

STARKE COUNTY TRAVEL EXPENSE POLICY
ADOPTED MAY 16 2011

This document establishes Starke County government policy for reimbursement payments to county employees and office holders (generally "employees" herein) for expenses incurred by them while on County employment assignments away from their normal work location.

1. **Prior Authorization.** All business travel must be approved in advance by the employee's Supervisor, Department Head or responsible Elected Official.
2. **Responsibility for Making Travel Arrangements.** Employees approved for business travel are responsible for making their own travel arrangements.
3. **Lowest Reasonable Travel Expense.** Employees and officials should minimize travel expenses, and avoid impropriety or the appearance of impropriety. Whenever practical, employees should use a County vehicle or common carrier. Shared lodging is recommended, but not mandatory.
4. **Eligibility.** Expenses that have been paid by another person or entity are ineligible for payment or reimbursement. Unless specified by federal or state grants or specified by a contract, payment or reimbursement of eligible travel expenses will be made to the employee. The employee is responsible for non-business expenses. All travel expenses should occur within a reasonable time prior to and after the business event.
5. **Preauthorization.** When the employee anticipates incurring extraordinary travel expenses, the expenses must be approved in advance by the commissioners. The following circumstances are extraordinary circumstances necessitating preauthorization:
 - Travel outside Indiana.
 - Costs exceeding a total of \$500.00.
 - Guest or family accompanying the employee during travel outside Indiana.
 - Group travel exceeding six participants.
 - Mode of transportation is not the most economical.
 - Lodging rate exceeding \$150 person per night.
 - Travel duration extending past 5 business days.
 - Travel funded by federal or state grants subject to guidelines in conflict with this policy.
 - Alternative travel arrangements that would save the County travel expenses.

FILED

MAY 16 2011

Katherine Criffin
AUDITOR, STARKE COUNTY

A signed document evidencing approval from the commissioners must accompany the reimbursement claim. Please contact the Commissioners well in advance to request pre-authorization.

6. **Registration Fees.** Generally, a registration fee for a conference, meeting, educational event or otherwise directly related to the business travel is an allowable expense. If the registration fee includes a meal not itemized separately, then the entire registration fee will be considered for payment. If the registration fee includes a meal and the meal is listed as a separate charge, the registration fee is reimbursable and the meal charge will be paid in accordance with

the meal provisions set forth in paragraph 12, below.

7. **Transportation.** An employee may travel by airline, train, bus, taxi, or rental car and/or personal vehicle mileage for travel necessary in the discharge of official duties, but must select the most economical mode of transportation available. The cost to upgrade to first-class or other preferred status is not reimbursable.

8. **Automobile mileage rates.** Employees may claim mileage at the current *IRS Standard Mileage Rate (IRS Publication 463)*. Mileage will be paid from the employee's place of work or home; whichever is the lesser amount. Travel from home to work and from work to home is ineligible for reimbursement. Generally, the employee should record start and ending odometer readings; alternately on-line mapping tools, such as Map Quest, may be used to verify distances for the purpose of mileage reimbursement.

Other transportation-related costs, with proper receipts, may be reimbursable, such as parking, tolls, shuttle, etc.

Should a more cost-effective travel arrangement be available, the County will consider reimbursement based on evidence, provided by the traveler, to support the claim.

9. **Lodging.** Overnight accommodation is an allowable expense, but only when the travel distance exceeds fifty (50) miles from the Starke County Courthouse. Wherever possible, employees and officials are encouraged to stay in hotels offering government rates. The County prefers to pay conference package room rates, whenever available or standard room rates when conference package rates are not available. The County reserves the right to limit reimbursement if the room rate appears unreasonable or excessive. The costs to upgrade room status or for fees due to late check-out are not reimbursable.

10. **Lodging - Ineligible Expenses.** The following are ineligible for county expense claims: dry cleaning, child care, pet care, personal telephone calls, television or video charges, gym or spa services, room service charges, valet services, gratuities. Services such as Internet, telephone, or fax may be reimbursable with evidence supporting their use for business purposes.

11. **Lodging - Receipts Required.** All claims for reimbursement for lodging expenses must be supported by a receipt issued by the lodging facility. Applicable taxes are reimbursable.

12. **Meals.** A "meal" is defined as breakfast, lunch or dinner. Beverages (aside from those served at a meal), and snacks are not considered a meal and are ineligible for reimbursement. Gratuities and alcoholic beverages are also ineligible for reimbursement. Beverages (aside from those served at a meal), and snacks may be eligible for reimbursement due to medical condition. The County may request documentation of medical condition before paying for beverages and snacks.

Expenses for meals incurred when traveling are initially the responsibility of the employee. When travel extends past one calendar day, the County may reimburse actual meal receipts not to exceed \$26.00 for each full day of the travel duration. For extended travel beginning after 3 p.m., the maximum reimbursement rate is reduced to \$13.00 for the first day. For extended travel ending before 3 p.m., the maximum reimbursement rate is reduced to \$12.00 for the last day.

13. **Travel Expense Reports; Receipts.** All claims for travel, except mileage, shall be filed on forms prescribed by the Starke County Auditor. Standard receipts properly itemized and signed, or receipted invoices must be attached in support of the claim. Receipts must identify the date of purchase, the merchant's name and address, and the total cost. Copies of cancelled checks and credit card statements may constitute proof of payment, but do not qualify as proper receipts. Claims must be supported by documentation stating the purpose for travel, such as a registration form. Claims submitted without proper documentation will be returned to the submitting department without processing. Please submit all travel expense reports and claims to the Auditor within 30 days following the business travel.

This policy does not apply to reimbursable travel expenses of jurors or witnesses; however, if a department deems it appropriate to use this policy as guidelines for non- employee travel-related expenses, the County may pay those expenses accordingly.

Exceptions to this policy may be specified in the Indiana Code, in which case the Indiana Code provisions are controlling. However, it is the responsibility of the employee or official making the reimbursement claim to cite the relevant code section with their claim so that the Auditor's staff can handle claims quickly and efficiently.

The Board of Commissioners has inherent authority to manage public funds of the County and therefore reserve the right to approve or deny travel expense claims for any reason not inconsistent with Indiana or Federal Law, including reasons not specifically addressed by this policy. Employees are advised to consult with their Department Head, Auditor, and the Commissioners to determine whether to request preauthorization under paragraph 5, above.

Abuse of this policy, including falsifying expense reports, may constitute grounds of disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment.