Travel and Expense Policy

City of Mount Vernon
New York

City Council
Danielle Browne, Esq., President

Jaevon Boxhill

Edward Poteat

Cathlin B. Gleason

Derrick Thompson

Mayor
Shawyn Patterson-Howard

City Comptroller
Dr. Darren M. Morton

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Purpose of the Travel Policy

The purpose of this Travel Policy is to provide clear guidance to City agencies, employees, board and commission members, elected officials, and volunteer members of the public regarding the City of Mount Vernon's rules and procedures for official travel. It outlines the standards for reimbursement of expenses incurred while conducting official City business.

Pursuant to Section 91a of the City Charter, and consistent with the provisions of this policy, the Comptroller is authorized to establish rules and regulations governing the reimbursement of travel expenses deemed necessary and in the best interest of the City. Reimbursement will be made only for actual, reasonable, and necessary expenses directly related to official City business.
Travel Reimbursement Process

All travel-related reimbursements are processed through the Finance Department's Accounts Payable (AP) process upon submission of a Payment Voucher, duly approved by the appropriate Department Head, designee, or other authorized official.

In addition to this approval, all travel expenses must be independently reviewed and certified by the traveler, affirming that the expenses were reasonable, necessary, and incurred on behalf of the City.

For travel expenses incurred by a Department Head, the certification must be performed by either the Mayor, the Comptroller, or their authorized designee, provided the reviewer is fully familiar with the City's travel policy.

Section 1. Authorization for Travel, Education, Training, and Acquisition of Certain Materials and Services – All Elected Officials.

A. Approval and Budget Limitations for Travel, Education, and Training by Elected Officials

All travel, education, or training expenses incurred by elected officials exceeding $500, travel

outside New York State must receive prior approval from both the City Council and the Board of Estimates and Contracts**.** Approval must be sought through the submission of a Referral Letter, which must include a clear statement of the trip's purpose, its anticipated benefits to the City, personnel attending and a detailed estimate of all associated costs. These expenditures must not exceed the amount allocated in the respective department's annual budget for travel, education, and training. If additional funds are required, a formal request for a budget transfer must be submitted and approved by both bodies. All other city-related travel expenses must adhere to the approved accounts payable policies and procedures.

Furthermore, from the date of a municipal general election in which an elected official appears on the ballot and is not re-elected, through December 31st of that year, the official shall not engage in or incur any expenses for travel, education, or training unless such activity is explicitly authorized in advance by both the City Council and the Board of Estimates and Contracts.

B. Reservation Guidelines and Reimbursement Limits

Elected officials are strongly encouraged to make travel and lodging arrangements early to secure the lowest available rates, including early bird or discounted conference rates. All transportation and accommodation bookings must utilize the most economical options available, such as coach-class airfare, government or conference hotel rates, and single occupancy lodging.

If an elected official makes arrangements independently rather than through the City and the cost exceeds what the City could have obtained, the excess amount will not be reimbursed unless approved by a simple majority vote of both the City Council and the Board of Estimates and Contracts.

C. Ownership of Materials and Services Purchased at City Expense

All materials and services acquired by elected officials at City expense and charged to their travel, education, or training budgets shall become the property of the City, subject to the availability of departmental funds. This includes:

1. Books, periodicals, audio/video recordings, software, published papers, or reports with a value exceeding $100 per item;
2. Professional services such as research, legal consultation, or work by contract employees or consultants.

D. Reimbursement Procedures

Elected officials must comply with the procedures outlined in Section 3 of this policy regarding the submission of travel reimbursement claims, the issuance of travel advances, and the direct payment of education or training expenses.

Section 2. Authorization for Travel, Education, Training, and Acquisition of Certain Materials and Services – City Employees, Members of Boards and Commissions, Volunteer Members of the Public, and Other Non-Employees.

A. Request for Training and Travel Authorization

Any request involving expenses exceeding $500, travel beyond a 35-mile radius from the City of Mount Vernon, out-of-state travel, or the use of a City vehicle must be accompanied by supporting documentation and receive prior approval from both the City Council and the

Board of Estimates and Contracts. All other city-related travel expenses must adhere to the approved accounts payable policies and procedures.

Prior to approval by the City Council and Board of Estimates and Contracts, a Request for Training and Travel form, detailing the purpose of the trip, its anticipated benefits to the City, conference/training agenda, the personnel attending, and a comprehensive estimate of all associated costs must be submitted and approved by the Department Head or their designee before the scheduled departure date.

When a Request for Travel includes multiple attendees, it must also include a written explanation justifying the need for each additional participant.

