

# NUECES COUNTY TRAVEL POLICY AND PROCEDURES

## Overview

It is the policy of Nueces County to reimburse staff for reasonable and necessary expenses incurred in connection with approved travel on behalf of Nueces County. Travelers should incur the lowest reasonable travel expenses and exercise care to adhere a professional attitude and appearance. 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.

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

## Authorization and Responsibility

The County Judge, designated department approval authorities and the County Auditor's office are required to review travel expenditures. Travel requests will be processed using the purchase order system, travel request and travel reimbursement forms. Please refer to the separate travel processing procedures document for specific instructions. Before a travel request can be processed, a W-9 must be provided for all requested vendor payments. Supporting documentation must be attached to the travel request and reimbursement forms before and after the travel. An individual may not approve his or her own travel or reimbursement. Within 2 weeks of completion of a trip, the traveler must submit a Travel Reimbursement form to obtain reimbursement of expenses.

The Travel Reimbursement form must be signed by the department head and employee. If there is reason to believe that the expenditures are inappropriate or extravagant the reimbursement will be withheld.

## Personal Funds

Travelers should review reimbursement guidelines before spending personal funds for business travel to determine if such expenses are reimbursable. See *Travel Expenses/Procedures* for details. Nueces County reserves the right to deny reimbursement of travel-related expenses for failure to comply with policies and procedures. The County Judge must approve any requests to travel days outside those which would be required for normal arrival and departure days when County funds are utilized.

Travelers 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

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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. Nueces County will not prepay any personal expenses with the intention of being “repaid” at a later time, nor will any personal expenses be reimbursed.

### Exceptions

Occasionally it may be necessary for travelers to request exceptions to this travel policy. Requests for exceptions to the policy must be made in writing and approved by the County Judge or by the County Auditor.

### Travel Expenses/Procedures

#### *General Information*

Nueces County may issue prepayments for airfare, conference registration fees, per diem and mileage cash advances (see below under **Travel advances** for amount of authorized advance). Authorized business travel for employees that include advances must be pre-approved.

Reimbursement of parking, mileage and any other reimbursable items require receipts.

#### *Permissible Prepaid Travel Expenses*

**Airfare.** Travelers are expected to obtain the lowest available airfare that reasonably meets business travel needs. Travelers are encouraged to book flights at least 30 days in advance to avoid premium airfare pricing. Coach class or economy tickets must be purchased. First-class tickets are not reimbursable. Airfare may be purchased with a credit card.

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

**Conference registration fees.** Conference registration fees can be prepaid with a credit card or check.

**Travel advances.** Cash advances are authorized for situations that might cause undue financial hardship for employees. See below for maximum amount of cash advances:

Total estimated cost	Amount of Cash advance
≤ \$187.50	Lesser of 100% of total estimated cost or \$150.00
> \$187.50	80% of total estimated cost

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Expenses associated with the travel must be submitted on a reimbursement form within two weeks of the return date. The traveler must repay Nueces County for any advances in excess of the approved reimbursable expenses. The department initiating the travel is responsible for notifying the Auditor's office to deposit any excess funds into the appropriate departmental account.

Travel advances are processed by submitting a completed Travel Request to the Auditor's office. Reimbursement for any remaining expenses (including the remaining 20% not paid with the cash advance) is processed on a Travel Reimbursement form approved by the designated approval department.

### Reimbursements

Requests for reimbursements of travel-related expenses are submitted on a Travel Reimbursement form. This form must be accompanied by supporting documentation.

These forms must be submitted to the auditors office within two weeks after the trip is completed.

Reimbursement of travel expenses is based on documentation of reasonable and actual expenses supported by the original, itemized receipts where required.

**Airfare.** If the airfare was not prepaid by the auditors 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.

Travelers are expected to obtain the lowest available airfare that reasonably meets business travel needs. Travelers are encouraged to book flights at least 30 days in advance to avoid premium pricing.

Coach class or economy tickets must be purchased. First-class tickets are not reimbursable.

**Automobile Mileage (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 company for travel that is business or not personal in nature.

Reimbursement for use of a personal automobile is based on the Nueces County mileage rate.

The Travel Reimbursement form is required for reimbursement for all vehicle-related expenses. Nueces County mileage reimbursement rates are determined by the Nueces County Commissioners and subject to change.

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The department head/authorized designee/or management may determine maximum mileage amount to be reimbursed for any trip by use of a map service such as map quest and may determine that the shortest route available from the service used is the maximum mileage payable for the trip. Travel from home to work and from work to home is not eligible for mileage reimbursement. An employee that travels from home to a temporary work site (also includes travel to airport, hotel, conference site, etc.) driving past his regular work place on the way may claim the mileage from the regular work site to the temporary work site as reimbursable.

