

HIDALGO COUNTY, TEXAS
ADMINISTRATIVE POLICY MANUAL

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TRAVEL POLICIES, GUIDELINES, AND PROCEDURES

1.00 REFERENCE

County Auditor's Form T.1.1 "Application for Official Travel"
County Auditor's Form T.1.2 "Registration, Lodging, Vehicle Rental, & Airfare Check Request"
County Auditor's Form T.1.3 "In-County Travel Automobile Expense Claim"
County Auditor's Form T.1.4 "Final Travel Expense Claim"
County Auditor's Form T.1.5 "Out-of-County Travel Advance Request"
County Auditor's Form T.1.6 "Non-overnight Meal Expense Incurred by Law Enforcement Personnel While Transporting Detainees/Conducting Extraditions"

2.00 AUTHORITY

Local Government Code § 152.011 "Amount set by Commissioners Court"
Local Government Code § 152.035 "Reimbursement for Mileage Expenses" (County Auditor)
Local Government Code § 152.901 "Travel expenses for Certain County Agents and Board Members"
Local Government Code § 152.907 "Continuing Education Expenses for County and Precinct Officers"
Government Code § 611.001 "Lodging and Meal Expenses"
Government Code § 611.002 "Common Carrier Fares"
Penal Code § 39.02 "Abuse of Official Capacity"

Internal Revenue Service Publication 1542 "Per Diem Rates"
Internal Revenue Service Publication 15 "Employer's Tax Guide" (Circular E).
Income Tax Regulations § 1.62-2 "Reimbursements and other expense allowance arrangements"

3.00 BACKGROUND

Local Government Code § 152.011 authorizes Commissioners Court to set the amount of the travel expenses and other allowances for County and precinct officers and employees who are paid wholly from County funds.

Commissioners Court approved the original policies, guidelines and procedures on June 1, 1996. On May 5, 2015, the Hidalgo County Commissioners Court revised the travel policies, guidelines, and procedures that were previously amended on September 23, 2014 and August 5, 2008. These travel policies, guidelines, and procedures supersede those found in the Hidalgo County Personnel Policy Manual ("Brown Book") and the Hidalgo County Civil Service Commission Rules ("Blue Book") and any other travel policy previously approved by Commissioners Court. The travel policies, procedures, and guidelines set forth below are applicable to Hidalgo County Officials (Elected Officials, Appointed Officials, and Department Heads) and employees.

Hidalgo County has adopted an "Accountable Plan" for the reimbursement of business travel expenses. Pursuant to Federal Tax Regulation § 1.62-2, reimbursements for travel under an "Accountable Plan" must meet three requirements as follows:

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1. There must be a business connection and the expense must be reasonable;
2. There must be a reasonable accounting of the expenses (amounts paid up to the allowable federal per diem rates are deemed substantiated); and
3. All excess reimbursements must be repaid in a reasonable time.

Federal Tax Regulation § 1.62-2(k) provides that, in addition to these three requirements, the plan cannot exhibit a "pattern of abuse." If a payer's reimbursement or other expense allowance arrangement evidences a pattern of abuse of the rules of section 62(c) and this section, all payments made under the arrangement will be treated as made under a nonaccountable plan.

Pursuant to Federal Tax Regulation § 1.62-2(c)(5), payments or reimbursements under a nonaccountable plan are included in the employee's gross income, must be reported as wages or compensation on the employees Form W-2, and are subject to withholding and payment of employment taxes (social security, Medicare, unemployment).

4.00 POLICIES AND GUIDELINES

1. Travel expenses shall be allowed only for County Officials and employees (collectively referred to as employees) while on official County business. The purpose of the trip must be for the County's benefit and/or be related to the Department's primary business activities as follows:
 - a. To obtain statutorily required continuing professional education;
 - b. To obtain continuing education related to an employee's work or maintenance of a license or certification;
 - c. To testify before legislative bodies, regulatory agencies and commissions, and other forums that may make decisions affecting the County including its affiliated agencies and operations;
 - d. To participate in professional organizations related to the employee's job assignment;
 - e. To conduct essential research and information-gathering for improvement of County operations or compliance with the law;
 - f. To monitor the development of state or federal legislation or implementation of legislation that might affect the County;
 - g. To participate in forums, coalitions, and discussions relating to the policy, legislative, and regulatory interests of the County;
 - h. To pursue the County's interests in litigation or criminal justice;
 - i. To promote the economic development interests of the County; or
 - j. To carry out other purposes determined by Commissioners Court to be in the interest of the County.

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2. Sufficient funds must be available in the adopted budget before expenditures are made.
3. Travel expenses must be reasonable and necessary. Any inappropriate or excessive costs will not be reimbursed.
4. Preference should be given to local and in-state training, unless training is not available locally or in-state.
5. Departments shall designate one employee as the travel liaison and shall require such employee to attend a training session provided by the County Auditor's Office in conjunction with the Purchasing Department soon after revisions to the Travel Policies, Guidelines, and Procedures (hereinafter referred to as the Travel Policy) are approved by Commissioners Court. The travel liaison will be responsible for training his/her Departments employees on the Travel Policy and keep them informed of any changes in travel rules.
6. Departments must ensure that all travel reimbursements are examined to ensure compliance with the Travel Policy prior to submitting payment requests. Employees must ensure that their travel complies with the Travel Policy and must not seek reimbursement for travel expenses that the employee should reasonably know are not reimbursable.
7. AUTHORIZATION FOR OFFICIAL TRAVEL
 - a. Prior to making any reservations and/or traveling, Departments that report to the County Executive Officer (hereinafter referred to as the Executive Officer) must obtain approval from the Executive Officer by submitting **Form T.1.1 "Application for Official Travel"**.
 - b. The County is not obligated to pay for travel by Departments that report to the Executive Officer if prior approval from the Executive Officer was not obtained.
8. METHOD OF PAYMENT FOR TRAVEL EXPENSES
 - a. Direct Payment - Registration fees, lodging, and airfare may be paid directly to vendors. The request for payment must be submitted to the County Auditor's Office - Accounts Payable Section at least two weeks prior to the date the check will be needed.
 - b. Department's Travel Credit Card - If direct payment is not possible, the Department's travel credit card may be used to pay registration fees, lodging, and airfare (see Travel Credit Card procedures). Reservations for lodging, rental vehicles, or airfare using the Department's travel