B. Travel Arrangements: Transportation, Accommodations, and Registration

1. Transportation, lodging, and conference registration should be coordinated in advance by a designated staff member and, whenever possible, billed directly to the City.
2. All travel arrangements must reflect the most economical options available. This includes coach-class airfare, applicable special discounts or conference rates, and single occupancy accommodations at government rates. If government rates are unavailable at the selected lodging facility, the Department Head must approve any alternate rate prior to booking.
3. In situations where there is an emergency or a limited timeframe to complete the approval process in order to secure lower costs, and sufficient funds are available in the relevant departmental budget, the Comptroller may authorize payment for registration and transportation costs (such as airfare or train fare). Such expenditures must be subsequently ratified by the City Council and the Board of Estimates and Contracts.

C. Reimbursement Procedures and Travel Advances

All travel reimbursements, advance payments, and direct payments related to education and training, and subject to the provisions of this section, must follow the procedures, standards, and guidelines outlined in Section 3 of this policy.

Section 3. Procedures and Standards for Travel Reimbursement Requests and for Travel Advances – Applies to All Elected Officials, Employees, Volunteers and other Non- Employees.

This section applies to all elected city officials, employees, members of boards and commissions, volunteer members of the public, and other non-employees. The processing, approval, and payment of each expense in a travel reimbursement claim, or a travel advance request, shall be done in compliance with this section. In order to qualify for reimbursement, each expense must be reasonable and prudent under the circumstances and directly related to the conduct of city business, or a service or substantial benefit provided for the City. Care must be taken to avoid unnecessary or excessive expenses.

It shall be the responsibility of the Comptroller or his/her designee to ensure that these policies are uniformly applied, and to provide the forms, instructions, and training, necessary for implementation.

Exceptions to this section may be made only for unusual or extenuating circumstances and upon

the written approval of the Comptroller that:

(a) The expenses to be reimbursed are reasonable under the circumstances that occurred; and

(b) That such expenses reasonably relate to the conduct of city business, or provide a service or substantial benefit received by the City; and

(c) That compliance with this section was not feasible.

A. Travel and Reimbursement Voucher. All reimbursement claims must accompany the approved legislation, and Travel and Reimbursement Voucher, which include departmental information, description of the authorized travel, detailed expenditures, and Certification of Travel Expense Report.

B. Documentation for All Claims. Claims for reimbursement shall be paid if accompanied by a bona fide vendor's receipt and consistent with the following policies. Such receipts must show the date, a description of the purchase, vendor identification, and amount paid. Credit card receipts are acceptable if they meet the information requirements above. Other specific rules for the documentation of a reimbursement are included below.

C. Meals – Travel Related - Per Diem Rate. Meals shall be reimbursed at the per diem rate for Mount Vernon/Westchester County per the US General Services Administration (GSA) in effect during the date(s) of travel. The per diem rate includes the costs of tax and gratuity. No receipts are required for daily meal per diem.

D. Meals – Not Travel Related – Reimbursement or Direct Payment for Actual Meal Costs, or Direct payment for the Provision of Food on Certain Occasions. Reimbursement, or direct payment, for meals, or direct payment for the provision of food on certain occasions, for Elected Officials, board members, commissioners/department heads, volunteers, members of the public, non-employees, and staff conducting formal city business at meetings, events, or other activities, during meal times is specifically authorized if the following requirements are met:

1. The purpose of the meeting is to conduct official city business or to provide training to city employees or city officials; AND
2. The meals are an integral part of the business meeting or training session. AND
3. The meeting or training is a special situation or occasion outside of the normal daily business of city employees. City funds may not be used to provide meals for staff parties, routine staff meetings, routine departmental meetings, or any event deemed to be social in nature.

   Expenses for meals or food where city business is conducted and that could otherwise reasonably occur during non-meal periods, are not eligible for reimbursement. Meal reimbursement, not related to travel or otherwise authorized in a Collective Bargaining Agreement, for city staff must be approved in advance by the Department Head in accordance with this policy.

   Under no circumstances may alcohol be provided at city expense.

E. Whenever a situation arises under subsections B or C above, where a meal(s) is included in a registration or conference fee, or where direct payment from the city ***or any third party*** is used for food during the conduct of city business, ***and*** the person requesting reimbursement or submitting a travel advance claim actually attends that meal, then the per diem rate for that day shall be reduced to reflect such a meal(s). The per diem rate shall follow the GSA per diem rate for Mount Vernon/Westchester County in effect at the time of travel.

F. Travel Related Expenses Authorized. Reimbursement for the reasonable costs of business travel is acceptable. In determining the "reasonableness" of an expense the following general guidelines shall apply:

1. City Vehicle. Out of the area costs of vehicle operation are acceptable, such as gas. Any other vehicle-related expenditures such as oil, tires or other repairs must be preapproved by the Commissioner of Public Works or his/her designee.

