



# Buncombe County, North Carolina

## Travel Policy

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### 1.0 Policy Information

<b>Category &amp; Subcategory:</b>	Travel	<b>Original Effective Date:</b>	9/16/2008	<b>This Revision Effective:</b>	4/10/2018
<b>Persons Affected:</b>	Eligible Buncombe County Workforce				
<b>Approvals:</b>	Approved By:	County Manager	Approved By:	Assistant County Manager	
	Date Approved:		Date Approved:		

### Revision History

Effective Date	Version	Section	Summary of Changes	Author
9/16/2008	1.0		Adopted by Board of Commissioners	
11/20/2012	1.1		Amended by Board of Commissioners	
4/10/2018	2.0		Revisions by Policy Review Group	Policy Review Group

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## 2.0 Purpose/Introduction

The purpose of this policy is to establish a uniform policy that is consistent with the business objectives of Buncombe County. It provides the guidelines for the authorization and reimbursement of travel expenses incurred by employees when travel is necessary to conduct business on behalf of the County.

It is the County's policy to reimburse employees for reasonable expenses incurred when traveling for official County business, including meetings, conferences, trainings, workshops, and seminars. Travel may be local, ~~in~~ in state, out-of-state, foreign and/or overnight.

## 3.0 Definitions

### 3.1 Department Director

Director of a given department with authority to make budgetary decisions. Examples include Planning Director as well as elected officials who head departments, such as the Sheriff and Register of Deeds.

### 3.2 **Designee**

Staff member chosen by the Department Director to act on their behalf during their absence or at appointed time for certain duties or responsibilities.

### 3.3 **M&IE**

Meals and incidental expenses such as laundry and room service, tips for services and other fees that may be associated with travel.

### 3.4 **Per Diem**

Daily allowance for M&IE.

### 3.5 **GSA**

US General Service Administration. Web Site for Per Diem rates: <https://www.gsa.gov/travel/plan-book/per-diem-rates>

### 3.6 **Passengers**

Can be staff members; staff from other governing agencies and municipalities; and clients of Buncombe County departments. All passengers using County or Rental Vehicles must be on official County business.

## 4.0 Applicability

These policy and procedures are applicable to all Buncombe County employees, ~~personnel~~ Department Directors may enact additional requirements dependent upon budget or resources available. Emergencies may preclude the applicability of policy in certain instances.

## 5.0 Roles and Responsibilities

The County realizes that in the course of providing services and professional development to its employees that staff travel can be a necessity. A critical balance must be sought when requesting travel. This is the ~~The~~ County's ~~need~~ responsibility for cost effectiveness should be the guiding principle when considering decisions involving employee travel, and the employee's need for quality services and support. Employee travel should be via the most economically viable via the lowest cost alternatives and consistent with good business practices. ~~Neither luxury nor sub-standard modes of transportation and accommodations should be used.~~

Employee travel and ~~the~~ associated expenses will be authorized only in circumstances that are clearly consistent with the mission of the County. It will be the responsibility of each Department Director, or their designee, to ensure that all employee travel meets this objective and all reimbursements are made for reasonable business expenses in connection with the authorized travel as defined in this policy.

## 6.0 Policy

### **Travel Request**

All requests for travel must be approved in advance by the applicable Sheriff, Register of Deeds, Department Director, or their designee. Foreign travel must be approved by the County Manager The County Manager/Assistant County Manager and the Department Director must approve foreign travel.

~~Lawson Expense Management~~ Lawson Expense Management must be used to submit all work-related

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~~expenses, including travel. To request a Travel Advance, use an Expense Request and for Reimbursement and Reconciliation purposes, use an Expense Report. The Finance Department must receive the approved request no less than ten (10) working days prior to the travel date when a cash advance is being requested. **Buncombe County Travel Policy requires advanced approval before traveling.**~~

~~**Travel Reconciliation**~~

~~After travel is complete, employees must reconcile their travel expenses by changing their Request to a Report and include all travel expenses, both company paid and out of pocket. If a Request was not submitted for an advance, a Report must be entered listing all travel expenses, both company paid and out of pocket and receipts must be attached if required. Receipts for meals are not required. This must be done within five (5) working days after the completion of the trip.~~

~~Please refer to the [Buncombe County Travel Procedures regarding specifics for expense management and travel reconciliation](#). These procedures will outline the mandatory requirements for travel reconciliation. All monies owed to the County must be paid at the time of the reconciliation.~~

**PER DIEM MEAL ALLOWANCE AND INCIDENTAL EXPENSES**

**Overnight Travel**

~~Ideally, per diem will be requested in advance of travel when possible. If this is not possible,~~ Travelers may request to be reimbursed for meals and incidental expenses (M&IE) for overnight travel based upon Federal per diem rates in accordance with GSA. ~~Lawson Expense Management will calculate the allowed Per Diem.~~ The per diem rate is based upon the city/county where travel is located. Meal receipts are not required and should not be submitted with trip documentation. Incidental expenses include laundry, room service, tips for services and other fees.

