

# Douglas County Travel Policy and Procedures Manual

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## **I. Purpose**

Provide guidelines for authorization and administration of travel expense reporting by Douglas County's elected officials, employees, members of the advisory boards, and all others who are authorized to travel on County business and seek reimbursement from the funds of Douglas County, Georgia.

## **II. Objectives**

- A. Uniformity and fairness for all travelers,
- B. Conservation of public funds.

## **III. Scope**

These policies and procedures apply to all of Douglas County's elected officials, employees, members of the advisory boards, and all others who are authorized to travel on County business and seek reimbursement from the funds of Douglas County, Georgia (hereinafter "County Representatives").

- \* **All travel and reimbursement will be at the discretion of the County Administrator.**
- \* **Commission members should reference the Douglas County Board of Commissioners Monthly Expense Policy for details.**

## **IV. Definitions**

- A. **County business** shall pertain to either of the following:
  1. Business – travel for the purpose of conducting official authorized County business.
  2. Professional/Educational – authorized travel to attend meetings, conferences, and training/certification programs for professional growth and development as well as the mutual benefit of the County.
- B. **Authorizing party** – individual authorized to approve or disapprove all travel-related requests. Individual shall be in a level of authority such that they can accurately evaluate the need for and the cost and benefit of such travel.

- C. **Requesting party** – individual who will be reimbursed for travel costs incurred out of the funds of Douglas County, Georgia.
- D. **Metro-Atlanta area** – area including the counties of Barrow, Bartow, Carroll, Clayton, Cobb, Coweta, DeKalb, Douglas, Fayette, Floyd, Forsyth, Fulton, Gwinnett, Henry, Newton, Paulding, Pickens, Rockdale, Spalding, and Walton.

## **V. Administration**

- A. County Representatives are expected to search out the most reasonably priced arrangements for their travel event taking into consideration their personal safety and a reasonable level of comfort and dignity.
- B. The County does not contract with a specific travel agent. County Representatives may book travel arrangements through an agent of their choosing or by utilizing one of the many Internet sites available for such purposes.
- C. Arrangements should not be made until the Travel Expense Form is approved in writing by the Chairman and the County Administrator.
- D. Travel arrangements that include air, lodging, and/or car rental should be made as far in advance as possible, preferably at least thirty (30) days prior to the travel event to insure the most economical and desirable arrangements.
- E. A County Representative traveling on appropriate and pre-approved business will not be denied reimbursement for reasonable costs incurred in conformance with this policy.
- F. County Representatives are urged to use personal credit cards for payment of travel expenses, thereby reducing/ eliminating the need for cash advances. Timely submission of approved requests for reimbursement should provide County Representatives with reimbursement funds in time to pay their credit card charges as they become due.

## **VI. Guidelines for Authorization of Travel**

- A. All County Representatives requesting to travel on official County business must complete the Travel Authorization/Expense Reimbursement for approval prior to travel.
- B. Decisions as to which travel is authorized begin with the budgetary process. Travel needs must be anticipated and submitted in the budget for approval by the Board of Commissioners.

- C. The authorizing party's responsibility is to stay within his/her departmental budget's travel allocation as approved by the Board of Commissioners.
- D. Prior to approving a travel request, the authorizing party is responsible for determining that a sufficient unexpended appropriation remains in the travel budget to reimburse all expected costs of the travel.
- E. Personal items, alcoholic beverages, and expenses of family members are not authorized.
- F. Expense reports must be prepared to reflect only actual expenses essential to the conduct of County business by the County Representative.

## **VII. Expense Reimbursement Policies**

The following reimbursement guidelines are intended to set forth **minimum standards**. County Representatives are expected to spend funds prudently.

- A. **Lodging** – Reimbursement for lodging is authorized when the individual's travel requires overnight accommodation. Overnight accommodations are not considered necessary within the Metro-Atlanta area unless special circumstances warrant them (approval by the County Administrator is required). **Receipts are required for all lodging costs.**

- 1. County Representatives are reimbursed for the cost of single standard room accommodations typically occupied by business travelers at moderately priced hotels. The minimum corporate, governmental, or lowest special rate should be requested along with any other discounts which you might receive (i.e. senior citizen/AARP).

