



**Starr County**

**Travel Policy**

**Effective Date: 05/22/2023**

## PURPOSE

Commissioners Court recognizes that expenditure of public funds for travel is necessary to conduct County business. This policy establishes appropriate requirements, limitations and guidelines for county employee business travel and ensure expenses are legitimate, reasonable and appropriate, which will require accountability for the use of public funds by county employees and officials.

## AUTHORITY

Upon adoption of this policy by Commissioners Court, the County Auditor shall be responsible for the implementation and interpretation of this policy, as well as enforcement of the policy, in accordance with Local Government Code, 112.006 and 112.007. The County Auditor shall issue, maintain and update any procedure, control and form needed to ensure compliance with this policy. The County Auditor shall notify Commissioners Court of any changes that may occur, as Starr County follows the Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts, and the GSA for setting the standard mileage rate and the standard per diem rate.

## SCOPE

This policy applies to all county employees whose travel expenses are paid from public funds controlled by the county or county officials.

**Lobbying:** Commissioners Court (or its duly appointed designee) will present official county policy and the county stance on legislative bills and issues to the Texas and U.S. Legislature. Unless specifically authorized by Commissioners Court, no other county official or employee is to expend public funds to communicate directly with a legislator or a member of their office staff in support of or in opposition to official county policy. Any county official or employee who chooses to meet with, discuss or otherwise attempt to influence legislative issues must do so at their own expense and in their Individual or elected capacity, not as a representative of Starr County.

## DEFINITIONS

**County Business** – Business travel for the purpose of conducting official authorized county business or professional/educational travel to attend meetings, conferences and training programs for professional growth and development as well as for the mutual benefit of the county.

**Employee** - Elected officials, appointed officials and paid employees of Starr County. This policy does not cover travel expenditures of volunteers, consultants or other person(s) representing the county.

**Educational Travel** – travel for County employees attending official educational seminars, trainings, and/or conferences. Items for travel expense maybe include meals, lodging, airline fare, mileage for use of personal vehicle, public transportation, registration fees and/or other allowable costs.

**Law Enforcement Travel** – travel of County law enforcement and correction officers for expenses associated with the detainee transportation and/or extraditions.

### GENERAL POLICY PROVISIONS

1. Qualifying travel expenses will be paid or reimbursed for an employee traveling on official county business, provided the employee keeps and submits original invoices, receipts or other required documentation. All expenses must be reasonable, necessary and have a valid business purpose.
2. Travel expenses are not allowed for two or more county employees on the same receipt. Each employee shall keep travel expenses separate due to Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests. Exceptions can be made by the County Auditor, if deemed necessary.
3. Duplicate travel expense payments or reimbursements are prohibited. This would include payment or reimbursement of the same expense by both the county and a third party/sponsor. County may advance funds, if needed, for sponsored paid trips, but is expected to return for deposit-sponsored funds.
4. If travel expenses are being paid by another source, the employee may claim reimbursement for any travel expense allowed under this policy that is **not** reimbursed by the other source, with proper documentation.
5. Travel expenses paid from grant funds may have specific requirements. Refer to grant budget guidelines or consult with the County Auditor prior to travel. If the travel expenses allowed by this policy are greater than the grant reimbursement, the additional expenses not covered by the grant may be submitted for reimbursement, providing there are funds available in that employee's departmental budget.
6. International travel outside of the continental United States is prohibited without prior approval of Commissioners Court at least 30 days before the departure date of the trip.
7. Employees may, on occasion, combine personal and county travel on the same trip provided there is no additional cost to the county; personal travel is not reimbursed. The county will only pay or reimburse expenses for the business travel portion of the trip. There should be no additional cost to the county for the personal travel. If a county vehicle is used for transportation, the employee must follow all other applicable county policies and procedures.

