



## EL PASO COUNTY

### Travel and Training Policy

**Adopted Date: November 8, 2010**

**Revised Date: October 24, 2016**

It is the policy of the County of El Paso to develop and foster a professional workforce that supports effective County government. As such, the following policy provides guidelines which shall outline the County's procedures concerning travel and training for County employees when requested in advance, and when such events are funded by the County of El Paso or travel occurs on County time.

#### I. Request Process

Approval of travel and training expenditures from County funds requires Department Head approval which certifies that the training is a true benefit to the County. All relevant travel and training forms shall be submitted to the County Auditor's Office at least 45 days prior to the date of travel, where they will be reviewed for compliance with this policy. Travel that is not submitted timely may result in the travel advance being denied, and travel reimbursement being sought upon return from such travel. Exceptions to this may be made directly to the County's Chief Administrator. Incomplete packets shall not be accepted. All forms can be found on the County's Intranet site within the County Auditor's page.

Approved travel and training expenditures not already paid by County credit card or directly paid will be processed in the form of a travel advance made payable to the traveling employee. All travel must be reconciled and substantiated within 10 business days of the return date.

The request of such travel and training shall include the following forms:

##### A. Travel and Training Request Form

1. The purpose of this form is to gather the basic information on the traveling employee, and the purpose of the travel and/or training. Instructions for completion can be found within the form itself.
2. Section 2 of this form requires a breakdown of expected travel expenses associated with this particular travel. As a result, the following supporting documents shall be attached to the Travel and Training Request Form:
  - Copy of airfare quote for dates of travel
  - Copy of auto rental quote or shuttle quote for dates of travel (if relevant)
  - Copy of hotel quote for covered stay
  - Copy of training conference registration quote
  - Copy of Employee Training and Professional Certification Agreement (Section I-E below)
3. All relevant sections of the form must be completed in accordance with the guidelines as stated within Section III of this policy, and must be signed off by the Department Head, or designee.

##### B. Travel and Training Justification Form

1. The purpose of this form is to illustrate the relevance the requested travel and training has on the County's overall benefit, and to show the funding source that will be used. It is important that all relevant sections be completed based on the instructions within the actual form.
2. Section A requires disclosure if County funds are requested, and further requires the traveling employee to select the appropriate category based on the purpose of the travel. This section must be completed by all traveling employees.
3. Section B seeks disclosure only if County funds are not requested. The purpose of this section

is to designate when a County employee travels for work related purposes utilizing funds not paid for by the County, yet the coding of the time for the traveling employee will still be coded in KRONOS and paid for by the County. Ex) Association funds, private funds, and other public funds which are not subject to Commissioners Court authority. See Section I-C below.

4. All relevant sections of the form must be completed in accordance with the guidelines as stated within **Section III** of this policy, and must be signed off by the Department Head, or designee.

### **C. Travel Expenditure Voucher**

1. The purpose of this form is to document the actual expenses of the travel and training once the training is completed. It is important that all relevant sections be completed based on the instructions within the actual form.
2. Travel Expenditure Vouchers are required to be submitted to the County Auditor's Office within 10 business days of return. All original receipts shall be attached to the voucher for airfare, lodging, registration and car rentals or shuttles. Meal receipts, however, are **not** required to be submitted.
3. When the Voucher is completed, the County may owe additional funds to the employee, or the employee may need to submit a reimbursement to the County for funds not used.
  - If the County owes additional funds, after verification with this policy and after approval by the County Auditor's Office, the County Auditor's Office will process the reimbursement and notify the employee when the check is ready for pickup.
  - If the employee owes funds to the County, the employee should be sure to attach a personal check or money order for that amount to the Travel Expenditure Voucher. Failure to comply with this policy may result in a salary offset of the employee/official's wages to satisfy the amount due.
4. All expenses shall be justified in accordance with the guidelines set forth in Section III of this Travel and Training Policy. Failure to submit the Travel Expense Voucher within the required deadline will prevent subsequent travel advances from being issued until the employee is in compliance, and can also result in corrective action.

