

Grant County Personnel Policy

1202 – Travel Authorization & Expense Reimbursement					
Approval Date	09/14/21	Issued Date	02/07/22	Revision Date	01/01/22

1202.1 Specifics

- 1202.1.1 Reimbursable out-of-pocket expenses: Certain reimbursable out-of-pocket expenses may be required of an employee during employment. Any out-of-the-ordinary expenses are subject to prior approval by a supervisor. Expenses should be submitted monthly. Outstanding expenses at year end must be submitted to the Accounting Department by the established Accounts Payable cutoff date. Employees who incur exceptionally high expenses may submit an additional *Expense Reimbursement Claim* form (available on the County’s intranet home page under “PDF Fill-In Forms”) prior to end of the month. Specific information regarding allowable expenses and procedures are set forth below in this policy.
- 1202.1.2 Reimbursable Travel: In order to provide service to Grant County’s citizens, and training and information for our employees, travel may be required. Employees may be required to travel outside of normal work hours and/or stay overnight outside of the area. Grant County will reimburse eligible employees for reasonable expenses associated with such travel, subject to such travel and expenses having been previously approved. All work-related travel is subject to prior approval by the Elected Official or Department Head. All out-of-state travel is subject to prior approval by the Board of County Commissioners. Specific information regarding work travel is set forth below in this policy.

1202.2 Policy Definitions

- 1202.2.1 Employee: Defined as Elected Officials/Department Heads and employees, members of boards or commissions, and volunteers as authorized by the appointing authority, and other person allowed by law, grant, or contractual agreement.
- 1202.2.2 Official County business: Business that relates directly to an employee’s work function and is both essential and necessary for County business and includes, but is not limited to:
- a. Conducting legitimate County business such as fulfilling normal job functions, negotiating agreements, inspecting or purchasing equipment, coordinating with other governmental agencies;
 - b. Obtaining information or training directly related to a person’s official function; or
 - c. Serving as an official representative of Grant County.

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- 1202.2.3 Travel Status: An employee is considered to be in travel status when the time between his/her departure and return exceeds twelve (12) hours.
- 1202.2.4 Government rate: The discounted rates offered to government employees, in the course of conducting official business, by lodging establishments, rental car agencies and other providers of services to government employees.
- 1202.2.5 Allowances: Payments for specific travel related expenses (meal and mileage) that are paid at set rates, and may be paid prior to travel.
- 1202.2.6 Travel Allowance Claim Form: A form used by County employees to request allowance for eligible expenses.
- 1202.2.7 Expense Reimbursement Claim Form: A form used by County employees to request reimbursement for eligible expenses.
- 1202.2.8 Emergency Travel: The occurrence of emergency travel due to unforeseen circumstances. Travel scheduled for more than three (3) days prior to departure is not defined as emergency travel by this policy.
- 1202.2.9 Emergency Travel Fund: A cash account maintained by the County Auditor from which funds may be immediately issued, upon request, in the case of emergency or unforeseen travel. The County Sheriff and GrIS also maintain Emergency Travel Funds.
- 1202.2.10 Emergency Travel Claim Form: A form used by County employees to request prepayment for emergency travel expenses.
- 1202.3 General Rules**
- 1202.3.1 Employees traveling on official County business shall exercise good judgment in incurring expenses in order to avoid unnecessary or excessive County expenses which, if incurred, may not be authorized for reimbursement. Travel requests and claims shall strictly conform to the provisions of this policy and other applicable laws, grants, contracts or policies.
- 1202.3.2 Employees will be responsible for excess travel costs resulting from taking an indirect route or delaying return for personal preference. Additional travel expenses may be approved if an indirect route or delay reduces the County's total costs.
- 1202.3.3 The provisions of this policy shall apply to both domestic and foreign travel, except that the limits on travel expense reimbursements for transportation, lodging, and meals and incidentals shall apply only to travel within the continental United States, which shall consist of the forty-eight (48)

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contiguous states and the District of Columbia. Transportation, lodging, and meals and incidental expense reimbursement for travel outside the continental United States shall be based upon actual expenses to a maximum of the overseas rates established by the federal General Services Administration for federal travel to the specific location, subject to all other provisions of this policy.

