



# Travel Policy

Effective July 1, 2025

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## 1. PURPOSE

This policy outlines City travel, training, and meal expenditures and provides guidelines for reimbursement. It ensures employees are reimbursed for necessary and reasonable expenses incurred during authorized City business. The goal is to promote fairness, accountability, and responsible use of taxpayer funds, while maintaining transparency and consistency in reimbursement practices. This policy supersedes all previous travel-related policies and takes precedence over any conflicting purchasing policies.

## 2. SCOPE

- a. This Administrative Policy applies to all City departments and agencies, including elected and appointed officials.

## 3. DEFINITIONS

For the purposes of this policy, the following definitions apply:

- a. **Conferences** - The term conferences shall include, but not be limited to, any training sessions, programs, educational institutions, special events, seminars, workshops, consortiums, functions, or meetings attended by a City employee while representing the City of Marion or acting on its behalf.
- b. **Employee** - Refers to any City official, elected official, full-time, part-time, or temporary employee, board/commission/committee member or volunteer that has been approved to attend any such conference, and for which the City is assuming to pay travel expenses for.
- c. **Department Director** – Refers to the head of a City department with the authority to approve travel requests for their direct reports or subordinates. The mayor, city manager, or deputy city manager shall be considered the department director for the purpose of approving travel requests submitted by the department director.
- d. **Designee** - Refers to an individual duly authorized to approve travel requests on behalf of the mayor, city manager, or a department director.
- e. **Travel Expenses** - Costs incurred by City employees while conducting City business away from their designated work location. These expenses include transportation (airfare, rail, rental car, ride-share services, or mileage reimbursement for personal vehicles), lodging, meals, incidental expenses (*e.g., tips, minor fees*), and any other necessary business-related costs.

## 4. RESPONSIBILITY

- a. **Employee** - Each employee is responsible for understanding and complying with this policy.
- b. **Department Director** - The department director is responsible for ensuring adherence to the policy guidelines related to travel authorization.
- c. **Finance Director** - The finance director is responsible for overseeing the implementation of this policy and ensuring accountability across all departments.
- d. **Payroll Manager** – The payroll manager is responsible for accurately processing employee reimbursements through the payroll process and in compliance with this policy.

## 5. AUTHORIZATION FOR TRAVEL

- a. All travel wherein the destination is outside of the limits of Linn County shall be authorized in advance of departure and before incurring any travel expenses. Authorization must be given by the employee's respective department director or designee.
- b. See [Day Travel Guidelines](#) for travel within Linn County limits.

- c. Once the travel is approved, employees may incur registration, transportation, and lodging expenses that should be paid for through a City-issued purchasing card where possible. Travel expenses incurred by an employee without prior authorization will not be reimbursed by the City.
- d. The decision regarding the necessity of an overnight stay while traveling for City business is at the discretion of the department director but the following factors should be considered:
  - i. Travel time to the destination
  - ii. Conference start and end times
  - iii. Cost efficiency
  - iv. Employee health or special needs
  - v. Work schedule and obligations
- e. Travel authorization must be requested on the Travel Authorization Form available online.
- f. All travel requests must be reviewed by the department director, considering factors such as budget availability, job relevance, and the potential benefits to the City. The following items should be taken into account:
  - i. Federal, State or local mandated training required for licensing, certification, or other qualifications.
  - ii. Preparatory Training: Applies where the employee's future job responsibilities will require new skills which can only be effectively gained by external training.
  - iii. Legislative/intergovernmental: Meetings that appear to hold high potential for long-term effect(s) upon the City and/or department.
  - iv. National, Regional, or State conferences and workshops: Attendance contingent upon quality of workshop/conference as this relates to staff members' current job responsibilities.
  - v. Mandated training or certification to obtain or maintain organizational accreditation.
- g. Any expenses incurred by an employee serving in a leadership capacity with a professional organization are eligible to be reimbursed if participation is deemed beneficial to the City's operations. Employees will only be reimbursed for those expenses that are not reimbursed by the professional organization, and subject to the limits established by this policy. Such organizations include both structured organizations (one that requires dues/official membership) and informal groups of common-role members or cities (e.g., *metro managers/mayors/finance, etc.*).

## **6. REVIEW AND ENFORCEMENT PROCEDURES**

- a. The Finance Department will review each travel request for policy compliance, appropriateness of expenses, applicable regulations, and complete documentation.
- b. City employees shall adhere to all rules outlined in the Travel Policy; an employee is subject to progressive discipline (up to and including termination) for any violations. The department director will partner with Human Resources pursuant to City Personnel Policy, Section 5.02.

## **7. POLICY EXCEPTIONS**

- a. The city manager, acting city manager, or finance director has the authority to approve exceptions to this travel policy on a case-by-case basis when deemed necessary due to exceptional circumstances.

