

## TRAVEL POLICY

### I. Purpose and Scope

The Town of Mammoth Lakes ("Town") recognizes that certain travel, workshops, conventions, seminars, conferences, meetings, and other business-related activities are beneficial to the Town and its operations and will result in expenses being incurred on behalf of the Town by its employees. The Town recognizes that employees should not personally incur any business-related expenses when travelling on Town business. Due to the Town's remote location, the cost of employee travel can be high and employees often have unique considerations and circumstances to take into account when travelling for work purposes. This policy establishes procedures for authorization and reimbursement for travel by Town employees on Town business.

This policy applies to all employees and elected and appointed officials. Failure to comply with the provisions of this policy, including falsification of travel expenses, will result in disciplinary action up to and including termination of employment where applicable and other penalties defined in California Government Code §53232.4 as it applies to elected officials.

### II. Definitions

**Employee:** Includes regular employees, limited-term employees, and elected and appointed officials.

**Per Diem:** The amount of funds allowed to an employee traveling on Town business that is provided as a reasonable payment for meals or other allowed out-of-pocket business-related expenses.

**Reasonable and Customary Expenses:** Are those defined by this policy or, in the absence of such definition, those established by Internal Revenue Service (IRS) guidelines.

**Town Business:** Includes, but is not limited to, attendance at training sessions, seminars, conventions, professional associations, workshops, meetings and other travel purposes.

### III. Policy

#### A. General Provisions

1. The Town shall pay for reasonable and customary expenses associated with employee travel. Travel shall be at the most reasonable and economical cost to the Town, considering total cost of transportation, time spent in transit, employee safety and convenience, and the availability of Town-owned vehicles. Travel privileges may be restricted or denied based on budgetary constraints.
2. No employee shall experience personal financial loss for reasonable and necessary costs as a result of representing the Town, as long as the expenses are within the guidelines set forth in this policy.
3. Efforts shall be made to book all travel in advance to take advantage of lower rates. Government, discount, and group rates shall be used when available.
4. Any personal travel expenses incurred in conjunction with approved travel on Town business must be separate and distinguishable from reimbursable Town travel expenses.
5. Expenses incurred under this policy shall be appropriate to the circumstances and consistent with the best interests of the Town and its desire to minimize travel costs.

## **B. Procedures**

### **1. Authorization and Claim for Travel Expense Form**

All employee travel must be approved by the employee's Department Head. Travel by the Town Manager or Town Council is self-authorized. An Authorization and Claim for Travel Expense form (Attachment A) is required for all travel and must be completed and submitted to Accounts Payable at least one (1) month, or as soon as reasonably possible, prior to travel commencement to ensure timely processing for any travel advance. Requests received within two (2) weeks of travel commencement will be processed in a timely manner; however, the employee is not guaranteed to receive per diem prior to departure. Applicable original receipts, registration forms, brochures, conference agendas, etc. must be attached. The form may be submitted to Accounts Payable after the completion of travel if no travel advance is requested. Emergency travel may be approved at the discretion of the Town Manager or designee.

### **2. Travel Advances**

Travel advances are typically used for per diem and other business-related out-of-pocket expenses to be paid by the employee while traveling. The Town will not provide a cash advance to an employee for anticipated travel expenses other than per diem.

- i. When a travel advance is requested, it will be provided to the employee at least one (1) week prior to commencement of travel, providing the request is made in sufficient time.
- ii. All money advanced to an employee to pay for travel expenses constitutes a lien in favor of the Town upon the accrued wages of the employee to whom the advance is made, should the travel not be taken and funds not repaid as provided for in this policy.
- iii. Other than per diem, receipts accounting for travel expenses in excess of the amount advanced must be returned to Accounts Payable within two (2) weeks of the employee's return to work. Only approved expenses incurred will be reimbursed. Failure to submit the request for reimbursement within two (2) weeks may result in the denial of reimbursement for those expenses.
- iv. Advances not expended must be reconciled and submitted along with any monies due to the Town to Accounts Payable within two (2) weeks of the employee's return to work. Employees shall reimburse the Town any allowance provided for a meal that was subsequently paid for by a third party. However, employees are not expected to reimburse the Town the remainder of what was not spent on a particular meal.
- v. Any advance payment made to an employee for travel that is canceled shall be repaid to the Town within two (2) weeks of cancellation.