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.

Nueces 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, Nueces County encourages travelers to purchase collision damage waiver (CDW) and loss damage waiver (LDW) coverage. Nueces 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 a coverage (if any) provided by his or her automobile insurance company for travel that is business or not personal in nature.

Parking fees, tolls and other incidental costs associated with the vehicle use are not covered by the rental agreement.

Travelers 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.

**Conference registration fees.** If the conference fee was not prepaid, Nueces County will reimburse these fees. 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.

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**Lodging.** The cost of overnight lodging (room rate and tax only) will be reimbursed. Cost of lodging will begin 1 day before the conference if necessary. Nueces County will reimburse lodging expenses at reasonable, single occupancy or standard business room rates. When the hotel or motel is the conference or convention site, reimbursement will be limited to the conference rate.

Only single room rates are authorized for payment or reimbursement unless the second party is representing the agency in an authorized capacity. If the lodging receipt shows more than a single occupancy, the single room rate must be noted. If reimbursement for more than the single room rate is requested, the name of the second person must be included.

**Meals (per diem).** Per diem allowances may be reimbursable for out-of-county travel which may be taxable to the employee when there is no overnight travel involved.

Maximum per diem associated with overnight travel is \$36 per day, which is equal to \$12 per eligible meal. Nueces County per diem rates are determined by the Nueces County Commissioners Court. Incidental expenses, unless specifically cited in this policy, will not be reimbursed.

During 2015, Nueces County was audited by the IRS where it was determined we were not in compliance with IRC Section 61(a)(1) which provides that, except as otherwise provided in subtitle A of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986, gross income includes compensation for services, including fees, commissions, fringe benefits, and similar items.

The Internal Revenue Code provides that meals are non-deductible personal expenses, unless paid or incurred during overnight travel away from an employee's ordinary place of business for a business purpose. When an employer pays for an employee's meal while on business travel that does not meet the "overnight travel" rule, the payment is deemed to be a payment of an employee's personal living expense and a taxable fringe benefit. As a taxable fringe benefit, the payment is required to be included in the employee's wages for Federal employment tax purposes. There is no exception to this rule for law enforcement personnel.

The County routinely pays for meals for employees involved in the transport of prisoners when there is no overnight travel. "Overnight travel" means that the employee must travel away from their general tax home area substantially longer than an ordinary day's work, and they need substantial sleep or rest to meet the demands of the work while away from home.

Effective October 1, 2016, per diem for meal allowances requested for travel not meeting the "overnight travel" rule will hereby be treated as a taxable benefit for County employees. The value of the reimbursed meals will be included in addition to the recipient employee's wages for Federal employment tax purposes and will be

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subject to federal income tax withholding, and FICA taxes (Social Security and Medicare).

Per diem reimbursements are based on departure and return times over the entire 24-hour day and are prorated accordingly.

	Meal Eligible for Reimbursement		
Travel Time	Breakfast	Lunch	Dinner
12:00 AM – 8:00 AM	YES	NO	NO
12:00 PM – 4:00 PM	NO	YES	NO
5:00 PM – 11:59 PM	NO	NO	YES

Receipts are not required for per diem allowances. Meals provided are to be taken out of per diem allowances whether or not the employee chooses to utilize the meal provided. (Identified as full breakfast, lunch provided, dinner provided). Exceptions must be approved by the elected official or department head.

Employees requesting meal reimbursements from day travel will be required to enter this request via the timesheet reporting process. This procedure will be provided in a separate document. Per diem for meals associated with overnight travel is included as a part of the Travel Request and/or Travel Reimbursement form, as applicable.

**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 Nueces County:

- Airline club memberships.
- Airline upgrades.

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- Business class for domestic flights or first class for all flights.
- Child care, babysitting, house-sitting, or pet-sitting/kennel charges.
- Commuting between home and the primary work location.
- Costs incurred by traveler's failure to cancel travel or hotel reservations in a timely fashion.
- Evening or formal wear expenses.
- Haircuts and personal grooming.
- Laundry and dry cleaning.
- Passports, vaccinations and visas.
- Personal entertainment expenses, including in-flight movies, headsets, health club facilities, hotel pay-per-view movies, in-theater movies, social activities and related incidental hotel costs.
- Travel accident insurance premiums or purchase of additional travel insurance except as indicated on p.4 under *Automobiles*.
- 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 company purpose for engaging in the travel or attending the event. Such travel is generally limited to senior management and should occur infrequently.

### Fiscal Year-End Travel Requests

Travel Budget For Registration And Airfare For New Fiscal Year Trip May Be Expensed With Current Years Monies

Travel Budget For Hotel And Per Diem For New Fiscal Year Trip Will Only Be Expensed With New Fiscal Year Monies