- 1202.3.4 Any travel or meal expense that is unallowable per policy may not be the object of a direct expenditure of County funds.
- 1202.3.5 Any person who knowingly approves or pays, or causes to be approved or paid, a false or untrue claim shall be punishable and civilly liable under RCW 42.24.110.
- 1202.3.6 Any travel expense received in advance of travel must be reviewed by the EO/DH or designee once travel has concluded to ensure that travel did occur and expenses were incurred as expected. Upon return from travel, employees must complete the travel verification section on the department's copy of the Travel Allowance Claim. Any travel expenses that are received in advance of travel, but then are not incurred for any reason, shall be promptly repaid to the County.
- 1202.3.7 Under no circumstances shall any advance payment of expenses be considered as a personal loan to any employee and any unauthorized expenditure of any such advance shall be deemed a misappropriation of public funds.

1202.4 Health and Safety of Travelers

- 1202.4.1 The health and safety of travelers is a top priority in the conduct of travel related activities. It is advantageous to the County to establish and alter travel plans and itineraries with consideration of hazardous inclement weather and other situations that could threaten the health and safety of County personnel. When this occurs, travelers should:
 - a. Promptly notify their supervisors of the change in travel plans; and
 - b. Note the reason for any additional expense on their travel expense vouchers.

1202.5 Travel/Expense Authorization

- 1202.5.1 All travel must be approved in advance, except in the case of an emergency that requires travel to commence within twenty-four (24) hours. Expenses incurred without prior approval may not be reimbursed if the EO/DH deems the travel/expenses unnecessary.
- 1202.5.2 All claims must be authorized as follows:

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- a. Claims for employees must be approved by their department's EO/DH;
- b. Claims for Department Heads must be approved by the Board of County Commissioners;
- c. Claims for Elected Officials or the Board of County Commissioners must be approved by the Auditor.

1202.5.3 EOs/DHs may formally delegate the authority to authorize claims for some or all of their assigned area by providing written instruction to the County's Chief Accountant, while ensuring the requirements of paragraphs 1202.5.2(a)-(c) above are met.

1202.5.4 Out of State Travel: Out of state travel must be approved in writing by the EO/DH and by the Board of County Commissioners prior to departure. Employees should endeavor to attend training and conferences within Washington State whenever possible.

1202.6 Travel Allowance/Expense Reimbursement Claims

1202.6.1 Claims must be signed by the claimant and approving authority (see section 1202.5.2 above) and then added to an accounts payable batch and submitted to the Accounting Department. All expenses will be paid directly from the department's funds.

1202.6.2 Travel Allowance Claim Forms may be used to request meal and mileage allowances prior to travel. Meals and mileage are the only expenses for which allowances may be provided as they are paid at set rates and therefore do not require receipts.

- a. Any travel allowances that are received in advance of travel, but are not ultimately incurred, for any reason, shall be promptly repaid to the County. If the Grant County payables check, originally issued to the employee, has not been cashed or deposited, it may be returned to the Accounting Department to be voided. Otherwise, the claimant must immediately provide a check or money order to the department for repayment of County funds. This repayment shall be deposited with the Grant County Treasurer. A copy of the deposit receipt shall be attached to a copy of the original *Travel Allowance Claim Form* and shall be submitted to the Accounting Department;
- b. *Travel Allowance Claim Forms* may be submitted to the Accounting Department up to twenty (20) days prior to travel. If an employee requires his/her allowance prior to departure, the Accounting Department must receive a completed *Travel Allowance Claim Form* no later than ten (10) days prior to travel. If a *Travel Allowance Claim Form* was not submitted prior to the departure date, then an

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Expense Reimbursement Claim Form shall be used instead to claim reimbursement.

1202.6.3 Expense Reimbursement Claim Forms may only be used to claim reimbursement for exact expense amounts and must be accompanied by supporting receipts. Meals and mileage are the only exception to this rule as they are paid at set rates and do not require receipts. Meals shall be claimed at per diem rates as established by the GSA.

1202.6.4 Expense Reimbursement Claims must be submitted to the Accounting Department no later than thirty (30) days from the return date. Expense Reimbursement Claims submitted after thirty (30) days may be processed if there were extenuating circumstances and approval is received from the EO/DH and the Auditor to process the late claim. Expense Reimbursement Claims submitted to the Accounting Department outside of the fiscal year in which the expenses were incurred will not be processed, unless the expense occurs at year-end and the thirty (30) day period to process the claim falls in the following year.

1202.7 Emergency Travel

1202.7.1 Emergency Travel Funds: An Emergency Travel Fund is a checking account maintained by the County Auditor from which funds may be immediately issued, upon request, in the case of emergency travel. Emergency Travel Funds are also maintained by the Sheriff's Office and Grant Integrated Services. Emergency Travel Funds shall be reconciled on a monthly basis, and may be periodically reviewed by the County Auditor for appropriate use and tracking.

