

SANTA CLARITA VALLEY WATER AGENCY
EMPLOYEE TRAVEL AND EXPENSE REIMBURSEMENT POLICY
(Board Approved August 2018)

INTRODUCTION

The Agency recognizes the benefit of training and attendance at professional and business meetings and functions for the purpose of advancing professional knowledge and providing opportunities to exchange information related to Agency operations and issues.

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

This policy applies to employees only; a separate policy exists for Board of Director members. This policy serves to establish basic guidelines and procedures for the consistent application of expenses and reimbursements related to Agency-approved travel, and to substantiate accountability and proper use of Agency funds.

GENERAL POLICY

The Agency generally pre-pays for registration/conference/seminar fees and air travel as requested and approved on the Employee Seminar/Meeting Request Form, or other authorized form of approval. Employees will be reimbursed for authorized and approved travel and expense costs when a detailed Employee Reimbursement Form is submitted and approved. Authorization for travel and expense reimbursement will be limited to:

- a. Conferences
- b. Seminars
- c. Workshops
- d. Meetings
- e. Other functions from which the Agency derives a specific benefit through attendance, and is deemed necessary and/or advantageous to the Agency

Travel should be via the means most direct and economical to the Agency. Agency employees and officials are expected to exercise sound judgment when incurring and submitting travel expenses, in keeping with the standards and proprieties of an accountable and transparent public agency. Costs that are deemed unnecessary, unrelated or otherwise excessive will not be reimbursed or paid.

All expenses related to employee travel must be included in the Department budget. Departments are required to forecast employee travel costs and incorporate those costs as part of their yearly budget process. Travel and training requests will be reviewed and approved on a case-by-case basis and only if there are sufficient funds in the Department budget to cover all associated expenses.

This policy is not intended to address every issue, exception or contingency that may arise in the course of Agency travel or attendance at meetings. Accordingly, the basic standard that should always prevail is to use good judgment and economy in the stewardship and use of Agency funds.

Definition of Travel

For the purposes of this document, the word “travel” is used to denote activities of employees in connection with authorized attendance at conferences, meetings, seminars, workshops, training and related purposes, including necessary transportation to and from, with or without an overnight stay.

Expense Reimbursement

Employees will be reimbursed for reasonable and necessary expenses incurred incidental to services provided on behalf of the Agency and for authorized travel on Agency business, subject to the following limits and restrictions. An approved **Employee Reimbursement Form** with receipts attached must be submitted to Accounts Payable for payment. Such expenses will not be reimbursed when incurred for family members of the employee.

Except for regularly occurring meetings, approval by the General Manager and/or appropriate Department Manager is required in advance of the travel. The **Employee Seminar/Meeting Request Form** or other authorized form of approval can be used to obtain the prior approval. The completed form should provide a cost estimate for each activity in sufficient detail to determine that the amount is reasonable and necessary.

Reimbursable Expenses

Costs incurred while conducting official Agency business that can be reimbursed including travel-related expenses, food and non-alcoholic beverages for special meetings, supplies for training, and small tools and equipment as required. Specific provisions for all reimbursable expenses listed below are provided in this policy.

- Meals incurred due to travel or provided for the benefit of continuing work or Agency business
- Conference/Seminar Registration fees
- Hotel Lodging
- Airfare
- Mileage Reimbursement – See “Employee Responsibilities” section below for criteria
- Rental car/Taxis/Shuttles/Train (i.e. Amtrak, Metro)
- Fuel expenses for vehicles used in the course of business travel (i.e., rental car)
- Miscellaneous travel-related expenses, including but not limited to:
 - Tips – Generally 15% to 20% depending on service and/or restaurant policy for larger group tables
 - Baggage check fees and reasonable tips
 - Airport parking in long-term/economy (lowest cost option, no valet parking)
 - Communication - Reasonable personal telephone calls will be reimbursed. Hotel Internet/email or similar communication access will be reimbursed if used for reasonable Agency purposes

Non-Reimbursable Expenses

Non-reimbursable expenses include but are not limited to the following:

- Alcoholic beverages
- In-room movies and other personal entertainment
- A meal purchased to take the place of a meal that was included in the registration fee
- Meals or expenses for non-employees (unless prior management approval is obtained)
- Valet parking, unless no other off-site parking is available, or for medical reasons
- Airline trip protection insurance (unless prior management approval is obtained)
- Spas and gyms (exception – if cost is included with room rate)
- Laundry/dry cleaning
- Traffic or parking citations
- Medications and other items of a personal nature

GENERAL REIMBURSEMENT PROCEDURES

A request for reimbursement must be submitted on an Employee Reimbursement Form within a reasonable amount of time, or as soon as practicable after the expenses are incurred – generally within one week after the travel. It is the employee's responsibility to submit the completed Employee Reimbursement Form accurately and fully in compliance with this policy.

