

# RESOLUTION 2021 734

BEFORE THE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS OF BENTON COUNTY, WASHINGTON:

**IN THE MATTER OF APPROVING THE BENTON COUNTY BUSINESS TRAVEL AND EXPENSE POLICY AND RESCINDING RESOLUTION 2015-041 AND 2011-294 EFFECTIVE NOVEMBER 1, 2021**

**WHEREAS**, on January 13, 2015 the Board of County Commissioners last updated the County's Business Travel and Expense Policy; and

**WHEREAS**, as rules, regulations, and practices change, it is necessary to update County policies to ensure they are applicable and provide for efficient operation; and

**WHEREAS**, Resolution 2011-294 fixes per diem and milage rates for the County whereas the new policy ties to the Washington State Office of Financial Management approved rates making that Resolution obsolete; and

**WHEREAS**, certain updates contained in this policy require new procedures and training, therefore, the implementation date is delayed to give Departments time to read and understand the policy before it takes effect; **NOW THEREFORE**,

**BE IT RESOLVED** that the Board of Benton County Commissioners hereby approves the attached Business Travel and Expense Policy with an effective date of November 1, 2021; and

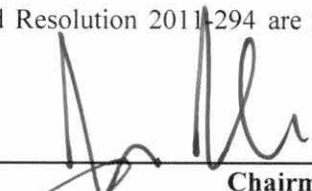
**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Benton County Auditor will establish policies and procedures for the issuance and management of the pre-paid advance travel cards; and


**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that pursuant to RCW 2.36.150 and RCW 43.03.060, the milage allowance paid for jury duty is prescribed by the Director of Financial Management; and


**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that all Benton County Elected Officials, the County Administrator, Department Managers, County Employees and other authorized travelers shall either use a County issued credit card, be reimbursed or receive advanced travel payments in accordance with the attached Business Travel and Expense Policy; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that Resolution 2015-041 and Resolution 2011-294 are hereby rescinded effective November 1, 2021.

Dated this 5th day of October 2021.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Chairman of the Board

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Chairman Pro Tem

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Member

Attest: .....   
Clerk of the Board

Constituting the Board of County  
Commissioners of Benton County,  
Washington

## BENTON COUNTY BUSINESS TRAVEL AND EXPENSE POLICY

**EFFECTIVE:** November 1, 2021

**I. Purpose**

This policy establishes official guidelines and procedures for ordinary and necessary, approved travel expenses.

**II. Scope**

This policy applies to all Benton County employees and elected officials.

**III. Policy**

**A. General**

Business travel and expenses are restricted to those activities that are reasonably necessary and clearly in the best interest of the County. Employees on travel must be sensitive to the potential negative public perceptions regarding business expenses incurred by County employees and are expected to use prudence and good judgement when traveling at the County's expense.

**B. Definitions**

"Approved Travel Expense(s)" shall mean County financial responsibility for certain registration, transportation, lodging and meal costs related to travel for County business.

"Authorizing Individual" shall mean the appropriate Elected Official, Department Head or the County Administrator (or any of their designees) who has fiscal responsibility for the travel budget for the respective Department.

"BOCC" shall mean the Board of County Commissioners

"Continental Breakfast" shall mean a buffet-style meal that typically includes items such as bagels, toast, condiments, pastries, fruit, juice, cereals, beverages and possibly eggs, and meat.

"Day Travel" shall mean travel when the Traveler does not stay in lodging away from their home for one or more nights.

"Exclusion Zone" shall mean the area inside the boundaries of Benton and Franklin Counties.

"Overnight Travel" shall mean travel to locations outside of the exclusion zone when the Traveler stays in County paid, employee reimbursed, or free lodging away from their home for one or more nights.

"Traveler" shall mean a Benton County Elected Official, the Benton County Administrator, county employees, volunteers and members of Benton County Boards and/or Commissions.

**C. Travel Authorization**

- a) All Travelers must be approved for travel by an Authorizing Individual in order to receive payment and/or reimbursement for allowable travel expenses. Travel must be approved even if some entity, other than the County, funds all or part of the expenses related to the travel. Under no circumstances will travel expenses be authorized for any organizations.
- b) Travel may be approved for attendance at job-related seminars, conferences, conventions, training, or other appearances so long as they pertain to County business.
- c) Approval of travel by an Authorizing Individual is required for all travel outside of the exclusion zone.
- d) Authorizing Individual shall ensure the following when approving travel:
  - Traveler has provided sufficient information about the travel so a determination can be made as to whether or not the travel pertains to County Business.
  - In the case of pre-approval, a detailed cost estimate of travel costs has been prepared or for reimbursement, a detailed listing of all actual costs has been provided.
  - Funds exist within the current travel budget to pay for travel expenses.

