Dept of Health and Human Services

NC FAST TEAM MEMBER TRAVEL REIMBURSEMENTS

1. Introduction

The North Carolina Families Accessing Services through Technology (NC FAST) Case Management project will recruit a significant number of its staff from other Divisions of the Department of Health and Human Services and from county Departments of Social Services. A consistent and fair travel reimbursement policy is an important component of this recruiting and will allow the project to attract and retain qualified county and state employees.

Under State of North Carolina statute and policy, employees traveling from their duty station on state business are reimbursed for such travel. This regular business travel is further governed by the rules and procedures established by individual business units, including the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services. The NC FAST project will follow all NC DHHS policies for this type of travel.

This document addresses staff traveling from their regular office to the NC FAST project office when they are working for the project. It defines terms, eligibility, rates, recordkeeping, and reimbursement for the NC FAST project members.

1.0 Definitions

Based on the Financial SC discussions and the State of North Carolina Budget Manual, maintained by the Office of State Budget and Management, the following definitions apply to all the scenarios:

1.0.0 State Policy

Statutory regulations for per diem, travel, and subsistence allowances for state departments, agencies, boards, commissions, committees, and councils are contained in North Carolina General Statutes 138-5, 138-6, and 138-7. These statutes are further supported by the Office of State Budget and Management and Office of State Personnel policies and procedures.

An employee traveling on official state business is expected to exercise the same care in incurring expenses that a prudent person would exercise if traveling on personal business and expending personal funds. Excess costs, circuitous routes, delays, or luxury accommodations and services unnecessary, unjustified, or for the convenience or personal preference of the employee in the performance of official state business is prohibited.

2.0.0 Status

"Assigned to" means any county or state employee joining the NC FAST project for an extended period and working exclusively on project development tasks such as business requirements, gap analysis, user acceptance testing, etc. These types of tasks require an employee to work full-time in the project's Raleigh-area office to support the design, development, and implementation phases of the NC FAST Case Management system. The number of project staff and their responsibilities are set by the NC FAST EAC.

For the purposes of these scenarios, all employees discussed are considered to be ***assigned to*** the NC FAST project staff.

"Working on" refers to any county or state employee who, as part of his or her regular work assignment, participates in limited-time activities such as workgroup sessions and focus groups. These types of tasks are designed to facilitate communication and information exchange between county/state departments (or divisions) and the NC FAST project. Participation in these activities is voluntary and is part of the necessary cooperation of state and county departments required for the NC FAST project to meet its goals. An employee's work unit is responsible for any expenses incurred according to its appropriate travel policies and procedures. The number of participants necessary for these activities is set by the NC FAST Project Team. If a county or state department assigns additional personnel to these activities, the individual's work unit is responsible for all costs and expenses without reimbursement from the NC FAST project.

3.0.0 Work Schedule

Personnel assigned to the NC FAST project staff must work full-time on the project. The standard work schedule is 40 hours per week. All team members must start work by 8 a.m. on Monday morning and end the work week at 5 p.m. on Friday afternoon.

4.0.0 Duty Station

All personnel assigned to the NC FAST project staff work at the project's office located in the Raleigh, North Carolina-area. For the purposes of determining travel reimbursements, a team member's duty station is defined as either:

- Temporary: County employees and some state employees (from offices outside of the Raleigh-area) assigned to the NC FAST project staff are temporarily located at the project's office in Raleigh. Their permanent duty station remains the work location of their regular county or state position.
- Reassigned: When assigned to the NC FAST project staff, state employees whose permanent duty station is located in the Raleigh-area are reassigned to the NC FAST project office as their duty station.

5.0.0 Travel Status

State regulations require that any employee traveling for work be reimbursed for certain expenses. For these purposes, personnel assigned to the NC FAST project staff will fall into one of three categories:

- Reassigned Status: These employees, whose duty station is reassigned to the NC FAST project office, are eligible for travel reimbursement only when they travel away from the project's office on official business. They are not eligible for reimbursement of their commute to the NC FAST project office. NC FAST team members on Reassigned Status are expected to work from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday. (These team members will be referred to as "reassigned" team members.)
- On Local Travel Status: If the distance from a temporary team member's permanent duty station or home, whichever is closer, to the NC FAST project office is less than or equal to 35 miles. Team members on Local Travel Status are expected to work from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday. (These team members will be referred to as "local" team members.)
- On Distant Travel Status: If the distance from a temporary team member's permanent duty station or home, whichever is closer, to the NC FAST project office is greater than 35 miles.

Team members on Distant Travel Status are expected to work from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday; however, their work time includes travel time to the project's office from their permanent duty station (or home). When these team members stay overnight in the Raleigh-area, they should plan their travel schedule so that they arrive at work no later than 1 p.m. on the first work day each week and leave no earlier than 12 noon on the last work day each week; during the week they are expected to work from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. (These team members will be referred to as "distant" team members.)

6.0.0 Travel Reimbursement

Local and distant team members only are allowed reimbursement for their commute travel to the Raleigh-area NC FAST project office. All commute travel is assumed to be by the team member's personal vehicle. Actual mileage is reimbursable. Mileage is measured from the closer of the team member's permanent duty station or home to the NC FAST project office. The NC FAST project will reimburse commute travel using the prevailing, standard mileage rate set each January 1 by the United States Internal Revenue Service (currently $0.445 per mile). All applicable tolls and any necessary parking or storage fees at the NC FAST project office location are reimbursable when accompanied by receipts.