1202.7.2 Emergency Travel Claim Forms may be used by employees who require funds prior to travel and when travel is planned less than three (3) days from the departure date. Emergency Travel Claims may request a reasonable estimate of the expenses expected as a result of the emergency travel and that cannot otherwise be paid for directly by the department.

1202.7.3 Emergency Travel Claim Forms must be signed by the claimant and the EO/DH or designee and then submitted directly to the Accounting Department. Departments shall be responsible for maintaining appropriate documentation with a copy of the submitted Emergency Travel Claim which indicates the travel was of an emergency nature as defined by this policy. The County Auditor may audit these records periodically for appropriate use and tracking of Emergency Travel Funds. The claimant may be issued a check immediately, as long as the request is made during normal business hours and the proper issuing authority (the Auditor or Chief Accountant) is available

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for signature. Otherwise, the department will be notified as soon as the check is ready and the claimant or department designee may pick up the check from the Accounting Department.

1202.7.4 *Emergency Travel Claims* are paid by a check or checks issued from the Accounting Department's Emergency Travel Fund. Additionally, the Sheriff's Office and Grant Integrated Services have Emergency Travel Funds for use by their departments for qualifying claims. Emergency Travel Funds must be replenished promptly once travel has concluded. To replenish the Emergency Travel Fund, departments shall submit an *Expense Reimbursement Claim Form* listing "Grant County Emergency Travel" as the claimant. Policies regarding *Expense Reimbursement Claims* apply (see section 1202.6.3 for requirements for *Expense Reimbursement Claims*). The *Expense Reimbursement Claims* issued to replenish Emergency Travel Funds must be submitted to the Accounting Department no later than ten (10) days after travel has concluded. If repayment is not received by this deadline, it will be considered delinquent. Consequences for delinquent repayments are as follows:

- a. Failure to submit a timely and proper *Expense Reimbursement Claim* or to reimburse the County for advanced payment that was ultimately in excess of the expenses incurred shall render the employee personally liable for the full, unpaid amount plus interest at ten percent (10%) per year from the date of default until repaid and the County shall thereupon have a prior lien against and a right to withhold all funds payable or to become payable by the County to the employee.
- b. Employees who are delinquent in submitting replenishing claims or repaying a prior advance may not receive additional advances.
- c. The County Auditor shall be notified by the Accounting Department of any delinquent reimbursement and will also provide written notice to the EO/DH of the situation, as well as the policy set forth in section 1202.7.3(a) and (b) above.

1202.7.5 If an advance payment was less than the expenses ultimately incurred, an additional *Expense Reimbursement Claim* shall be submitted listing the employee as the claimant and requesting the difference. If an advance payment was more than the expenses ultimately incurred, the employee shall provide a personal check or money order (payable to Grant County), which will be submitted to the Accounting Department with the replenishing *Expense Reimbursement Claim*.

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1202.8 Meal Expenses

1202.8.1 General Rules Regarding Meal Expenses

- a. Employees shall be in travel status for three hours beyond their regularly scheduled work hours to be eligible for meal allowances. The three hours may consist of hours occurring before, after, or a combination of both before and after the traveler's regularly scheduled work day.
- b. Meal reimbursements for employees, when not in travel status but on official County business, may occasionally be allowed. These meal reimbursements will be paid at cost, will require receipts, and must be approved by the EO/DH and the Board of County Commissioners. The reason for the meal (*e.g.*, "Attendance required at lunchtime meeting with presentation to County boards") and a list naming all individuals for which a meal was provided by the expense shall be submitted with the receipt. The expense shall not exceed the appropriate per diem rates, per person, for the meal.

1202.8.2 Meal Allowances Rates: Meal allowances shall be paid at the Meal and Incidental Expense (M&IE) per diem rates provided by the General Services Administration (GSA). Rates vary by area.

- a. The per diem rate includes taxes and tips; as such, employees will not be reimbursed separately for those items.
- b. When the expense of a meal is included in a registration fee for a training or conference, the per diem allowance must be deducted by the fixed allowance for the respective meal. Any such deductions will not cause the incidental expense portion of the per diem allowance to be reduced.
- c. On a first and last travel day, employees are only eligible for seventy-five percent (75%) of the total M&IE per diem rate.
- d. To search for a Total M&IE (Meal and Incidental Expense) per diem, visit: www.gsa.gov/mie. For a breakdown of the per diem by meal rates, incidental rates, and decreased rates for the first and last day of travel visit: www.gsa.gov/mie. The travel destination city shall be used to determine the per diem rates for the entirety of the trip.

