



Buncombe County, North Carolina

Travel Policy

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1.0 Policy Information

Category & Subcategory:	Travel	Original Effective Date:	9/16/2008	This Revision Effective:	4/10/2018
Persons Affected:	Eligible Buncombe County Workforce				
Approvals:	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 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. 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. The County's responsibility for cost effectiveness should be the guiding principle when considering decisions involving employee travel. Employee travel should be via the most economically viable alternatives and consistent with good business practices.

Employee travel and 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 Department Director, or their designee. The County Manager/Assistant County Manager and the Department Director must approve foreign travel.

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.

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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. 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, 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.

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.

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.

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Air Travel

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.

Ground transportation including travel to/from the airport and place of lodging, and travel to/from place of lodging to place of business 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.

County Vehicles

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. Please refer to the Buncombe County Travel Procedures for guidance on submitting a rental vehicle request. Reservations should be made as far in advance as possible to ensure timeliness of pickups by the rental car vendor.

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.

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.

Family Members and Personal Travel Buncombe County does not 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.

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.

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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.