# TRAVEL

**Applicability**
This policy shall apply to all MBCG officers and employees, including elected and appointed officials.

**Authorized Travel and Expenses**
Travel and related expenses shall be authorized when a traveler is engaged in the conduct of official MBCG business, which shall include the following:

1. Travel to and from the location of a conference, seminar, school or training program which is held either inside or outside the territorial limits of Bibb County and which enhances an officer's or employee's ability to complete their functions or duties.

2. Travel to and from any location to conduct operations of MBCG.

3. Travel to and from any location for the purpose of extraditing or transporting a prisoner as may be required by the courts.

**Travel Requests, Approval and Reporting**
All travel by department personnel requires prior approval of the department head or designee. It is, therefore, the department head's responsibility to remain within the travel allocation of the budget.

**Travel Advances**
A travel advance for travel related expenses may be made by written request on such forms as may be prescribed by the Finance Department. Such request should be made no less than seven business days prior to the date the advance will be needed. Travelers who fail to submit the advance request in sufficient time to receive an advance will be responsible for travel expenses and will be reimbursed after the travel event has been completed. Travel advance payments will be made in the form of a check and will not be available before two business days prior to the date costs will be incurred or departure is required. All efforts should be made to have travel advances paid in advance by check written directly to the traveler. No advance will be made for less than $25.00. For reimbursement of travel expenses of less than $25.00, the traveler must submit a travel expense report after the travel event has been completed.

**Registration, lodging and transportation payments**
Registration fees and fares for common carrier transportation should be paid by departmental purchasing cards whenever possible. If that is not an available option, then those costs will be paid in advance by the Finance Department by check made payable to the vendor providing the service. The traveler shall be responsible for submitting the request for payment (along with the registration form, invoice or bill) in sufficient time for the payment to be processed and mailed prior to any deadline. Whenever possible, lodging accommodations should be paid for in advance in the same manner as registration fees and fares for common carrier transportation.

**Reimbursement of expenses and final settlement of advances**
If the sum advanced to a traveler exceeds actual reimbursable expenses, the traveler shall reimburse the excess to the MBCG Cash Manager in the Finance Department. If the amount advanced was not sufficient to cover the reimbursable expenses or in cases where the traveler used personal funds to pay travel expenses, a voucher will be processed to cover the difference.

Travel expense forms must be approved by the employee's supervisor and submitted to the Finance Department. Such requests and settlements shall be made on forms prescribed by the Finance Department. The forms must be signed by the traveler’s department head. Expense forms should be submitted within three business days following the completion of travel or return to regular scheduled duties. All travel reimbursement requests should be included on the travel expense report. Any reimbursement due to the traveler will be made by check within five business days of receipt of the complete and approved travel expense form. Requests for reimbursement submitted after three business days may be denied.

Should a report for final settlement of advances not be filed within ten calendar days following the traveler’s return to work, the traveler’s name will be placed on a list which makes the traveler ineligible for future advances. When the reports are submitted, the traveler’s name will be removed from the list and they will again be eligible for future advances. Should a final settlement of advances not be filed within fifteen calendar days following the traveler’s return to work, the Finance Director shall be authorized to withhold any such cash advance or direct payment from the traveler’s paycheck. Any expenses incurred over and above the advance will not be reimbursed after this period.

**Documentation of Expenses**
Receipts or other documentation shall be required for all expenses with the exception of the following: meals, toll charges and tips.

**Allowable transportation expenses:**

- **Common carrier**
  A common carrier shall be any scheduled airline, train, or bus and the authorized rate shall be limited to the minimum fare available – generally called "economy" or "tourist" class fares. Reservations should be made far enough in advance to permit procurement of proper reservations and to take advantage of any special savings plans offered by the carrier.

- **Travel by Auto**
  A traveler driving either a private auto (including rental vehicles) or a MBCG-owned auto must possess a current valid Georgia driver's license. Travelers using privately owned vehicles must provide, at their expense, collision and liability insurance in at least the statutory minimum insuring themselves, their passengers, and others in the use of their private auto while on MBCG business.

  When more than one MBCG official or employee is attending an event, separate vehicle allowances will not be approved if one vehicle is sufficient for transportation, unless separate arrival and departure times are required by other MBCG business or approved by the department head. Thorough documentation of the circumstances requiring deviation from this policy must be submitted with the request for reimbursement.