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credit card must be made by the Purchasing Department unless the Department has been authorized by Commissioners Court to have custody of a travel credit card. The Department's travel credit card may not be used to make reservations at rates higher than allowed by the Travel Policy. Expenditures made with the travel credit card must be in compliance with the Travel Policy.

- c. Personal Credit Cards and/or Cash - If registration fees, lodging, or airfare is not prepaid, the County will reimburse the employee for travel expenses incurred in accordance with the Travel Policy upon completion and submittal of **Form T.1.4 "Final Travel Expense Claim"**. The County will not reimburse interest, over the credit limit charges, or late charges incurred on the employee's personal credit card.
- d. Travel Advance - The employee may obtain a travel advance subject to certain restrictions (see Section 4.20).

9. COORDINATION OF TRAVEL

- a. "Coordination of travel" in this Section means employees traveling together in a personally owned vehicle, County vehicle, or rental vehicle.
- b. Except as provided by section (d) below, coordination of travel is required when four or fewer employees employed by the same Department travel on the same dates with the same itinerary to conduct the same official County business. If more than four employees employed by the same Department travel on the same dates with the same itinerary to conduct the same official County business, then coordination of travel is required for each group of four employees and for any fraction in excess of a multiple of four employees.
- c. When coordination of travel is required, only the driver of the personal vehicle or rental vehicle will be reimbursed for mileage or fuel charges, respectively. Mileage incurred by an employee to meet at a designated location or to pick up other employees may be reimbursed if reasonable and documented (see Section 4.12).
- d. Exception to coordination of travel: Coordination of travel is not required by Hidalgo County Officials. It is also not required if prior to the trip, the County Official determines that coordination of travel is not feasible. That determination must be based only on factors relating to official County business. Determinations should be made on a trip-by-trip basis and must be provided in a written memo to the County Auditor's Office – Accounts Payable Section. If the County Auditor's Office determines that the rationale for the determination was not

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related to official County business, only one of the employees will be reimbursed.

10. AIR TRAVEL

- a. When the most efficient travel is by air, reimbursement will be limited to coach fare. Refundable fares should be considered if the possibility of a trip cancellation exists. Airline tickets should be reserved in advance, when possible, in order to obtain the most reasonable rates. The use of a travel agency to book air travel reservations is discouraged.
- b. Package fares (Friends Fly Free, etc.) are encouraged when two or more employees are traveling to and from the same location and overall cost can be reduced.
- d. The employee must personally pay for the cost of the package fare (Friends Fly Free, etc.) if the employee is flying with family or friends. The employee will only be reimbursed for one half of the price of the coach fare upon completion and submittal of **Form T.1.4 "Final Travel Expense Claim"** and evidence of the price of the coach fare.
- e. Baggage charges for up to two checked bags are reimbursable. Baggage charges in excess of the second checked bag will not be reimbursed unless the fees are incurred for checking County-owned equipment. Baggage excess weight and size fees will not be reimbursed. A written memo must be addressed to the County Auditor's Office – Accounts Payable Section describing the County-owned equipment and the reason(s) for the equipment.
- f. Charges for changes made to flight reservations will not be reimbursed unless the change is necessary due to official County business, a natural disaster, other natural occurrence, illness, or personal emergency. A written memo must be addressed to the County Auditor's Office – Accounts Payable Section stating the reason(s) for the change to the flight schedule. If the County Auditor's Office determines that the rationale for the change was not related to official County business, a natural disaster, or other natural occurrence, illness, or personal emergency, the employee will not be reimbursed for the charges.
- g. An original receipt for baggage fees must be submitted as supporting documentation for the reimbursement. In addition, an original passenger receipt issued by the airline company or an original itinerary issued by the airline company or travel agency must be submitted as supporting documentation for reimbursement. The original receipt or itinerary must include the name of the employee and airline, the ticket

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number, the class of transportation, the travel dates, the amount of the airfare, and the origin and destination of each flight. In addition, proof of payment is required if the airfare was paid by the employee.

If the original passenger receipt and itinerary are both unavailable, the supporting documentation must include a copy of the receipt or itinerary, the canceled check or credit card slip used to pay the transportation expense, or the credit card billing on which the transportation charges appear. If any of these alternative methods are used as supporting documentation, the information required from the receipt or itinerary described above must still be included in the documentation.

11. PERSONAL VEHICLE

- a. Personal vehicle travel will be reimbursed at the County adopted rate per highway mile. Employees receiving a car allowance will not be reimbursed mileage, unless traveling outside of Hidalgo County. The County's adopted rate may be obtained by contacting the County Auditor's Office - Accounts Payable Section at (956) 318-2511. Please note that the mileage rate may differ if utilizing grant funds, questions should be addressed to the County Auditor's Office - Grants Accounting Section at (956) 318-2511.
- b. Mileage reimbursements for an employee who chooses to drive out-of-state rather than fly should not exceed the lowest round trip coach airfare available at the time travel was authorized. The employee must supply documentation to support what the airfare would have been at that time.
- c. When more than one employee is traveling to the same destination, coordination of travel is required, except as provided in Section 4.9.d. The names of all employees traveling together on the same trip and in the same vehicle must be listed on **Form T.1.5 "Out-of-County Travel Advance Request"** and **Form T.1.4 "Final Travel Expense Claim"**.
- d. The driver is responsible for providing reasonable and necessary transportation to all the passengers while on the trip. Transportation expenses for a passenger using another form of transportation while on the trip will not be reimbursed.
- e. Mileage is calculated on a point-to-point basis using a readily available mapping service (MapQuest, Google Maps, etc.), plus reasonable incidental travel. Any out-of-way or unreasonable travel distance as determined by the County Auditor will not be reimbursed.

