

# **Erath County Travel Policy**

(Revised February 2020)

## **Overview**

It is the policy of Erath County to reimburse personnel for reasonable and necessary expenses incurred during approved work-related travel.

Employees seeking reimbursement should incur the lowest reasonable travel expenses and exercise care to avoid impropriety or the appearance of impropriety.

Reimbursement is allowed only when reimbursement has not been, and will not be, received from other sources. If a circumstance arises that is not specifically covered in this travel policy, then the most conservative course of action should be taken. Visit with the Auditor if you have any questions.

Business travel policies are aligned with county reimbursement rules. All business-related travel paid with Erath County funds must comply with county expenditure policies.

## **Authorization and responsibility**

All business travel must be authorized. Personnel should verify that planned travel is eligible for reimbursement before making travel arrangements. Within 5 days of completion of a trip you must submit a travel reimbursement form and supporting documentation to obtain reimbursement of expenses.

An employee may not approve his or her own travel or reimbursement. The travel reimbursement form must be signed by the Elected Official or Department Head.

Out of state travel must be approved through Commissioners Court and should be scheduled on the agenda through the County Judge's office well in advance.

## **Personal funds**

One should review reimbursement guidelines before spending personal funds for business travel to determine if such expenses are reimbursable. Erath County reserves the right to deny reimbursement of travel-related expenses for failure to comply with policies and procedures.

Those who use personal funds to facilitate travel arrangements will not be reimbursed until after the trip occurs and proper documentation is submitted.

## **Vacation in conjunction with business travel**

In cases in which vacation time is added to a business trip, any cost variance in airfare,

car rental or lodging must be clearly identified on the Travel Request form. Erath County will not prepay any personal expenses with the intention of being "repaid" at a later time, nor will any personal expenses be reimbursed.

## **Travel Expenses/Procedures**

### ***General information***

Authorized business travel for personnel that includes prepayments must be pre-approved. Prepayment for business travel will be considered rare, with the exception of conference fees and airfare. Typically lodging charges should only be paid after being incurred.

*A Purchase Order must be obtained from the Auditor's office and is required prior to traveling. Estimates should be made for hotel, meals, conference, mileage and any other anticipated expenditures.*

### **Permissible prepaid travel expenses**

Before the travel, Erath County may issue prepayments for airfare, rental vehicles and conference registration fees. Applicable policies and methods of payments for these prepayments follow.

**Airfare.** Personnel are expected to obtain the lowest available airfare that reasonably meets business travel needs. Airfare may be prepaid by the Auditor's office.

Personnel are encouraged to book flights at least 30 days in advance to avoid premium airfare pricing.

Coach class or economy tickets must be purchased for domestic or international flights with flight time totaling less than five consecutive hours excluding layovers.

A less-than-first-class ticket (i.e., business class) may be purchased at Erath County's discretion for domestic or international flights with flight time exceeding five consecutive hours excluding layovers.

Airfare may be purchased with a credit card through the Auditor's office with a requisition being obtained prior to the purchase.

**Rental vehicles.** Erath County will pay for approved use of a rental vehicle.

**Conference registration fees.** Conference registration fees can be reserved with a county credit card or paid in advance by county check. Remember all expenditures

require a requisition in advance of the purchase. An invoice for the registration fees is required before payment will be made.

Prepayment of registration fees is discouraged, unless fully refundable to the county in the event of personnel not attending.

**Travel advances.** Cash advances are only authorized for specific situations that might cause undue financial hardship for business personnel. These situations are limited to personnel traveling on behalf of Erath County and these situations would be considered extremely rare. The county provides county issued credit cards to Elected Officials and Department Heads to help eliminate personnel from having to use their own funds for travel.

### **Reimbursements and Validation**

Requests for reimbursements and travel reports of travel-related expenses are submitted on an Expense Reimbursement form obtained from the County Auditor's office. This form must be accompanied by supporting documentation, including but not limited to detailed receipts for any expenditure incurred. A conference agenda and a print out of Google maps for mileage reimbursements should be included.

These forms must be submitted to the Auditor's office within 5 days after the trip is completed. Expense Reimbursement forms not submitted within this time frame require exception approval from the Auditor's office.

Reimbursement of travel expenses is based on documentation of reasonable and actual expenses supported by the original, itemized receipts. Detailed receipts are required for all travel related expenses, including meals.

### **Reimbursements that may be paid by Erath County are shown below:**

**Airfare.** If the airfare was not prepaid by the Auditor's office, an original itemized airline receipt, an e-ticket receipt/statement or an Internet receipt/statement is required. The receipt must show the method of payment and indicate that payment was made.

**Automobile (personally owned—domestic travel).** A valid driver's license issued within the United States and personal automobile insurance are required for expenses to be reimbursed. Drivers should be aware of the extent of coverage (if any) provided by his or her automobile insurance for travel that is business or not personal in nature.

