



Cameron County, Texas
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CAMERON COUNTY TRAVEL POLICY EFFECTIVE OCTOBER 1, 2018

GENERAL PROVISIONS

PURPOSE:

This policy is intended to establish appropriate requirements, limitations and guidelines for county employee business travel. The specific purpose of this policy is to:

- a) Establish appropriate use and limitations on use of public funds for travel required for county employees
- b) That travel expenses are legitimate and reasonable business travel
- c) That employees are conscientious of their use of public funds for travel
- d) Require accountability for usage of public funds by county employees and officials

AUTHORITY:

Upon adoption by Commissioners Court, the County Auditor shall implement, interpret and enforce this Policy in accordance with Local Government Code 112.002, 112.006 and 112.007. The Auditor shall issue, maintain and update any procedure, control and form needed to ensure compliance with this Policy.

SCOPE:

This policy applies to all employees whose expenses are paid by public funds controlled by the county or county officials.

LOBBYING:

Commissioners Court (or its duly appointed designee) will present official county policy and the county's position on legislative bills and issues to Texas and the U.S. Legislature. No other county official, unless specifically authorized, may expend public funds to communicate directly with any legislator or a member of their staff in support or opposition to official county policy.

GENERAL PROVISIONS:

County officials and department heads are responsible for ensuring travel expenditures are valid and appropriate. It is recommended that officials consider sending individuals to seminars taking into consideration the department's objectives or needs and budgetary restraints.

INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL:

Must be mandatory or relevant to County business as may be determined by the Commissioners Court in the Court's sole discretion and judgment. Individuals that are pre-approved for necessary International Travel include the County Judge, County Commissioners, County Administrator and Bridge Director. Any other designees must be approved by Commissioners Court. A request for international travel BY OTHER THAN PRE-APPROVED INDIVIDUALS must be made with sufficient time in advance as to allow full and fair consideration of the merits of the request by Commissioners Court. Public modes of transportation must be used by all International Travelers at all times

All records for travel and training using public funds are open to inspection under the Texas Open Records Act, unless prohibited by law.

Employees should use good judgment and be conscientious of their use of public funds for travel. Due diligence should be exercised in accomplishing county needs and business as a prudent person would exercise if traveling for personal business. Excess costs, delays, luxury accommodations and indirect routes do not exhibit prudent behavior.

Employees are personally liable for any disallowed expense incurred that does not fall within the parameters as established in this policy.

Reasonable accommodations needed under the American with Disabilities Act should be coordinated with travel, transportation, lodging, meals and conference officials as needed to comply with individual needs.

Any employee found to be submitting false travel claims is subject to disciplinary action.

Should any questions arise regarding this policy or in the event of any unusual circumstances, the county official or department head should seek the County Auditor's opinion prior to travel.

SPECIFIC GUIDELINES

1. All travel must be approved by Commissioners' Court (CCt). County employees, traveling Out-of-County and In County on official County business, will be reimbursed for such travel upon submitting the appropriate travel expense forms (http://co.cameron.tx.us/administration/county_auditor/index.php) and/or receipts to the County Auditor. Travel advances will be given only if travel has been approved by CCt before date of travel and subject to budget. CCt approval agenda items should include provision for those days necessary to travel to the meeting location with allowable costs in compliance with Cameron County Travel Policy. Agenda items submitted with travel costs in excess of approved travel policy are subject to review by County Auditor when employee requests travel advance or reimbursement. The County adopts the State of Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts terminology and definitions regarding the Cameron County Travel Policy.