**When traveling within Georgia, County Representatives should request exemption from sales/use and hotel/motel taxes. Exception forms will be provided to traveling County Representatives. Taxes incurred by County Representatives for failing to utilize these forms will not be reimbursed by the County.**

- 2. The County will pay only actual room rental costs supported by the hotel bill for each day that lodging away from home is required for business reasons.

3. All County Representatives shall attempt to incur only reasonable hotel expenses when out-of-town. Where possible, the County will seek group rates from the host of the event, or from the provider of hospitality services to mitigate cost.
4. Concierge level, suite, and condominium accommodations are not permitted for County business unless authorized in advance by the department head and the County Administrator's office.
5. All hotel accommodations should be guaranteed for late arrival to the County Representative's personal credit card.
6. Because all hotel accommodations are guaranteed for late arrival, it is imperative that the hotel be advised of any cancellation of hotel space prior to the specified cancellation time (usually 6:00 p.m. the day of arrival) to prevent "no show" charges.

Be sure to obtain the name of the person at the hotel to whom you speak and the cancellation number assigned. A "no show" charge will be passed on to the traveler for verification and payment if attributable to the traveler's failure to cancel.

7. Hotel receipts must be attached to the Travel Expense Form. Charges other than actual room cost should be itemized on the expense report.
8. County Representatives may be exempted from local option excise taxes and state sales tax on rooms, lodging, and accommodations when traveling on official business within the State of Georgia. Obtain a "Hotel/Motel Tax Exemption Request" form and State Sales and Use Tax Exemption Form from the Finance Department and present it to the hotel at the time of check-in.
9. When two County Representatives share a room, one County Representative shall pay and request reimbursement for the full lodging charge. The second County Representative shall not be entitled to any reimbursement since he/she did not incur any expense. In the rare circumstance where the hotel agrees to split the bill, each County Representative would be responsible for their share. Due to privacy issues, a County Representative may request separate accommodations via the County Administrator. Optional: If employees share a room, each employee sharing the room will receive an additional \$30.00 per diem. (Employees of the opposite sex are not permitted to share a room).

B. **Meals** – County Representatives are entitled to reimbursement for meals based on a per diem amount of fifty-five dollars (\$55.00/day), based on the following breakdown:

Breakfast	\$15.00, this amount includes gratuity
Lunch	\$15.00, this amount includes gratuity
Dinner	\$25.00, this amount includes gratuity

1. The above limits are expected maximums and should be sufficient in most restaurants visited by the requesting party. **Receipts are not required when requesting reimbursement at per diem rates.**
2. For a single day trip:

Breakfast: Reimbursement will be authorized provided the requesting party began his/her travel day before 7:00 a.m. and the one way trip is at least sixty (60) miles. Mileage must be supported by odometer readings.

Lunch: Reimbursement will be authorized only if the work related travel is between 11:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. and is located outside of Douglas County.

Dinner: Reimbursement will be authorized provided the County Representative returns after 7:00 p.m. **and** the one way trip is at least sixty (60) miles. Mileage must be supported by odometer readings.

3. For trips involving overnight travel, meals will be reimbursed at above rates.
4. No reimbursement will be allowed when meals are included as part of a registration fee or are provided free by common carrier. Conference/training schedules or agendas should be included with reimbursement requests that detail if meals were included in the registration fee. If there is not a schedule or agenda detailing this information, the County Representative needs to provide a signed statement that meals were not included and therefore they are seeking reimbursement. **Meals will not be reimbursed without this documentation.**

C. **Travel**

1. Air

- a. It is the obligation of each County Representative to choose the least expensive flight from the various alternatives. In many cases a traveling County Representative can save hundreds of dollars by purchasing tickets on discount airlines, promotional flights that might require advance booking, that might entail one stop, or that might depart and/or arrive at times slightly less convenient. The savings available on these flights frequently outweigh the traveler's inconvenience, even when they necessitate travel schedule adjustments.

In the era of lower priced airfares and electronic tickets, ticket exchanges, cancellations or credit for unused tickets has become more difficult. The traveling County Representative must be certain of their travel needs before booking. The County will not pay for unused airfare unless authorized by all approving parties including the County Administrator. Reasoning must be provided in writing.

- b. Planning in advance will generally guarantee the lowest airfare and satisfy the traveler's preference. Travel arrangements should be made at least thirty (30) days prior to the travel date.
- c. The approved class of transportation for all County Representatives is coach. Most major airlines offer excursion or other discounted fares under certain conditions. Every effort should be made to take advantage of these rates by planning and ordering tickets within the required time frames.
- d. If a business trip is canceled prior to departure, contact all vendors to begin the process of refunding the unused tickets.
- e. A copy of the ticket coupon and/or boarding passes must be attached to each Travel Expense Form.