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- f. For in-county mileage reimbursement, a daily travel log must be maintained that indicates specific destination points (including address information), purpose of travel, and any other information deemed necessary. Employees must request reimbursement on a monthly basis utilizing **Form T.1.3 "In-County Travel Automobile Expense Claim"**.
- g. Commuting expenses incurred in traveling between the employee's residence and their main place of work (County office) or for mileage/expenses incurred in any other travel of a personal nature are not reimbursable. If mileage incurred in a single day to a place outside the office exceeds normal commuting mileage (home to office and return), the difference between mileage incurred that day and commuting mileage is reimbursable. As guidance, please refer to the following examples:

Example 1: Debra has a meeting outside of the office. She drives directly to the meeting location, attends the meeting, and returns home. Her total round trip is 26 miles. Since her normal commute is 10 miles round trip to the office each day, Debra will only be reimbursed for 16 miles.

Example 2: Mary has a 10-mile daily round trip commute to the office. She reports to the office in the morning and leaves for a ten o'clock meeting at the Sheriff's Department. The meeting lasts until the end of the normal workday, at which time she goes home. Mary traveled a total of 40 miles that day. She will be reimbursed for 30 miles.

Example 3: Daniel has a 15-mile daily round trip commute to the office. He has an eight o'clock meeting at the Department of Budget and Management. He goes directly from home to the Department of Budget and Management, returns to the office after the meeting, and goes home at the end of the day. Daniel traveled 45 miles. Only 30 miles are reimbursable.

Example 4: Frank has a morning meeting at the Precinct 1 office. The meeting lasts all day, and Frank returns home from Precinct 1. A total of 20 miles were traveled. Frank commutes 30 miles round trip to the office each day, therefore no request for reimbursement can be made.

Example 5: Sam uses his own pickup truck for work. He accounts for the business use of his truck and is reimbursed for his mileage. He sometimes travels to and from his main place of work outside of his regular work schedule. This travel is considered commuting (personal

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expense) and is not reimbursable. It does not matter whether Sam is commuting outside of his regular work schedule.

- h. The County does not provide insurance coverage for personal vehicles; therefore, each Department is responsible for ensuring employees traveling on County business have a current automobile insurance policy that provides adequate coverage. The name of the employee must appear on the automobile insurance card. Vehicular accidents, vehicle repairs, parking fines, towing charges, and theft of property are the responsibility of the employee, not the County.
- i. Departments should ensure that employees using a personal vehicle file a copy of their current insurance card and current driver's license with the County Auditor's Office. Mileage reimbursement will only be made if a current driver's license and current insurance card are on file with the County Auditor's Office – Accounts Payable Section and the driver had an unexpired driver's license and current insurance coverage at the time of travel.

12. COUNTY VEHICLE

- a. Employees are encouraged to use a County vehicle instead of their personal vehicle when traveling. Employees are required to have a current driver's license. When more than one employee is traveling to the same destination, coordination of travel is required, except as provided in Section 4.10.d. Individuals not on County business cannot be transported in a County vehicle, except for detainees and inmates. Additionally, County vehicles cannot be used when combining County business and personal leave.
- b. Original receipts are required for reimbursement.
- c. The driver is responsible for providing reasonable and necessary transportation to all the passengers while on the trip. Transportation expenses for a passenger using another form of transportation while on the trip will not be reimbursed.
- d. Vehicular accidents must be reported to the local police before leaving the scene. The Department of Budget and Management - Safety Division must also be notified at (956) 318-2644, as soon as possible.

13. VEHICLE RENTALS

- a. Vehicle rentals will be reimbursed when it is the most economical means of transportation. Reservations for vehicle rentals made under the name

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of Hidalgo County are required to be made through the State of Texas travel management services contract due to the insurance coverage provided (loss/damage waiver and liability insurance coverage). Questions regarding vehicle rentals may be addressed to the Purchasing Department at (956) 318-2626. Additional information regarding the current contracted vendors and contracts may be obtained by visiting: www.window.state.tx.us/procurement/prog/stmp/stmp-rental-car-contract/vendor-comparison/

- b. Vehicle rental reservations should be made in advance to ensure the availability of the appropriate size and type of vehicle. When more than one employee is traveling to the same destination, coordination of travel is required, except as provided in Section 4.10.d. In addition, a statement as to whether the Department has an assigned County vehicle and the reasons for not utilizing the County vehicle should be noted on the purchase requisition. Rental vehicles are to be restricted to size and type as follows:
 - I. Compact, midsize, or full size car when used by one to four County employees.
 - II. Midsize sport utility or minivan when used by four or more County employees.
 - III. Rental of "luxury" are not allowed, unless the vehicle rental company honors the rate for the applicable size and type of vehicle allowed by the Travel Policy.
- c. Rental of vehicles is acceptable for one day before the meeting or conference begins whenever same day rental is not practical. Return of the rental vehicle one day after the meeting or conference ends is acceptable if same day return is not practical.
- d. The employee must personally pay for the rental of a vehicle of a size and type not allowed by the Travel Policy. The employee will only be reimbursed the state contract rate for the allowable vehicle size and type. If an employee accepts insurance coverage for a vehicle rental in order to be covered during the trip, the entire cost of the insurance coverage will be a personal expense and not reimbursable.
- e. The name of each employee allowed to drive the rental vehicle must appear on the rental agreement to ensure proper coverage.
- f. The driver is responsible for providing reasonable and necessary transportation to all the passengers while on the trip. Transportation expenses incurred by a passenger using another form of transportation while on the trip will not be reimbursed.

