

MENDOCINO COUNTY POLICY #18	TRAVEL AND MEAL POLICY
ADOPTED: April 26, 1988	ADOPTED BY: Minute Order
MODIFIED: December 8, 1992	AMENDED BY: Minute Order
MODIFIED: April 6, 1993	AMENDED BY: Minute Order
MODIFIED: February 12, 2002	AMENDED BY: Minute Order
MODIFIED: December 11, 2007	AMENDED BY: Minute Order
MODIFIED: September 19, 2017	AMENDED BY: Minute Order
MODIFIED: April 14, 2020	

1. Statement of General Policy

- 1.1 Travel is limited to only those purposes that enhance the efficient and effective operation of County government.
- 1.2 County employees traveling on County related business shall do so by the most economical means reasonably available, both in terms of financial costs as a primary focus and productive time utilization as a secondary consideration.
 - 1.2.1 Factors such as: the distance to be traveled, the time required (using good judgment and reasonable care) to arrive at your destination safely and on time, proper trip planning, emergency situations, inclement weather, and other conditions, may have a significant impact in determining the cost of travel.
- 1.3 Department Heads are encouraged to contact the Chief Executive Officer or Auditor-Controller to obtain approval before expenses are incurred when they are uncertain of specific allowable circumstances.
- 1.4 Whenever possible, County employees should take full advantage of any available government discounts and/or travel agency special rates.
- 1.5 County vehicles should be used, if available, when traveling on County business.
- 1.6 Employees may also use, as an option, their personal vehicle for travel on official County business providing they meet the following requirements:
 - 1.6.1 A personal vehicle is herein defined as an automobile, truck or van. Motorcycles, mopeds, scooters, bicycles, or similar vehicles may not be used to conduct county business.
 - 1.6.2 Vehicles shall be adequately insured. The liability insurance on any private vehicle used in County business must conform to the minimum requirements set forth in the financial responsibility section (16020) of the California Vehicle Code (\$15,000/\$30,000 liability and \$5,000 property damage).
 - 1.6.3 The vehicle shall be in sound mechanical condition adequate for providing required transportation in a safe manner.
 - 1.6.4 The vehicle shall be equipped with, and each occupant will be required to use, seat belts.

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- 1.6.5 The cost of damage and/or wear and tear to a privately owned vehicle used on County business is the responsibility of the owner of the vehicle.
- 1.6.6 Employees not in compliance with these minimum standards shall not be authorized to drive their personal vehicle on County business.
- 1.6.7 It is the responsibility of the department head to ensure that written verification of such insurance is current and on file in the department in advance of such travel.
- 1.7 Authority to travel and reimbursements for customary and reasonable costs incurred for such travel including meals, transportation, registration, lodging, parking and other related costs shall be in accordance with policy and procedures delineated herein.
- 1.8 Employees are encouraged to use departmental credit cards, if available, for all travel expenses. The exception is fuel or other vehicle-related expenses for County vehicles, which should be purchased with the County Garage-issued credit card for each vehicle.
- 1.9 All travel reimbursement claims must be completed in ink or typewritten. Claims completed totally or partially in pencil will be returned as unacceptable.
- 1.10 In **all circumstances, including** special circumstances not otherwise provided for in this Policy, the County Auditor-Controller and/or Chief Executive Officer or designee shall be the final approving authority regarding reimbursement for any expense.

2. Travel Authorization / Travel Advances

- 2.1 Travel outside the State of California shall require prior approval by the Chief Executive Officer. A Travel Request (form CAO-009) must be submitted for approval at least twenty (20) calendar days in advance of the departure date to allow adequate time for review and the ability to secure travel discounts.
 - 2.1.1 Exception: Necessary travel involving apprehension, investigation, and transportation of prisoners, dependents or wards of the Court; prosecution or incarceration activities are exempt from the requirements of this section.
 - 2.1.2 However, in keeping with Government Code Sections 1063 and 1770 (f), any officer (or department head), shall not absent himself/herself from the State for more than 30 days unless upon business for the state, County or judicial district, or with the consent of the Board of Supervisors.
 - 2.1.3 In no case shall any officer (or department head) absent himself/herself from the State for more than two months without the consent of the Board of Supervisors, with the written approval of the governor, nor shall such absence continue for a period exceeding six months in any one year. (This does not apply to judicial officers.)
- 2.2 Travel for which the total anticipated cost per person is in excess of one thousand dollars (\$1,000) shall require prior approval by the Chief Executive Officer.
 - 2.2.1 Exception: Members of the District Attorney's Office are exempt from this requirement.
- 2.3 Travel costs shall include conference/seminar registration fees.

