

Missoula County Travel Policy

Purpose

This policy establishes guidelines and procedures for the amount and type of travel expenses eligible for reimbursement. For purposes of this policy, “employee” includes all County employees, elected officials, and appointed members of boards, commissions, and councils.

Scope

This policy is applicable to all County departments and entities. Departments may apply additional requirements as long as they are equal to or more restrictive than these standards. Law enforcement officers participating in extraditions or multi-state investigations are governed by departmental policy for extraditions and for multi-state investigation-related travel.

Limitations

Travel expenses must have a public purpose and serve the public interest. All travel expenditures must be reasonable and necessary, and reimbursement for expenses solely for the benefit of an individual is not allowable.

Administration

Department heads are responsible for: the implementation of the policy within their departments; employee compliance with travel policy; prior authorization of travel; approval of travel advances, settlements, and reimbursement requests; and management of expenditures within budgetary constraints.

The County Auditor has final authority for administering, interpreting, and applying the terms of this policy.

Employee travel time is governed by the federal Fair Labor Standards Act and the state of Montana wage and hour laws. Human Resources should be consulted prior to travel to determine appropriate compensation rates.

Except as noted, receipts are required to support requests for travel reimbursement.

Other References

For lodging, meals and incidentals, Missoula County follows the GSA Per Diem rates as provided in <https://www.gsa.gov/portal/content/104877>, updated annually. Incidentals are described as: Fees and tips given to porters, baggage carriers, hotel staff, and staff on ships.

Policy

Allowable Expenses/Modes of Travel

Air: All commercial air travel should be by the least expensive service available and will be reimbursed with appropriate receipts. The cost of one checked bag is an allowable expense, but the traveler is responsible for class upgrades and itinerary or booking changes which are not the result of an emergency or required to satisfy the business needs of the County. When a lower airfare can be obtained with an additional overnight stay, the County will pay the extra day's meals and lodging, if cost effective.

Rail: Coach or tourist class is reimbursable; however, the selection of this mode of transportation should be evaluated carefully in terms of cost and time requirements.

County Vehicle:

County vehicles are available for travel and must be used for business purposes only. If personal funds are used to purchase gas for the vehicle, a receipt must be submitted to obtain reimbursement.

Personal Vehicle: Personal vehicle mileage will be reimbursed at the applicable statutory rate allowed by the Internal Revenue Service. Departments will be notified of the current rate at the beginning of the calendar year.

If a personal vehicle is used, the driver must possess a valid Montana Drivers License and carry liability insurance which meets or exceeds the requirements cited in MCA 61-6-103. The County reserves the right to require proof of insurance for any personal vehicle used for County business. Any employee who chooses to drive a personal vehicle when one is available from the motor pool should be aware that the County does not provide coverage for loss or damage to personal vehicles.

If an employee chooses to use a personal vehicle over a common carrier, mileage reimbursement shall not exceed the cost of airfare.

Rental Vehicles: A rental vehicle is a justifiable expense if it is cheaper than other forms of transportation; anyone requesting use of a rental vehicle must demonstrate that it is the least cost alternative. A rental vehicle requested from the General Fund Training pool requires prior approval of the Human Resources Department; otherwise, the department head must approve a rental vehicle prior to travel. Employees traveling outside the state of Montana must purchase a Loss Damage Waiver (sometimes also called a Collision Damage Waiver or Physical Damage Waiver). If Liability Insurance is not provided in the rental contract, the employee must purchase such insurance from the rental car company.

Taxis, Airport Limousines, Shuttle Buses, Parking, Tolls: Such expenses are reimbursable, and receipts are required (parking meters excepted). Taxi fares, including gratuities of 15% or less, are allowable with receipts. If an employee chooses to take a taxi when a less expensive shuttle service is available, reimbursement will be limited to the cost of the shuttle. Valet parking, unless the only parking option available, and parking tickets are not eligible for reimbursement.

Public Transit (Buses, Subways, Street Cars): Fares are reimbursable without receipts if the total for such expenses is less than \$10 for the entire trip.

Lodging

All County employees are authorized the actual cost of lodging at a conference site. If no rooms are available at the conference site, an employee will be reimbursed for the cost of lodging at an alternative location as long as its room rate does not exceed the conference room rate. In any event, employees are encouraged to seek less expensive room options if available nearby. Documentation which shows the conference room rate must be provided with a travel advance or reimbursement request.

If a conference is held at a site which provides no lodging, or if lodging is unrelated to attendance at a conference, reimbursement will not exceed the maximum rate quoted for the city on the US General Services Administration (GSA) website, <https://www.gsa.gov/portal/content/104877>. If the city is not listed on the rate schedule for the destination state, the standard rate for lodging in the continental United States will apply. If all suitable lodging in the area exceeds the GSA rate, contact the Auditor's office prior to making any reservations. Employees are reminded to inquire if a government rate is available.

If an employee is accompanied by a spouse or family member, the lodging invoice must bear a notation, signed by an authorized representative of the establishment, as to the single room rate, including tax. The employee is responsible for the difference between single and double occupancy room rates.

Meals and Incidentals

GSA per diem rates will be used to reimburse travel meals and incidentals. Subject to the exceptions below for meals provided by a conference, seminar, or travel days, the reimbursement will be the rate for the entire day for the destination city, county, or the destination state, if the city or county is not listed on the GSA rate schedule. The first and last day of travel will only be reimbursed for meals actually eaten and incidentals.