### **D. Travel Disclosure Report**

All travel expenditures approved by the County for employees who are FLSA exempt shall be posted on the County's website within thirty (30) days after approval or completion of travel.

1. In an effort to keep the public informed, FLSA exempt employees who are traveling on non-County funded travel shall publicly disclose their travel connected to their duties as a county employee, or their official duties as an officeholder. As mentioned in Section B(3) of this policy, the Travel and Training Justification Form (Section B) should be completed to authorize such disclosure.
2. If authorized, non-County funded travel expenditures shall be posted on the County's website within thirty (30) days after approval or completion of travel.

### **E. Employee Training and Professional Certification Agreement**

Training and Professional Certification Agreements will be used to document a training agreement between an employee and the County for County funded travel, or professional certification expenses, that is **in excess of \$1,000**. Further, the agreement shall explain the process for repayment of such funds if an employee voluntarily terminates his/her employment within a certain time based on the following Range Scale:

1. Range Scale:
  - \$1,000 - \$1,999 spent:
- Employee Commitment to County Employment:
  - 12 months

- \$2,000 - \$4,999 spent: 24 months
  - Above \$5,000 spent: 36 months
2. Employee agrees that if he/she voluntarily terminates his/her employment after the completion of their training/professional certification within the Range Scale, the employee shall repay the pro-rated cost of the training/professional certification. Further, the employee agrees to repay any such funds immediately, if for any reason the employee does not actually spend the funds as designated, or fails to attend the training or obtain the professional certification.
  3. Employee agrees that said repayment shall be deducted from the employee's final paycheck. If the final paycheck is insufficient to cover the repayment amount, then the employee agrees to pay the difference to the County of El Paso within 90 days of separation.
  4. Repayment shall be for the remaining balance of months left on the agreement from the date of the employee's voluntary separation from employment and **after** completion of the above training or professional certification.
  5. The cost of the agreement shall include all costs associated with the training or professional certification.
  6. All Training and Professional Certification Agreements shall be signed by both the employee and the Department Head prior to training or professional certification efforts.
  7. Department Heads may keep a copy of the Agreement in the department file; however, original Agreements shall be forwarded to the Human Resources Office to be placed in the Employee's file. Upon separation, this information will be verified during the exiting process.
  8. Each training/professional certification shall require an Employee Training and Professional Certification Agreement; however, the employee's commitment to the County will not be stacked. (ie. Employee attends 2 training conferences, one in January and one in July. The January training costs \$1,500 and the July training costs \$2,000. The employee will sign the January agreement committing them to 12 months of County employment, while the July training commits them to 24 months. Therefore, the 24 months of commitment would be in effect, because it would include the 12 months from the first agreement already. The two agreements will **not** be combined requiring the employee to commit to 36 months.)
  9. Exceptions to the agreements may be made by the Chief Administrator, or designee, for valid reasons. (ie. Retirement, lost elections, etc.)

## II. Approval Process

All relevant travel and training forms mentioned above shall be submitted to the County Auditor's Office at [auditorstravel@epcounty.com](mailto:auditorstravel@epcounty.com) at least 45 days prior to the date of travel, where they will be reviewed for compliance with this policy. Incomplete packets shall not be accepted.

### A. The County Auditor's Office

1. Once packets have been reviewed for policy compliance, the County Auditor's Office will analyze the requests to determine business interest, cost effectiveness of such request, and overall travel necessity.
2. Should the County Auditor's Office approve the request, the item will be placed on the next available Commissioners Court meeting for the Court's approval of the expense.
3. If the County Auditor's Office does not approve the request, notification shall be made to the Department Head within 5 days of such denial. Appeals may be made directly to the County's Chief Administrator.
4. Travel advances which are fully reimbursable from a third party will not be considered or approved. However, if the County pays for the travel in advance, and is reimbursed by the third party at a later time, those funds shall be remitted back to the County as soon as possible, but

no later than 10 days of receipt by the third party. All travel costs that are reimbursed from a third party, and not remitted to the County, may be subject to the County's Fraud, Waste and Abuse policy.