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- 2.4 A Travel Request (form CAO-009) must be submitted at least twenty (20) calendar days in advance of the departure date.
 - 2.4.1 Exception: Members of the Sheriff, County Jail, Probation or Juvenile Hall departments are exempt from this requirement when attending required STC or POST training.
 - 2.4.2 2.4.2 Exception: Members of the District Attorney's Office are exempt from submitting Travel Requests.
- 2.5 Required group meetings or gatherings (breakfast, luncheons and dinner functions) for which the anticipated cost for meals exceeds \$25 per person shall have the prior approval of the Chief Executive Officer. The approval request must be submitted in memorandum form to the Executive Office at least 20 calendar days in advance of the event.
- 2.6 County vehicles are to be used by employees only on authorized County business.
- 2.7 In the event that a department believes a travel alternative other than the least cost method is justifiable, the department is required to notify the County Auditor-Controller and/or Chief Executive Officer to secure authorization prior to making travel arrangements.
 - 2.7.1 Failure on the part of the department to obtain approval in these circumstances could result in the claim being rejected.
- 2.8 Travel advances are not encouraged and will not normally be processed.
 - 2.8.1 Exceptions may be made in an emergency or otherwise unusual circumstances as defined and authorized in writing by the department head and approved by the Chief Executive Officer or designee.
 - 2.8.2 Claims for registration and lodging may be prepaid directly to the vendor.
- 2.9 All such claims and any authorized advances relating to employee travel must indicate employee name(s), department, destination, dates of departure and return, and must be submitted no later than ten business days prior to the date of departure.
 - 2.9.1 In addition, approved advances will require employees to provide full accountability for their travel expenses within thirty days of their return.
 - 2.9.2 Such accountability will include providing the necessary receipts for lodging, conference fees and other travel expenses, which necessitated the advance request.
 - 2.9.3 Departments are requested to assist the Auditor-Controller and/or Chief Executive Officer or designee to ensure that this process be followed through on a timely basis.

3. Travel Reimbursement for Mileage: Personal Vehicles

- 3.1 Mileage reimbursement for authorized in-County and out-of-County travel where an employee uses his/her personal vehicle will be based upon the rates specified and set forth in the respective memorandums of understanding or agreements with the bargaining units and/or individual employees.
 - 3.1.1 The rates shall be adjusted annually to reflect the current rate established by the IRS.

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- 3.1.2 A separate rate will be established for modified (handicapped enabled) vehicles, and shall be based on the State rate, as approved by the Auditor-Controller.
- 3.2 Mileage between home, County Garage, and headquarters (employee's regular work site) is considered to be personal commuting expense and is not reimbursable.
- 3.3 Employees temporarily assigned by their department head, during normal business hours and without proper notice, to a work location other than their regular work site shall be reimbursed for mileage but only to the extent that such mileage is greater than their normal commuting mileage.
- 3.4 Under circumstances where proper notice had been given by the department head, employees temporarily assigned to another work location shall not have their mileage reimbursed. Such mileage is considered to be personal commuting mileage.
- 3.5 Mileage costs associated with travel by an employee who leaves from his/her home to attend meetings or other functions at locations other than the employee's regular work site without returning to his/her regular work site is fully reimbursable without deduction for employee's normal commute mileage.
- 3.6 Mileage costs associated with travel by an employee driving between different work locations (after having first arrived at his/her regular work site) are fully reimbursable without deduction for employee's normal commute mileage with the exception that mileage from an employee's last work location is reimbursable only to the extent that it exceeds his/her normal commute mileage home.
- 3.7 Mileage associated with travel during times of emergency or call backs, occurring outside of normal business hours or on regular days off, is fully reimbursable without deduction for normal commute mileage under the following circumstances:
 - 3.7.1 Special mission or errand at the prior specific request of the department head;
 - 3.7.2 Other travel or business journey undertaken by an employee at the specific request of the department head occurring away from employee's regular work station; and
 - 3.7.3 Mileage travel deemed to have occurred within the course of an employee's employment under the going and coming rule of the Workers' Compensation Law.