Note: If neither the city nor county is listed, ~~the location is a standard destination with a rate of \$70.00 for lodging and \$39.00 for meals and incidental expenses (M&IE).~~ [then the standard rate for that state applies.](#) This rate is subject to change and will be posted on the GSA web site.

Buncombe County’s policy for Per Diem is as follows:

- First and last day of travel equals 75% of daily M&IE
- Full allowance for all other days

[P-Cards should not be used to pay for meals for which an employee received per diem. See the P-Card policy for details.](#)

~~Meals Away From Home But Not Overnight~~ **Day trip travel reimbursement**

[The County will reimburse an employee for lunch per diem rate when traveling out of county on business in which a return to the county for lunch would be time and cost-prohibitive. The County will reimburse only the registration or meeting fee when lunch is included in the cost of the course/seminar/meeting.](#)

[When a day trip creates an extended workday, where the traveler:](#)

- a. [Departs before 6 a.m., breakfast can be reimbursed at one-third the per diem rate for the location to which the traveler is going.](#)
- b. [Returns home after 7 p.m., dinner can be reimbursed at one-third the per diem rate for the location from which the traveler is returning.](#)

~~Traveling “away from home” means:~~

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- ~~1. The employee must be traveling away from the general tax home area substantially longer than an ordinary day's work, and~~
- ~~2. The employee needs to obtain substantial sleep or rest to meet the demands of the work while away from home. IRC §162(a)(2)~~

~~In order to be excludable as reimbursements, the travel must be temporary and be substantially longer than an ordinary day's work, requiring an overnight stay or substantial sleep or rest.~~

Generally, these meals are taxable as wages to the employee because travel must be away from home overnight to be excluded.

## **LODGING AND TRANSPORTATION**

Transportation expenses shall be reimbursed based on the most economical mode of transportation that reasonably meets the official travel needs.

The use of a P-Card for Booking for Lodging and Air Travel will be required unless the Department does not have access to a P-Card at the time of booking. Use of personal credit cards is discouraged for this purpose as the County is unable to recoup sales tax and P-Card rebates and this use will be at the discretion of the Department Director. Reimbursement for lodging will be limited to the GSA rate for that location or the rate actually paid, if lower, unless such accommodations are not available. An exception would be if the traveler is attending a conference and the conference hotel or other hotel sponsored by the conference charges a higher conference rate.

Accommodations should only be made at a venue that is a legally established provider of lodging. Those employees booking accommodations should consult the local government rate at the lodging establishment and compare with other available rates when booking. Booking non-refundable rates is discouraged.

### **Air Travel**

~~Air Travel will be via the most direct route and at the lowest rate available for coach class. First class air travel is not allowed unless there is no other means of transportation available. Deviations from the lowest fare must have the prior approval of the department director or their designee.~~

Booking of air travel should be done using available coach rates that best suit the work schedules and budget of the Department. Employee time away from work shall be a consideration in deciding the mode of travel.

Employees who choose a mode of transportation other than flying due solely to personal considerations when coach airfare is the least expensive means of travel will be reimbursed based on the least expensive cost, either airfare or actual expenses. Alternate modes of transportation cannot take away from employee's work schedule.

~~No more than two (2) County Commissioners or upper level management may fly together on the same plane. No more than three (3) County employees are allowed to fly together on the same plane and must be at the discretion of the department director or their designee.~~

Ground transportation including travel to/from the airport and place of lodging, and travel to/from place of lodging to place of business ~~Transportation from the airport to final destination~~ should be by the most reasonable mode of travel available taking into consideration both employee safety and schedule constraints. This includes taxi and/or shuttle services and public transportation. The use of a rental vehicle for this purpose must have the prior approval of the Department Director or their designee.