5. All travel advances from current fiscal year funds must be approved prior to the adoption of the subsequent fiscal year's budget. However, travel that occurs between October 1<sup>st</sup> and November 15<sup>th</sup> of the new fiscal year may be considered using current fiscal year funds if submitted prior to the end of the fiscal year.
6. Travel requests made by persons who are not County officers or employees (ie. Members of a board appointed by Commissioners Court) shall be made directly to the County's Chief Administrator. If the travel request is approved, the Chief Administrator will properly notify the County Auditor's Office to ensure appropriate policies and processes are followed.

#### **B. Commissioners Court Approval**

1. Requests initially approved by the County Auditor's Office will be submitted via a separate paid claims schedule to Commissioners Court listing all travel/training funding requests for the Court's approval.
2. The County is not obligated to pay for travel if prior approval is not obtained.
3. Should the Commissioners Court approve the paid claims schedule as proposed by the County Auditor's office, checks will be issued in the name of the traveling employee.

#### **C. Notifications**

1. Once approval by the Commissioners Court is made, the County Auditor's Office will notify the traveling employee of such approval.
2. The County Auditor's Office shall also notify the Department Head, or designee, of such approval to ensure they are made aware.

### **III. Guidelines**

A. The following guidelines shall be considered when making a travel/training request:

1. In an effort to be fiscally responsible regarding training funds, no more than four (4) employees from the same department, or 50% of the department's employees, whichever is **lower**, shall attend the same training or conference when County funds are being utilized. Exceptions shall not be made without prior written approval by the County's Chief Administrator. If the County's Chief Administrator does not approve an exception after a written request is made, the department may appeal this directly to the Commissioners Court.
2. All travel requests will be reviewed for prudent use of travel funds, including choices of hotel, car rentals, etc.
3. In booking air travel, officials and employees should compare state rates and those available over the internet to assure the best price available at the time of scheduling. Tickets should be purchased over the internet in most instances, and as early as possible to ensure the best rates.
4. All lodging paid by the County shall be reasonable and utilize the State of Texas travel guidelines as a general cost guide: <https://fm.xcpa.state.tx.us/fm/travel/travelrates.php>.
5. Automobile mileage shall be reimbursed at the federal GSA rate, which may be found at <http://www.gsa.gov/portal/content/100715>. Reimbursement for mileage may not exceed reasonable costs of airfare, if available.
6. **Rental Cars** - The most reasonable cost for ground transportation is required. If taxi or shuttle is available, and will not interfere with the travel itinerary of the traveling employee, it is

required to be utilized. Otherwise, if a rental car is the most economical method of transportation, it may be authorized.