2. When a conference registration, meeting or agenda is in the afternoon and allows for same day travel, it is the intent of this policy to approve travel subject to these parameters. For example, if a conference site is in Austin/San Antonio and registration is in the afternoon, departure time will be approved for same day. There should not be a need for prior day travel which would necessitate an extra day of travel which would incur additional costs.
3. All County travel approved by CCt is subject to available budgetary appropriations. No travel advance will be issued without available budget.
4. Requests for travel advance should be submitted no later than 7 days prior to actual trip (if not sooner). Failure to plan accordingly may delay advance travel check.
5. The County will reimburse actual expense incurred for lodging, however costs should be within the parameters of approved policy. Receipts must be submitted with the appropriate Travel Expense Claim Form. The County will only advance travel funds for County paid trips. For those Elected Officials, Department Heads/Directors, and County Employees who travel on behalf of other agencies, or when other agencies provide for travel costs, County will advance funds, if needed, for sponsor paid trips, however, the Department must submit the sponsor reimbursement request with Expense Claim Form. When **reimbursement from sponsor/other entity is expected**, such statement must be included on the Agenda Travel Form.
6. All travel expenditures must be encumbered prior to actual travel to ensure that budgeted funds are available. If travel is for a seminar, conference, etc., a copy of the pamphlet or brochure must be attached.
7. A purchase order must be obtained from the Purchasing Department for all registration fees, if trip is cancelled purchase order should be cancelled by the department. Registration fees will be paid by the Accounts Payable Department upon submission of a completed registration/enrollment form. Sufficient time must be allowed to process the necessary paperwork and/or payment before the conference date.
8. No travel advance will be issued if a prior travel advance request remains outstanding from the department. No travel advance can be issued if funds are not available in the budget at the time the advance is requested. No advances will be issued contingent upon possible approval of budget amendment. Exceptions to this provision can only be made upon approval by the County Auditor.
9. Travel for any purpose other than transporting prisoners and other related law enforcement activities must first be approved by the CCt. Complete details of trip and expenses must be submitted to the CCt, along with the Agenda Travel Form. When travel is for the purpose of required training and education, certificates of course completion must be completed and included with the Travel Expense Claim Form.

10. It shall be the responsibility of each elected/appointed official or department head to utilize funds for official County business only. A County agent shall minimize the amount of travel expenses paid or reimbursed by the County. The department or agency shall ensure that each travel arrangement is the most cost-effective considering all relevant circumstances. These funds are budgeted for the purpose of allowing elected/appointed officials, department heads and their employees to attend various association meetings, training seminars, educational seminars, and required law enforcement travel relating to prisoners and probationers.

LODGING

11. Overnight lodging expenses will be reimbursed on actual charges (itemized receipt required), however, the cost should be reasonable for the city/location. Lodging costs the day before the County business begins and the day after business ends is allowable if travel reasonably requires more than one day.
 - a) Conference rates provided by conference organizer should be utilized if available. In the event of overbooking, overflow/alternate sites of lodging rates should be reasonable for that location.
 - b) Travel expenses are allowed for county elected/appointed officials and county employees. If spouse/dependent accompanies county official or employee, any difference in lodging cost above the single rate must also be deducted. Other expenses for additional travel will not be reimbursed.
 - c) Third party lodging sometimes includes additional service charges and fees to county and is not recommended for usage.

Overnight lodging will not be reimbursed for travel within the four-county area to include: Cameron, Willacy, Hidalgo, and Starr Counties. The exception to the policy is when an association seminar, hosted by a county department, is held at mentioned sites. Overnight lodging and meal per diem will be allowed for the individuals involved with the hosting of the seminar.

The County may not reimburse a county employee for a lodging expense incurred at a place that is not a commercial lodging establishment. Hotel expenses can only be claimed for the actual cost of the room and receipts must be itemized. Incidental costs criteria are addressed in Section #30.

12. When driving from seminars held in San Antonio and points south that end no later than 4:00 P.M., an overnight stay should not be necessary. Individuals attending seminars ending at 1:00 P.M. or earlier in Austin, Houston, or points south should be able to drive home on same day. In cases of inclement weather discretion is recommended to maintain personal safety. These situations will be evaluated on a case by case basis by the traveler. Before embarking on a County-sponsored trip, make sure that the vehicle being used is properly checked for safety equipment and spare tires.

TRANSPORTATION

13. The county will reimburse actual expenses on travel by air, bus, and train at the lowest possible rates. That is reimbursement for travel accommodations based upon a 7-day advance notice when trip information was available 7 days prior to travel. When a county employee opts to drive rather than to fly to a destination, county will reimburse travel based upon a 7-day advanced notice round-trip airline ticket fare. No other charges relating to driving will be subject for reimbursement. Use of a private vehicle for travel outside the county for trips in excess of 800 miles will be reimbursed at a rate not to exceed the total cost of round-trip coach airfare. (Prisoner transport is exempt). Airfare quote shall be included with the agenda travel form from the date the county employee was provided trip information.
14. Cameron County has a credit card that can be used to acquire and pay for air fare reservations, training/conference registration fees and used to reserve lodging. In order to access this card for any of these allowed uses, usage of this card must adhere to this travel policy. Usage of this credit card requires compliance with **Cameron County Purchasing/Credit Card Policy and Procedures and Cameron County Card User Agreement which is administered by the County Auditors Office.** Usage of Cameron County credit card is available through the Cameron County Auditor's Office only and all users are required to contact the Auditors Office for authorized access.
15. Out of County Travel – Mileage reimbursement for use of personal vehicle will be based on IRS mileage reimbursement at time of occurrence. Reimbursement will be based on the shortest route to and from their destination for Out of County travel. The number of reimbursable miles traveled by an employee may be determined by point-to-point itemization. Point-to-point mileage may be documented by an employee's vehicle odometer reading or by a readily available online mapping service. When determining the reimbursable miles, the county will consider the route that provides the shortest distance, the quickest drive time or the safest road conditions.