4. Meal Reimbursement

4.1 General Per Diem Meal Limits

Meal reimbursement (excluding alcoholic beverages and tips) for employees shall be up to the General Services Administration (GSA) per diem rates (<https://www.gsa.gov>).

4.1.1 Please note that pursuant to Section 1.2 of this Policy, County employees traveling on County related business shall do so by the most economical means reasonably available.

4.2 Planned Non-Emergency Travel Within Mendocino County

Food expenses will not be reimbursed for employees traveling on official County Business within Mendocino County, except as follows:

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- 4.2.1 Employees required by their department head, and exclusive of their normal commute time, to leave their place of residence at least two hours prior to the beginning of their normal workday. In such cases, the employee is entitled to reimbursement for breakfast.
- 4.2.2 Employees required by their department head, and exclusive of their normal commute time, to return to their place of residence at least two hours subsequent to the conclusion of their normal workday. In such cases, the employee is entitled to reimbursement for dinner.
- 4.2.3 Employees will not be reimbursed for lunches, with the exception of those lunch meetings that the employee is required to attend, at the prior specific and written direction of the department head, and during which County business is conducted with the public or representatives from organizations other than the County. In such cases, the department will be required to submit adequate documentation in a manner and content acceptable to and prescribed by the Auditor-Controller and/or Chief Executive Officer or designee.
- 4.2.4 Lunches with other County employees, whether or not County business is conducted, are not eligible for reimbursement.

4.3 Planned Non-Emergency Travel Outside Mendocino County

Food expenses will be reimbursed for employees traveling on official County business outside the boundaries of Mendocino County, as follows:

- 4.3.1 Employees that arrive at their place of residence at least two hours subsequent to the conclusion of their normal workday. In such cases, the employee is entitled to reimbursement for dinner.
- 4.3.2 Employees required to leave their place of residence at least two hours prior to the beginning of their normal workday. In such cases, the employee is entitled to reimbursement for breakfast.
- 4.3.3 Employees required to leave their place of residence or work at least two hours before the normal lunch period, and return to their place of residence or work at least two hours after their normal lunch period. In such cases, the employee is entitled to reimbursement for lunch.
- 4.3.4 The Auditor-Controller may approve meal reimbursements up to the amount allowed by the GSA per diem rates in designated higher rate cities. Receipts may be required as justification for these claims.

4.4 Meals/Food Costs Associated with Local /Group Meetings

Generally, meal and/or food costs in connection with group meetings held either within or outside normal business hours are not reimbursable events. However, the following exceptions to this rule apply:

- 4.4.1 Regarding business meals occurring outside normal business hours, in certain instances, the cost of business-related meal expenses may be allowed.
 - a. It must clearly be shown that it was impractical to conduct the County's business during normal working hours and that the meal took place under conditions beyond the employee's control.

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- b. The employee must provide justification on the travel expense claim in addition to department head approval.
 - c. The justification statement must include the purpose or goal of each business-related meal and the unusual conditions that justify payment.
 - d. The payment cannot, however, exceed the maximum amount allowable under this policy for the particular meal(s) in question.
- 4.4.2 Meals in connection with breakfast, lunch or dinner meetings with the public, directly related to departmental operations, and at the prior specific request of the department head, shall be reimbursed for the actual reasonable cost of the meal if the charge for the meal is a fixed cost.
 - a. Such cost shall not exceed \$25 unless prior approval is obtained from the Auditor-Controller. (As an example, if a Building Inspector is asked by his/her department head to attend a meeting of a contractor's association, which happens to be a luncheon meeting, the Building Inspector's lunch will be reimbursed).
- 4.4.3 Meals charged separately from conference registration fees will be reimbursed at the regular County rate unless such costs, if higher, can be adequately substantiated by both a receipt and reference to the conference program brochures which indicate such meals are provided as an optional part of the conference program itinerary.
- 4.4.4 Food costs for departmental staff meetings either within or outside normal working hours will not be reimbursed unless, under special circumstances, prior written approval is first obtained from the County Auditor-Controller and/or Chief Executive Officer or designee.
- 4.4.5 Reasonable food costs associated with meetings involving members of the general public or other public agencies, who donate their time for a beneficial County purpose, shall be reimbursable at the discretion of the department head. In this instance, food items shall be limited to snacks and refreshments only.
- 4.4.6 Reasonable reimbursement of costs for lunch for individuals (non-county employees) donating their time to sit as members of an oral interview board shall be allowed.