If an employee's travel includes meals the County has prepaid (such as through a registration fee for a conference, seminar, or other event), such meals cannot be included in the meal per diem reimbursement. An employee with special dietary restrictions should ask the conference site if such restrictions can be accommodated as part of the registration fee. If not, per diem is allowable. Continental breakfasts, refreshments during breaks, and hors d'oeuvres served during social hours or receptions are not considered meals even though they may be included in the cost of registration. Documentation from the conference (registration, agenda, etc.) which shows the meals provided must accompany a travel advance or reimbursement request.

If an employee's travel is confined to a single work day, any meals are considered taxable income by the IRS. Meals taken while traveling on county business will be reimbursed at the GSA rate for the destination city, county, or the standard rate for the state if the city or county is not listed in the rate schedule. A properly approved reimbursement claim must be submitted to payroll with the employee's timesheet.

Other Allowable Expenses

Business telephone calls, faxes, or other necessary business expenses are allowable if documented by receipts. Employees are encouraged to use cell phones or prepaid phone cards for personal calls; otherwise, such calls are limited to \$10/day.

Unallowable Expenses

Alcoholic beverages and expenditures of a personal nature are not allowable. Examples include: hotel/motel room service charges in excess of applicable per diem rates, mini-bar and amenity charges; porter service for personal luggage; laundry service; in room movies; transportation expense for dining out (unless the hotel/motel does not have dining facilities or there are none within walking distance); optional valet parking; parking tickets, and fees at a conference or meeting for social events such as golf, sightseeing, or the entertainment of a spouse or guest. Other expenditures, otherwise allowable, may be rejected without proper travel authorization or expenditure documentation.

Combining Personal Travel and County Business

When an employee combines personal travel with an official County business trip, reimbursements and payments will be made only for those costs necessary for the County's portion. Transportation costs and per diem will be allowed only for the most direct route to the destination of the County trip, and reimbursement and payment for meals and lodging will be allowable only during the time the employee is in County travel status. No costs will be reimbursable for vacation or personal days. If an employee chooses to drive, whether to accommodate family members or to provide additional excursion opportunities, mileage will not be paid in excess of the least cost airfare; per diem will be paid as if the employee had flown.

Travel Expenses for Non-County Employees

The County will pay travel costs for someone who is not an employee if the person: 1) is traveling at the specific request of the County, 2) is serving as a volunteer to a County program, or 3) is providing services under a County contract, which includes provision for reimbursement for travel related costs. Grant-related travel must be consistent with this policy, unless the grant provides otherwise. It is strongly recommended that departments consult with the County Auditor before travel arrangements are made for a non-county employee.

Travel Expenses Paid by Outside Entity

Entities outside the County may pay for authorized employee travel, with prior review and consultation from the County Attorney's Office, and this policy should be followed as a guide to allowable costs. The County will reimburse the employee as usual. The payment from the external agency must be made to the County and not to the employee or vendors providing services related to the travel. Such transactions should be documented for audit purposes. The following exceptions apply: 1) an employee who is a member of a professional association attending an association function as an association official (elected or appointed or invitee) may be reimbursed directly by the association for those travel expenses; 2) travel expenses chargeable to a grant or contract awarded to the County should be consistent with this policy, unless the grant provides otherwise, and recorded according to the requirements of the grant or contract and the County's fiscal procedures; and 3) an employee traveling on behalf of another government agency may have their travel plans arranged and reimbursed directly by the sponsoring agency.

Expenses Paid for Position Vacancy Interviews

The County will pay the expenses for a candidate coming to Missoula for a job interview for department head or other professional position with the prior approval of the appropriate authorizing official and subject to budgetary constraints. The cost of such travel will be charged to the applicable departmental budget. The County will reimburse the interviewee for transportation costs, meals, and lodging while in Missoula in accordance with this policy. The County will not reimburse employees for candidate interviews during mealtime; such interviews should be conducted in the work place.

Other

Employees are encouraged to make every effort to minimize travel expenses. When more than one employee is traveling to the same destination on the same date, every effort should be made to coordinate the activities, including carpooling and sharing motel accommodations.

Reimbursement Procedures

Travel claims must: be submitted for all requests for reimbursement; provide an explanation for trip; be signed by the employee and approved by the appropriate department head; be submitted per trip. No one may authorize his or her own claim for reimbursement. Amounts spent in excess of maximum per diem allowances will not be reimbursed.

Travel Advances

Advances for amounts greater than \$100 may be obtained on a Travel Advance form signed by the appropriate department head. A single page universal template for a travel advance and settlement may be found in Public documents [here](#). The advance should be based on the allowable per diem for the number of travel days, exclusive of meals provided by a conference, and reasonable estimates for the costs of lodging, personal vehicle mileage or airport shuttle. Advances must be submitted at least two, but no more than three, weeks prior to departure. In no event will per diem or other travel money be advanced without a properly completed Travel Advance form.

A travel advance must be settled within 15 days of returning to work. The employee must complete a travel claim and provide original receipts or other supporting documentation. If the claim is more than the advance, the employee will be issued a check. If the claim is less than the advance, the employee must reimburse the County for the difference using either a personal check or cash.

Travel advances which have not been settled within 15 days will be referred to the Auditor's Office, and the employee will be notified that the entire advance will be deducted from the next paycheck if settlement is not received.