In County Travel -An employee using a private vehicle for transportation to conduct official County business will be reimbursed at the current IRS mileage reimbursement rate at time of travel. On a regular workday, mileage is calculated from the employee's place of work. If the employee is required to travel on a non-work day, the mileage is calculated from the employee's home.

Out of County Travel - Coordination of travel is required when two, three, or four county employees employed by the same department travel on the same dates with the same itinerary to conduct the same official county business. When coordination of travel is required, reimbursement will ONLY be made to the driver of the personally owned vehicle or leased vehicle. This provision does not prevent any other passenger from receiving reimbursement for other eligible expenses incurred. Coordination of travel is not required if the county official determines that coordination is not feasible. Determinations should be made on a trip by trip basis and must be provided in a written memo to the County Auditor's office.

Employees who have a county vehicle assigned to them for their sole use should use their county vehicle for trips of eight hours or less. A gasoline credit card will be issued for use with a County vehicle traveling out of the area. Other passengers accompanying a county employee when traveling on county business while utilizing a non-county vehicle shall be covered solely by the auto owner's auto insurance and it shall be understood that the county assumes no risk for their presence in that vehicle. All drivers of non-county owned vehicles should have current and adequate auto insurance.

A vehicle allowance is provided to county officials to compensate them for usage of their personal vehicle while conducting In-County business. This allowance cannot duplicate in-kind service such as gasoline, maintenance, repairs or the routine use of a county vehicle. Individuals receiving a vehicle allowance may only use a county vehicle for In County Travel on a limited basis/or under certain conditions without possibly becoming subject to IRS reporting regulations.

County officials receiving a vehicle allowance are eligible to receive mileage reimbursement for usage of their personal vehicle for travel outside of county limits on trips pre-approved by CCt. Individuals receiving a vehicle allowance are eligible to use a county vehicle for travel outside of county on trips pre-approved by CCt.

16. Employees provided a vehicle for their sole use in fulfilling their duties as outlined in their job description, shall utilize that vehicle when driving to a seminar or other meetings. A county gasoline credit card will be issued to the driver. The driver must turn in the gasoline receipts incurred in the travel upon their return.
17. Other individuals accompanying county employees on trips for which the county provides mileage reimbursement are not covered by the county auto insurance or general liability for any acts they may cause or acts that may be inflicted upon them. The county assumes no responsibility for the presence of non-authorized persons in a county vehicle or hired non-owned vehicle. Employees transporting non-authorized persons while on a county approved trip for which mileage is to be reimbursed or a county vehicle is provided shall indemnify the county for the costs associated with the non-authorized person's actions. It is the responsibility of the employee who is operating a vehicle in connection with county assignments to provide a current driver's license and current proof of auto insurance. Failure to maintain current auto insurance shall be grounds sufficient for termination of employment with the county.
18. When flying to a destination and the conference/training/meeting/seminar is being held at the host hotel, if auto rental is necessary, vehicle rental arrangements should be made in advance. If vehicle rental is needed one rental will be allowed when a group per department is traveling. Auto rentals shall be paid with a purchase order using a contracted price through county's vendor to avoid additional fuel surcharges and fees.

19. **Unplanned Vehicle Rental:** A county employee is entitled to reimbursement for the cost of renting a vehicle to attend a conference/training/meeting/seminar that has been approved by CCt. Reimbursement includes all applicable taxes and mandatory charges. It may include a charge for a collision damage waiver or a loss damage waiver if not already included in the contracted rate for the rental. A charge for liability insurance supplement, personal accident insurance, safe trip insurance, or personal effects insurance is not reimbursable. In order to be reimbursed for the rental cost, a county employee must retain an original and complete receipt issued by the rental company.
20. Parking will be reimbursed when a receipt is submitted with the Travel Expense Claim.
21. Valet parking will be reimbursed when self-parking is not an option or is needed due to medical reasons.
22. Miscellaneous reimbursements include, but are not limited to, county auto repairs, transportation network company services (Uber, Lyft), taxi services, tolls, and shuttle services. Receipts must accompany request for reimbursement. At all times, care should be taken to ensure the selected method of transport is the most economical mode of transport in addition to one's personal safety.