**CI. Allowable Expenses**

**1. Registration Expenses**

Registration costs for meetings, conferences, conventions, work sessions, educational courses, seminars, classes, trainings etc. may be approved if it is deemed it will benefit the County and is reasonably related to the Traveler's job duties.

**2. Transportation Expenses**

- a) The method of transportation shall be by the most economical and safest mode available that takes the most direct route or is most advantageous to the County. Transportation shall be primarily by vehicle, air and/or rail.
- b) Travelers shall obtain the government rate, or another lower rate, for all transportation related costs whenever possible.
- c) For a given mode of travel, the cost of a coach class fare, or equivalent, shall be utilized unless a less expensive fare is available. Travelers may elect to upgrade to a higher class fare at their own expense provided they make all upgrade arrangements and pay for any increased costs directly.
- d) Only reasonably necessary taxi or public transportation costs will be approved.
- e) Reasonably necessary parking and toll costs may be approved with a submitted receipt.
- f) Travel by vehicle shall be primarily in a County owned vehicle (department assigned or motor pool) unless one is determined to not be available in

which case the Authorizing Individual may approve the use of a leased/rented third-party vehicle or personal vehicle (as set forth in (h) and (i) below). For the purposes of determining if a County vehicle is available, factors regarding the suitability and safety of the technically available vehicles may be considered.

- g) Leased/rented third-party vehicles may be approved under the following conditions:
- The leased/rented vehicle shall be the lowest cost, standard vehicle that adequately carries the person(s) and equipment needed for conducting County business. Generally, this shall be considered a “mid-size” class vehicle unless specifically approved otherwise.
  - A loss Damage Waiver, Collision Damage Waiver or similar coverage offered by the leasing/rental agency shall be obtained.
- h) Under rare circumstances, when a suitable County owned or a leased/rented vehicle is unavailable and another mode of travel is impractical, the Authorizing Individual may approve the use of a personal vehicle for County related travel under the following conditions:
- Traveler shall provide a copy of proof of vehicle insurance meeting Washington State Financial Responsibility laws.
  - Mileage will be reimbursed at the currently approved Washington State Office of Financial Management rate. Current rates may be found at <https://www.ofm.wa.gov>
  - Mileage will not be reimbursed for that portion of travel which would normally be part of the Traveler's commute. This includes commute miles when the employee has been temporarily re-assigned to another office subject to relevant collective bargaining agreement provisions.
- i) Except as provided above, Travelers who elect to use their personal vehicle for travel rather than a County vehicle or approved leased/rented vehicle will not be eligible for mileage reimbursement. Use of personal vehicles for County business is highly discouraged and the County takes no responsibility for damage or other losses related to the use of said personal vehicle. Travelers should consult with their automotive insurance carriers regarding the implications of using a personal vehicle for County business.
- j) Travelers driving on County business shall follow the regulations set forth in the Benton County Vehicle Use Policy. Only authorized Travelers may ride in County vehicles or leased/rented vehicles. Travelers may not use the County vehicle to transport their spouse, children, other family members, friends or any other non-county employees except that, when attending conferences, seminars or other events, the Traveler may share rides with employees or elected officials of other governmental agencies.

### **3. Lodging Expenses**

- a) Lodging costs will not be approved for Travelers within the exclusion zone.