4.5 Conferences

- 4.5.1 Meal costs incurred during an employee's time away from normal conference activities will be reimbursed at the regular County rate.
- 4.5.2 Employees will not be reimbursed for meals if the cost of a meal is included in the conference fee either reimbursed or paid directly by the County.
- 4.5.3 However, snacks and/or continental breakfasts are not considered to be meals in this context.

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5. Travel Reimbursement for Lodging

- 5.1 An employee will be reimbursed for lodging expenses incurred on official County travel only if the employee is more than fifty (50) miles away from his/her normal work station (as defined by his/her department head), or home (whichever is closer to the point of lodging). Such reimbursement is subject to the prior approval of the department head and the dollar limits delineated herein.
- 5.2 Overnight lodging will be reimbursed at actual lodging cost not to exceed the GSA per diem rates with the following exceptions:
 - 5.2.1 If a special rate for lodging is made available as part of a conference package, that rate will not be subject to the GSA per diem limit, provided the rate is a reasonable one given the geographic location of the lodging.
 - 5.2.2 For high cost travel areas, reimbursement shall be up to the GSA per diem maximum allowable per day limit.
- 5.3 To be eligible for the lodging reimbursement, the employee must be authorized to travel to the designated area and must furnish a commercial lodging receipt for the day(s) of travel that indicates the location of the lodging. Lodging expense can also, as an option, be prepaid to the vendor.
- 5.4 Employees who equally share lodging expenses may claim one of the following:
 - 5.4.1 The pro-rata share of the room rate with receipt in their own name, or
 - 5.4.2 The pro-rata share of the room rate with copy of receipt noting the name of the other employee(s), or
 - 5.4.3 The pro-rata share of the County's maximum lodging rate reimbursed to the employee where a lodging receipt is not required.
- 5.5 If an employee takes a companion, the employee should ask the hotel to provide verification of single room cost or separate invoice. Reimbursement is at the single room rate plus tax (if any).
- 5.6 If an employee extends a business trip for personal convenience, only the time of departure/return relating to County business should be claimed for reimbursement purposes.
- 5.7 The transient occupancy tax (room tax) is levied by cities and counties and varies in rates ranging from 6% to 12% statewide.
 - 5.7.1 This tax may be waived (and your lodging rate reduced) if you show proof you are on official County business.
 - 5.7.2 Employees should inquire about the transient occupancy tax when making reservations and should attempt to have the tax waived for all lodging charges, regardless of location.

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6. Travel & Related Expenses Reimbursement Procedures

- 6.1 Each employee traveling on behalf of the County shall maintain and submit such records as may be required to substantiate requests for reimbursement, regardless of the requirement of having receipts for the particular expense.
 - 6.1.1 These records are to be submitted to the Auditor-Controller along with a Travel Reimbursement Claim (form A/C-06) (except as otherwise exempted in section 2.4.1) within thirty days of incurred travel in order to be reimbursement for expenses.
 - 6.1.2 Failure to adhere to the filing deadline requirement may result in the denial of the reimbursement claim by the Auditor-Controller.
- 6.2 Receipts are not needed to be reimbursed for the following travel related expenses [though a Travel Reimbursement Claim (form A/C-06) needs to be filed]:
 - 6.2.1 Meals [subject to the maximum daily per diem rates].
 - 6.2.2 Bridge Tolls.
 - 6.2.3 Mileage reimbursement for use of personal vehicle [though a mileage report needs to be submitted].
 - 6.2.4 Parking or parking meter costs of \$5.00 or less per day.
 - 6.2.5 Telephone, Fax or telecommunication charges related to County business of \$2.50 or less per claim.
 - 6.2.6 Taxi, bus or other mass transit fares of \$5.00 or less per event.
- 6.3 Receipts ARE needed in order to be reimbursed for the following travel related expenses:
 - 6.3.1 Lodging costs.
 - 6.3.2 Registration/Conference fees (whether or not prepaid by County)
 - 6.3.3 Parking or parking meter costs of more than \$5.00 per day.
 - 6.3.4 Telephone, Fax or telecommunication charges related to County business in excess of \$2.50 or less per claim. Telephone, fax or telecommunication receipts must show the date, place and party called.
 - 6.3.5 Taxi, bus or other mass transit fares in excess of \$5.00 per event.
 - 6.3.6 Car rental and related costs
 - 6.3.7 Air Travel and related costs
 - 6.3.8 Commuter Bus fares [such as the Airporter service]