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- g. Employees are encouraged to re-fuel the rental vehicle prior to returning it to the vehicle rental company in order to avoid high-priced gas charges. In addition, the original gas receipt must be submitted to the County Auditor's Office - Accounts Payable Section with the completed **Form T.1.4 "Final Travel Expense Claim"**.
- h. The original vehicle rental receipt/bill and vehicle rental agreement must be submitted as supporting documentation for payment or reimbursement. The original vehicle rental receipt/bill must indicate the starting and ending dates of rental, rental rates, name of the vehicle rental company, name of the driver and any additional drivers, and itemize all other expenses incurred. The vehicle rental agreement must include the name and signature of the employee that picked up and returned the vehicle, the time and date the vehicle was picked up and returned, the location where the vehicle was picked up and returned, and the amount of miles that were traveled.
- i. Vehicular accidents must be reported to the local police before leaving the scene and the vehicle rental company. The Department of Budget and Management - Safety Division must also be notified at (956) 318-2644, as soon as possible.

14. TAXIS, BUSES, AND OTHER GROUND TRANSPORTATION

- a. Expenses for taxis, buses, and other ground transportation to and from airports will be reimbursed only when necessary. The use of a hotel shuttle service is encouraged when available.
- b. Limousine service is not allowed. If expenses for limousine service are incurred, the expenses will be considered a personal expense for the traveler.
- c. Original receipts are required for reimbursement.

15. TOLLS

- a. Tolls paid by an employee while traveling on official County business are reimbursable.
- b. Original receipts are required for reimbursement. The receipt must itemize the date and the fare charged for each trip.

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16. LODGING

- a. The County encourages the use of clean, comfortable, and safe hotels but expects that employees will be frugal in selecting a hotel.
- b. Employees are required to use the State of Texas travel management services contract for hotels in order to arrange the most favorable rate unless cost benefits may be achieved by other means. For a hotel directory listing please visit:
http://portal.cpa.state.tx.us/hotel/hotel_directory/index.cfm Questions regarding this contract may be addressed to the Purchasing Department at (956) 318-2626. Additional information may be obtained by visiting:
www.window.state.tx.us/procurement/prog/stmp/.
- c. Hotel reservations should be made in advance in order to obtain the most economical rates (government, conference, and other available discount rates, etc.).
- d. If traveling in-state, the County will pay the most economical single occupancy room rate up to a maximum of \$139 plus applicable tax per night per person. However, if the employee is staying at the host hotel where the seminar/conference/meeting is held or overflow hotel, the County will pay the applicable single occupancy room rate, conference (block) rate, or government rate. In addition, if rooms are no longer available at the host hotel or overflow hotels, the County will pay the single occupancy room rate up to the greater of \$139.00 or the applicable host or overflow hotels conference (block) rate plus applicable tax per night per person.
- e. If traveling out-of-state, the County will pay the most economical single occupancy room rate up to a maximum of \$300 plus applicable tax per night per person. However, if the employee is staying at the host hotel where the seminar/conference/meeting is held or overflow hotel, the County will pay the applicable single occupancy room rate, conference (block rate), or government rate. In addition, if rooms are no longer available at the host hotel or overflow hotels, the County will pay the single occupancy room rate up to the greater of \$300.00 or the applicable host or overflow hotels conference (block) rate plus applicable tax per night per person.
- f. When employees share lodging, the County will reimburse each employee his or her share of the actual lodging expense in an amount not to exceed the maximum lodging reimbursement rate. Each employee must complete a **Form T.1.4 "Final Travel Expense Claim"** and note on the Form that lodging was shared.

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Example 1: John and Robert are employed by the same County Department and are planning an official County business trip to Austin. The maximum lodging rate is \$139 per night plus applicable tax. The men would prefer to stay at a specific hotel that is most convenient to the location of their business meeting/conference. The room rate in this hotel is \$140 per night plus applicable tax. John and Robert decide to share a room so they can stay in the hotel of their choice. Since each employee is allowed up to \$139 per night plus applicable tax, the lodging cost is reimbursable. John and Robert may each claim \$70 per night plus applicable tax.

Example 2: Angela and Vanessa are employed by the same County Department and are planning an official County business trip to Austin. The maximum lodging rate is \$139 per night plus applicable tax. The women would prefer to stay at a specific hotel that is most convenient to the location of their business meeting/conference. The room rate in this hotel is \$300 per night plus applicable tax. Angela and Vanessa decide to share a room so they can stay in the hotel of their choice. Since each woman would be allowed up to \$139 per night plus applicable tax, the lodging cost is only reimbursable up to \$278 per night plus applicable tax. Angela and Vanessa may each claim up to \$139 per night plus applicable tax.

- g. Hotel reservations at a rate above the allowable rate must be paid using the employee's own personal credit card or funds (see Travel Credit Card Procedures). If a spouse and/or dependent(s) accompany the employee, the County will not reimburse the difference in hotel room rates above the single occupancy room rate.
- h. When an election to share rooms is made, written notice must be provided to the Purchasing Department in order that the Travel Credit Card is utilized to make the reservation or pay for the hotel accommodations.
- i. Arrival one night prior to the day of the meeting or conference is acceptable whenever same day travel is not practical. However, same day travel is required when the location of the meeting or conference is within 100 miles from the employee's normal place of work and the meeting or conference begins at or after 10:00 AM. Same day travel is encouraged when the meeting or conference begins at or after 12:00 PM and the location of the meeting or conference is less than 300 miles away.

