



## BUNCOMBE COUNTY TRAVEL POLICY

Board Adopted 09/16/2008

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**1.0 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, workshops, and seminars. Travel may be local, in-state, out-of-state, foreign and/or overnight.

**2.0 APPLICABILITY**

These policy and procedures are applicable to all personnel.

**3.0 DEFINITIONS**

**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.

**Per Diem**

Daily allowance for M&IE.

**M&IE**

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

**GSA**

US General Service Administration. Web Site for Per Diem rates.

**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 GENERAL PROVISIONS**

**Overview**

A critical balance must be sought when requesting travel. This is the County's need for cost effectiveness and the employee's need for quality services and support. Employee travel should be via the lowest cost alternative 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.

## 5.0 TRAVEL AUTHORIZATION AND APPROVAL

### **Travel Request**

All requests for travel must be approved in advance by the Sheriff, Register of Deeds, department director, or their designee. Foreign travel must be approved by the County Manager.

### **Required Forms**~~Lawson Expense Management~~

~~Buncombe County requires all travelers to obtain documented prior approval from the department director or their designee for all travel. Lawson Expense Management must be used to submit all work related 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 authorization request no less than ten (10) working days prior to the travel date when a cash advance is being requested. To request an advance before travel, employees must complete a Travel Advance Request Form. Buncombe County Travel Policy requires advanced approval before traveling.~~

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~~To request reimbursement for travel expenses incurred, employees must submit a completed Travel Reconciliation / Reimbursement Form. Both forms are located on County Central <http://intranet.buncombecounty.org/Finance/policies.asp#forms>~~

### **Travel Reconciliation**

After travel is complete, employees must reconcile their travel expenses by ~~completing and submitting to the Finance Department the Travel Reconciliation / Reimbursement Form~~ 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, attaching receipts if required.~~ This must be done within five (5) working days after the completion of the trip. ~~The original travel approval must be attached if a cash advance was not requested.~~

~~All monies owed to the County must be paid at the time of the reconciliation.~~

## 6.0 LODGING

### **Hotel / Motel Rates**

The actual cost of hotel/motel may be advanced or reimbursed when supported by a paid receipt itemizing daily charges. If the employee has a Buncombe County VISA

card, the lodging costs should be charged to their PCard according to the Policy and Procedures for Purchase Cards.

Buncombe County will reimburse up to the Maximum Lodging ~~rates listed on the GSA U.S. General Services Administration's web site: <http://www.gsa.gov/Portal/gsa/ep/home.do?tabId=0>~~. In accordance with U.S. General Services Administration (GSA), Lodging costs above this allowance requires the prior approval of the department director or their designee. An example would be if the traveler is attending a conference and it is held at a hotel charging higher rates. Travelers should always ask for the local government rate when making reservations.

## 7.0 PER DIEM MEAL ALLOWANCE AND INCIDENTAL EXPENSES

### **Overnight Travel**

Travelers may request to be reimbursed for meals and incidental expenses (M&IE) for overnight travel based upon Federal per diem rates ~~available at <http://www.gsa.gov/Portal/gsa/ep/home.do?tabId=0>~~. 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). This rate is subject to change and will be posted on the GSA web site.

~~Buncombe County offers one option for calculating the Per Diem rate. Please use the following to calculate Per Diem: 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~~

## 8.0 ~~NON-OVERNIGHT OR LOCAL TRAVEL~~ Meals Away From Home But *Not* Overnight

Traveling "away from home" means:

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.

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

~~An employee may qualify for a reimbursement of up to twenty (20%) percent of the daily Per Diem rate for Buncombe County when required to be away from their place of work on official business during the work day. All reimbursements require a receipt and prior approval of the department director or their designee. Such reimbursement is at the discretion of the department director.~~

## 9.0 **TRANSPORTATION**

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

### **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.

Employees who choose a mode of transportation other than flying 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 employees 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.

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 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. 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://www.gsa.gov/Portal/gsa/ep/home.do?tabId=0>

[http://aoprals.state.gov/web920/per\\_diem.asp](http://aoprals.state.gov/web920/per_diem.asp) under the Foreign Travel Tab.

### **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.

### **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.

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 VISA cards can not be used for the purchase of gasoline. 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 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 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 official business.

### **10.0 REQUIRED TRAVEL FORMS**

All required Travel Forms referenced in this Travel Policy can be found at the following web site: <http://intranet.buncombecounty.org/Finance/policies.asp#forms>

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