Employee Reimbursement Form

The Employee Reimbursement form is updated every calendar year. The most current form can be found in DMS (Document Management System). Completed forms are to be approved and signed by the supervisor and/or Department manager. Department manager reimbursement forms are to be signed by the General Manager. Accounts Payable (AP) will review the form for completeness and compliance with this policy. Forms that are submitted to AP for payment and found to be incomplete or do not comply with this policy will be returned to the employee for appropriate action (i.e., incorrect calculations, missing receipts, documentation, clarify expense, etc.). This will delay payment of the reimbursement.

The general guidelines for processing the Employee Reimbursement Form include but are not limited to the following:

- The Employee Reimbursement Form must be accompanied by the detailed/itemized receipt(s) and documentation as proof of payment made by the employee
- Examples of detailed receipts include the following:
 1. Copy of the approved and signed Employee Seminar/Meeting Request Form
 2. Copy of the Certificate of Completion or other such document as proof of attendance and/or that Agency-related business was conducted
 3. Detailed receipt(s) that includes the name of the business, date of the transaction, all items purchased, price per item and total cost, including tip. A copy of a credit card receipt or statement for travel purposes *is not* considered an itemized receipt.
 4. Receipts for meals for groups must include the names of the employees or persons consuming the meal.

- Pre-paid reimbursements – Employees submitting an Employee Reimbursement Form for items paid by personal check or credit card (i.e. memberships, license, certification, etc.) must provide proof of payment along with the invoice and copy of the newly issued certification/license. Proof of payment can be a copy of the cancelled check, front and back, or a copy of the check with the bank statement showing the check has been cashed. If paid by personal credit card, a copy of the credit card statement with the paid invoice/receipt indicating “paid by credit card” must be submitted.
- Lost itemized receipts – Employees are responsible for obtaining copies of lost receipts from the establishment and/or provide details including the following information:
 1. Name of business, address and phone number
 2. Date of transaction
 3. Number of party, if applicable
 4. Description and cost of each item purchased
 5. Total cost including tip, if applicable
 6. Reason that an itemized receipt is not obtained/attached

Employee Reimbursement requests approved for payment will be processed in the next *regularly* scheduled AP check run.

Conference or Seminar Registration Fees

Conference or seminar attendance must be approved in advance by the appropriate manager or supervisor. Dollar limits for approval levels are set by management and are reviewed on a periodic basis. All conferences, seminars and travel that require overnight travel and/or airfare must be approved by the General Manager. Conference or seminar registration fees may be pre-paid by the Agency. Submit the completed, approved Employee Seminar/Meeting Request form or other form of approval to the authorized purchasing card holder or the Board Secretary well before the conference or seminar to allow for processing. For forms submitted to the Board Secretary, Employee Seminar/Meeting Request forms are processed on Thursday of each week. Planning ahead and submitting early will allow for “Early Bird” registration discounts, travel discounts and ensure your registration can be made in a timely manner. The form and attachments should include the following:

- Supporting documents of conference or seminar such as agenda/itinerary, brochure etc.
*See “Note” below
- Date(s) of conference or seminar
- Registration form completed with all necessary information (i.e. name of attendee(s), cost for each, etc.). *If multiple employees within a Department will be attending the same conference/seminar, submit all requests at the same time as a package.*
- Name and address of payment recipient, or website information
- Note the mode of transportation that will be used to and from, i.e. mileage or using Agency vehicle
- Keep a copy of the approved form for submittal with the Employee Reimbursement Form upon completion of travel/attendance

Lodging

Lodging costs must not exceed the maximum group rate published by the conference or activity sponsor, provided that lodging at the group rate is available to the employee at the time of the booking. If the government or group rate is not available, expenses for lodging must be moderate and reasonable. Accommodations must be obtained in proximity to the conference or meeting site. No reimbursement request for overnight accommodations will be approved for expenses incurred within the Agency's service area, except upon approval of the General Manager. Such expenses will not be reimbursed when incurred for family members of the authorized employee. All expenses that do not fall within these guidelines must be approved by the General Manager before the expense is incurred.