### GENERAL TRAVEL GUIDELINES

#### A. Lodging

1. When evaluating travel costs, it is important to consider employee costs. Savings from inexpensive travel can be more than offset by excessive travel time that keeps the employee away from normal county duties.
2. Out-of-county travel that **does not include an overnight stay** is considered to be day travel and shall consider registration fees, mileage, parking fees and/or tolls reimbursable costs.
3. Out-of-county travel that **includes an overnight stay** is eligible for hotel and other travel reimbursement identified in this policy. Meal expenses incurred during overnight travel can be advanced or reimbursed on a per diem basis and meals expenses do not require receipt.

### B. Travel Cancellation

4. If it becomes necessary to cancel a trip, the employee is required to make all necessary cancellations and notify the County Auditor's Office (Accounts Payable division) if payments were made in advance (registration, lodging, airfare, and vehicle rental, etc.).
5. An employee may be reimbursed for travel expenses or cancellation charges incurred as a result of attempting to conduct official County business if:
  - a. The employee is unable to conduct the official County business because of other official County business that had to be conducted by the employee, or
  - b. The employee is unable to conduct the official County business because of a natural disaster or other natural occurrence, or
  - c. 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.
6. Supportive documentation for justification of a travel expense or cancellation charge incurred under these circumstances must include a description of the official County business, natural disaster/occurrence, illness or a personal emergency occurrence that made the employee unable to follow through with the travel arrangements in connection to pre-paid County business.
7. 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.
8. Travel expenses or cancellation charges incurred by the County resulting from the failure of an employee to cancel reservations for reasons other than those mention above shall be deducted from the employee's payroll check within 30 days of the scheduled county business.

### C. Transportation

9. Mileage reimbursement during out-of-county travel shall be based on the shortest route to and from the travel destination, while considering safe road conditions. The number of reimbursable miles traveled by an employee shall be determined on a point-to-point basis. An employee's vehicle odometer reading or online mapping service may document point-to-point mileage.
10. Proper coordination during out-of-county travel is preferred when two, three or four County employees from the same department will share the same travel dates and destination to conduct the same official County business. During this type of group travel, reimbursement will ONLY be made to a single driver for the use of their own personal vehicle, whether owned or leased. Coordination of departmental group travel is not required if the County official determines that coordination is not feasible, and must provide a written memo of justification to the County Auditor.
11. Auto rental for out-of-county business travel is reimbursable for a county employee when it is the most economical means of transportation. Reimbursement includes all applicable taxes and mandatory charges. It may include a charge for a collision damage waiver or a loss damage waiver if not already included in the contracted rate for the rental. A charge for liability insurance supplement, personal accident insurance, safe trip insurance, or

personal effects insurance is not reimbursable. In order to be reimbursed for the rental cost, a county employee must retain an original agreement and receipt issued by the rental company.

12. Airfare for out-of-county travel is reimbursable only for coach/economy full-service seat based on the required arrival of the event. Payment confirmation and itinerary must be submitted with travel reimbursement form. The traveler will be responsible for any excess charges of an airline ticket purchase other than the above mention.

D. Meals

13. Meal reimbursements are not to exceed the approved per diem rate. A meal per diem incurred that is usual and customary in conjunction with regular daily job duties is not reimbursable.
14. Meal reimbursement for educational and law enforcement travel purposes shall be based on the State of Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts standard rates and are subject to change. Please refer to the County Auditor’s Per Diem memorandum for current approved per diem rates.

Educational & Law Enforcement Travel	Departure Day	Travel Day	Return Day
Out-of-County, with Overnight Stay	Lunch Dinner Incidentals	Breakfast Lunch Dinner Incidentals	Breakfast Lunch Incidentals
Out-of-County, without Overnight Stay	N/A	Lunch Incidentals	N/A
In-County, without Overnight Stay	N/A	N/A	N/A

**COUNTY OFFICIAL AND/OR DEPARTMENT HEAD RESPONSIBILITY**

1. County officials and department heads are responsible for ensuring travel expenditures are valid and appropriate. Travel expenditures from County funds requires that the travel must benefit the County.
2. In accordance with this county policy and the procedures established by the County Auditor, employees traveling on official county business will be paid or reimbursed for reasonable expenses incurred if travel funds have sufficient budget availability.
3. If travel is authorized without budgeted funds available, the County official or department head may be held personally liable for the expenses and responsible for reimbursing the county for any amount not covered by its budget.
4. It is the responsibility of the County official and/or department head to verify that the traveling employee operating the vehicle in connection with the county business holds a valid current driver’s license.

