

**EMPLOYEE REIMBURSEMENT
(MEMBERSHIP, CONFERENCE, & MEETING EXPENSES)**

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I. PURPOSE

The City of Visalia recognizes the value and necessity of employees holding membership in bonafide professional organizations, attending professionally related conferences and seminars and attending meetings of importance to City business. The City encourages these activities, and, to accommodate them, has established the following policies and procedures.

Department Heads are responsible for managing membership, conference and meeting expenses in conformance with these policies and procedures, and must approve all such expenses and any exceptions, unless otherwise stated in this policy.

II. POLICY AND PROCEDURES

A. Professional Memberships

Policy: City employees are eligible for City sponsorship in associations or organizations whose purpose is to serve and develop the profession of the employee, or which provides a service which is beneficial to the operation of the City.

Procedure: Memberships for all organizations should be budgeted in advance and must be approved by the employee's Department Head.

B. Service Club

Policy: The City shall pay up to \$250 annually in a service club membership. These dues will cover the expenses of one person per club with department heads having first selection on club memberships. Any remaining memberships may be filled by other City employees. The City will not pay membership dues for more than one employee per club. Fraternal organizations shall not be considered as service clubs for purpose of this policy.

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Procedure: Department Heads are responsible for verifying the service club memberships of their employees.

These memberships are considered “earnings” by the IRS and therefore taxable. The amount of membership(s) paid will appear on the employee’s W-2 Form.

C. Conferences and Meetings

1. Out of Town

Policy: The City will only pay out of town expenses as defined in this policy for those conferences and meetings that are determined to be advantageous to the conduct of City business. Employees are encouraged to travel together when more than one individual is attending the same conference or meeting in order to reduce costs. It is the policy of this City to send only one person to the same conference or meeting unless Department Head and/or Advisory Staff approval is obtained in advance.

- a. Transportation:** It is expected that the shortest and most direct route and the least expensive method of transportation will be used. If air travel is selected, it will normally be by coach-class air. Employees may, at their own expense, upgrade their travel accommodations.

The City will pay the cost of round trip air fare, the cost of employee travel to and from the employee’s home and the air terminal, the cost of employee parking at the air terminal, and the cost of transportation to and from the point of arrival/departure and the conference center. Generally, the latter should be in the form of public transportation or group limousine service.

If a private vehicle is used for travel within the State of California, the transportation allowance shall be at the rate set by the City vehicle policy.

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If a city-owned vehicle is used, there will be no allowance except that out-of-pocket operating expenses will be reimbursed. When feasible, employees are expected to car pool on out-of-town travel.

- b.** Lodging: The City will pay for conference and meeting related out-of-town lodging. Employees are expected to stay at the conference center hotel, any hotels affiliated with the conference, or at a hotel with rates not in excess of the conference hotel. (If space is available at the conference hotel, and an employee wishes to stay at an off-site location, the City will not reimburse for expenses between the employee's hotel and the conference). Employees are expected to stay in clean, safe, and comfortable lodging while out of town on City business. These accommodations can be determined to be in the three and four star range rating as determined by the American Automobile Association rating guide for hotels/motels. Whenever appropriate, employees are encouraged to share rooms in order to save on travel expenses. Employees are also encouraged to make reservations for travel and lodging as far in advance as possible so that the lowest possible prices may be secured. Employees are eligible for lodging on the evening before a conference which is scheduled to begin before noon the following day and on the evening of a conference which ends after 5:00 p.m. if the event is more than 120 miles from the City of Visalia.
- c.** Meals and Incidental Expenses: A travel allowance for meals and for incidental expenses shall be given. Incidental expenses shall be defined as: local taxi fares, business telephone calls, local parking, tolls, and tips.

This travel allowance will be given for programmed days of a conference or meeting and for time spent in travel. Until further notice the maximum rate of travel advance shall be \$50 per day for all employees. Expenses exceeding the travel advance shall be documented and approved on a case-by-case basis.

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Nonreimbursable expenses shall include such items as: in-room movies, museum visits, tours, bar tabs, night clubbing, etc. These types of nonreimbursable expenses will be considered to be the financial responsibility of the person incurring the expenses. However, travel to and from meals and meetings connected with the purpose of the trip in a reasonable mode of transportation will be reimbursed by the City.

- d. Conference Expenses: The City will pay for all necessary conference fees, registration, and materials charges.

Procedures: Travel, lodging, and registration arrangements should be made at least two weeks in advance if possible. An approved request for check along with an invoice or listing of conference expenses should be sent to Finance Department.

A travel advance may be obtained in the form of a check with a request made two weeks in advance. Travel expenses may also be incurred through a City credit card or an individual's own funds or credit cards.

Within five working days after return from the conference an employee must file an Out-of-Town Expense Report with the Finance Department. This report will itemize the date, nature, and amount of all expenses; appropriate documentation in the form of receipts and/or credit card slips should be submitted with the report (receipts are not required for incidental expenses). If an employee has received a cash advance, and if total expenses are less than the amount of the advance, cash, or a check in the amount of the difference should also be submitted. If an employee has used his/her own funds, a check will be issued to the employee to cover all expenses which do not exceed the established maximums for expense categories.

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2. Local

Policy: The City will pay expenses for local business meetings and conferences approved by the department head which are directly related to the professional development of the employee or the conduct of City business. For purposes of convenience, the term “local” is defined as including the areas of Tulare, Fresno, Kings and Kern Counties.

Allowable expenses include:

- a. Travel:** The cost expenses for personal vehicle use will be reimbursed at the established mileage rates. Parking will also be reimbursed.

- b. Meals:** The cost of meals taken in conjunction with local conferences or meetings will be paid up to a maximum of \$10.00 for breakfast, \$15.00 for lunch, and \$25.00 for dinner, provided that a meal is a programmed part of the meeting, or conference or has the advance approval of the department head. Exceptions to this aspect of the policy need to be approved by the department head in advance.

- c. Conference/Meeting Expenses:** The cost of registration and materials for approved conference or meeting attendance will be paid by the City.

- d. Business Guests:** The cost of meals provided to business guests of the City of Visalia shall be at the discretion of Department Heads.

Procedures: When possible, advance payment through City check should be made for local conference, meetings and business contacts. If petty cash is used, receipts and expended funds must be returned. If personal funds are used, a claim with attached receipts should be filed with Finance Department.

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3. Out-of-State Travel

Out-of-state travel shall be limited to the extent possible. Written justification is required for all out-of-state travel as to the anticipated benefit to the City and the employee. The justification will be reviewed and approved by the Advisory Staff on a case-by-case basis for cost effectiveness and benefit. Advisory Staff travel is to be monitored by the City Manager. All rules that apply to out-of-town travel shall apply to out-of-state travel, unless otherwise specified in this policy.

The City will, in certain instances involving a request for out-of-state travel by an employee, pay for conference attendance fees and lodging, if travel is paid for by the employee and, if the department and Advisory Staff determine through written justification that the trip is both cost effective and beneficial to the organization.

4. Spouse Expenses

Policy: Generally, any expenses for a spouse to attend a conference or meeting will not be paid by the City. However, the City recognizes that spouse attendance is beneficial in some cases. Any requests for spouse expenses should be approved by the appropriate Advisory Staff member.

For convenience, some spouse expenses to be paid by the employee may be billed to the City, but proper reimbursement should be made by the employee within five working days after return to the City.

5. Exceptions

- a.** Exceptions to this policy are to be approved on a case-by-case basis by either the City Manager or Advisory Staff as so indicated in this policy. Should unanticipated events occur outside of the circumstances covered by this policy, the City Manager shall have final approval.