

**BLOUNT COUNTY GOVERNMENT  
COMPREHENSIVE TRAVEL POLICY  
Effective – January 1, 2020**

**I. Introduction**

- A. This policy governs travel on official business for Blount County. These regulations cover all County personnel, elected and appointed officials (including the Board of County Commissioners) along with their employees, and other travelers using County money for travel. The term “employee” is used throughout this Policy but shall be interpreted to mean any authorized traveler at County expense. The Mayor, Department of Finance, Elected Officials and Department Heads have full responsibility for the enforcement of these regulations. The term “department head” is used throughout this Policy but shall be interpreted to mean any department head, elected or appointed official or designee whom authorizes travel expenses for County employees.
- B. It is the intent of this Policy that employees not suffer additional cost as a result of travel or business expenses incurred to carry out assigned duties. Employees shall be reimbursed for such expenses subject to the limitations provided in this policy.
- C. It is the responsibility of the employee and department heads to be familiar with the travel policy and adhere to the policies and procedures within. Deliberate disregard of these regulations while traveling on County business or filing an intentionally misleading or fraudulent travel claim is grounds for disciplinary action, up to and including termination.
- D. The signature of the approving person(s) indicates that the cost, time, and other factors have been considered and the proposed travel and cost are a prudent use of County resources. This includes a determination that (a) the trip is necessary, (b) the County will derive business value sufficient to justify the time and cost, (c) funds are available in the budget account identified, and (d) proposed expenses are reasonable.
- E. This Comprehensive Travel Policy for Blount County Government was adopted by the Blount County Commission on December 19, 2019.

**II. General Provisions**

- A. **Overnight Travel Defined:** Overnight travel is defined as work-related activities outside of Blount County and/or multi-day conferences for which an overnight stay is required. Overnight travel must be approved by department head in advance utilizing the Travel Request/Reimbursement Form. See Section II.E.
- B. **Non-Overnight Travel Defined:** Non-overnight travel is defined as work-related activities within Blount County and/or single day training events where no overnight stay is required. In these instances, authorization is not required in advance but mileage and other expenses should be approved by department head when requesting reimbursement.
- C. **Official Station Defined:** The department head is responsible for establishing the official station of the employee. This is typically the location from which the employee performs the major portion of his/her assigned duties. If the employee’s home is closer to their point of destination including airports. The employee can use their home as their official station or starting point when logging mileage.

- D. **Travel for Non-Employees:** Expenses associated with travel of an employee's spouse, family or friends will not be reimbursed by County. Employees shall not arrange travel that is less advantageous or causes greater expense to County to accommodate personal travel plans. Any additional expenses incurred as a result of personal travel, including but not limited to extra hotel nights, additional stopovers, meals or transportation are the sole responsibility of the employee. Notation of employee's spouse or other individual's traveling with the employee should be noted on any applicable forms or receipts
- E. **Travel Authorization:** Prior to any overnight travel, the employee must complete an Overnight Travel Request/Reimbursement Form (TRR-1). All proposed expenditures related to the travel must be estimated and form must be approved by department head. (Department heads must get approval from the Mayor). Department head may approve exceptions in individual cases.

**Travel Request/Reimbursement Form:**

**For Overnight Travel:**

Prior to Overnight Travel: All costs associated with the travel shall be reasonably estimated and shown on the Overnight Travel Request/Reimbursement Form (TRR-1). The form must be approved and signed by the department head before any advance fees or other expenses are paid.

A copy of the conference program, where applicable, must be attached to the form. If the program is unavailable prior to the travel, it must be submitted when requesting reimbursement.

Employees shall make full use of discounts which are given for advance registrations or advance airline reservations. Employees must request the conference, governmental, or weekend rate, whichever is cheapest, when making lodging or car rental reservations.

Return from Overnight Travel: Within 30 business days of return, employee must submit a signed & reconciled Overnight Travel Request/Reimbursement Form (TRR-1) in accordance with the reimbursement procedures noted in section VI.

Receipts for lodging, vehicle rental, conference fees, and other reimbursable costs are required for reimbursement.

Original signed Overnight Travel Request Form (TRR-1) should be included along with Overnight Reimbursement Form (TRR-1) for any overnight travel.