1202.8.3 Unallowable Meal Expenses

Meal costs may not be paid by the County as a direct expenditure when:

- a. They are included in another County expense, regardless of whether the person partakes in the meal or refreshment; or

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- b. They are incurred for recreational or social events such as office parties, going away parties, retirement parties, or other personalized social events; or
- c. They are incurred by the purchase of alcoholic beverages and tobacco products; or
- d. It would violate the provisions of Article VIII, Section 7 of the state constitution, which prohibits the gifting of public funds.

1202.9 Transportation Expenses

1202.9.1 General Rules Regarding Transportation Expenses

- a. Travel shall be by the method of transportation and route that will be most advantageous to the County, considering the cost of transportation, other travel expenses and salary. The excess cost of first class or business class fares for a given mode of travel shall not be reimbursed when less expensive fares are available.
- b. When automobile transportation is necessary, a County vehicle shall be used whenever practical (see Section 1201 above, Motor Vehicle Use). The use of a private automobile can only be authorized for travel pursuant to the above-referenced Motor Vehicle Use Policy. When rental vehicles are authorized, government rates must always be requested.
- c. When reasonable, two or more employees should travel in one vehicle.
- d. When travel requires commercial transportation (*e.g.*, airlines, railways, etc.) travel tickets are to be tourist class *via* the most cost effective route. Commercial transportation used in lieu of more economical motor transportation should be consistent with what would be considered reasonable for the circumstances.
- e. Taxi fares, motor vehicle rentals, parking fees, ferry tolls and bridge tolls to and from the event site are allowable expenses.

1202.9.2 Transportation expenses will be reimbursed at cost and will require receipts, except for mileage allowances, which will be paid at the standard rate.

1202.9.3 **Mileage allowances:** If a County vehicle is not available and an employee is allowed to use a private automobile for County related travel, the employee will receive a mileage allowance. The allowance shall be calculated at the published County rate, and receipts are not required.

- a. Mileage shall be calculated from the point of origin to the final destination. If an EO/DH requires an employee to report to the work place prior to travel departure, then point

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of origin will be the work place. If the EO/DH allows departure from the employee's residence, then the residence shall be the point of origin. The final destination shall be the event or lodging site.

- b. Mileage between an employee's home and regularly assigned workplace is not an allowable expense. (Mileage between a regional committees member's (not a full-time elected official) home and the meeting site is an allowable expense, and will be paid at the current published County rate.
- c. If employees carpool, only the driver/owner of the vehicle may claim mileage.

1202.10 Lodging Expenses

1202.10.1 General Rules Regarding Lodging

- a. Lodging expenses are only allowable for overnight travel.
- b. Lodging expenses in the host city may be claimed from the day the authorized event begins through the night before it ends, unless additional lodging expenses are deemed appropriate by the EO/DH to allow for timely and safe travel and/or to reduce overall travel costs to the County.
- c. Government rates must always be requested.

1202.10.2 Travel Reimbursement Rates

- a. Lodging expenses are paid at cost, shall not exceed federal per diem lodging rates, and receipts are required. Departments should pay for lodging expenses with a department credit card whenever possible. Otherwise, lodging expenses may be reimbursed upon return.
- b. The employee shall be reimbursed for actual lodging costs incurred for single occupancy, as long as those costs are consistent with what would be considered reasonable for the area and circumstances and/or to a maximum of the federal lodging limit published at: <https://www.gsa.gov/portal/category/26429> for the host city plus taxes. If the lodging receipt indicates a charge for double occupancy and two persons are authorized to travel on behalf of the County, each traveler shall be allowed one-half the double occupancy charge. If one occupant is not an employee authorized, the authorized employee shall be reimbursed at the single occupancy rate to a maximum of the federal lodging limit. The EO/DH responsible may require double occupancy for work travel, for cost containment purposes.
- c. Lodging expenses in excess of the federal lodging per diem rates, as established by the GSA, may be authorized by the EO/DH if the following conditions are met:

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- i. The department attempted, but was unsuccessful in locating lodging options within the federal lodging limit within a reasonable distance of the event site;
 - ii. The authorized means of transportation between the alternative lodging site and the event site would exceed the savings in lodging costs; or
 - iii. The EO/DH, or designee, has authorized the excess expenditure in writing and in advance for any urgent circumstances which may exist.
- d. Lodging costs in excess of the federal lodging per diem rates will be considered to be authorized by the EO/DH upon their signature of the accounts payable batch including the lodging cost and/or upon their signature on the *Expense Reimbursement Claim*.