2. Personal Vehicle Mileage Expense and Limitation.
   a. Mileage expenses shall be reimbursed for travel within a 300-mile radius of the City, at the current mileage rate per GSA in effect at the time of travel. The point of origin shall be city hall (or other place of city employment) or home, whichever is shorter under the circumstances. Mileage will be paid only for such point to point travel and only for necessary travel between city business activities, and not for personal local trips, at the travel destination.
   b. Trips beyond a 300 mile radius shall be reimbursed in an amount equal to the appropriate round trip coach air fare to the destination (plus travel to/from airport, parking fees and other necessary expenses associated with air travel), based upon the date and approximate time of departure.
   c. The Comptroller or his/her designee shall approve computations necessary to comply with this section.

3. Rental Vehicle. The cost of vehicle rental will be handled on an exception basis and must be approved in advance as part of the official approval or by the Comptroller or his/her designee, if the expense does not exceed the total approved travel budget. Only business miles are reimbursable. If the vehicle was used for non-business purposes, the cost of the rental shall be pro-rated accordingly.

4. Air Travel. Advance tickets should be purchased using City of Mount Vernon Credit/Purchasing Cards. Where it is not feasible to follow that procedure, as determined by the Comptroller or designee, direct reimbursement of incurred expenses is authorized.

5. Airport Delivery/Pick-up Mileage or Parking Expenses. Round trip mileage to the airport will be reimbursed provided the cost of mileage based on the current GSA rate is less expense than parking or alternate transportation.

6. Other Travel Expenses. Miscellaneous travel expenses such as bus, taxi, bridge or

other tolls, parking, ferry, rail or ride share will only be authorized if necessary and are included on the Request for Travel and Training form.

G. Accommodations and Lodging. Hotel/motel accommodations will be reimbursed or paid at a maximum of the single room rate. A vendor's receipt for this category is required for all claims.

H. Incidental Travel Expenses – Reasonable and Necessary. Reasonable and necessary incidental travel expenses include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. Allowable Incidental Expenses.
   a. Baggage check fees.

2. Non-Allowable Incidental Expenses. Non-allowable incidental travel expenses, include but are not limited to:
   a. Personal entertainment.
   b. Room Service.
   c. Theft, loss or damage to personal property.
   d. Expenses of a spouse, family or other person not authorized to receive reimbursement under this policy.
   e. Airline or other trip insurance.
   f. Any travel upgrade fees.
   g. Personal postage, reading material, personal telephone calls.
   h. Personal toiletries .
   i. Liquor.
   j. Laundry or dry-cleaning.
   k. Cash advances.
   l. Fines or traffic tickets.
   m. Personal health expenses

I. Reimbursement Claims and Advance Travel

1. All claims for reimbursement and travel advances shall be submitted on forms supplied by the Finance Department and should be submitted for payment within thirty (30) days from the completion of the travel.
2. Reimbursement claims for which special approval of the Comptroller, or designee, is required must include such written approval.
3. Reimbursement claims submitted by the Mayor, City Council member, Comptroller and/or Department Heads ***may include*** the otherwise reimbursable travel or business-related expenses of other City of Mount Vernon elected or appointed officials, or employees, who are part of the specific travel and would be entitled in their own right to make a claim for reimbursement of such travel or city business-related expenses. The Comptroller, Mayor, City Council Member or their designee, is authorized to charge such travel or city business related expenses on a city credit card.
4. All reimbursement claims by the Mayor and City Council President shall be reviewed and approved by the Comptroller.

5. All city credit/purchase card charges are subject to audit by the Comptroller or designee. Any person guilty of misuse or violation of relevant policies governing the use of city credit/purchase cards shall be subject to personal reimbursement or penalty by law.

Volunteers, Members of Boards and Commissions, Members of the Public, and Other Non-Employees – Substantial Benefit Requirement for Reimbursement of Travel, Education, Training, or Other Expenses Under This Resolution. Expenses incurred by individuals who are not City employees or officials may be reimbursed when such reimbursement can reasonably be considered compensation for a service rendered or a substantial benefit provided to the City, of comparable value.

To qualify, the following conditions apply:

Written documentation must be provided demonstrating the expected benefit to the City unless one of the following exceptions applies:

a. The individual is a board member or commissioner acting within the reasonable scope of their official duties; or
b. The individual is a volunteer, member of the public, or other non-employee who verifiably participates in a bona fide City-sponsored activity alongside City officials.

In such cases (a or b), no further documentation of benefit is required, as their participation is presumed to confer substantial value to the City.

This section may also apply to applicants for City employment, provided reimbursement is specifically authorized by the Mayor or their designee.

Any dispute regarding whether an activity qualifies as a bona fide City activity shall be resolved by the Mayor or Comptroller, subject to appeal to the City Council.

Section 4. Effective Date. This resolution shall take effect immediately upon its passage by the Board of Estimates and Contracts. However, any claims for reimbursement, travel advances, or direct payment of expenses related to events or travel activities that occurred prior to the effective date of this resolution shall be reviewed and processed in accordance with the policies and resolutions in effect at the time those expenses were incurred.