**For Non-Overnight Travel**

No prior authorization is required for non-overnight travel. Within 30 business days of return, employee must submit a signed Non-Overnight Travel Request/Reimbursement Form (TRR-2) in accordance with the reimbursement procedures noted in section VI.

Receipts for conference fees, and other reimbursable costs are required for reimbursement.

- F. **Travel Advance**: If a prospective traveler does not have sufficient funds to front their allowance for meals and incidentals until the County is able to reimburse him/her upon return.

The County will provide the traveler a cash advance by depositing the appropriate per-diem amount into their personal bank account prior to the traveler's departure. Cash advances are only to be used to assist persons who cannot travel without receiving funds in advance of travel. Funds are to be requested by the respective department head and must be approved by the Director of Finance or his/her designee.

Requests for cash advances must be submitted by the respective department head to the Director of Finance or his/her designee. at least 10 business days prior to the anticipated travel along with signed Overnight Travel Request/Reimbursement form (TRR-1) with detail of estimated expenses. The amount of the travel advance will be based on 80% of the total estimated cost of necessary travel. Advances will not be issued for less than \$100

- G. **Purchasing Card Use for Travel**: To minimize costs to the traveler, advance invoicing of registration fees, airfares, and similar expenses can be made directly to the County Department to pay for such known "pre-travel" expenses via departmental Purchasing Card after the travel has been approved. The Purchasing Card Policy and Procedures should be followed when using the Purchasing Card for travel or other approved purchases.

### III. **Travel Considerations**

#### A. **Air Travel**:

1. The employee will be reimbursed for actual airfare costs for one (1) seat plus taxes/fees incurred. A receipt in the form of a ticket stub or computer generated invoice must accompany the expense claim.
2. Reservations for air travel should take advantage of discount fares and advance booking should be taken whenever practical. Fares should not exceed the regular tourist or coach fares offered.
3. Whenever necessary, employees may book a Saturday night stay if the reduction in cost of airfare is more than the cost of per diem and lodging.
4. Airline baggage fees for up to 2 bags will be reimbursed.

- B. **Automobile**: Automobile transportation may be used when common carrier transport cannot be scheduled, when it is more economical than common carrier transport, or when expenses can be reduced when two or more employees are traveling together.

#### **Personal Car**:

1. In the use of personally owned cars, the authorized mileage allowance includes all operating expenses such as gas, oil and repairs. Travelers will not be reimbursed for automotive repairs or breakdowns when using a personal vehicle.

2. All travel claims submitted for mileage reimbursement must include either point to point mileage (i.e.: Maryville to Nashville) or include odometer readings from beginning to end of travel.
3. If a privately owned automobile is used by two (2) or more authorized travelers on the same trip, only the traveler who owns or has custody of the automobile will be reimbursed.
4. Mileage will be reimbursed based on the GSA mileage rate established January 1 each year. This rate is published online via <https://www.gsa.gov/travel-resources>

**Rental Car:**

1. Use of a rental car is only allowed if the cost is less expensive than public and private transportation such as bus, taxi, subway, Uber, Lyft, etc. (Groups of 3 or 4 traveling together can usually obtain a rental car for less than public transportation and some forms of private transportation).
2. Officials or employees who plan to secure a rental car should 1) have a valid driver's license, 2) personal automobile insurance, and 3) should utilize the standing rental car contract provider.
3. Rental cars shall be requested and approved on the Overnight Travel Request/ Reimbursement Form prior to beginning travel. Rental cars must be from the standard, midsize, or economy category unless an exception is pre-approved by the department head.
4. Fines for traffic or parking violations will not be reimbursed by the County.
5. Rental car gasoline purchases will be reimbursed. Receipts must be attached for reimbursement.

**Ground Transportation:**

1. Reasonable ground transportation fares are allowed from airports (bus, taxi, subway, Uber, Lyft, etc.). It is expected that bus or shuttle bus service to/from airports will be used when available and practical. In traveling between hotels or other lodging and meeting or conference sites, reasonable fares will be allowed.

**C. Parking:**

1. Necessary charges for hotel and airport parking will be allowed provided that airport parking fees do not exceed normal taxi fare to and from the airport. Receipts must be furnished for reimbursement. Valet parking will be allowed only if that is the only parking available or the cheapest way to handle parking.

