

# Council Policy 1-01 Employee Travel

**DISTRIBUTION:** All Departments

**EFFECTIVE DATE:** November 5, 2024

**SUBJECT:** Employee travel

**PURPOSE:** To establish a standardized travel policy when requesting to attend schools, conferences, conventions, job related training, or official travel and to provide employees guidance on allowable expenditures and the proper means to document those expenditures. This policy offers direction to employees who are traveling for public business purposes, which are properly approved before the travel occurs, and assists with accountability of all travel expenses upon return.

**BACKGROUND:** The policy provides the administrative regulations governing all travel on behalf of the City of Lawton. Such travel includes being out of town on City business, training, seminars, workshops, professional conferences overnight or local vicinity travel. To protect the interests of the City, its council members, and its employees, the following procedures govern reimbursement.

This policy sets out standard guidelines for expense reimbursement , deviations from this policy may result in the employee not being reimbursed for their travel.

## **PROCEDURES:**

### **1. General Provisions**

- i. Travel arrangements and payment of travel expenses will be made in accordance with guidelines established herein.
- ii. All overnight trips must be authorized in advance by completing the Travel and Training Authorization Form and signed by the proper approval authority:
  - i. Trip estimated cost totals less than \$3,499 - Department Director
  - ii. Trip estimated cost totals more than \$3,500- Department Director and Finance Director are both required to sign
  - iii. Any employee taking more than two out-of-state trips per fiscal year must have a Travel and Training Authorization Form signed by their Deputy City Manager (or the City Manager for the Police and Fire Chiefs and City Attorney).

Once signed, the Travel & Training Authorization will need to be attached to any claims submitted for cash advances or reimbursements.

- iii. Funds for travel expenses must be appropriated in the approved annual budget.
- iv. Travel expenses shall be paid only for officials representing the City of Lawton. Expenses for spouses, friends, and business associates will not be reimbursed , nor shall they be charged on the city creditcard.

- v. For any travel that is grant funded, the travel reimbursement will be completed in accordance with the grantor's policy (e.g., Oklahoma State grants will follow the State's travel policy).
- vi. Advance approval from the appropriate Deputy City Manager or City Manager is required when travel is being funded by a commercial vendor.

## 2. Out-of-Town Travel

### i. Registration

- i. The City will pay the registration for City-related workshops, conferences and seminars via a City of Lawton issued Credit Card or a Payment Authorization. Special events and tours that are not job-related and are leisure activities are not allowable expenses. Accidental use of a City issued Credit Card will be immediately reported to their Director. The employee is financially responsible to remit payment for all unapproved purchases.
- ii. Reimbursement will not be made for meals provided at a hotel, conference, seminar, or convention when a meal(s) is included as part of the registration, or otherwise provided at no charge to the employee. Whether or not the employee partakes in the meal is not relevant when deducting the meal amount from the per diem allotment. A continental breakfast will not be deducted from per diem amounts. If the employee has any dietary restrictions and will not be able to partake in an otherwise provided meal the City will pay per diem for that meal(s) provided that the employee provides evidence of the restriction.

### ii. **Transportation** - Employees are expected to utilize the most economic mode of transportation available. Each department is responsible for making transportation arrangements.

- i. **Commercial Airfare** - Air travel should be considered when travel distance exceeds two hundred (200) miles one way. The City will prepay expenses for airfare or public transportation. These expenses should not exceed the cost of a round trip coach ticket with no add-ons (extra leg room, early boarding, etc.) fees.
- ii. **Rental Vehicle** - Normally Rental Vehicles are not an authorized expense. However, it is recognized that under some circumstances a rental may be necessary. Rental cars will be limited to a compact size vehicle. Documentation for the justification is required when submitting the Travel Expense Report. The City is self-insured, and it is not necessary to take out additional insurance. A copy of the City's insurance paperwork can be obtained before departure. Additional insurance will not be a reimbursable expense.
- iii. **Ground Transportation and Parking** - Cab fare (e.g., taxi, uber or lyft), tolls, shuttles and parking fees incurred while on City business are reimbursable expenses. Parking at the airport will be reimbursed at the

lowest rate available.

