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City of Columbus Travel Procedures and Guidelines		



I. Introduction

The following travel guidelines, effective **December 1, 2019**, were prepared by Columbus City Auditor Megan N. Kilgore. These guidelines are to be used to supplement the “Travel” directive. ***The necessary forms are located on the Division’s intranet by clicking the “Online Forms” link.***

II. General Requirements

A. Policy

These regulations establish a standard procedure for reimbursing officials and employees of the City of Columbus for authorized expenses incurred while traveling on City business, attending conferences, conventions, or such activities which are deemed to have a municipal purpose.

B. Audit of Travel Expense Reports

The City Auditor has the authority to question any item of expense for which reimbursement is asked and may refuse to pay, modify, or reduce any item which is unreasonable or incompatible with present travel costs (Reference Columbus City Ordinance 1187-60).

C. Definitions

1. Activity: Any conference, convention, seminar, school, meeting, or similar municipal affair will henceforth be referred to as an activity.
2. Travel: Travel on City business where overnight lodging is required.
3. Traveler: Any elected or appointed City officer or other employee of the City who is attending an activity on behalf of the City of Columbus will henceforth be referred to as a traveler.

D. Approval

1. Prior to attendance at any activity, the benefit of the activity to the City must be approved by the appropriate **Department Director**.
2. In order for all actual, necessary, and reasonable expenses to be reimbursed, the responsible department shall have the **appropriate Budget Reservation Travel Encumbrance (BRTE) form(s)** certified by the City Auditor prior to any obligation being incurred by the City. ***The responsible department must verify that the monies have been appropriated and not encumbered for any other purpose in an amount sufficient to pay the estimated expenses.***

3. The **Travel Encumbrance** – B RTE **Form** provides multiple lines for the appropriate vendor numbers for registration fees and airline costs. Use only the appropriate vendor numbers. When registration fees are part of the costs, attach a copy of the registration documents. If registration fees or airline tickets should be paid in advance, so indicate in the explanation section.

Note: **This form** is not intended to be used for local mileage.

4. If travel is funded and/or to be reimbursed via grant funding, the City Auditor hereby recognizes and permits the travel, lodging, and per diem amounts as provided by the grant. All grant expenditures require valid receipt for proof of payment.

E. Reporting

Upon return from an eligible activity:

1. **Within 45 days of return from a trip, each traveler shall individually complete and submit the Travel Expenses – Reimbursement Request form with the proper vouchers to Fiscal Operations Section personnel.** Each traveler shall claim only his or her own expenses unless otherwise specifically approved by the City Auditor.
2. Reimbursable items shall be actual, reasonable, and necessary expenses incurred while attending an eligible activity.
3. Receipts should be obtained whenever practicable.
 - a. Receipts are required for such items as lodging, travel, registration fees, and extraordinary expenses that are an integral part of the activity.
 - b. Receipts are not required for meals **or the allowable incidental expenses.**
 - c. Receipts are required for taxi fares, bus, other local public transportation, or transportation network companies such as Uber and Lyft only when practicable.
 - d. Upon return from a trip involving City-charged air travel, the traveler should properly voucher reimbursable travel expenses incurred, including applicable normal baggage charges for up to one (1) carry-on item and one (1) piece of checked baggage. A copy of the airline ticket or other evidence of the charge, including baggage fees, should also be attached to the **Travel Expenses – Reimbursement Request form.**
 - e. Frequent flyer miles awarded as a result of flights paid for by the City are to be used only in conjunction with other City-authorized flights and are not for personal use.
4. It is expected that every traveler will be as prudent and mature in handling City funds as his or her own.

F. Excluded Items

The City of Columbus will not reimburse the traveler for **entertainment** expenses or expenses incurred on behalf of any non-City employee for any reason.