  Travelers will be reimbursed for actual cost of incidental expenses incurred in the use of private, rental or MBCG-owned vehicles such as parking fees, bridge and toll road fees, etc.

- **MBCG-owned Vehicle**
  If the department for which the traveler works is assigned a MBCG-owned vehicle, the traveler should, if at all possible, use the MBCG-owned auto rather than their personal vehicle.

  If a MBCG-owned vehicle is used, the traveler will not be reimbursed for mileage, but will be reimbursed for the actual cost of purchased gasoline and oil. In addition, small emergency repair expenses such as flat tire, battery charges, fan belt replacement, etc. will be reimbursed, provided that appropriate receipts are furnished. Automotive breakdowns requiring repairs in excess of $200 should be reported to the appropriate department head for instructions.

- **Personal Auto**
  The use of private autos or rental vehicles for MBCG business will be reimbursed at the current IRS rate. Reimbursable travel expenses do not include trips from the traveler's place of residence to a MBCG building or vice-versa. Travelers electing to use a private auto in lieu of travel by common carrier, where common carrier is practical, will be reimbursed the vehicle mileage expense or the amount of Economy Air Fare, whichever is less. Travelers who elect to use a rental vehicle in lieu of travel by common carrier, where common carrier is practical, will be reimbursed at the cost of the auto rental, not including mileage expense, or the amount of Economy Air Fare, whichever is less.

- **Ground Transportation**
  Ground transportation by taxi, bus, rental car, rideshare service, or limousine is an allowable expense when actually incurred in conjunction with common carrier transportation to and from terminals, hotels, restaurants, and meeting locations, if necessary. The most economical means of ground transportation should always be used.

- **Points of Departure and Return**
  The points of departure and return for travel status shall be either the office at which the employee carries out their duties or their residence; whichever is more practical under the circumstances. All travel should be by the most direct route. However, an expressway route which involves more total mileage may result in savings in personnel time and therefore would be considered the more direct route in most circumstances. Travel to restaurants and other locations after reaching the initial destination should be kept to a minimum. Reason and good judgment should be exercised in this determination. It will be the responsibility of the department head to monitor the reasonableness of mileage reimbursement requests.

- **Lodging**
  When lodging accommodations are not available at the conference or class site, travelers should choose the most reasonably convenient and economical hotel accommodations possible. Travelers requiring overnight accommodations should inquire about the hotel’s government rate. The rate is usually lower than special conference or group rates, and always less than regular rates.

  When traveling within the State of Georgia, officials or employees can exempt both sales and local hotel/motel excise tax. When reserving accommodations, please inform the hotel staff that the accommodations will be paid for by MBCG so that they can accurately calculate the charges if an advance payment is to be made. Also, inquire as to whether the forms necessary to obtain this exemption should be sent with the advance payment or presented at the time of check-in. If the forms are to be sent with the payment, it shall be the responsibility of the traveler to attach these forms to the payment request. Forms may be obtained from the Finance Department.

Reimbursement for lodging will cover only those nights during which an event occurs. If an employee arrives early or leaves late from an event, the MBCG will not pay for extra nights of lodging accommodation. However, if travel and event schedules require that an employee arrive the evening before or leave the morning after an event, the MBCG will pay for reasonable extra accommodations.

Travelers sharing a room with a traveling companion (other than an authorized MBCG traveler) will be reimbursed for the single occupancy rate.

Travelers requesting additional amenities including, but not limited to, suites, kitchenettes or a fireplace will be reimbursed for the standard single room rate. Travelers must pay for additional amenities.

- **Meals**
  Travelers are allowed a per diem meal allowance while traveling on MBCG business. The per diem allowance is based on the IRS Standard Meal Allowance and varies depending on the particular city to which the traveler is traveling. The per diem rate for any city in the United States or internationally may be obtained from the department head or from the Finance Department.

  For partial days of travel, i.e. the first and last day of a trip that includes overnight stays, or for single-day out-of-county travel, the per diem allowance shall be 75% of the daily per diem rate for the destination city.

  Tips are included as part of the daily per diem allowance and will not be reimbursed as a separate expense.