## **8. METHODS OF PAYMENT**

### **a. Purchasing Card – Preferred Method**

- i. Travel expenses such as airfare, conference registration fees, and lodging expenses should be paid by using a City-issued purchasing card.
- ii. A purchasing card must not be used to purchase meals while traveling unless the meal is purchased through a conference registration. (See meal per diem below)

### **b. Accounts Payable ACH or Check**

- i. Travel expenses such as conference registrations fees, lodging expenses, and catered meals can be paid using a City-issued ACH or check payment when necessary.
- ii. Department administrative staff should follow the accounts payable process for payments made by ACH or check.

### **c. Personal Credit Card or Check**

- i. Travel expenses such as parking, ride-share services, and fuel expenses can be paid by an employee's personal credit card or check where a City-issued purchasing card is not available. An employee's use of a personal credit card or check should be minimized as much as possible.

### **d. Cash Advances**

- i. City employees who anticipate incurring out-of-pocket expenses for authorized travel may request a cash advance. The only travel expenses eligible for cash advance are per diem and mileage.
- ii. All cash advance requests require approval from the employee's department director or designee before submission.
- iii. All cash advances will be paid through payroll and must be submitted no later than the Friday prior to the regular payroll processing. Cash advances will not be provided outside of normal payroll process.
- iv. Any unused portion of the advance must be returned and accounted for within ten business days following the conclusion of travel.

## **9. REPORTING GUIDELINES**

### **a. Detailed Support Documentation**

- i. Employees must submit detailed receipts for all reimbursable and City-paid expenses except for meal per diem. These receipts should clearly itemize the total cost including any applicable sales tax.
- ii. Employees must submit a complete agenda for their conference which should include a detailed schedule of sessions, meals, and events, if available.

### **b. Travel Reimbursement Processing & Timeline**

- i. A completed Travel Expense Form must be submitted to the Finance Department within 10 business days following the completion of travel and no later than the Friday prior to the regular payroll processing date.
- ii. All travel reimbursements will be processed through payroll direct deposit.

## **10. REIMBURSABLE TRAVEL EXPENSES**

### **a. Mileage:**

- i. When an employee travels directly to or from a temporary work location (e.g. conference or meeting), mileage reimbursement will be based on the shorter distance between:
  - 1. The point of departure (or return) and the temporary work location, or

- 2. The regular work location and the temporary work location.
- iii. Travel between an employee's regular work location and home is considered personal commuting and is not eligible for mileage reimbursement.
- iv. Any personal travel or deviations from the business route should not be included in the mileage claim.
- v. City employees must follow the IRS Standard Mileage Rate.
- vi. In instances where multiple employees are traveling in the same vehicle, only the vehicle owner will be eligible for mileage reimbursement.
- vii. Employees receiving a car allowance that is not specified in an employment contract are eligible for mileage reimbursement for travel outside of Linn County.

**b. Meals Per Diem:**

- i. City employees will be reimbursed for eligible meals based on the applicable per diem rate. For current per diem meal rates please refer to the [U.S. General Services Administration \(GSA\) website](#). Meal per diem will be reimbursed based on specific meal periods.

Please see the breakout below:

**Breakfast:** 17% of the Per Diem Rate

- a. Employees are eligible for breakfast reimbursement if the departure is before 7 a.m. and breakfast is not provided by the hotel or conference.

**Lunch:** 33% of the Per Diem Rate

**Dinner:** 50% of the Per Diem Rate

- b. Employees are eligible for dinner reimbursement, if they return after 6 p.m. and dinner is not provided by the hotel or conference.

- ii. If the conference provides a meal, that meal will not be eligible for per diem reimbursement.
- iii. Employees with specific dietary restrictions or allergies may be eligible for meal per diem reimbursement if they are unable to consume the food provided.
- iv. Employees are responsible for documenting the meals that were not provided during the event.

**c. Baggage Policy**

- i. The City will reimburse the cost of one carry-on or one checked bag per traveler for official business travel, whether domestic or international. Additional baggage fees will be reimbursed only if excess baggage is necessary for the performance of official duties (e.g., carrying specialized equipment or materials).

**d. Parking**

- i. Parking expenses may be eligible for reimbursement by the City, provided that the employee submits a receipt or other supporting evidence of the parking fees paid during the course of travel or business-related activities.
- ii. The City of Marion is a tax-exempt government entity; however, sales tax associated with parking will be paid by the City if necessary.
- iii. Long-term parking at the airport may be reimbursed if necessary.