- b) Authorizing Individual may approve actual lodging costs, plus applicable taxes and fees, incurred for single occupancy up to the Washington State Office of Financial Management approved lodging rate. Current rates may be found at <https://www.ofm.wa.gov>.
- c) Lodging costs that are greater than the approved lodging rate may be approved if supported by a proper, detailed cost analysis. The cost analysis should consider the following factors:
  - Distance from the event to the lodging
  - Travel logistics
  - Availability of transportation to and from the event
  - Safety and security considerations
- d) Lodging costs from the night before an event and/or the night the event ends may be approved under the following conditions:
  - The event start or end time, when coupled with the required driving duration, can be used to justify the additional overnight stay
  - Travel logistics such as flight times dictate the additional night stay
  - The health and safety of travelers is considered advantageous to the County and can be used to justify the additional overnight stay
  - Compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is considered to be advantageous to the County and can be used to justify the additional overnight stay
- e) Proper, detailed cost analysis is required to be submitted along with documents requesting pre-approval for travel or with receipts when it was not practical to obtain pre-approval.
- f) Whenever possible, lodging costs should be paid directly by the County as opposed by the Traveler, who must then seek reimbursement. This may be accomplished by the County paying for the costs in advance or by providing the Traveler with a County purchase card specifically for the lodging costs.

#### **4. Meal Expenses**

- a) Meal Expenses will not be approved for Travelers within the exclusion zone.
- b) The approved rate and breakdown for meal expenses shall follow the Washington State Office of Financial Management (OFM) State and Administrative & Accounting Manual (SAAM) Section 10.90.20 fixed allowance for each meal consistent with the appropriate per diem rate for the host County or City found at [www.ofm.wa.gov](http://www.ofm.wa.gov). These maximum rates include all taxes, tips and other fees.
- c) Meals included in a registration fee, airfare, lodging (e.g. continental breakfast) or other approved travel expense are not eligible for per diem for that meal whether the traveler actually consumes the meal or not. The only exception to this is if the meal provided does not meet the reasonable dietary restrictions (e.g. gluten free or other food allergies) of the Traveler. In the case of dietary restriction exceptions Traveler may request

reimbursement for meals not covered by advanced travel authorization pursuant to Section F of this policy.

- d) For day travel or the first and last days of overnight travel, per diem eligibility is based on the following departure and arrival times from or to the Traveler's normal work location or residence:

Breakfast – departure prior to 6:30 AM

Lunch – departure prior 11:00AM or arrival after 1:00PM

Dinner – arrival after 6:30PM

- e) All per diem expenses for day travel will be treated as required by then-existing Internal Revenue Service regulations for tax and reporting purposes.
- f) If a Traveler believes a meal should be approved due to extenuating circumstances that would not otherwise be approved under this policy, they may make a request to the Authorizing Individual. The Authorizing Individual shall provide documentation of the reason for approval or denial of the request.
- g) During emergency situations such as, but not limited to, initial crime scene investigations, major crimes, emergency evacuation situations, natural disasters, etc., when County employees/volunteers are working extended hours and stopping for a meal break could worsen the situation and/or increase costs to the County the Authorizing Individual may provide an on-scene meal of nominal cost. Nominal cost shall follow the OFM SAAM Section 10.90.20 fixed allowance for each meal. A detailed receipt for the meal purchase along with a listing of all employees and volunteers provided a meal and all pertinent information involving the situation must be provided.

## 5. Ineligible Expenses

Authorizing Individual shall not approve and Traveler shall not be reimbursed for ineligible expenses, including:

- Any expense that would constitute a violation of the Washington State Constitution, Article VIII, Section 7 or when a gift of public funds would occur
- Expenses not directly related to conducting official County business
- Expenses that are unreasonable, excessive or unnecessary
- Expenses incurred without prior approval from the Authorizing Individual unless a bona fide emergency occurred preventing prior approval
- Travel and miscellaneous expenses not approved under this policy
- Travel paid for by any other organization
- Expenses incurred for recreational or social events such as office, going away parties, retirement parties, or other personalized social events
- The purchase of alcoholic beverages, tobacco, marijuana or drugs
- Expenses considered to be personal, including but not limited to:

- Hosting meals or entertaining others
- Personal telephone calls
- Entertainment, clothing, personal sundries or services
- Transportation for entertainment or similar personal activities
- Trip Insurance
- Medical, dental or hospital expenses
- Fines, penalties and non-refunded security deposits
- Dependent care
- Additional meals, lodging or transportation expenses for a spouse or guest
- Mileage if traveling as a passenger in a vehicle other than the Traveler's own
- Additional costs of taking an indirect route, an early departure or delayed return trip for personal preference or convenience except in circumstances where the indirect route, early departure or delayed return reduces the County's costs
- Any tips or gratuities associated with personal expenses or in excess of per diem amounts
- Charges for vehicle service calls caused by the negligence of the Traveler (e.g. fuel deliveries, lock out assistance, jump starting services when lights left on)
- Tolls associated with the use of high occupancy toll (HOT) lanes
- Fines, citations or infractions received while on County business