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- j. Return one day after the meeting or conference ends is acceptable whenever same day travel is not practical. However, same day travel is required when the location of the meeting or conference is within 100 miles from the employee's normal place of work and the meeting or conference ends at or before 3:00 PM. Same day travel is encouraged when the conference or meeting ends before 12:00 PM and the location of the meeting or conference is less than 300 miles away.
- k. Extra hotel nights for personal reasons will not be reimbursed. Extra hotel nights for personal reasons will not be paid using County funds or the Department's travel credit card.
- l. An employee may not be reimbursed for a lodging expense incurred at a place that is not a commercial lodging establishment.
- m. An original lodging receipt showing payment in full must be submitted as supporting documentation for payment or reimbursement. The receipt must include the name and address of the commercial lodging establishment, the name of the employee, the single occupancy room rate, and a daily itemization of the lodging charges.

17. MEALS

- a. Meals for out-of-county travel will be reimbursed as follows:

- i. Out-of-County – In-State Travel

- A. Meals, including tips, will be reimbursed based on a per diem rate of \$39 per day. The per diem will be prorated for partial days (\$9-breakfast, \$12-lunch, and \$18-dinner). Trips beginning before 8:00 AM will receive \$39; trips beginning after 8:00 AM but before 1:00 PM will receive \$30; trips beginning after 1:00 PM will receive \$18. Trips completed before 8:00 AM will receive \$9; trips completed after 8:00 AM but before 6:00 PM will receive \$21; and trips completed after 6:00 PM will receive \$39. The employee is not required to keep receipts to document the cost of these meals. However, please note that receipts may be required when utilizing grant funds. Questions should be addressed to the County Auditor's Office - Grants Accounting Section at (956) 318-2511.

- ii. Out-of-County – Out-of-State Travel

- Meals will be reimbursed based on one of the following methods:

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- A. On a per diem basis as provided above for in-state travel.
- B. Actual cost of meals including taxes and tips/gratuities (up to 15% of the cost of the meal) with original itemized receipts up to a maximum of \$64 per day. The \$64 maximum amount will be prorated for partial days (\$14-breakfast, \$20-lunch and \$30-dinner). Trips beginning before 8:00 AM may receive up to the maximum amount of \$64; trips beginning after 8:00 AM but before 1:00 PM may receive up to a maximum amount of \$50; trips beginning after 1:00 PM may receive up to a maximum of \$30. Trips completed before 8:00 AM may receive up to a maximum of \$14; trips completed after 8:00 AM but before 6:00 PM may receive up to a maximum of \$34; and trips completed after 6:00 PM may receive up to a maximum of \$64. The employee is required to keep original itemized receipts to document the cost of these meals. If the employee fails to submit the required receipts for any one day, the meal reimbursement will be based on a per diem basis as provided above for in-state travel.
- b. Meals that are an integral part of the seminar or conference and are listed separately on the registration materials may be allowed at a rate higher than the applicable per diem rate. However, the daily per diem rate will be reduced by the applicable meal per diem rate. Supporting documentation such as the registration receipt or printed material showing which meal(s) is covered is required.
- c. Meals for in-county travel and travel not requiring an overnight stay will not be reimbursed, except as provided in subsection (d.) below.
- d. Actual meal expenses incurred by law enforcement personnel while transporting detainees/conducting extraditions that did not require an overnight stay will be taxed by the County Treasurer's Office. The non-overnight meal payment is deemed to be a taxable fringe benefit by the Internal Revenue Service. As a taxable fringe benefit, the payment is required to be included in the employee's wages for federal income and employment tax purposes. **Form T.1.6 "Non-overnight Meal Expense Incurred by Law Enforcement Personnel While Transporting Detainees/Conducting Extraditions"** must be completed and submitted to the County Treasurer's Office.
- e. Meal costs charged separately that do not require an overnight stay and are part of a registration fee will be reimbursed for in-county travel.

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- f. Advances for meals will only be provided when traveling out-of-county for two days or longer.

18. NON-REIMBURSABLE EXPENSES:

- a. Alcoholic beverages
- b. Valet parking (if self-parking is available)
- c. Tips and gratuities in excess of 15% of the actual meal cost for out-of-state travel, taxi, and shuttle fares.
- d. Personal phone calls - all phone calls are deemed personal calls unless proof is submitted that the call was for County business
- e. Personal items, such as prescriptions, cosmetics, movies, golf, health club, spas, haircuts, shoe shines, newspapers, laundry/dry cleaning charges, etc.
- f. Loss of funds or personal belongings
- g. Lodging costs for extra day(s) on the trip for personal reasons
- h. Luxury vehicle rentals (see exception in Section 14)
- i. Additional charges for accommodations, meals, travel, etc., for individuals not on County business who accompany the traveler on an authorized County business trip
- j. Fines, court costs, and related expenses
- k. Meals for non-overnight travel (see exception 18.d and 18.e)
- l. Baggage fees in excess of the second checked bag (see exception Section 11.e.)
- m. Baggage excess weight fees.
- n. Insurance purchased for rental vehicles (see section 14.a); Roadside assistance, GPS units, and Personal Accident Insurance.
- o. Interest, over the limit, or late charges incurred on a personal credit card
- p. Expenses deemed unreasonable, excessive, unsupported or unexplained

19. TRAVEL ADVANCES:

- a. Employees are encouraged to personally pay for travel expenses and request reimbursement from the County after returning from the trip. Employees may request a travel advance if the seminar/conference/meeting is scheduled to last for 2 or more days by completing **Form T.1.5 "Out-of-County Travel Advance Request"**.
- b. Travel advances are issued to the requesting employee and may not be used by any other employee. Likewise, travel advances are issued for a specific trip and may not be used for a trip different than the one listed on the original request.