**e. Ride-Share Service/ Shuttle Service / Taxi**

- i. Employees will be reimbursed for transportation expenses incurred through the use of ride-share services, shuttle services, or taxis, provided the travel is related to official City business. A City-issued purchasing card should be used, if available.
- ii. Reimbursement will be authorized under the following conditions:

1. Attendance at City-related conferences or meetings.
  2. Transportation to or from the airport for business purposes.
  3. Obtaining a meal while on City business, provided that a meal is not supplied, and the travel is within a reasonable distance from the business activity.
- iii. Employees are permitted to tip up to a maximum of 20% of the total ride cost.
- f. Toll Expenses**
- i. Toll charges incurred during business-related travel will be reimbursed upon submission of the corresponding receipts.
- g. Fuel**
- i. Employees may use City vehicles for travel if available with prior approval from the department director. When using a City vehicle, employees are required to use a City-issued purchasing card for fuel expenses. If a purchasing card is not available, employees may submit fuel receipts for reimbursement.

## **11. CITY-PAID TRAVEL EXPENSES**

### **a. Transportation**

- i. The mode of transportation selected must be the most economical option available, taking into consideration the nature of the trip, the distance to be traveled, and the overall cost-effectiveness of the transportation choice. In cases where multiple transportation options are available, employees should choose the least expensive method unless approved by department director.

### **b. Air Travel**

- i. City employees should only utilize air travel if it is seen as the most cost-effective mode of travel. When air travel is necessary, coach or economy class should be selected, provided such options are available, as they represent the most economical choice.
- ii. The City will not reimburse employees for expenses related to seating upgrades, including but not limited to premium or business class seating, extra legroom, or any other seating enhancements. Exceptions may be granted only with prior approval from the department director if the upgrade is deemed essential for the employees' duties or travel needs, such as accommodation for ADA requirements, traveling with a police canine, or managing short layover times.
- iii. The City of Marion is a tax-exempt government entity; however, sales tax associated with airfare will be paid by the City if necessary.

### **c. Lodging**

- i. Employees are expected to select the most cost-effective lodging option that prioritizes safety, provides reasonable comfort, and is conveniently located near the event. When booking accommodation, employees are responsible for inquiring about available conference or government employee rates to ensure the best value.
- ii. In certain cases, employees may be authorized to incur additional costs for upgraded lodging, such as when standard accommodation is unavailable or when the upgrade is necessary for health or safety reasons. Prior approval must be obtained from the department director.
- iii. Lodging expenses incurred for official business should be charged to a City-issued purchasing card. This includes the cost of the room, taxes, and any other related lodging fees.
- iv. Any incidental charges, such as meals, room service, or personal expenses, must be charged to a personal card. If any incidental charges are mistakenly or intentionally

charged to the City card, the employee will be required to reimburse the City for the full amount of these charges. Reimbursement must be made within ten business days upon identification of the unauthorized charges.

- v. An Itemized receipt should be retained by the employee upon check out and turned in with their Travel Expense Form.

**d. Conference Registration**

- i. Conference registrations should be paid by City-issued purchasing card or by a City-issued check. Every effort should be made to secure an early registration discount. Conference registration fees should exclude sales tax, and a receipt reflecting the total cost must be obtained.
- ii. If any documentation needs to be sent with the check to the conference vendor, the employee or department admin must provide a copy to be mailed along with the copy to be filed with the invoice documentation.
- iii. If conferences include any costs for voluntary, supplemental, recreational, or other excursion activities, these costs would normally be considered personal expenses to be paid by the employee, unless specifically related to the purpose of the conference, and approved by the department director or designee. Supporting documentation or official activity descriptions must be included with any reimbursement requests.  
*Example 1: If as part of a Community Development conference, there are options for excursions into the host City to tour some new styles of City development projects, this would be a “related purpose” item and would be subject to reimbursement.*  
*Example 2: If as part of a Police conference, there was a recreational golf outing available, this would not be considered a “related purpose” item and would not be reimbursable.*
- iv. If a conference sponsors a special event, where a meal is served, such as an annual banquet, the employee will not receive per diem for that specific meal period.

**e. Rental Car**

- i. The department director must give advance authorization prior to renting any vehicles for business purposes.
- ii. Rental vehicle expenses should be paid for with a City-issued purchasing card whenever possible. If necessary, a personal credit card may be used should a City-issued purchasing card not be feasible.
- iii. If a conference location requires the use of ground transportation to go to and from the hotel to the conference site, renting a car may be considered. If the cost of renting a car is more practical to the City, as compared to other means of transportation such as taxi, Uber/Lyft or subway, a vehicle may be rented for use during the conference. The employee is responsible for obtaining the best available rate on a standard-sized rental car. If more than two employees attend the same conference, the size of the vehicle may be adjusted according to the capacity needed to accommodate the number of people traveling. Luxury and convertible models are not permitted upgrades.
- iv. Supplemental insurance options covering the rental vehicle should not be purchased through the rental agency, as all aspects of the rental are covered under the City of Marion’s insurance policy when reserved for City business.
- v. Detailed receipts for rental vehicles should be retained upon returning the vehicles and submitted with a Travel Expense Form.

