

BERTIE COUNTY GOVERNMENT



TRAVEL POLICY

Revised October 2015

It is the intent of this policy to provide Bertie County Departments and agencies a comprehensive reference for uniform interpretation of payment or reimbursement for travel expenses pertaining to official travel and subsistence.



Bertie County Government Travel Policy

Section 1: Purpose

The intent of this policy is to make uniform provision for reimbursement of necessary expenses of County employees or officials of the County who are required to travel within or out of the County boundaries in the performance of their duties and in the interest of County affairs.

Section 2: Policy Administration

All respective Department Heads are responsible for the administration of the provisions in this policy. Department Heads are authorized to approve or disapprove of travel reimbursements for the employees under their supervision except where otherwise stated.

Section 3: Employee and Board Member Responsibility

An employee, board member, county commissioner, or county official traveling on official County business is expected to exercise the same care in incurring expenses that a prudent person would exercise if traveling on personal business and expending personal funds. Excess costs, circuitous routes, luxury accommodations, and services unnecessary or unjustified in the performance of official business are not acceptable under this policy.

Employees and board members will be responsible for unauthorized costs and any additional expenses incurred for personal preference or convenience. Employees and board members are expected to be in attendance at all meetings in which they are traveling. Willful violations of this policy may result in dismissal from County employment or other disciplinary action.

Section 4: Definitions and General Policies

A. Travel

Bertie County recognizes that employees, board members, department heads, commissioners, and county officials are required to travel both within and without of the State of North Carolina for the purpose of representing the County at meetings and professional associations, as well as for training to enhance their skills regarding the performance of their various positions within the County

Government. Specific protocols will be outlined for in-state and out-of-state travel in Section 6 of this policy.

B. Employee's Duty Station

Duty station is defined as the job location at which the employee has been assigned.

For an employee in travel status, the duty station should be the point when traveling begins the majority of the time, usually their office setting or building.

The designation of an employee's home as the duty station should be used if the mileage will be less, and there is no reason for the employee to begin traveling from the office.

C. Registration Fees

The County allows reasonable registration fees for employees, department heads, board members, commissioners, and county officials to be paid for each occurrence. They may be paid by the employee and then be reimbursed, or be paid directly by the County. The County requires itemized receipts for reimbursement.

Efforts should be made to secure scholarships from any professional organizations to cover registration fees for representatives of the County when at all possible.

D. Requesting Party

The person completing the required travel (county employee, department head, county commissioner, board member, or county official) and who will also submit reimbursement that is appropriately itemized and documented for eligible travel costs incurred while conducting County business.

E. Meal Reimbursement Types & Rates

Expenses for meals within and without of lodging venues are expected to be reasonable.

The County offers two options regarding meals during travel.

Option 1: Reimbursement for the cost of meals in connection with County business will be paid at the following rates: breakfast \$10.00, lunch \$12.00, and dinner \$22.00 including tip/gratuity. Gratuity is allowable at 15%.

Detailed, itemized receipts showing all items purchased must be turned in for reimbursement when using this option.

Reimbursement for partial day travel may be made as follows: breakfast may be reimbursed if duty station is departed prior to 7:00AM. Lunch may be reimbursed if duty station is departed prior to 10:00AM and returned to after 2:00PM. Dinner may be reimbursed if duty station is returned to after 8:00PM.

Reimbursement will be made according to each meal as listed above, but only for the amount of the receipt plus gratuity.

Itemized receipts are required before reimbursement can be dispersed by the Finance Office.

Meal items and other expenses that are NOT reimbursable are listed in Section 9 of this policy.

Option 2: In lieu of itemized receipts, a County employee, County Department Head, board member, or County Commissioner may opt to use a “per diem” system which would include a daily rate travel advance for meals **not to exceed \$30 per day**.

The request for such an advance must be completed using the County’s Travel Advance Form, and be turned into the Finance Department at least 1 week prior to date of travel.

For more information about Travel Advances, please see Section 12 of this policy.

F. Mileage Allowance

The amount authorized to be paid on a per-mile basis for travel by privately owned vehicles will be determined and/or revised each fiscal year according to the IRS rate.

If you are unsure about the current mileage reimbursement rate, contact the Finance Office.

Mileage will be paid beginning at the office or home, whichever is closest to the destination.

Authorized travel modes are outlined in Section 5.

G. Travel Sheet

A travel sheet is a form that a County employee, “the traveler,” will use upon completion of a specific trip, or trips, within a given time period prescribed by the Department Head.

This form lists all mileage, private or public transportation, lodging, meals, registration fees (if not paid in advance), and other eligible travel expenses for reimbursement. **ALL** receipts are required to be fully itemized and attached to the travel sheet before being submitted to the Department Head for approval.

ALL reimbursement requests shall be filed for approval and payment within 30 days after the travel period ends for which the reimbursement is being requested. Travel period is defined as the calendar month during which the travel occurred.

All travel sheets must be approved by the Department Head before being presented to the Finance Office for reimbursement, and the Department Head’s signature must be secured.