5. It is encouraged to schedule travel arrangements with ample time and taking advantage of group discount rates, as well as prepaying these travel expenses whenever possible by initiating the appropriate purchase orders for timely check payment to vendors.
6. Starr County is a tax-exempt entity. When preparing for travel expenditures, employees should avoid incurring sales tax.

### EMPLOYEE RESPONSIBILITY

1. Employees should use good judgment and be conscientious of their use of public funds for travel. An employee on an official county business should exercise the same care in incurring expenses and accomplishing official county business that a prudent person would exercise if traveling for personal business. Excess costs, indirect routes, delays or luxury accommodations unnecessary or unjustified in the performance of official county business are not considered as exercising prudence behavior.
2. Employees traveling on official county business must submit all original receipts for audit and reimbursement, or risk being held personally liable for their travel expenses. Supportive documentation required may vary upon circumstances but must include vendor name, address, date of service, itemized listing of expenses, and amount).

### SUPPORTIVE DOCUMENTATION EXAMPLES

- Original itemized hotel receipt (indicating zero balance owed)
  - Original airline ticket receipt
  - Original baggage fees receipt
  - Original car rental receipt and/or agreement
  - Original toll receipts
  - Original taxi receipt
  - Original parking receipt
  - Original seminar/conference/training receipt confirmation
  - Seminar/conference/training agenda
  - Seminar/conference/training certificate of completion
  - Mapping service print out (MapQuest, Google Maps, etc.)
3. The County Auditor shall establish a deadline for submitting travel documentation, no more than seven working days after the arrival date. Original receipts, certificates of completion, or proof of hours shall be submitted to the County Auditor's Office.
  4. In the event a County employee fails to attend or check-in for the approved and paid-in travel site, the County employee is responsible to make all appropriate cancellations within reasonable time for a proper refund back to the County. Otherwise any lost expenditures shall be deducted from the employee's salary. All excess travel funds not expended shall be returned to the County Treasurer's Office.
  5. Employees are personally responsible for any expense not allowed under this policy. Any employee found to be submitting false travel claims is subject to disciplinary action.

Starr County will not advance or reimburse funds, including, but not limited to the following:

UNALLOWABLE TRAVEL EXPENSES


- Alcoholic beverages
  - Dry Cleaning Services
  - Entertainment Expenses
  - Hotel/Health Club Charges
  - Limousine/Luxury Car Rental
  - Optional Insurance Charges on Car Rentals
  - Long Distance Hotel Phone Call Charges
  - Room Service, Bar, Water, Snacks
  - Spa/Recreational Hotel Charges
  - Movie Rental Charges
  - Parking Fines
  - Personal Items
  - Gratuities
6. Reasonable accommodation requests needed under the Americans with Disabilities Act should be coordinated with travel, transportation, lodging, meals and conference officials, as necessary, to comply with the needs of the employee.
  7. Any and all accidents should be reported to County officials and County Personnel Office.

TRAVEL EXPENSE FORMS

Expenses incurred for county business travel shall be submitted for reimbursement using the forms as prescribed by the County Auditor and processed within the next available Commissioners Court Meeting. Forms are available via the Starr County webpage under the County Auditor.

- Form #1 – Reimbursement Claim Form
- Form #2 – Travel Advance Form
- Form #3 – Monthly Mileage Travel Form
- Form #4 – Travel Rate Per Diem Memorandum


The above policy is APPROVED, PASSED AND ADOPTED by the Commissioners Court of Starr County, Texas, on this 22nd day of May, 2023.




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County Judge

May 22, 2023  
Date




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County Clerk

5-22-23  
Date