## **12. PROHIBITED EXPENSES**

Expenses not directly related to official City business are not eligible for reimbursement under any circumstances. Employees are prohibited from using a City-issued purchasing card for any of the following expenses:

- a. If an employee is traveling with a spouse, the City will only reimburse the employee for expenses directly related to City business. Employees are responsible for ensuring that any expenses associated with their spouse are clearly separated from those related to City business and are not included in reimbursement claims.
- b. Purchases of alcoholic beverages.
- c. Entertainment and recreation expenses, including hotel movies and health club access at a hotel or other venue.
- d. Golf outings, fitness events, or other recreational activities sponsored by the conference.

## **13. WAGES WHILE TRAVELING (Non-Exempt Employees Only)**

### **a. General Guidelines for Travel**

- i. For the purposes of this policy, normal working hours are defined as 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday – Friday or otherwise defined by the Department Director.
- ii. To determine whether an employee has incurred overtime while traveling, refer to the employee's respective union contract or the overtime section within the City of Marion Personnel Policy for non-union employees.
- iii. Any travel that takes place within normal work hours Monday – Friday is treated as time worked.
- iv. When an employee is required to travel outside of normal working hours as a passenger in a plane or automobile, the employee will not be compensated for that portion of travel time.

### **b. Travel Time While Driving**

#### **i. Driver Guidelines**

- 1. In accordance with FLSA guidelines, all authorized travel time spent driving is treated as "hours worked."
- 2. The option to elect driving instead of a more expedient option can be made with department director approval. However, the total cost, including any resulting overtime, associated with the alternate option should be considered prior to approval.

#### **ii. Passenger Guidelines**

- 1. In accordance with FLSA guidelines, travel time occurring outside of the normal work hours is not compensable if the employee is a passenger in a vehicle and is not performing work-related tasks during the travel. However, travel time occurring within the normal working hours is compensable.

### **c. Wages While attending a Conference**

- i. Work hours will be counted based on the conference agenda's stated start and stop times, excluding meals. If a conference includes an evening gathering, in which food is served, that portion of the conference does not count towards hours worked.  
*e.g., Opening night of the conference has a "meet & greet" event with cocktails and appetizers from 6 to 8 p.m. The two hours of the event would not count as hours worked.*

#### **14. DAY TRAVEL GUIDELINES**

The following guidelines only apply to travel that does not include an overnight stay.

##### **a. Within Linn County**

- i. A Travel Authorization Form is NOT REQUIRED for travel wherein the destination is within Linn County.
- ii. If reimbursable expenses are incurred during travel, then a Travel Expense Form will need to be completed.
- iii. Local Mileage: Employees who use their personal vehicles for authorized travel within Linn County on City business may be eligible for mileage reimbursement, provided the following conditions are met:
  1. Travel occurs outside of the city limits of Marion, Iowa.
  2. Mileage is calculated using the guidance in section 10 (a).

##### **b. Outside Limits of Linn County**

- i. All travel wherein the destination is outside of the limits of Linn County and does not include an overnight stay shall be authorized in advance of departure and before incurring any travel expenses. Authorization must be given by the employee's department director or designee by completing a Travel Authorization Form.

##### **c. Day Travel Reimbursable Meal Expenses**

- i. Employees will be reimbursed for eligible meal expenses based on the applicable per diem rate for the respective time of day the meal was consumed.
- ii. Meal Reimbursement Eligibility
  1. If employees' travel exceeds eight hours (excluding unpaid/non-working lunch break), meals will be reimbursed as follows:
    - a. Breakfast – if departure is prior to 7 a.m., and breakfast is not provided by the conference.
    - b. Lunch – If lunch if not provided by the conference.
    - c. Dinner – If return is after 6 p.m. and dinner is not provided by the conference.
- iii. Meal expenses incurred during travel that do not require an overnight stay will be treated as taxable income and reported on the employees' W-2 in compliance with IRS guidelines.

#### **15. TRAVEL EMERGENCIES AND UNFORESEEN EVENTS:**

- a. If an employee encounters a weather emergency, natural disaster, national or regional security threat, or other unforeseen circumstances while traveling for City business, they should use sound judgment regarding their personal safety, even if it necessitates changes to their travel plans. Expenses incurred in such situations will be evaluated individually to determine if they are eligible for reimbursement or considered personal expenses. Employees should communicate any emergencies to their supervisor, department director, or city manager as promptly as possible.