III. Specifications and Guidelines

A. Living Expenses

1. Meals *and Incidentals*

- a. ***Travelers may only receive reimbursement for meals and incidentals in accordance with the rates established by the Government Services Administration (GSA), which are based on lodging location. Refer to the GSA’s website (<https://www.gsa.gov/travel/plan-book/per-diem-rates/mie-breakdown>) to determine the exact rates based on the state and city.***
- b. ***On the days the traveler begins or ends travel, the GSA reimbursement rate for meals is set at 75 percent of the full-day allowance.***
- c. Meal allowances for areas outside of the continental United States will be ***set by the U.S. Department of State and may be obtained on the U.S. Department of State, Office of Allowances website (<https://aoprals.state.gov/>).***
- d. Special meals that exceed the reasonable cost allowance are reimbursable when they are an integral part of the activity, receipted, itemized, and explained on the expense report.
- e. If a meal(s) is (are) included as part of the registration fee from the activity being attended, the normal allowance for that meal will not be reimbursed.
- f. There will be no meal allowances for “same day travel”—that is, when a traveler leaves home and returns home on the same day.

2. Lodging

- a. Reimbursement for lodging will be made only if ***submitted with an itemized receipt that clearly reflects the room description and rate, taxes, and all other charges. The*** receipts must accompany the travel expense report.
- b. No allowance for lodging expenses may be claimed:
 - (1) Within Franklin County
 - (2) Within the county of residence from which the employee commutes to his or her headquarters
 - (3) Within fifty miles of the employee’s residence ***or regular work location***
- c. ***The*** reasonable, actual single-room rate only is reimbursable.
- d. ***If a traveler chooses to use lodging other than a single hotel room, such as an airbnb or another short-term rental, the total cost of both options must be submitted on the Travel Cost Comparison Worksheet, and the traveler will be reimbursed the lower amount.***

3. **Miscellaneous** Expenses

- a. Expenses incurred for laundry and dry cleaning may be reimbursed if the employee is in continuous travel status in excess of five days without returning home during that time. These items must be receipted and itemized.
- b. **Expenses incurred for baggage, internet connections, faxes, copies, express mail services, or telephone calls on official City business and for rental of equipment or temporary office facilities for meetings necessary for the conduct of official City business may be reimbursed. These items must be receipted and itemized.**

B. Travel

1. Personal Automobile Usage

- a. Columbus City Ordinance 1739-94 provides that travelers may be reimbursed at a rate equal to the Internal Revenue Service's allowable rate for business mileage for use of privately owned vehicles for transportation on any City business in or out of the City of Columbus.
- b. Use of private vehicles will be authorized when it is **within 300 miles of the City of Columbus**, the lowest available travel fare, or for the convenience of the City.
- c. **If approved to use a private vehicle for convenience of the traveler, the City shall limit reimbursement to the lower of either the amount of the lowest coach airline fare, fee for one piece of checked baggage, airport parking, and local ground transportation at the destination; or actual mileage traveled multiplied by the current mileage rate.**
 - (1) When reimbursement for mileage in lieu of air fare is claimed, no allowance will be paid for lodging, meals, or other expenses en route that would not have been incurred if commercial transportation had been used.
 - (2) Road and bridge tolls are reimbursable so long as the sum of such tolls and the mileage reimbursement do not exceed the coach air fare, **baggage, airport parking, and local transportation** allowance. If **the** destination is not served by air, fare to the nearest terminal will be allowed and mileage will be allowed for round trip from that terminal city to destination.
- d. Reimbursement will be based upon AAA mileage charts. Excess mileage claimed for reimbursement must be substantiated as necessary and reasonable on the **Travel Expenses – Reimbursement Request form**.
- e. Mileage is payable to only one of two or more employees traveling on the same trip and in the same vehicle.

b. Allowable items shall include:

- (1) Airport/hotel **local transportation** service, taxi **or rideshare** fares, parking garages, transportation network company fares, or other local transportation (receipts required when practicable).
- (2) Bridge, tunnel, and highway tolls (receipts required when practicable).

C. Registration Fees

Reimbursement may be made for the fee for attending seminars, conferences, or other activities provided that attendance by said traveler is deemed beneficial as set forth by the requirements in Section II, **D**.

D. Since it is not possible to anticipate every travel potentiality that might arise, requests for reimbursements that vary from the above guidelines will be addressed on a case-by-case basis. It is anticipated, however, that such cases will be rare.