In general, overnight stays are permitted upon General Manager approval, if:

- Attending an approved multi-day conference/seminar/meeting requiring a maximum of one night stay for every day of the conference/seminar/meeting
- The allowed hotel expense is no more than the cost of the conference hotel or the nearest "reasonable" accommodations
- Government rates should be requested (you may be requested to show your Agency ID)
- Employees are responsible for hotel/lodging expenses and processing these expenses on an Employee Reimbursement Form upon completion of travel. See "Note" below.
- Employees may make their own hotel/lodging reservations or request a reservation be made on the Employee Seminar/Meeting Request Form. If the Board Secretary holds the hotel reservation for the employee using an Agency credit card, the employee's credit card is still required at the time of check-in. See "Note" below.
- An itemized receipt from the hotel is required for reimbursement and must include detailed charges per room per night. The final receipt must show form of payment used and zero balance. Lodging expenses submitted for reimbursement without this documentation will be returned unpaid pending the proper documentation.

** NOTE: Hotel/lodging cost for the first night stay may be required by some hotels at the time of conference/seminar registration. If required, the Board Secretary will pay for this cost (on the Agency credit card) at the time the registration process is completed.*

Meals

Expenses for food must be moderate and reasonable. Employees may receive reimbursement for meals due to travel on Agency business, attending approved seminars or conferences (i.e., when meals are not included in the registration fee) and special meetings. There will be no reimbursement for breakfast on the day the trip starts unless travel is required to begin one hour before employee's normal start time in **order to arrive at the destination on time**. There will be no reimbursement for dinner on the day the trip ends unless the travel is required to end after 7:00 p.m. Such expenses will not be reimbursed when incurred for family members of the authorized employee. Allowable meal reimbursements are based on the following criteria:

- The reasonable cost of meals, including tips, not to exceed \$100 per person per day.
- An itemized/detailed receipt for each meal is required for reimbursement and includes the following:
 1. Name of establishment and date
 2. Description and price per item and total cost
 3. Tip – generally 15% to 20% depending on service and/or restaurant policy for larger group tables
 4. Receipts for meals for groups should include the number of party and names of the employees or guests
- A copy of a credit card receipt or statement is not considered an itemized receipt and will not be accepted for reimbursement
- Expenses incurred for business associates while conducting Agency business will be reimbursable
- Receipts - If an itemized/detailed receipt is lost, the employee is responsible to contact the establishment for a copy and/or provide details including the following information:
 1. Name of business, address and phone number
 2. Date of transaction
 3. Number of party and names of person(s) consuming the meal
 4. Description and cost of each item purchased
 5. Total cost including tip
 6. Reason that a copy of an itemized receipt is not obtained/attached

Special meetings – Snacks and beverages for special meetings may be reimbursed if obtained for meetings of at least three hours in length. A lunch or dinner meal may be reimbursed if provided for the benefit of continuing Agency work; prior approval is required. Special meetings are described as any meeting that is not a regularly scheduled meeting. Examples of a special meeting include non-routine training, non-routine team meetings, extended/necessary consultant meetings, etc.

The Agency will not provide reimbursement for alcoholic beverages.

TRANSPORTATION

Agency vehicles should be used when available and reasonable to do so. If an Agency vehicle is not available, employees will be reimbursed for mileage for using their privately owned vehicles. Multiple employees going to the same location are required to coordinate plans. No unauthorized personnel are allowed to drive or ride in Agency vehicles.

Employees may use other appropriate commercial means of transportation, if necessary, in the most efficient manner consistent with scheduling needs and cargo space requirements. In the event a more expensive means of transportation is used, the reimbursable amount will be limited to the cost of the most reasonably economical means of transportation available.

Methods of Travel

Mileage

Use of Private Vehicles for Agency Business. If an Agency vehicle is not available, employees will be reimbursed for mileage for using their own vehicle. The basic criteria include:

1. The use of private vehicles for Agency business will be reimbursed at the rate allowed by the IRS (subject to IRS updates).
2. An employee using a private vehicle on Agency business must maintain legally acceptable automobile insurance with liability coverage indicating the minimum limits required by the State of California.
3. The employee's private vehicle insurance is the primary insurance on the vehicle.
4. Reimbursement for mileage while conducting Agency business will be made from the employee's home or headquarters office, whichever results in the lesser distance. Reimbursement of mileage for non-workday travel will be made from employee's home.
5. Proof of mileage must be attached to the Employee Reimbursement Form. Proof can be obtained using one of the free, on-line map/driving direction providers (i.e. MapQuest).