### **Foreign Travel**

Foreign travel must be approved in advance by the County Manager, Assistant County Manager, and the Department Director. The same requirements and recommendations from Air Travel section above applies to Foreign Travel as well. ~~The M&IE rates are located at the following web site of GAS: [http://aoprals.state.gov/web920/per\\_diem.asp](http://aoprals.state.gov/web920/per_diem.asp) under the Foreign Travel Tab.~~

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## County Vehicles

~~If a **department** is assigned a County vehicle, this vehicle can be used for travel of 120 miles or less per trip. Travel in a County vehicle is at the discretion of the department director or their designee. Travel required in the course of executing daily job duties are excluded from the 120 miles. Example would be a Permit and Inspections vehicle or Tax Department vehicle.~~

~~If a **staff member** is assigned a County vehicle, the staff member can use the vehicle for travel that is greater than 120 miles per trip. Example would be a staff member required to be on call twenty four hours a day, requiring a County vehicle to perform their duties.~~

County vehicles may be used for travel outside of the county when approved by the Department Director or his designee. These decisions should be made considering the department's need for county vehicle usage. Please consult the Vehicle Usage Policy for details.

## Vehicle Rental

A rental vehicle may be requested by employees for official County business. ~~Rental vehicles will be used for travel of more than 120 miles per day. Please refer to the Buncombe County Travel Procedures for guidance on submitting a rental vehicle request. Reservations for rental vehicles shall be made by completing the Rental Car Request Form available at <http://intranet.buncombecounty.org/Finance/vehicleRentals.asp>. This form must be completed in its entirety. To qualify for a rental, travel should exceed 120 miles average in a 24 hour period.~~

~~Reservations should be made as far in advance as possible to ensure timeliness of pickups by the rental car vendor. A confirmation number will be emailed to employees and their supervisor when the reservation has been made.~~

~~When using a rental vehicle for travel, fuel purchases are to be made only with a "gas" credit card. Buncombe County procurement cards cannot be used for the purchase of gasoline, unless an emergency arises. The gas credit cards are available for pick up at the Finance Department prior to travel. Employees must return the gas card, all fuel receipts and rental receipt to the Finance Department within two (2) days of return from travel. All passengers traveling in a rental vehicle must be on official business.~~

## Personal Vehicles

If an employee is traveling out of county on business, the use of county vehicles or rental vehicles would be encouraged over the use of personal vehicles and the Department Director or their designee should approve the use of personal vehicles for out of county travel. The numbers of employees traveling and how many vehicles would be used as well as ADA compliance are considerations in this decision.

If an employee chooses to use their personal vehicle instead of a rental vehicle, the reimbursement will be at the standard mileage rate allowed by the Internal Revenue Service and is calculated from the employee's regularly assigned place of work or duty station to destination.

~~If an employee is traveling more than 120 miles and chooses to use their personal vehicle when a rental car is available, the reimbursement rate could be less than the standard rate. Such reimbursement will be left to the discretion of the department director or their designee.~~

~~Employees may claim mileage for use of personal vehicle on County business in the local area, provided it is approved in advance by the Department director. Commuting from home to work or work to home is not eligible for reimbursement.~~

## Family Members and Personal Travel

Buncombe County does not ~~reimburse pay for or reimburse~~ a traveler for the transportation, lodging, meals or other expenses of a traveler's family or traveling companion(s). It is the responsibility of the traveler to identify any expenses pertaining to family or companions. ~~All passengers traveling in a County vehicle must be on~~

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~~official business.~~

### LOCAL MILEAGE FOR COUNTY BUSINESS

Travel in a personal vehicle from the office to visit a client or establishment, store, another department, post office, etc. for a work-related activity is a travel expense that would be reimbursed at the current IRS mileage rate. Travel from home to work, from office to lunch, or any other personal travel may not be claimed as local travel expense.

Employees whose job duties do not normally incur mileage may claim mileage for use of personal vehicle on County business in the local area, provided the Department Director or their designee approves it in advance.

If you are traveling from home to a location before going to work, you may only claim additional mileage that is more than your normal daily commute. Example: you live in Woodfin (North Asheville) and drive to Office Depot on Tunnel Road, and then to work at a County office downtown. You do not claim mileage from your home in Woodfin, to Office Depot, to work. You only claim mileage equivalent to leaving from your office and going to Office Depot.

### TRAVEL FOR BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS (BOC) AND BOARD APPOINTED POSITIONS

All travel for Board-appointed positions (to include the County Manager, the Clerk, and the Finance Director) will be approved by the Chair or Vice-Chair of the BOC. The Board of Commissioners will be advised if any of these positions travel out of state or out of the country.

Any business travel by members of the BOC outside of North Carolina Association of County Commissioners (NCACC) or National Association of Counties (NACo) events will require notification to the Chair and/or Vice-Chair of the BOC prior to approval or reimbursement of said travel.