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- c. Travel advances are the sole responsibility of the requesting employee and such funds should be safeguarded from loss or misuse. Advances will be recorded as a receivable from the employee until the employee settles the advance through the submission of a properly completed **Form T.1.4 "Final Travel Expense Claim"**.
- d. Travel advance requests must be submitted to the County Auditor's Office - Accounts Payable Section with sufficient time for the check to be processed (at least two weeks prior to the date the check will be needed). If the request is not received within the time specified, the employee will have to personally pay for the travel expenses.
- e. Registration fees, lodging, and airfare will not be advanced to the employee. Employees are expected to make arrangements to prepay these travel expenses, whenever possible, by using the Department's travel credit card or by requesting a check be issued to the vendor.
- f. Mileage may be advanced to employees traveling in their personal vehicle. Mileage will be calculated on a point-to-point basis using a readily available mapping service (MapQuest, Google Maps, etc.) and the current County adopted rate per highway mile. Incidental mileage will not be advanced.
- g. Incidental expenses (e.g., taxi fare, shuttle fare, fuel charges for rental vehicles, airport and/or hotel parking) may be advanced based on justification.
- h. In the event the trip is cancelled, travel advances must be returned to the County Treasurer's Office no later than 20 calendar days after the day of the seminar/conference/meeting.
- i. Employees are required to account for their travel advance on **Form T.1.4 "Final Travel Expense Claim"**. A properly completed Form T.1.4 along with original itemized receipts (except meal receipts) must be submitted to the County Auditor's Office - Accounts Payable Section within 20 calendar days after the employee returns from the trip. Subsequent travel advances will not be processed for an employee who has not settled a previous travel advance.
- j. If an employee fails to account for a travel advance by submitting **Form T.1.4 "Final Travel Expense Claim"** within 60 days from the date the employee returned from the trip, the County Treasurer will deduct the travel advance from the employee's next paycheck. After the advance has been deducted from the employee's paycheck, the employee will not be able to request reimbursement from the County. Unsettled travel

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advances for terminated employees will be deducted from their final paycheck.

- k. It is the responsibility of each Department to maintain a register of advances and reimbursements to ensure control over the advances and/or expenditures of all travel funds.
- l. Prior to issuing a final paycheck to a terminated employee, the Department must ensure that all travel advances have been accounted for or repaid to the County. The County Treasurer shall also contact the terminated employee's department to verify there are no pending reimbursement forms to be submitted on the terminated employee's behalf. Any outstanding amount due the County will be deducted from the employee's final paycheck. If the employee is no longer an Elected Official or employee, the traveler shall deliver a personal check to be deposited in the appropriate fund by the Department. A matter of dispute or non-reimbursement may be referred to the District Attorney's Office for any necessary action or may be reported to the IRS as taxable income.

20. TRAVEL CANCELLATIONS

- a. If it becomes necessary to cancel a trip, the employee is required to make all necessary cancellations, notify the Purchasing Department if the Department's travel credit card was used for reservations, and/or notify the County Auditor's Office - Accounts Payable Section if payments were made in advance (registration, lodging, airfare, and vehicle rental, etc.).
- b. An employee may be reimbursed for travel expenses or cancellation charges incurred as a result of attempting to conduct official County business if:
 - i. The employee is unable to conduct the official County business because of other official County business that had to be conducted by the employee. The employee is unable to conduct the official County business because of a natural disaster or other natural occurrence and the expense would be payable or reimbursable had the official County business been conducted; or
 - ii. The employee is unable to conduct the official County business or returns before the official County business is completed because of an illness or a personal emergency.
- c. The supporting documentation for a travel expense or cancellation charge incurred under these circumstances must include a description of

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the official County business, natural disaster or other natural occurrence, or the Department's determination that an illness or a personal emergency occurred that made the employee unable to conduct official County business. In addition, any checks in the possession of the employee for payment of travel expenses (registration, hotel, etc.) must be returned to the County Treasurer's Office and be accompanied by a written request to void the checks. A copy of the written request to void the checks must also be submitted to the County Auditor's Office – Accounts Payable Section.

- d. Travel expenses incurred by the County resulting from the failure of an employee to cancel reservations for reasons other than those listed above will be deducted from the employee's payroll check within 60 days of the seminar/conference/ meeting date.

21. TRAVEL REIMBURSEMENTS

- a. The reimbursement rate for certain travel expenses may vary from the County's rate if grant funds are being used. Before expenses are incurred, questions should be addressed to the County Auditor's Office - Grants Accounting Section at (956) 318-2511.
- b. Travel expenses incurred by an employee while conducting official County business will be reimbursed in accordance with the Travel Policy upon submission of a properly completed **Form T.1.4 "Final Travel Expense Claim"**.
- c. Only actual travel expenses incurred by the employee will be reimbursed. An employee who receives free transportation or lodging in exchange for mileage points or other non-monetary credits belonging to the employee is not considered to have incurred an expense.
- d. An employee may not accept a reimbursement or advance for a travel expense from more than one source. An employee who anticipates receiving or actually receives a travel expense reimbursement or advance from a source other than the County may only seek a reimbursement or advance from the County if the employee incurred or anticipates incurring travel expenses in excess of the amount reimbursed or advanced by the other source. If the employee receives reimbursement for the same travel expense from the County and another source, the employee must return the County's reimbursement to the County Treasurer's Office no later than 20 days after receipt of the subsequent reimbursement.

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- e. If an original receipt is lost, an employee may submit a purchase affidavit to claim a reimbursement.

22. SANCTIONS

- a. An employee who violates the Travel Policy and misuses County property or funds may be subject to disciplinary action, including termination, payroll deduction or reimbursement of any unauthorized travel expenses, and/or criminal charges.