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6.4 The following travel related expenses will NOT be reimbursed:

- 6.4.1 Gratuities
- 6.4.2 Personal telephone calls
- 6.4.3 Alcoholic beverages
- 6.4.4 Entertainment (including related transportation costs)
- 6.4.5 Violations of legal requirements
- 6.4.6 Valet parking, to the extent the valet service is in excess of self-serve parking
- 6.4.7 Cleaning
- 6.4.8 Fines
- 6.4.9 Bails

6.5 Emergency roadside repairs made to private vehicles will NOT be reimbursed

6.6 To be reimbursed for emergency repairs to County maintained vehicles the following rules apply:

- 6.6.1 For repair costs over \$350:
 - a. Contact the County's General Services Department or, if unavailable, your department head to make the appropriate arrangements.
 - b. Prior authorization is mandatory before proceeding with repairs.
- 6.6.2 For repair costs under \$350:
 - Have repairs made and submit receipt(s) on Travel Expense Claim.

7. Public Safety Emergencies – Provisions for Meals and Lodging

7.1 A Public Safety Emergency is a situation or series of events that requires immediate and continuous presence and effort by a County employee in order to prevent, avoid, or minimize to the extent possible, damage to or loss of human life or County property and assets.

7.2 The Department Head or his/her designee must be apprised of the public safety emergency, **authorize the designation of the public safety emergency**, and any continued temporary workstation.

7.3 The public safety emergency must require the continued attention or effort on the part of the employee such that:

- 7.3.1 He or she cannot leave the duty station area to take a meal break, or
- 7.3.2 Places the employee at a temporary work site or duty station where the employee cannot reasonably travel to a meal location and return to duty in sufficient time to resume their normal duties and responsibilities.

7.4 When a County employee is required by his or her Department Head, or designee to continue on duty for four (4) or more hours beyond the end of their regularly scheduled workday without a meal break, every possible effort will be made to provide a meal to the employee at his/her temporary duty station, or the employee will be reimbursed for the meal at the rates listed in section (4.1).

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- 7.4.1 **Each Consecutive Five Hours:**
Each additional consecutive five (5) hours, every effort will be made to provide a meal or the employee is entitled to reimbursement for the meal at the rates listed in section (4.1).
- 7.4.2 **Prior to Regularly Scheduled Work Day:**
All County employees required to report to work four (4) hours prior to their regularly scheduled workday, every effort will be made to provide a meal or the employee is entitled to reimbursement for the meal at the rates listed in section (4.1).
- 7.4.3 **Emergency Call-Back:**
All County employees who are called back to work and are required to stay five (5) hours or more, every effort will be made to provide a meal or the employee is entitled to reimbursement for the meal at the rates listed in section (4.1).
- 7.5 When an event deemed to be a Public Safety Emergency arises such that a County employee is assigned by his/her Appointed Authority, Department Head, or their designee to a temporary duty station at a location where the employee cannot reasonably return home due to his/her duties or it would take the employee one hour or more to return home, the Department Head or his/her designee is authorized to provide the employee with temporary lodging for the duration of the temporary emergency assignment.
- 7.6 Requests for reimbursement must be made within ten business days of the end of the public safety emergency event to the County Auditor-Controller and/or Chief Executive Officer or designee. The request must be signed by the Department Head and contain an explanation of the circumstances surrounding the emergency event.
- 7.7 Said reimbursements for overnight lodging shall conform to the provisions of Section 5.2 of this policy.

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