MEALS

23. BUSINESS MEETING FOOD

CCt approval is required for food and non-alcoholic beverages purchased and brought into county facilities for county business meetings, if costs are more than \$250 per meeting or \$15 per person. If costs do not meet these parameters, costs are reimbursable contingent upon budget availability. The following criteria is required for all business meals provided:

- a) Meeting is agenda driven and directly related to county business
- b) Food and beverage are an integral part of the meeting
- c) Meeting time coincides with a regular meal time

The county official/department head is accountable for determining the:

- a) Necessity of expending public funds for food and non-alcoholic beverages
- b) Appropriateness and accuracy of claim
- c) Availability of funds
- d) Conformity with county policy

Grant funding may have specific requirements for these circumstances. Please consult with the County Auditor for program specific requirements when dealing with Grant Funding.

24. Travel which is Out of County and does not include an overnight stay is considered day travel and is reimbursable for mileage, parking and tolls with applicable receipt. Per IRS Publication 5137, meal expenses incurred during day travel are considered taxable fringe benefits and will be reimbursed through payroll for the amount received (per allowable per diem) in gross pay before payroll taxes and withholdings are deducted. County shall report fringe benefits as income on the employee's W-2. Funds will not be advanced for meal expense on day travel.
25. In instances when travel time is less than six (6) hours and travel does not exceed 50 miles beyond the employee's normal job site, meal costs will be reimbursed with appropriate receipt and when travel is necessary for conference attendance; meal per diem incurred that is usual and customary in conjunction with regular job duties is not reimbursable. Meal reimbursements are not to exceed per diem.
26. Out of County Travel that includes an OVERNIGHT STAY is eligible for hotel and other travel reimbursement as identified in this policy. Meal expenses incurred during overnight travel can be advanced or reimbursed on a per diem basis and meal expenses do not require receipt.
27. All day travel and Out of County travel costs are to be reported in the "Travel Expense Claim Form."
28. Maximum per day allowable is \$45.00
For Out of County travel that includes an overnight stay, departure day and return day of travel meal per diem will be 75% of maximum per diem = \$33.75. ($\$45.00 \times 75\%$)

OUT OF STATE TRAVEL WILL BE EXEMPT FROM THE MEAL PER DIEM DUE TO REGIONAL COSTING VARIANCES. AT ALL TIMES COSTS ARE TO REGIONALLY REASONABLE. DUE TO THIS OUT OF STATE EXEMPTION, MEAL RECEIPTS WILL BE REQUIRED FOR REIMBURSEMENT AND FULL TRANSPARENCY.

29. Daily travel meal costs are reimbursable when incurred for conference attendance, reimbursements are not to exceed per diem of \$45. Advances are not processed for daily travel; all daily travel costs will be processed on a reimbursement basis. Decision as to what meals (no receipt required) will be reimbursed is at Department Head discretion at the following rates:

Breakfast	\$10.00
Lunch	\$15.00
Dinner	\$20.00

30. Incidental expenses are at times necessary when traveling. These expenses are reimbursable when incurred with accompanying receipt. Expenses are limited to internet access, meeting room rental and similar expenses. Incidental expenses must serve to enhance/further the purpose of County travel and justification must be provided.

31. All travel expenses incurred for county business travel will be reimbursed when an original receipt is submitted along with the Travel Expense Claim Form. The receipt should include vendor information, date, itemization of expenses incurred, and amount.
32. Travel Expense Claim Forms are due at the County Treasurer's no later than one (1) week after the travel has occurred. Excess travel funds are due at this time. Travel expenses payable to employees will be paid through Accounts Payable/Payroll and processed within two weeks or at the next available court meeting, provided that the Travel Expense Claim is accurate as submitted.
33. It shall be the responsibility of each elected/appointed official and/or department head to see to the strict compliance of this policy. In areas where this policy statement does not address, the "State of Texas Travel Allowance Guide" as promulgated by the Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts shall act as guidance for treatment of county travel related expenditures.

GUIDELINES FOR EMERGENCY TRAVEL

1. Emergency consideration is only applicable when time constraints between notice of the meeting and CCt approval does not allow for normal procedures to be followed. Items must still be presented to CCt at the next scheduled meeting.
2. Travel must be deemed necessary at the County Official/Department Head's discretion.
3. Departure date must be prior to next scheduled CCt meeting.
4. County policies regarding lodging, meals, registration and mileage are still applicable.
5. All travel requests are subject to available budget.
6. Travel requests must be submitted to the County Auditor for approval.