1202.11 Out of State Travel:

- 1202.11.1 Out of state travel must be approved in writing prior to incurring any cost for such travel. Written approval by the Board of County Commissioners must be received before booking any hotels and airline for out of state travel, preferably 90 days before, but no later than 30 days before expected travel dates
- a. Each employee will need to fill out an “Out of State Travel Approval Request” form which can be found on the Intranet. This will be in lieu of employees/department heads/elected officials writing letters to the commissioners asking for approval.
 - b. Each employee will also need to use the “Airline Comparison Tool” form when wanting to book any airline tickets. Comparing costs of each airline to find the most cost effective to the county.
 - c. Once approved by the Commissioners the department can book hotels and airline for out of state travel. The signed “Out of State Travel Approval Request” form will need to be included as back up for any accounts payable batch that is paying for those expenses.
 - d. Upgrading any flights will be unallowable on the county credit cards. These purchases will need to be paid for by the employee after the flights are booked.

1202.12 Miscellaneous Expense

- 1202.12.1 Miscellaneous travel expenses related to official County business which are considered essential will be reimbursed at actual costs and receipts are required. These include but are not limited to:

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- a. Registration fees for seminars, conferences, conventions or similarly organized program subject to any limitations previously set forth in this policy;
- b. Rental of a room in a hotel or other facility that is used to transact official business.
- c. Charges for necessary word-processing services, photocopies or facsimile (fax) transmissions in connection with the preparation of reports and/or correspondence for official County business.
- d. Traveler's checks.
- e. Baggage handling service, when necessitated by physical limitations or when carrying excessive baggage or equipment required for an official business purpose, may be claimed.

1202.13 Professional Memberships/Licenses:

- 1202.13.1 Employees may have an opportunity to participate in professional associations and acquire licenses or certifications, which promote Grant County's goals and the employee's own professional development. Employees requesting to have memberships or licenses paid by the County shall be in writing and document the cost and benefit to the employee and Grant County and is subject to prior written approval by the supervisor.

1202.14 Appointed Boards, Commissioners and Special Speakers:

- 1202.14.1 For those who are appointed to boards, serve as Commissioners, and/or are special speakers that are dealing with County business (inclusive of County staff):
- a. Meetings held during meal times are eligible to be reimbursed with prior approval from the Board of County Commissioners; and
 - b. Host agencies may also cover the cost of meals.

1202.15 Unallowable Expenses:

- 1202.15.1 Expenses that are not directly related to official County business, and/or are set forth as unallowable by this policy, are considered unallowable expenses.
- a. Unallowable expenses include, but are not limited to:
 - i. All room service charges, including: laundry services, valet services, media services or other items of a similar nature. Meals are paid by allowances and may not be claimed as a room service expense.
 - ii. Costs of personal trip insurance or medical services.
 - iii. Personal telephone calls, except in emergency situations or necessary notification of extension of travel plans.

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- iv. Entertainment expenses including, but not limited to, clothing, personal sundries and services.
- v. Fines and penalties.
- vi. Dependent care, except as may be provided through a County benefits program.
- vii. Expenses for spouses, guests, and/or family member(s).
- viii. Any expense deemed unreasonable or unnecessary by the EO/DH, which may be otherwise permitted under this policy.

1202.15.2 Any exception(s) to the unallowable expenses as listed above requires written approval from the Board of County Commissioners, which must be submitted with the *Expense Reimbursement Claim* to the Accounting Department.

1202.15.3 The County shall not provide funding of travel expenses when a source of reimbursement other than the County is specified in county, state, or federal law or policy. In cases where reimbursement is available from another source, the County may, at the option of the approving authority, pay the difference between what the County policy would allow for the total travel activity and the total reimbursed from the other source for expenses reimbursable under the provisions of this policy, but shall not selectively reimburse for only specific items with differing reimbursement rates between the County and the other source.

1202.16 State of Washington Travel Policy or County Policy:

1202.16.1 Very few positions are funded in a way that permits travel expense reimbursement under the State of Washington Travel Policy; in cases that are, employees may choose to utilize either the State Travel Policy or this County policy, but not both.