Mileage in Lieu of Airline Travel. Employees who choose to drive to an Agency event in lieu of airline travel requires advance approval of the Department Manager and General Manager. Mileage reimbursement is not to exceed the cost of round-trip airfare including airport parking and ground transportation.

- Employees must submit proof of airfare rates for comparison. To obtain proof, go to the Southwest Airlines website. Calculate the round-trip airfare using "refundable/exchangeable" rate/fare. If Southwest does not travel to the required destination, go to the best discount airfare rate site available for the actual travel dates and nearest airport. Attach all documentation to the Employee Reimbursement Form.

While operating an Agency vehicle or driving a personal vehicle on Agency business, the driver must possess a valid State of California, Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) driver's license, and must comply with the requirement of the California Vehicle code and local regulations and ordinances.

Refer to the section entitled "Employee Responsibilities" for additional criteria/information.

Airfare

Generally, airfare is pre-paid by the Agency and arranged by the Board Secretary on the Agency credit card. Employees are to submit the Employee Seminar/Meeting Request Form as early as possible to obtain the lowest cost airfare and ensure your flight reservations can be made in a timely manner. Air travel will be by coach or economy class. The Agency uses Southwest Airlines refundable/ exchangeable tickets. Do not elect trip protection insurance unless you have received prior General Manager approval. Long-term parking at the airport should be used for travel exceeding 24 hours.

Taxis/Ridesharing/Shuttles/Train (i.e. Amtrak, Metro)

Employees are encouraged to use the lowest cost options when traveling, including use of taxi, ridesharing (such as Uber or Lyft), shuttle or train, whichever is less. When traveling together, employees should make an effort to use suitable economic measures (i.e., sharing taxis). Fees for taxis/ridesharing/shuttles/trains may be reimbursed with receipts. Generally, taxi, ridesharing or shuttle tip is limited to no more than 15% of fare.

Rental Car

The use of a rental car must be authorized by the General Manager prior to travel. A rental car should provide the most direct and economical means to the Agency and when cost of the taxi or shuttle service exceeds the rental car cost or travel during a conference/seminar is required. The following conditions apply:

- Multiple employees going to the same location are required to coordinate plans and are encouraged to share rental cars
- Only a compact car is allowed for use by three or fewer employees
- No unauthorized personnel are allowed to drive rental cars that have been authorized for Agency business
- Optional insurance coverage SHOULD NOT be selected
- The rental car company typically will not provide the most economical refueling cost to the Agency if the vehicle is returned without refueling the tank. The Agency expects employees to refuel the rental car prior to returning it to the rental company as long as it is safe to do so.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND REQUIREMENTS FOR REIMBURSEMENT

Travel Cancellation

In the event that pre-paid travel is cancelled for any reason, all Agency pre-paid expenses must be reimbursed.

- Pre-paid Airfare/Registration - Upon notification of cancellation, immediately notify the Board Secretary and return ticket/flight confirmations, boarding pass, registration confirmations, etc. The Board Secretary will seek reimbursements and follow through to ensure pre-paid reimbursements are refunded to the Agency. Employees are not responsible for non-refundable, Agency pre-paid expenses due to cancellations beyond their control.
- Employee Pre-paid expenses - Employees are responsible for seeking reimbursement for travel arrangements, hotel reservations, etc. that they have made and following through to ensure those reimbursements are received.

Travel Advance

Generally, employees are responsible to pay for lodging, meals, miscellaneous travel expenses, etc., and then submit an Employee Reimbursement Form along with required receipts upon completion of travel. The Agency will pre-pay airfare and registration fees as requested on the Employee Seminar/Meeting Request Form or other authorized form of approval. If there is a financial hardship in paying for Agency-required travel, the Agency may assist with payment of

anticipated eligible expenses with General Manager approval. This will be considered as an exception and each situation will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. There will be no advance allowed for a trip of one day or less or for trips where the estimated expenses are less than \$50.

