverages will not be reimbursed. Reasonable tips (20%) on business meals are acceptable.

Use of Personal Vehicles

The use of personal vehicles for County business travel is acceptable whenever a County vehicle cannot effectively be utilized. The County does not insure private vehicles so each employee is responsible to determine whether his personal automobile insurance policy coverage is adequate. Damage to the vehicle, vehicle repairs, parking fines, towing charges and theft of property are the responsibility of the employee, not the County. The County will reimburse the employee based upon beginning and ending odometer readings at the current IRS rate. In addition to mileage reimbursement, the County will reimburse parking and tolls incurred in the course and scope of County business.

The use of a personal vehicle for out-of-town travel whenever a County vehicle is not available is acceptable as long as the total cost to the County, including employee salary, does not exceed the cost of air travel. Minimum travel to restaurants and other locations will be included in the mileage reimbursed. Mileage will be computed from the employee's home or the regular work site whichever is closest to the destination.

Individuals with car allowances will be reimbursed for use of personal vehicles used beyond the contiguous counties of Galveston, Brazoria, Harris and Chambers. Mileage will be paid from League City to the destination and return to League City. Reimbursement will be computed as noted above.

Taxi, Hotel Shuttle, Public Transportation

Hotel shuttle service is the preferred method of travel at out-of-town locations where available. Day tickets or week tickets should be used when available. Round trip service is available at most airports to the major hotels in the area. Whenever hotel shuttle service is not available because of late arrival or an unusual destination, use of a taxi is acceptable. Receipts should be retained to document this expense. Using a taxi from a hotel or meeting site to visit a restaurant or other event site will not be reimbursed.

Long Distance Calls /Internet Service

The County will reimburse reasonable long distance charges for out-of-town travel. Phone cards, which are available at most convenience stores and hotel guest shops, are preferable. The use of hotel long distance service is discouraged. Collect calls are allowed only in an emergency.

Reasonable internet café service charges will be reimbursed, to facilitate employee remote access to County email promoting a continuation of County business from out-of-town locations.

Incidental Expenses

The County will reimburse for reasonable incidental expenses necessitated by a long trip. Customary hotel and transportation tips will be reimbursed.

Out of State Travel

A monthly report shall be prepared for all out-of-state travel and will be sent to the Commissioners' Court.

Expenses Not Reimbursed

- Movie charges
- Room service
- Spas
- Health club
- Room bars
- Limousines
- Luxury rental cars
- Refueling charges by rental car companies
- Optional insurance
- Entertainment expenses
- Personal items
- Medication or doctor's visits
- Valet parking-Except where preapproved by Commissioners' Court