PLEASE NOTE: If employees are requesting reimbursement for meal expenses, a copy of the agenda/program received at the conference or event should also be attached showing any meals provided by the host/professional organization.

Section 5: Authorized Travel Modes

A. County-owned vehicle

This method of transportation is to be used whenever a county vehicle is available. The Department Head may authorize reimbursement to the employee for exact operation expenses in circumstances where direct credit charges cannot be paid directly by the County (i.e. gas or fuel expenses).

B. Privately owned vehicle

When a County vehicle is unavailable for use, this mode of transportation may be used if specifically authorized by the appropriate Department Head. Reimbursement for operational expense shall be limited to the mileage allowance listed in Section 4-F.

C. Transportation by Common Carrier

Reimbursement for air, rail, or bus fare is limited to business or coach fare, substantiated by an itemized receipt.

PLEASE NOTE: Every effort should be made to obtain the lowest travel fares as much as possible.

D. Rental Vehicles

Reimbursement for rental vehicles will not be authorized without prior approval by the Finance Officer or the County Manager.

If approved, the rented vehicle should be secured at the lowest practical rate, and returned to the respective vendor as promptly as possible.

Section 6: Travel Destination(s)

A. Inside the County (Local Travel)

County employees and county officials who are required within the normal nature of their duties to travel regularly within the County and who are authorized to do so by the Department Head, are eligible for reimbursement of transportation expense.

County Commissioners receive a monthly travel stipend as compensation for all in-county travel, therefore mileage reimbursement for in-county travel is excluded.

B. Outside of the County (Out of Area Travel, excluding Out of State Travel)

Approved travel expenses outside of the County for county purposes or purposes in the best interest of the County, such as a training, conference, professional meeting, etc., may be reimbursed to the limits already set forth in this policy for:

1. Transportation cost
2. Lodging
3. Meals
4. Registration Costs (if not paid in advance)
5. Necessary miscellaneous expenses (parking fees, tolls, etc.)
PLEASE NOTE: Reasonable efforts must be made to secure affordable parking options (self-parking) before using a parking service (valet parking).

C. Out-of-State Travel

Out-of-state travel begins when the County employee, county official, board member, or commissioner leaves the State of North Carolina and remains in effect until the individual returns to the State of North Carolina.

PLEASE NOTE: Out-of-state travel requests by employees, board members, county officials, commissioners, and Department Heads must be approved in advance by the County Manager.

All efforts must be made in securing reasonable, cost effective travel arrangements when traveling out-of-state as practiced with all other travel outlined in this policy.

D. Travel with Others

When two or more employees are traveling to the same destination, maximum use shall be made of special group travel discounts and joint use of the transportation including taxi cabs, County-owned, or privately owned vehicles. Travel with representatives of other government units is encouraged whenever possible.

E. Other Travel Costs

Reasonable parking fees, tolls, taxi charges, and expenses of a similar nature, when appropriate during travel, are reimbursable upon submission of appropriate documentation of the same.

The Finance Officer or the County Manager shall approve or disapprove of all other expense reimbursements not clearly defined in this policy or those which have been questioned.

F. Commuting

No reimbursement shall be made for use of a personal vehicle in commuting from an individual's home to his/her duty station (office).

G. Timeline of Travel

In the event that a conference or program begins before 10:00am, an employee, county official, commissioner, board member, or an otherwise deemed county representative may proceed to their destination the night prior to the start of the event.

This option should only be used if the conference location is 2 or more hours away from the individuals home or duty station.

For example, a conference's first session is slated to begin at 9:00am. The event location is in Raleigh, NC. An employee may preemptively travel to Raleigh the night before in order to be fully ready to participate in conference events the next day.

Supportive documentation, such as a copy of the event agenda/program, must be submitted with a completed, Department Head approved travel sheet if reimbursement claims are sought for fulfillment.

Section 7: Lodging

Lodging will be reimbursed at an amount not to exceed \$125 per night, plus applicable taxes. Prior approval from the County Manager must be received for rates exceeding \$125 per night.

PLEASE NOTE: All reasonable efforts must be made in a timely fashion to secure a lower group rate within a conference/training hotel room block (if available) or a local/State government rate when booking lodging reservations. Employees should also familiarize themselves with all cancellation policies, and make every effort to avoid cancellation fees being charged to their department or to the County.

Reimbursement of lodging expenses incurred in counties contiguous to Bertie County will not be authorized without prior approval by the Finance Officer or the County Manager.

If more than one employee occupies the same hotel room, the total lodging expense should be reported on only one employee's travel sheet.

When another person, who is not an employee, occupies the same hotel room with an employee, county official, board member, or Department Head on an authorized trip, the employee must pay the difference between the single and double room occupancy rates (if applicable).

Itemized hotel folios/bills should be attached to travel reimbursement sheets, or turned into the designated individual when the County credit card is used to pre-pay any employee room reservations.

Section 8: County Credit Card

Employees and officials authorized to use a County credit card may elect to use them instead of seeking reimbursement; however, meals and lodging are still subject to the rates listed in Section 4-E, and Section 7.