- iv. **City Vehicle** - Employees are encouraged to use a City owned vehicle when traveling on City business. Reimbursements when using a city vehicle are limited to tolls, gasoline, parking, and other related expenses enroute to and from a destination. Reimbursement will be made only for expenses justified with itemized receipts .
- v. **Private Vehicle** - In certain limited circumstances travel in a privately owned vehicle maybe permitted with prior approval of the Department Director.
  - 1. Reimbursement amounts will be the IRS established rate at the time of travel. Mileage reimbursement will be calculated from the Traveler's starting locality. Travel reimbursement requests should include the route from either MapQuest or Google Maps. Expenses that result from unjustified excursions from the travel route will not be reimbursed.
  - 2. Toll fees and parking fees for a private vehicle are eligible expenses for reimbursement. The City will NOT be responsible for any other automobile related expenses when travel occurs in a privately owned vehicle. If a City-owned vehicle is unavailable, then other expenses related to the privately owned vehicle may be reimbursable.

If an employee requests to use a private vehicle for travel that normally would be provided by airfare, the employee's reimbursement will not exceed the cost of the most economical airfare. Due to fluctuations in airfare, the comparison rate will be established and documented, in writing, and attached to the Travel and Training Authorization and approved by the Department Director at the time other reservations are made. No lodging in route (round trip) will be allowed for any employee electing to drive a private vehicle when air flights are available , unless carpooling is shown to reduce the overall cost of the trip.
  - 3. Employees may use a City credit card or will be reimbursed for parking, toll fees, etc., at actual cost when itemized receipts are provided.

### iii. Lodging

- i. The City will pay for reasonable and appropriate actual lodging expenses upon submission of an itemized hotel receipt. Employees are encouraged to inquire about discounted or government lodging rates. Moreover, city employees are encouraged to inquire about a possible tax exemption for official travel hotel stays.
- ii. Employees are encouraged to secure lodging at a conference-hosted hotel at the conference discount rate if available.

- iii. The City will not reimburse the employee for additional expenses charged to the room (such as charges for suite upgrades, sitting rooms, movies, pornography, room service, valet parking, mini bar charges or other higher cost arrangements). Any amount that is charged to a City credit card that is deemed un-reimbursable will be reimbursed to the City by the employee.

#### **iv. Meals & Incidentals**

Payment for meals is based on the General Services Administration (GSA) per diem rate at <https://www.gsa.gov/travel/plan-book/per-diem-rates> . Note these rates include M&IE (meals & incidentals) .

- i. Alcoholic beverages are not reimbursable under any circumstance.
- ii. Meals will be reimbursed for City of Lawton employees only.
- iii. If the employee received an advance on meal per diems and returns early, then the employee must repay the difference between the advance and the actual M&IE entitlement.
- iv. Reference the GSA website above to find the M&IE rates per day an employee shall receive. Meals NOT included in registration fees are eligible for reimbursement.
- v. Departures to/ Arrivals from:
  - Traveling to/Departures to: Use the "First & Last Day of Travel" column, of the standard rate line. Employees will receive the total of this rate for the "travel to" day.
  - Returning from/Arrival from: Use the "First & Last Day of Travel" column, of the destination rate (the city from which the employee is traveling from). Employees will receive the total of this rate for the "travel from" day.
- vi. Receipts do not need to be turned in for Per Diem expenses.
- vii. Single Day Travel
  - If an employee is doing single day travel (leave from the city of Lawton and return to the city of Lawton within one day), employee will receive the total for "First & Last Day of Travel" on the GSA website on the standard rate line.

If the employee has any dietary restrictions and will not be able to partake in an otherwise provided meal the City will pay per diem for that meal(s). To ensure the correct per diem amount is calculated, provide dietary restriction information on the Travel and Training Authorization form, Section 16 (Remarks/Justifications).