- **Meals Within Bibb County**
  Expenses associated with meals for travelers to events occurring within the territorial limits of Bibb County may be reimbursed if one or more of the following conditions are met:

A. The traveler attended a seminar or conference at which the meal is an integral part of the seminar;

B. The traveler must participate in a meeting with an out-of-Bibb County individual or group whose principal purpose in Bibb County is to conduct business with MBCG. Extreme discretion should be used in spending travel funds for this purpose;

C. There is a meeting involving an elected official who is devoting their time to conducting MBCG business.

The meal cost reimbursement for the above circumstances will not exceed the IRS per diem allowance rate for MBCG in effect at that time.

- **Registration Fees**

  Registration fees in connection with an authorized conference or training class shall be an allowable expense and payment shall be made by departmental purchasing card whenever possible, or, if a purchasing card cannot be used, by the Finance Department. The attendee shall be responsible for submitting the request for payment, along with the registration form, in sufficient time for payment to be processed and mailed prior to any registration deadline. If necessary, MBCG will issue a check payable as directed by the sponsor of the conference or training class.

  In unusual circumstances, travelers may take the check and deliver it at the time of the conference or pay the registration fee themselves and then request reimbursement on the travel expense form, if approved by the department head. Optional assessments such as special events or personal memberships which are charges in addition to the class or conference fees are not allowable expenses.

- **Communications**

  Telephone and facsimile messages directly pertaining to official MBCG business shall be an allowable expense. Claims for payment of such charges shall be itemized and shall include location, the person contacted, and the justification for the communication. One personal call to confirm the safe arrival of the individual shall be an allowable expense. Expenses for all other personal calls will not be reimbursed.

- **Tips and Gratuities**

  Tips and gratuities in conjunction with an authorized expense (other than meals) shall be allowable if they are determined to be reasonable by the Finance Director. The per diem meal allowance includes all tips and gratuities for meal expenses.

- **Parking Fees**

  Expenses for parking shall be allowable if documented by paid receipt, except however, that no payment shall be made for charges in connection with any illegal parking violation.

- **Credit Cards**

  Whenever allowable expenses are purchased or paid by the employee with a credit card, the receipt shall include an itemization of expenditures, or, in the alternative, a separate receipt must be obtained for each expense. A credit card receipt showing only an aggregate of charges, unless itemized, shall not constitute sufficient documentation and shall not be the basis for reimbursement of expenses.

- **Spouses**

  Reimbursable expenses for spouses include any registration fee in cases when spouses are invited to and considered part of the function or when protocol requires the attendance of spouses. Meals for spouses or traveling companions are not otherwise reimbursable.

- **Other Expenses**

  Upon justification, the County Manager may authorize reimbursement to travelers for expenses of the limitations prescribed in this policy where they find that the expenses were reasonable and proper under the circumstances.

- **Unallowable Expenses**

  The following expenses are specifically unallowable for payment:

  - Expenses incurred by any person other than the traveler unless otherwise provided for in this policy or prior written approval has been granted by the Finance Director.
  - Expenses for entertainment, including but not limited to in-room movies and mini-bars.
  - Alcoholic beverages.

- Laundry service.
- Personal articles, toiletries, souvenirs, etc.
- Direct expenses for operating a personal vehicle, such as gasoline, oil, parts or repairs.
- Travel and related expenses incurred from an employee's residence to their designated work site.
- Any expenses for per diem allowances not required to ensure the employee's performance of official MBCG business. Scheduling or extending travel periods in order to increase per diem allowances is specifically not allowable.
- Any expenses incurred that are unrelated to official government business or activities as determined by the Finance Director.

- **Distribution of Travel Policy**
  It is the responsibility of the department head or others approving travel for employees to ensure that the traveler reads and understands the travel policy prior to incurring any charges which they might expect to be reimbursed by MBCG.

- **Information and Forms**
  Employees or officials who have questions concerning this policy or the application of this policy should contact the MBCG Finance Department. The Internal Revenue Service (“IRS”) schedule of per diem rates by location for meal expenses, along with the MBCG Travel Advance Requisition Form and MBCG Travel Expense Requisition Form, can be found on the MBCG website, under the tab for Finance Department—Finance Forms.

- **Final Authority**
  The County Manager has final authority for interpreting, applying, and considering any appeals from this policy.