PROCEDURES

A. Department

1. Ensure employee has read and understands the County's Travel Policy as it relates to minimizing travel costs and documenting travel expenses with original receipts.
2. If grant funds are being utilized, verify reimbursement rates and travel guidelines with the County Auditor's Office – Grants Accounting Section at (956) 318-2511.
3. Departments that report to the Executive Officer must obtain approval from the Executive Officer by submitting **Form T.1.1 "Application for Official Travel"** before making any reservations and/or traveling.
4. Submit requisition to the Purchasing Department for registration, lodging, airfare, vehicle rental, meals and incidental expenses, if any. Requisition for meals and incidentals should be made under the employee's name. Ensure travel expenses are in accordance with the Travel Policy and requisition includes the following:
 - a. Registration: seminar/conference/meeting name, date(s), location (city and state), name of employee(s), notation as to mode of transportation (County vehicle, rental vehicle, or use of personal vehicle).
 - b. Lodging: seminar/conference/meeting name, date(s), location (city and state), name of employee(s), type of room, daily hotel rate, and number of nights. In addition, written notice must be provided to the Purchasing Department if election was made to share rooms or decrease the meal per diem in order to increase the lodging rate per night.

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- c. Airfare: seminar/conference/meeting name, date(s), location (city and state), name of employee(s).
 - d. Vehicle Rental: purpose of rental (i.e. attend seminar/conference/meeting/election), seminar/conference/meeting/election name, date(s), location (city and state), name of driver and any additional drivers, type and size of rental vehicle, daily rental rate, location where rental will be picked up and returned (address, city, and state). If Department has a County vehicle, include a statement providing proper justification as to why the County vehicle will not be used.
 - e. Meals and incidental expenses: name of employee, seminar/conference/ meeting name, dates(s), location (city and state), meals and incidental expenses by type listed separately.
5. If utilizing the Department's travel credit card, request the Purchasing Department to book seminar registration, hotel accommodations, airfare, and car rental. For Departments that report directly to the Executive Officer, submit a copy of the approved **Form T.1.1 "Application for Official Travel"** to the Purchasing Department when requesting use of the Department's travel credit card.
 6. Department's that have been authorized by Commissioners Court to have custody of a travel credit card may book their own seminar registration, hotel accommodations, airfare, and car rental. If the Department reports directly to the Executive Officer, approval for travel must be obtained from the Executive Officer prior to booking any travel by obtaining an approved **Form T.1.1 "Application for Official Travel"**.
 7. If requesting direct payment for registration, and hotel accommodations, submit **Form T.1.2 "Registration, Hotel, Car Rental, & Airfare Check Request"** to the County Auditor's Office - Accounts Payable Section. In addition, for Departments that report directly to the Executive Officer, must submit a copy of the approved **Form T.1.1 "Application for Official Travel"** to the County Auditor's Office - Accounts Payable Section.
 8. If requesting a travel advance, ensure employee has submitted any pending **Form T.1.4 "Final Travel Expense Claim"** to the County Auditor's Accounts Payable Section. Then, submit requisition to the Purchasing Department for the travel advance in the name of the traveler and **Form T.1.5 "Out-Of-County Travel Advance Request"** to the County Auditor's Office - Accounts Payable Section. If you are a

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County Department reporting directly to the Executive Officer, submit the approved **Form T.1.1 "Application for Official Travel"** to the Purchasing Department and the County Auditor's Office when requesting requisition and check for a travel advance.

9. Ensure that within 20 calendar days after completion of travel, traveler completes **Form T.1.4 "Final Travel Expense Claim"** and returns any remaining travel advance funds to the County Treasurer's Office. **Form T.1.4**, along with a copy of the County Treasurer's receipt (if any), must be submitted to the County Auditor's Office – Accounts Payable Section only after it has been properly completed, supported, and signed. Reimbursement to the traveler, if any, will be delayed or denied until the original supporting documentation for expenditures made is received.

Supporting documentation includes the following:

- Original itemized hotel receipt indicating a zero balance owed
- Original airline ticket receipt or travel agency itinerary
- Original baggage fees receipt
- Original car rental receipt and car rental agreement
- Original toll receipts
- Seminar/conference/ agenda
- Original receipt and/or confirmation for seminar, conference, etc.
- Seminar certificate of completion, if available
- Original taxi receipt
- Original parking receipt
- Printouts of mapping service (MapQuest, Google Maps, etc.)
- If coordination of travel is required, submit written justification for need to travel separately

Original receipts must be affixed to a sheet of paper in date order and attached to **Form T.1.4 "Final Travel Expense Claim"**.

10. Submit, if applicable, the approved **Form T.1.1 "Application for Official Travel"** to the County Auditor's Office when requesting payment or reimbursement of travel expenses.
11. Forward copy of receipt issued for remaining travel funds and **Form T.1.4 "Final Travel Expense Claim"** to the County Auditor's Office – Accounts Payable Section.
12. Request reimbursement from hotel for any excess amount paid related to lodging rate and/or taxes, if applicable. Reimbursement should be made payable to the Hidalgo County Treasurer.

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13. Submit, if applicable, a copy of the County Treasurer's receipt for reimbursements received from hotels for any excess amounts paid to the County Auditor's Office – Accounts Payable Section.
14. Submit, if necessary, **Form T.1.3 "In-County Travel Automobile Expense Claim"**, including specific address points on a monthly basis by the 10th workday following the end of the month in which the expense was incurred.
15. If it becomes necessary to cancel a trip, the traveler is required to make all necessary cancellations, notify the Purchasing Department if department's travel credit card was used for reservations, and/or the County Auditor's Office – Accounts Payable Section if payments were made in advance (seminar registration, hotel accommodations, airfare, and car rental, etc.).