#### **v. Miscellaneous Expense Information**

- i. Miscellaneous fees or expenses (e.g., baggage fees, tolls, or other items) will be reimbursed at actual cost.
- ii. The City will not reimburse for personal items, services, or entertainment, including without limitation toiletries, medicine, clothing, grooming, laundry, dry cleaning, movies, snacks, or alcoholic beverages.
- iii. The employees shall be held responsible for exercising good judgment, practicability, and reasonableness with expenses incurred. Reimbursement claims that appear excessive will require additional documentation and justification. If it is determined the additional documentation is insufficient, those charges shall not be reimbursed.
- iv. Employees must request in advance and receive approval from the Department Director and Assistant City Manager and/or City Manager if training travel is combined with a personal vacation . Under no circumstance will the City reimburse any personal expenses.

#### **vi. Travel Payment and Reimbursement Procedures**

- Payment Authorization Form
- Travel and Training Authorization Form
- For conferences or training , including a copy of the official conference brochure or agenda and completed registration form, which indicates the meeting location, dates of the conference, and costs
- Airline itinerary, ticket stubs, or electronic ticket information

#### **vii. Travel Expense Report**

When the Traveler returns, a Travel Expense Report needs to be completed within fourteen (14) days of travel and

- i. The Travel Expense Report should include all expenses from the trip.
- ii. Include copies of receipts from all expenses (Excluding receipts for meals (unless a City Credit Card is used for meals). Per Diem expenses do not require receipts.
- iii. If any additional expenses need reimbursement, turn in a payment authorization with the Travel Expense Report.

#### **viii. Additional Information**

##### **i. Attendance and Conduct**

1. Traveling on behalf of the City and using public funds is a privilege. As an employee, you are expected to attend the

conference and training sessions. Be good stewards of taxpayer dollars.

2. An employee found to be absent from a substantial portion of the conference, seminar, sessions, or other activity without good and justifiable cause will be subject to disciplinary actions in accordance with the applicable Personnel Policies.
3. Any employee who performs any action that reflects poorly upon the City of Lawton; is involved in any conduct that is offensive; violates the common decency or morality of the community, or whose conduct is unbecoming of an employee will be subject to disciplinary actions in accordance with the City's Personnel Policies.

## **ii. Cancellations**

1. If registration, lodging , and/or transportation has been prepaid by the City and the employee is unable to complete the intended travel, the employee and sponsoring department are required to follow up on the cancellation policy of the sponsoring organization and lodging site. All possible means are to be explored to obtain refunds, partial refunds, or options for substituting another employee.
2. The employee must provide written justification, which is approved by the Department Director, to explain and justify the reason for their inability to travel as previously arranged . This written justification must be submitted to the Director of Finance.

## **iii. Refunds**

1. The sponsoring department and the employee have the responsibility for the oversight and administration of seeking refunds to the City and depositing those refunds with the Finance Department.
2. Any refunds the City obtains due to cancellations or overpayments must be deposited with the Finance Department. Any such refund received can be credited back to the department's budget; within the same fiscal year, by providing the original funding information to the Finance Department Designee with the refund.
3. If the City refund is payable to the employee, it must be endorsed to the City, delivered to, and received by the Finance Department.
4. If the refund is credited to the employee's personal credit card, the claimant is responsible for reimbursing the Finance Department for any amount due the City.

**3. Waiver of Travel Rules for Non-Employees**

For any non-employees traveling to conduct official City business—including but not limited to keynote speakers, guest lecturers, subject matter experts, or other similar individuals—the City will waive all standard travel policies and restrictions when an agreement specifies that the City will cover all travel expenses.

- i. This waiver applies exclusively to cases where a formal contract or agreement is in place, confirming the City's responsibility for covering transportation, lodging, meals, and other related travel costs.
- ii. All reimbursable expenses will be processed according to the terms outlined in the agreement, and contracted individuals are expected to submit relevant receipts and documentation per the City's reimbursement procedure.

**REFERENCES** : None

**RESCISSION** : This police rescinds Council Policy 1-01 dated December 14, 2021.

Approved by City Council this \_\_\_\_ day of November, 2024.

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STANLEY BOOKER, MAYOR

ATTEST:

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DONALYNN BLAZEK-SCHERLER, CITY CLERK

APPROVED AS TO FORM AND LEGALITY THIS \_\_\_\_ DAY OF NOVEMBER, 2024.

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JOHN R. ANDREW, CITY ATTORNEY