- All rental cars must be secured through the El Paso County Purchasing Department based on their reservation procedures.
  - Unauthorized or uninsured drivers will not be permitted to utilize rented vehicles and if permitted by the traveling employee, any liability that occurs will be the responsibility of that employee.
7. **Meal Per Diem** - Payment for meal per diem will not be paid if the travel is completed (depart and return) within the same day. Meals and incidental per diem is based on the federal GSA meals and incidentals (M&IE) rate for the primary destination which may be found at <http://www.gsa.gov/portal/category/100120>. If the primary destination or its county is not listed within the GSA chart, the standard rate for that State will be used.
    - When meals are provided by the event, including continental breakfast, meal per diem advances shall not be provided for those covered meal times and will be deducted in accordance with the GSA guidelines. (<http://www.gsa.gov/portal/content/101518>)
  8. **Trip Cancellations** – If a trip is cancelled and an advance has been issued, the employee is responsible for returning the funds within 5 business days to the County Auditor's Office. Failure to comply will result in funds being garnished from the employee's paycheck.
  9. **Vacation in Conjunction with Business Travel** – In cases in which vacation time is added to a business trip, any cost variance in airfare, car rental or lodging must be clearly identified on the Travel Request Form. The County will not authorize travel expenses for travel not associated with a County purpose.
  10. **Limitations** – Each County employee is limited to \$4,000 in cumulative travel and training funds during the course of each fiscal year. Exceptions shall not be made without prior written approval by the County's Chief Administrator. If the County's Chief Administrator does not approve an exception after a written request is made, the department may appeal this directly to the Commissioners Court.
  11. **Prohibited Expenses** – Prohibited expenses include but are not limited to the following:
    - Alcoholic drinks;
    - Nonbusiness related long distance and local telephone calls;
    - Supplies, books or other items must be purchased by the Purchasing Agent;
    - Gratuities in excess of 20%;
    - Utilization of travel agency; and
    - Non-required airline fees (early bird fees).

#### IV. Travel County Credit Cards

At the discretion of the Purchasing Department, departments who travel frequently may be issued a County credit card for the purpose of travel. County credit cards will be issued upon approval by the Purchasing Agent. Approval requires the submission of a request form which can be obtained on the County intranet, found within the Purchasing Department section.

A County credit card may only be used for official County business. Department Heads, and traveling employees, retain the responsibility to ensure all use of County credit cards must be done in accordance with this policy.

##### A. Guidelines

1. County credit cards may be used ONLY for the purchase of airfare (including advanced purchase on the internet), lodging, car rental or shuttle transportation, and conference or seminar registration.

2. County credit cards are restricted solely for use by the Credit cardholder, unless otherwise authorized.
3. Misuse of the County credit card will result in the immediate cancellation of the credit card, and could result in disciplinary action.
4. Travel credit cards will be deactivated 90 days prior to an elected official leaving office, or immediately after the November general election results have been canvassed and accepted by the County, whichever is sooner.

**B. Cancellations**

1. If travel must be cancelled for legitimate reasons, any credit for air travel must be returned to the County to be applied within the stipulations provided by the airline company.
2. If the airline cannot reimburse the County, the employee must reimburse the County, and may apply the airline credit for personal use at a later date.

**V. Travel Reimbursement**

Travel reimbursements are typically discouraged, as prepared travel is encouraged and should be used by all departments when at all possible. However, due to uncontrollable situations, or last minute travel necessities, this section will outline the procedures required to submit for a travel reimbursement during these instances alone.

If an employee does not obtain advanced approval for travel or training, employees may submit the travel request packet, as mentioned in Section I of this policy, within ten (10) working days upon the return of their travel, or completion of their training.

Travel Reimbursement requests must contain the approval of the department head.

Reimbursement requests submitted after then ten (10) working days shall not be considered. There will be no exceptions made, nor is this provision subject to appeal by the Chief Administrator or the Commissioners Court.

**VI. Supervisor Responsibilities**

Department Heads are expected to communicate this Travel and Training policy and its procedures to their employees, and shall be responsible for approving the initial travel requests according to this policy.

**A. Management**

1. Department Heads shall manage the number of employees being sent to any particular training at the same time based on impacts to the operation and within these policy guidelines.
2. Department Heads are required and authorized to execute the Employee Training and Professional Certification Agreements between their department and their traveling employees in accordance with the policies adopted herein. Department Heads shall submit their own Training and Professional Certification Agreements directly to the Chief Administrator for authorization.

**B. Discipline**

1. The County Auditor's Office will provide the Chief Administrator's Office a quarterly listing of employees who are not in compliance with the County's Travel and Training policy. As employees become non-compliant, the County Auditor's Office shall notify the Chief Administrator's Office immediately.
2. Continuous failure to comply with this policy may result in disciplinary action by the employee's Department Head.