- Employees must request a travel advance at least two weeks in advance by submitting an approved Employee Seminar/Meeting Request Form with travel expense forecast to their Department Manager.
- The Department Manager will review the request with the employee.
- If the Department Manager approves the request, the Director of Administrative Services will review the possibility of prepaying certain expenses on an Agency credit card or providing a cash advance.
- If a cash advance is approved, the requesting Department Manager will complete a Check Request Form for the amount to be advanced in the name of the employee as follows:
 1. Attach a copy of the approved Employee Seminar/Meeting Request Form to the Check Request form
 2. Notate in the comments: TRAVEL ADVANCE
 3. Submit to Accounts Payable. The Check Request/Travel Advance Form must be submitted no later than one week prior to the week the trip begins. If received after this time, a travel advance check cannot be issued.
- Employees must maintain receipts for all expenditures and complete the Employee Reimbursement Form upon completion of travel. Attach a copy of the signed Check Request/Travel Advance Form and approved Employee Seminar/Meeting Request Form. The travel advance amount will be deducted and any expenses over and above the advance amount will be reimbursed to the employee.
- Unused funds must be paid back to the Agency, either by cash or check, as soon as reasonably possible, no later than 15 working days. Failure to pay unused funds later than 15 working days may result in disciplinary action.

Educational Reimbursement

Employees may be eligible for reimbursement for college-level course(s) from an accredited institution, subject to the limitations noted in the Educational Reimbursement Policy – Employee Manual, Section 25. In general, the following conditions apply:

- An employee must submit a completed application for Education Assistance Program Form.
- Obtain approvals from the supervisor AND Human Resources Supervisor prior to enrolling in a class.
- Eligible courses must have relevance to the employee's job duties or career advancement at the Agency.
- A maximum of \$5,000 per fiscal year is available to each Agency employee for educational reimbursement purposes.
- An employee is responsible for all educational related expenses (i.e., tuition, books, college fees, parking, etc.). Reimbursement for educational expenses will be made upon completion of the course(s) with a minimum grade of C or equivalent.

- Proof of completion of the course and grade must be attached to the Employee Reimbursement Form along with all required receipts. Completed forms are submitted to the supervisor and Human Resources Supervisor for approval.

Employee Reimbursement requests approved for payment will be processed in the next *regularly* scheduled AP check run.

Licenses, Memberships, Fees and Dues

The Agency will pay for maintaining professional work-related certifications, licenses, memberships, fees and dues as noted in the Educational Reimbursement Policy – Employee Manual, Section 25. Generally, invoices approved for Agency memberships/fees and dues are received and processed by AP. Licenses and certifications pre-paid by employees' may be reimbursed.

Fees for application and testing for new licenses or certifications shall be pre-paid by the employee and will be reimbursed upon notice of successful completion.

To process a reimbursement, complete the Employee Reimbursement form and attach the following:

- A copy of the newly issued certificate/license
- Copy of the invoice indicating the amount due, term, etc
- Proof of payment. If paid by personal check, submit a copy of the cancelled check, front and back, or a copy of the check with the bank statement showing the check has been cashed. If paid by personal credit card, submit a copy of the credit card statement with the paid invoice/receipt indicating "paid by credit card"
- The form must be approved and signed by the supervisor before submitting to AP for reimbursement

Employee Reimbursement requests approved for payment will be processed in the next *regularly* scheduled AP check run.

RESPONSIBILITIES

Employee Responsibilities

Employees are responsible to read and understand the above policy and procedures for reimbursements. Employees are reminded to exercise good judgment in the expenditure of Agency funds in accordance with this policy, obtaining appropriate approvals, completing the Employee Reimbursement form and/or Employee Seminar/Meeting Request form, keeping accurate records of expenditures while traveling, attaching itemized receipts and submitting the form(s) in complete and timely manner, generally within one week upon completion of travel.

Mileage claims - In order to claim mileage for driving a privately owned vehicle on Agency business, all employees must:

1. Possess a valid California driver's license
2. Must maintain legally acceptable automobile insurance with liability coverage indicating the minimum limits required by the State of California
3. Understand that the employee's private vehicle insurance is the primary insurance on the vehicle; for that reason, any damage to the employee's personal vehicle and/or service or repair occurring on the trip will be the employee's responsibility, as insurance costs are factored in the IRS per mile cost reimbursement
4. The driver must comply with the requirement of the California Vehicle Code and local regulations and ordinances
5. Ensure that they have read and understand any driving and vehicle policies approved by the Agency.

Supervisor Responsibilities

Supervisors are responsible for review and approval of staff Employee Reimbursement expense claims and ensure that expense claims are complete with required documentation and do not exceed the allowances permitted by this policy.

Department Manager

The Department Manager will ensure that employees are aware of this policy. He or she must review staff Employee Reimbursement expense claims and may disallow amounts deemed improper or otherwise not properly accounted for. Agency staff responsible for issuing payments to reimburse employees for incurred expenses will bring questionable matters to the attention of the Department Manager and/or General Manager.