2. Rail and Bus Fare

- a. **Receipts are required for reimbursement of these transportation costs.**
- b. Transportation reservations shall be obtained at the most economical rate available.

3. County Vehicles

- a. The use of a County vehicle is authorized for travel to destinations of up to five hundred (500) miles from Douglas County. Operation of the County vehicle outside the state of Georgia requires the prior approval of the County Administrator or his/her designee or appropriate elected official.
- b. Only one County vehicle shall be used when more than one County Representative is attending a particular conference. Most County vehicles available will accommodate four (4) individuals comfortably. Utilize a second County vehicle or a personal vehicle if there are more than four (4) traveling County Representatives.
- c. Receipts must be obtained for all County vehicle expenses, including gasoline purchases.
- d. County vehicles may be driven only by County Representatives and officials.
- e. County vehicles should not be utilized when family members are accompanying the County Representative on a trip.
- f. **All vehicles must be returned with a full tank of fuel.**

4. Personal Vehicles

- a. To calculate the miles eligible for reimbursement, County Representative must determine the mileage from their normal office location to the destination and the mileage from their personal residence to the destination. **Mileage will be reimbursed for the shorter distance.**
- b. When more than one County Representative is attending a particular conference, separate car allowances will not be approved unless separate arrival and departure times are dictated by other County business, the number of attendees is greater than five (5).
- c. The reimbursement rate for personal mileage is equal to the rate published by the Internal Revenue Service. The rate is designed to cover fuel, maintenance, and liability and physical damage insurance costs of the personal vehicle.

- d. Requested mileage reimbursement must be supported by odometer readings. A print out of a MapQuest, Yahoo Maps, etc. must also be presented as support.
- e. County Representatives who use their personal vehicles on County business and request mileage reimbursement should prepare their request for reimbursement on **at least a monthly basis**.

## 5. Rental Cars

- a. Rental vehicles are not to be used unless the cost is less than that of other available transportation such as taxis, airport limousine, or hotel/airport shuttle services. In many cases a hotel shuttle, taxi, or airport limousine offers a fast, convenient, and economical mode of transportation from the airport to a hotel. If a car rental is necessary to reduce costs, County Representatives should share rental cars, use the appropriate size car as indicated below, and utilize any discount certificates offered by the travel agency and/or the car rental agency.
- b. The use of a rental car must be justified as an economical need and not as a matter of personal convenience. Vehicles may be rented when:
  1. Local transportation is not available.
  2. Schedules do not permit the use of local transportation.
  3. The cost of local transportation equals or exceeds the cost of renting an automobile.

All rentals will be at a corporate rate or lowest possible rate per day. When traveling in groups, sharing of cars will be practiced to minimize costs.

- c. Car rentals will be reimbursed on the following scale:
  1. 1-2 people Compact size auto
  2. 3-4 people Mid-size auto
  3. 5 people Full size auto

If special circumstances dictate, the County Representative may get a larger car if authorized by his/her supervisor. Cars must be equipped with standard accessories unless special circumstances require additional equipment.

- d. The County Representative shall accept the Collision Damage Waiver ("CDW") insurance, but reject any other insurance offered by the rental agency.
- e. The County Representative shall return the rental car with a full tank of gas, otherwise the County is charged a premium rate if the car rental agency refills the tank. Receipts for gasoline purchases are required for reimbursement.
- f. Car rental contracts and/or express checkout receipts are to be submitted as documentation for reimbursement.

#### D. Registration

- 1. Registration fees for conferences or seminars are reimbursable when supported by receipts.
- 2. Whenever possible, advance registration should be used.