Itemized receipts for all credit card expenditures must be submitted to the designated individual tasked with compiling the County credit statement each month which will then be submitted to the Finance Office for approval.

Section 9: Ineligible Expenses for Travel Reimbursement

A. The following items are considered ineligible for travel reimbursement:

1. Miscellaneous expenses not supported by itemized receipts
2. Meals prepaid as part of a registration fee
3. Meals purchased despite a prepaid meal being available within a registration fee
4. Commute to and from work place (see Section 6-F)
5. Gift shop purchases such as snacks, beverages, toiletries, gifts, souvenirs, or other personal items
6. Additional subsistence outside of the 3 allotted meals per day (see Section 4-E)
7. Items purchased to be used as door prizes or raffle items
8. Non-employee expenses (spouse, or family members)
9. Alcoholic beverages
10. Entertainment expenses (hotel movie rentals, elective events or activities such as shopping, sporting events, social events not included in registration fees, etc.)
11. Room Service
12. Traffic fines/citations

This list is not all-inclusive. The Finance Officer or County Manager shall approve or disapprove of all other expense reimbursements not clearly defined in this policy or those which may require interpretation for further consideration.

The County Manager is authorized to interpret and make reimbursement decisions on a case-by-case basis as conditions may warrant.

B. Telephone Calls

Employees, board members, county officials, commissioners, and department heads are not allowed to charge long distance phone calls to the County for calls of a personal nature, except as stated below.

All long distance calls that are to be paid by the County are those made pursuant to the employee conducting official County business.

An employee traveling to a location outside the local calling area is allowed one (1) “safe arrival” call upon arriving at the destination.

Additionally, employees may be properly reimbursed for emergency calls approved by the Department Head. An example of such is a call made when an employee calls home to inform someone that the travel period has been extended beyond original plans due to unforeseen reasons.

Section 10: Extraordinary Travel or Cost

In instances of travel not covered by this policy, or where the actual necessary costs exceed the maximum reimbursement allowed and the travel is in the best interest of the County, the County Manager may approve reimbursement of actual cost beyond the maximums stated herein.

Section 11: Travel Expenses not Addressed by this Policy

Any expenses falling outside the realm of this policy must be approved by the County Manager.

Section 12: Travel Advances

For “Out of the Area Travel” and “Out of State Travel (Sections 6-B and 6-C),” County employees, county officials, Department Heads, and commissioners may receive advances for travel expenses to avoid personal inconvenience or hardships. Using the approved travel advance form, the individual must submit a request in writing in advance to the respective Department Head estimating the travel cost.

The Department Head will then review the request and forward the signed and approved travel allowance advance forms to the Finance Office for payment.

Travel advance checks will not be issued for estimated expenses less than \$100.00.

Each employee traveling must obtain his/her own travel advance to facilitate easier reconciliation of travel advances and trip sheets, except in cases where more than one employee occupies the same hotel room. In that case, the entire lodging cost will be advanced to one employee.

Travel advances will be issued through the accounts payable process, so plan ahead to meet the accounts payable cutoff deadline.

Immediately upon completion of the travel, the employee will present an approved travel sheet to the Finance Department and return any money advanced in excess of the actual approved expenses within five (5) working days to the Finance Department. Any amount advanced and subject to return to the County, not promptly refunded, may be deducted from pay due the employee.

Section 13: Travel Procedure

- A. The travel sheet and supporting itemized receipts will be submitted to the Department Head for approval. Department Heads should review travel sheets to determine that they are mathematically correct, and that requested reimbursements agree to submitted receipts, when required, and are within the limits set forth by this policy. After approval by the Department Head is received, the form should then be forwarded to the Finance Office.

- B. The Finance Department will determine that the travel sheet and receipts have been properly approved, and that they are mathematically correct, and that requested reimbursements agree to the submitted itemized receipts, when required, and are within the limits set forth by this policy.

If an error in the reimbursement is found, the requesting party will be informed and the error will be corrected before payment is made.

- C. Trip Cancellation

When an employee cancels an approved trip and the County has already paid airfare, registration, and other related fees or issued a travel advance, a memo must be sent to the Finance Office explaining the cancellation.

Section 14: The Governing Body

Commissioners (members of the Governing Body) will receive reimbursement once a travel sheet has been submitted and reviewed by the Finance Officer and approved by the County Manager. Commissioners may be reimbursed for expenses incurred in the course of conducting official business on behalf of Bertie County.

ALL travel sheets should be submitted with itemized, detailed receipts.

Section 15: Accurate Information

A requesting party that knowingly submits a falsified reimbursement form may be subject to disciplinary action and criminal prosecution. An authorized party who approves a falsified form that they know to be false will be subject to disciplinary action or criminal prosecution. N.C.G.S. §159-181 (a) states that an officer or employee of a local

government or public authority who submits a written claim of approves a claim for funds that he/she knows to be false is guilty of a misdemeanor.

This policy was adopted on the **5th** day of **October**, 2015.