## **C. Eligible Expenses**

Eligible expenses are those actual costs incurred by an employee as a result of performing Town business. All expenses are subject to verification that they comply with this policy and will be reimbursed only if in compliance with this policy. Expenses for which employees receive reimbursement from another agency are not reimbursable.

### **1. Registration**

Fees to attend conferences, seminars, conventions, trainings, or other similar events may be paid in advance or onsite by Town credit card.

## 2. Transportation

The most economical mode and class of transportation should be used with consideration for scheduling, needs, time spent in transit, employee safety, and cargo space requirements.

### i. Air:

Only regular or coach/economy fares will be paid for by the Town. In the case where first class or business class service is used, reimbursement will be made at the regular or economy fare or equivalent rate.

### ii. Automobile:

*Town-Owned Vehicles:* Town-owned vehicles should be used for employee travel whenever possible. When using a Town-owned vehicle for travel, a credit card will be provided to the employee for refueling. The employee is required to record the car number and the mileage at the time of refueling on the gas receipts.

*Privately-Owned Vehicles:* An employee may choose to use a privately-owned vehicle in accordance with the Town's Vehicle Use Policy which requires approval from the Town Manager or designee and from the Human Resources Manager. Employees using Town-owned or privately-owned vehicles for Town business must comply with the Town's Vehicle Use Policy. Proof of vehicle insurance for use of privately-owned vehicles is to be provided to and kept on file by Human Resources. In such circumstances, the employee shall be provided with a credit card for the purposes of refueling. Gas usage may be audited based on the miles traveled.

### iii. Car Rental:

The expense of a rental vehicle will be reimbursed when rented for business necessity. The most economical car available should be rented when used for Town business.

### iv. Taxis/Shuttles/Trains:

Fares for taxis, shuttles, ride-share services, or trains may be reimbursed, including up to a fifteen percent (15%) gratuity per fare, when the cost of such fare is more economical, or when such transportation is necessary for time-efficiency.

## 3. Lodging

Lodging expenses will be reimbursed or paid for by the Town when travel on Town business reasonably requires an overnight stay. If a family member or guest accompanies the employee, the employee shall pay for any amount over that of a single accommodation. Upon checkout, the employee shall pay additional costs such as movies charged to the room or other room services, separately. Such expenses not paid separately by the employee will be deducted from any reimbursement owing.

If such lodging is in connection with a conference or similar event, lodging expenses must not exceed the group rate published by the conference organizer if such rates are available at the time of booking. When lodging is in connection with a conference or similar event, employees should stay at that location, when possible. If the conference or event hotel is not available, the employee should choose a nearby hotel with comparable rates to the conference or event hotel. Employees should request government rates when available.

#### 4. Meals

A per diem is provided for meal expenses according to the provisions below for each day the employee is traveling on Town business. No per diem will be provided for any meals that are provided by some other entity, person, or group while the employee is away, unless special dietary needs or restrictions need to be accommodated. Snacks and continental breakfasts such as juice, coffee, and pastries are not considered to be meals. No meal expense may be claimed or reimbursed more than once in a 24-hour period. The Town does not provide per diem for or reimbursement for alcoholic beverages. The rates may be amended from time to time, are maximums, not allowances, and include gratuities up to 15 percent (15%).

#### **Per Diem Rates**

Breakfast: \$22  
Lunch: \$23  
Dinner: \$36  
Incidentals: \$10

If the meal expense exceeds the per diem maximum, a memorandum or email justifying the additional expenses must be approved by the Department Director or authorized designee. Itemized receipts are required for all meal reimbursement claims that exceed the per diem amount.

#### 5. Other

Reasonable miscellaneous expenses may be reimbursed based on approval by the Department Head after the travel has been completed. Such expenses may include baggage handling fees, tips for taxis (not to exceed 15 percent), parking fees, tolls, and internet service only if used for work purposes.

#### **D. Credit Card Use**

Employees shall use Town credit cards to pay for necessary travel expenses in accordance with the Town's Credit and Charge Card Policy. Use of personal credit cards to pay for Town travel expenses is to be kept to a minimum. If a personal credit card must be used, the receipt must be included with the Authorization and Claim for Travel Expense form for reimbursement. Credit card statements are not an acceptable substitute for the original receipt.

#### **IV. Responsibility for Review**

The Town Manager, or designee, is responsible for reviewing this policy as needed or at least every five (5) years.