**D. Lodging:**

1. The County uses the Federal Travel Regulation guidelines to determine the maximum a traveler can be reimbursed for lodging. These amounts are available online in the GSA Travel Regulations found at <https://www.gsa.gov/travel-resources>
2. Lodging receipts are required and must itemize room charges by date.

3. Air B&B and similar accommodations are allowed as long as they comply with the GSA travel regulations as noted in (1). above.
4. If a convention rate exceeds the maximum reimbursement rate and is approved by the department head in advance and documented by a convention brochure or registration form, a higher reimbursement rate will be allowed.
5. Employees shall make full use of discounts which are given for advance registrations. Employees must request the conference, governmental, or weekend rate, whichever is lowest, when making reservations. NOTE: If accompanied by a county check and a tax-exempt form, hotels/motels will generally deduct state sales tax and charge only entertainment tax. Tax-exempt certificates are available on the Accounting Portal located on the Blount County website <https://www.blounttn.org/715/Accounting-Portal> or from Accounts Payable upon request.
6. Only single room rates are authorized unless a room is shared with another employee. If a room is shared, the applicable maximum reimbursement rates will be the combined allowance amount. The receipt for the entire amount should be submitted with the reimbursement claim.

#### **E. Meals and Incidentals (Per Diem)**

The County uses the Federal Travel Regulation guidelines for meals & incidental per diem based on the primary destination of the traveler. These amounts are available online in the GSA Travel Regulations found at <https://www.gsa.gov/travel-resources>

The meals and incidental expense rate includes taxes and tips in the rate, so employees will not be reimbursed separately for those items.

#### **Meals:**

1. For single day, non-overnight travel, in accordance with GSA guidance, employees are entitled to 75% of the prescribed per diem rate for one-day travel away from official station if it is longer than 12 hours. However, department head may grant meal reimbursement at their discretion based on individual departure and return times.
2. For overnight stays, per diem rate would be reimbursed at 75% for the day of departure and the day of return. Employees will be reimbursed at 100% for any travel days in between the departure & return. See GSA website for breakdown of calculated amounts.
3. If a meal is included as part of a conference or seminar registration or is included with the air fare, then the allowance for that meal will be subtracted from the total allowance for that day.

#### **Incidentals:**

1. The maximum per diem rates discussed above include a fixed allowance for incidental expenses. Incidentals are intended to include miscellaneous costs associated with travel such as tips for baggage handling, hotel staff, etc.

2. When claiming the incidental per diem, amount should be included based on the qualifications noted above for meals.
3. Employees on one-day travel status who work beyond their 7.5-hour workday may claim the \$5.00 incidental fee.

**F. Prisoner Transportation**

1. Prisoner transportation would be eligible for up to 100% of per diems.

**IV. Reimbursement Procedures**

- A. All costs associated with overnight travel shall be reasonably estimated using GSA rates and detailed on the Travel Request/Reimbursement Form (TRR-1) The form must be approved by the department head before any advance fees or other expenses are paid.

A copy of the conference program, where applicable, must be attached to the form. If the program is unavailable prior to the travel, it must be submitted when requesting reimbursement.

- B. Employees should submit claims for reimbursement no later than 30 business days after completion of travel. The form must show detail of expenses, be signed in ink by the employee, and be approved by department head prior to reimbursement. Receipts for appropriate expenses must be attached to the form.

- C. All signatures on the Travel Request/Reimbursement Forms must be original. It is the intent of the policy that each person submit his/her own individual travel reports whenever possible.

- D. All forms can be found on the county website: <https://www.blounttn.org/851/Forms>

- E. Transportation cost reimbursement will not exceed the standard mileage rate for distances of 250 miles (one-way) or less. Air travel for distances of over 250 miles will usually be considered practical considering the time savings. When the mileage reimbursement, extra meals, and extra lodging required because of driving long distances exceed the cost of air travel, only the lower cost will be reimbursed. Exceptions may be requested to these driving or flying provisions.

**V. Exceptions**

The Blount County Commission shall have the authority to grant exception from any or all part of these rules and regulations when deemed appropriate for an employee or group of employees on official travel.