Reimbursement for use of a personal automobile is based on the standard mileage rates as established by the Internal Revenue Service.

Personnel may not opt to request reimbursement for actual gasoline expenses in lieu of the Erath County mileage rate. County credit cards or fuel cards should never be used to fuel a personal vehicle.

*A detail trip agenda printed from Google Maps or a similar program is required to be turned in with your reimbursement request which will show miles being claimed. The map should be from your normal place of work in the county to your destination.*

**Automobile (rental—domestic travel).** Reimbursement for a commercial rental vehicle as a primary mode of transportation is authorized only if the rental vehicle is more economical than any other type of public transportation, or if the destination is not otherwise accessible. Vehicle rental at a destination city is reimbursable. Original receipts are required.

Erath County authorizes reimbursement for the most economic vehicle available. In certain circumstances larger vehicles may be rented, with supervisory approval. The rental agreement must clearly show the date and the points of departure/arrival, as well as the total cost. Drivers must adhere to the rental requirements, and restrictions must be followed. Original receipts are required.

When vehicle rentals are necessary, Erath County encourages Personnel to purchase collision damage waiver (CDW) and loss damage waiver (LDW) coverage. Erath County will reimburse the cost of CDW and LDW coverage; all other insurance reimbursements will be denied.

Drivers should be aware of the extent of coverage (if any) provided by his or her automobile insurance company for travel that is business and not personal in nature.

Parking fees, tolls and other incidental costs associated with the vehicle use are not covered by the rental agreement and should be turned in as separate reimbursable items if incurred.

Personnel are strongly encouraged to fill the gas tank before returning the vehicle to the rental agency to avoid service fees and more expensive fuel rates. County credit cards may be used to fill the gas tank on return of vehicle to the rental agency.

**Conference registration fees.** If the conference fee was not prepaid, Erath County will reimburse these fees, including business-related banquets or meals that are part of the conference registration. Original receipts to support the payment are required. If the conference does not provide a receipt, then a cancelled check, credit card slip/statement or documentation that the amount was paid is required for reimbursement.

Entertainment activities such as golf outings and sightseeing tours will not be reimbursed.

Registration fees paid directly by an individual will not be reimbursed until the conference is completed.

**Lodging (commercial).** The cost of overnight lodging (room rate and tax only) will be reimbursed to the Personnel if the authorized travel is 60 miles or more from their home or primary worksite, or if the travel includes multiple days away from home.

Exceptions to this restriction may be approved if requested in writing. Requests should be detailed as to the necessity and feasibility of lodging for travel that is less than 60 miles from the Person's home or primary worksite and presented to the Auditor's office.

Erath County will reimburse lodging expenses at reasonable standard business room rates. When the hotel or motel is the conference or convention site, reimbursement will be limited to the conference rate.

**Business meals (\$60/per day).** Personnel are required to follow Erath County expenditure policies when requesting reimbursement for business meals. Original itemized receipts are required. Non-itemized receipts will not be paid by the County and may require reimbursement to the county if county funds were expended via a county credit card (see credit card policy). ***Only actual expenditures are reimbursed for meals within the daily limit.***

Meals for county business travel not requiring an overnight stay will be added to the employee's payroll if reimbursement is requested.

Tips are customary in our society and may be included on your meal bill, but they should not exceed 15% of the meal cost.

Alcohol should never be purchased with County funds.

**Business expenses.** Business expenses, including faxes, photocopies, Internet charges, data ports and business telephone calls incurred while on travel status, can be reimbursed. Original itemized receipts are required.

**Parking.** Original receipts are required for parking fees, including airport parking. The lodging bill can be used as a receipt when charges are included as part of the overnight stay.

**Telephone calls.** The costs of personal telephone calls are the responsibility of the individual.

**Tolls.** Original receipts are required for tolls.

**Miscellaneous transportation.** Original receipts are required for taxi, bus, subway, metro, ferry and other modes of transportation.

### **Non-reimbursable Travel Expenses**

The following items that may be associated with business travel will not be reimbursed by Erath County:

- Alcohol
- Tobacco products
- Personal grooming products
- Commuting between home and the primary work location.
- Costs incurred by personnel's failure to cancel travel or hotel reservations in a timely fashion.
- Laundry and dry cleaning.
- Personal entertainment expenses, including in-flight movies, headsets, health club facilities, hotel pay-per-view movies, in-theater movies and social activities
- Travel accident insurance premiums or purchase of additional travel insurance.
- Other expenses not directly related to the business travel.

### **Travel for Non-Employees**

Additional costs for travel, lodging, meal or other travel expenses for spouses or other family members will not be reimbursed unless the individual has a bona fide County purpose for engaging in the travel or attending the event. This type of reimbursement should be discussed and approved in advance to help eliminate complications.

Conference and training agendas should be attached to the expense report.

***Remember, you are using taxpayer money when traveling. Use discretion and be conservative when dining out. We are stewards of our County's tax dollars.***