**E. Advanced Travel Authorization for Meal Per Diem**

- a) After the Authorizing Individual has approved the travel authorization request they, or their approved designee, shall submit a request for advanced payment of meal per diem to the Benton County Auditor on the forms acceptable to the Auditor's Office and containing required backup documentation including:
  - Approved travel authorization form
  - Applicable brochure or agenda for the event attended
  - Reservation confirmations for transportation and/or lodging
- b) Absent exigent circumstances, requests for advanced payment shall be received no later than 3 business days in advance of the proposed departure date.
- c) The Auditor's Office will review the submitted documentation and issue advanced payment of meal per diem only. Advanced payment shall be in the format of a pre-paid debit card. No other form of payment is available.
- d) After payment has been issued by the Auditor's Office, the pre-paid debit card will be available through the Authorizing Individual or their approved designee.
- e) Travelers using the pre-paid debit card for advanced travel meal per diem are not required to retain receipts for purchases made with the pre-paid card nor are travelers expected to return unspent funds on the pre-paid card at conclusion of travel.

**F. Travel Expense - No Advanced Travel or for Reimbursement**

- a) In cases where advanced travel authorization was not possible, or there were unanticipated expenses that advanced travel did not provide for, travelers may utilize a County provided credit card or may request reimbursement under this policy. In either case, the Traveler shall submit a completed Travel Expense Form to the Authorizing Individual not less than 72 hours after travel has been concluded.
- b) The Travel Expense Form shall be completely filled out and include the duration of travel, the travel destination(s), the name of all participants and the reason for travel. The following items shall also be included with the form:
- Applicable brochure or agenda for the event attended
  - Transportation itinerary and costs
  - Receipts for lodging
  - Detailed receipts for meals (not paid by advanced travel) and other eligible costs
  - A copy of the Traveler's vehicle insurance if travel was by personal vehicle
- c) Reimbursement will be for actual costs of eligible expenses except as outlined below.
- d) Limits for meal expenses to be reimbursed or paid using a County provided credit card shall be in accordance with Section D.4.b of this policy. The maximum rate for tips shall not exceed 15% even if a higher tip amount will not exceed the per diem limits except that in the case of a larger party where a higher tip rate is included in the invoice. In that case, the total amount of the meal plus tip must still be within the per diem limits.
- e) A detailed receipt is required for all expenses submitted for reimbursement. The receipt must list the name of the establishment, the date and time of purchase, an itemized description of the purchase or meal, the amount of tax, the amount of the tip, the amount of any other fees and the total amount expensed. Failure to provide a detailed receipt with all the above information will result in a maximum reimbursement amount for meals as outlined below:

Breakfast:	\$5.50
Lunch:	\$7.00
Dinner:	\$10.50

Failure to provide a detailed receipt for any expense other than meals will result in the reimbursement being declined.

In the event that the purchase was made with a County provided credit card, and a detailed receipt was not provided, the full purchase amount (non-meals) or the difference between the meal cost and the amounts stated above will be considered an unauthorized use pursuant to the Benton County Credit/Procurement Card Policy and may be recovered from the Traveler in any legal manner including, but not limited to, payroll deduction.



**G. Repayment of Expenses**

- a) The County shall seek repayment of expenses from the person who received advanced travel, reimbursement or utilized a County provided credit card whenever an audit or other subsequent review of travel expenses finds such expenses were paid for contrary to the provisions of this policy unless such expenses were incurred in reasonable reliance on the pre-approval of an Authorizing Individual or the Authorizing Individual determines the amount is de minimis (i.e. the cost and resources incurred in recouping the amount substantially outweighs the amount itself).
  
- b) In the event a Traveler does not make use of a reserved lodging arrangement or fails to appear for a scheduled event, they shall be responsible to repay to the County all costs incurred by the County which includes, but is not limited to, forfeited reservation fees, cancellation fees, meal per diem for travel dates, fuel costs, mileage reimbursements, transportation fees, etc. The only exception to this provision is under documented exigent circumstances (e.g. severe illness, death in the family, hazardous weather conditions). The County shall be entitled to recoup such costs in any legal manner including, but not limited to, payroll deduction.