If a trip was cancelled, any checks for payment of advanced travel expenses (registration, hotel, advances, etc.) must be submitted to the County Treasurer's Office. The check must be accompanied by a written request from the County Official to void the checks. A copy of the written request must be submitted to the County Auditor's Office - Accounts Payable Section.

In addition, if a trip was cancelled, **Form T.1.4 "Final Travel Expense Claim"** must be completed and submitted to the County Auditor's Office - Accounts Payable Section along with supporting documentation for any travel expenses or cancellation charges incurred. In addition to the items listed on Section A.8 above, supporting documentation should include the following:

- Description of the official County business
- Reason for cancellation that made the employee unable to conduct official County business (natural disaster, natural occurrence, illness, or a personal emergency). Cancellations for reasons other than those listed above will be at the expense of the traveler and be deducted from the employee's payroll check within 60 days of the seminar/conference/meeting date.

Failure to cancel reservations or cancellations for reasons other than those listed above will be at the expense of the traveler and be deducted from the employee's payroll check within 60 days of the seminar/conference/meeting date.

16. Submit, if applicable, **Form T.1.6 "Non-overnight Meal Expense Incurred by Law Enforcement Personnel While Transporting**

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Detainees/Conducting Extraditions” to the County Treasurer’s Office in order that the actual meal expenses incurred for non-overnight travel made by law enforcement while transporting detainees/inmates be included in the employee's wages for Federal income and employment tax purposes.

17. Prior to issuing a final paycheck to a terminated employee, the Department must ensure that all travel advances have been accounted for or repaid to the County.

B. Purchasing Department

1. Review requisition submitted by Department for registration, lodging, airfare, or vehicle rental. Ensure requisition includes the information listed in Section A.4 above and that request is in compliance with the Travel Policy. If request is submitted by a Department that reports directly to the Executive Officer, obtain a copy of the approved **Form T.1.1 “Application for Official Travel”**. In addition, written notice must be provided to the Purchasing Department if election was made to share rooms or decrease the meal per diem in order to increase the lodging rate per night.
2. If request is in compliance with Travel Policy, issue purchase order for registration, lodging, airfare, or car rental.
3. Upon Department request, make reservations for lodging, airfare, or vehicle rental using the Department’s travel credit card ensuring reservations comply with the Travel Policy.
4. Upon notice by Department of a trip cancellation, cancel reservations made using the Department’s travel credit card.
5. If airfare was reserved using the Department’s travel credit card, maintain a schedule of refundable airfare credits received as a result of cancellations. The schedule should include the Department name, employee name, cancellation date, and re-schedule/use date.

C. Executive Officer

1. Review **Form T.1.1 “Application for Official Travel”** submitted by Departments that report to the Executive Officer and approve request for official travel if need for travel is properly justified.

D. County Auditor

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1. Obtain the approved **Form T.1.1 "Application for Official Travel"** from Departments that report to the Executive Officer prior to processing a check for registration, lodging, airfare, travel advance, or reimbursable travel expenses.
2. Audit and process **Form T.1.2 "Registration, Lodging, Vehicle Rental, & Airfare Check Request"** ensuring compliance with the Travel Policy.
3. Audit and process **Form T.1.5 "Out-of-County Travel Advance Request"** ensuring compliance with the Travel Policy.
4. Audit and process **Form T.1.4 "Final Travel Expense Claim"** ensuring compliance with the Travel Policy.
5. Liquidate the purchase order issued for the travel advance from the out-of-county travel account and prepare a journal entry to record the out-of-county travel expense and remove the receivable owed from the employee when the employee settles the advance through submission of **Form T.1.4 "Final Travel Expense Claim"**.
6. Send notice to Departments when checks have been issued directly to the vendor or employee and a **Form T.1.-4 "Final Travel Expense Claim"** has not been submitted.
7. Notify the County Treasurer of any employees for which the County has made travel payments and who have not submitted **Form T.1.4 "Final Travel Expense Claim"** within the specified time.
8. Audit and process **Form T.1.3 "In-County Travel Automobile Expense Claim"** ensuring compliance with the Travel Policy.

E. COUNTY TREASURER

1. Receive, if applicable, **Form T.1.6 "Non-overnight Meal Expense Incurred by Law Enforcement Personnel While Transporting Detainees/Conducting Extraditions"**. Include the meal per diem for non-overnight travel made by law enforcement personnel while transporting detainees/inmates in the employee's wages for federal income and employment tax purposes.
2. Submit bi-weekly report to the County Auditor's Office – Accounts Payable Section listing employees who received a taxable meal per diem wage and whose wages were taxed.

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3. Mail out travel checks unless the Department has requested otherwise.
4. Notify the Departments when the travel advance or travel expense reimbursement checks have been processed and are ready for pickup.
5. Verify identification and obtain signature of employee picking up the check before releasing the check.
6. Verify that remaining travel funds being returned to the County by the employee are accompanied by a copy of a properly completed **Form T.1.4 "Final Travel Expense Claim"**.
7. Receive and issue official County receipt for reimbursements received from hotel for any excess amount paid related to lodging rate and/or taxes.
8. Deduct from the employee's paycheck any travel payments made to a vendor or the employee if **Form T.1.4 "Final Travel Expense Claim"** is not submitted within the specified time.
9. Provide notice to the County Auditor's Office – Accounts Payable Section that deduction was made for item number 8 above.
10. Contact a terminated employee's department to verify pending **Form T.1.4 "Final Travel Expense Claim"** have been submitted to the County Auditor's Office and settled.
11. Contact and verify with the County Auditor's Office – Accounts Payable Section that travel advances made to a terminated employee have been settled. If a travel advance has not been settled, deduct the outstanding amount from the employee's final paycheck.