#### E. Miscellaneous

##### 1. Parking and Shuttle Services

- a. Parking at Atlanta Hartsfield is strongly discouraged. Use of one of the many "park-n-fly" lots just outside the airport grounds is encouraged.
- b. Park-n-fly lots will be less expensive than Hartsfield and provide shuttle service to the terminal
- c. Parking and shuttle services will be reimbursed **when supported by receipts.**

##### 2. Business Meals

- a. Some officials and members of management are required to meet with persons of other government jurisdictions and professional institutions from which an exchange of information can be obtained that will prove beneficial to the County. When, in the opinion of the official or manager, there has been such an exchange, they may deem it appropriate to pay for the meal as a form of "thank you".

b. Such meals may be reimbursed pursuant to the following stipulations:

1. The requesting party is a Commissioner, elected official, member of the County Administrator's office or department head or equivalent.
2. A receipt is provided.
3. The Travel Expense Form contains on its face:
  - a. Restaurant name and location
  - b. Name and affiliation of the person(s) for whom the meal was purchased.
  - c. The purpose of the business discussion. UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES WILL THE EXPLANATION "BUSINESS DISCUSSION" BE ALLOWED. YOU MUST MAKE REFERENCE TO THE SPECIFIC TOPIC/ PROJECT DISCUSSED.

**F. Non-Allowable Expenses**

1. It is the County's policy to reimburse the County Representative for all reasonable and necessary expenses incurred in transacting the affairs of business; however, there are specific types of expenses which are considered to be of a truly personal nature and are not allowable.
  - a. Air travel and other personal trip insurance.
  - b. Barber, manicurist, shoe polisher, masseur, or the like.
  - c. Items of personal use.
  - d. Expenses of family members.
  - e. Alcohol or alcohol related products, tobacco or tobacco related products, electronic cigarettes or electronic cigarette related products, or other similar items.
  - f. Entertainment expenses (such as airline headsets, theater, movies, and sporting events) of the County Representative

while traveling unless incurred providing reimbursable entertainment for customers or others.

- g. Personal reading materials or services.
- h. Repairs, maintenance, or insurance on personal vehicles.
- i. Traffic fines and court costs.
- j. Unauthorized club or other membership dues or fees.
- k. Unauthorized trips, entertainment, gifts, or donations.
- l. Tips.
- m. Items not in compliance with this Policy.
- n. Items in violation of Georgia law.

2. County Representatives are responsible for lost or stolen personal property while traveling on County business.
3. County-owned property for which the County Representative is responsible while at their home worksite continues to be their responsibility if taken away from the office while traveling.

## **VIII. Procedures for Requesting for Authorization to Travel**

- A. When it becomes necessary to travel, the requesting party shall prepare and submit a Travel Expense Form (Exhibit A). The form should be submitted so as to allow sufficient time for the authorizing party to access it. The form must be approved by the authorizing party as indicated in Section V, Subsection C above.
- B. The “Estimated Expenses to be Incurred” column must be completed in its entirety to enable the authorizing party to compare anticipated trip costs against available budget. This column is for registration fees or hotels prepayments, the details about which should be attached to the form. Include confirmation numbers when they are provided.
- C. When approved:
  1. The ORIGINAL Travel Expense Form containing Estimated Expenses of the Travel Expense Form shall be forwarded to County Administrator for approval prior to travel. .

2. A copy of the **approved** form should be retained by the originating department to be submitted with the requisition upon return (see Section IX).

## **IX. Expense Reimbursement Procedures**

- A. Upon returning from an authorized trip, the requesting party shall present the authorizing party (shown under Section V, Subsection C above) with a complete itemization of all weekly trip expenses on a Travel Expense Form (Exhibit B).
- B. The completed Travel Expense Form shall be prepared summarizing all expenses incurred and deducting any prepayments and/or travel advances, and submitted to the authorizing party within five (5) days after returning from a trip.
- C. The Travel Expense Form shall be prepared accurately, completely, and should include all required receipts and explanations to facilitate its review, understanding, and processing. Direct payments (registration/hotel, etc.) to the County Representative should be deducted and a net amount due to or from the County Representative shown.
- D. The County Administrator's Office shall review all Travel Expense Forms to determine mathematical accuracy, cross-reference amounts claimed to appropriate receipts, and review the appropriateness of expenditures in accordance with this policy.
- E. Submission of inaccurate Travel Expense Forms will result in return for correction and resubmission and possible disallowance of amounts requested to be reimbursed.
- F. A County Representative who knowingly submits a false claim for reimbursement will be subject to disciplinary action.
- G. Travel Expense Forms are not required for expenses less than twenty (\$20.00) dollars that are not associated with pre-approved travel. All expenses less than twenty (\$20.00) dollars should be reimbursed from the local department's petty cash fund and need not be forwarded to the County Administrators office.