Any other travel for project business will be reimbursed based on the then-prevailing rules and rates established by the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services.

7.0.0 Meal Reimbursement

Current meal reimbursement rates, including any taxes and gratuities, authorized by the State of North Carolina are:

- Breakfast $ 7.00
- Lunch $ 9.25
- Dinner $15.75

Under certain circumstances, team members on Reassigned Status and Local Travel Status are eligible for reimbursement for the following meals:

- If the team member is required to leave for work before 6 a.m. and extend the workday by two hours, he or she is eligible for breakfast. The requirement for extending the workday by two hours must be approved by the NC FAST Project Director.
- If the team member is required to extend the workday by three hours and leave from work later than 8 p.m., he or she is eligible for dinner. The requirement for extending the workday by three hours must be approved by the NC FAST Project Director.
- Lunch is only reimbursed when a team member is on Distant Travel Status.

Team members on Distant Travel Status are eligible for reimbursement for the following meals:

- For each full day they are at the NC FAST project office, they receive three meals per day.
- One day a week, when traveling from home to the NC FAST project office, a team member is eligible for breakfast, lunch and dinner when he or she must depart home before 6 a.m. to reach the NC FAST project office by 1 p.m. (extending the workday by two hours); or, a team member is eligible for lunch and dinner when he or she must depart home after 6 a.m. to arrive at the NC FAST project office by 1 p.m. The requirement for extending the workday by two hours must be approved by the NC FAST Project Director.
- One day a week, when traveling from the NC FAST project office to his or her home, a team member is eligible for breakfast and lunch when departing the NC FAST project office no earlier than 12 noon and arriving home after 2 p.m.; or, a team member is eligible for breakfast, lunch, and dinner when departing the NC FAST project office no earlier than 12 noon and arriving home after 8 p.m. (extending the workday by three hours). The requirement for extending the workday by three hours must be approved by the NC FAST Project Director.

8.0.0 Travel Expense Reporting

Each team member is responsible for his or her own request for reimbursement. All team members are reimbursed directly by the NC FAST project using a DHHS Travel Reimbursement Request (Form BD-403) filed with the NC FAST Project Director or a designee within 30 (thirty) days of completing the travel. Following approval and processing, each team member is reimbursed by electronic funds transfer to a personal bank account (any relevant transaction fees charged by the financial institution being the responsibility of the team member).

9.0.0 Other Definitions

- All reimbursed travel discussed in this policy must be within the State of North Carolina.
- Any travel outside the state or beyond the scope of the policies discussed in this document requires the prior written approval of the NC FAST Project Director.
- Team members are not allowed to charge long distance telephone calls to the state for any calls made of a personal nature, except as follows. A team member on Distant Travel Status for two or more consecutive nights in a week is allowed one personal long distance telephone call for each two nights; reimbursement not to exceed $3.00 for each call. In case of emergency, team members can use the state network system or file for reimbursement for personal calls of an emergency nature. Such calls include team members on Distant Travel Status calling home to inform someone when the travel period has been extended due to unforeseen circumstances.
- This document deals with “commute” travel to and from the NC FAST project office; all team members are eligible for reimbursement when travel is required as part of their duties on the NC FAST team. DHHS policies and procedures apply in such circumstances. Examples of reimbursable travel would be traveling to another location for a project-related meeting or traveling overnight to a county office to provide training.

2. Travel and Subsistence Reimbursement Scenarios

1.0 Reassigned Team Members

State employees assigned to the NC FAST team from offices in the Raleigh area are on Reassigned Status and are not eligible for travel and subsistence reimbursement related to their commute. Meal reimbursements are only allowed as discussed in Section 7.0.0, above. Reassigned team members are eligible for travel and subsistence reimbursement related to any official business.

2.0 Local Team Members

County personnel and some state employees (whose regular duty station is outside the Raleigh area) assigned to the NC FAST project whose permanent duty station or home (whichever is closer) is less than or equal to 35 miles from the NC FAST project office are on Local Travel Status. These local team members are only eligible for daily travel reimbursement (Section 6.0.0, above) for the distance between their permanent duty stations or homes and the NC FAST project office plus any appropriate tolls and parking/storage fees. Team members on Local Travel Status are not eligible for lodging reimbursement under state rules and meal reimbursements are only allowed as discussed in Section 7.0.0, above. Local team members are eligible for travel and subsistence reimbursement related to any official business.

3.0 Distant Team Members

State and county personnel assigned to the NC FAST Business Team whose permanent duty station or home (whichever is closer) is more than 35 miles from the NC FAST project office are on Distant Travel Status. These team members are eligible for travel reimbursement, meal reimbursements, and lodging. Section 1.0.0, below, describes the standard reimbursement policy for distant team members, while Sections 2.0.0 and 0.0.0 describe alternative travel and lodging options for team members.

1.0.0 Four Nights Lodging Per Week

The distant team member is allowed one paid round trip per week between his or her permanent duty station or home (whichever is closer) and the NC FAST project office, as described in Section 6.0.0. Meals are reimbursed as described in Section 7.0.0. The NC FAST project will book and directly pay for suitable lodging for four nights (in a standard motel or hotel) to reduce the team member's out-of-pocket expenses and control project costs. Any incidental charges or fees (and taxes on those amounts) incurred at the accommodations are the responsibility of the team member. Such charges include, but are not limited to, telephone calls, movies, snacks, and laundry. Daily travel between the NC FAST project office and the lodging, and any associated parking/storage fees or tolls, is not reimbursed.

2.0.0 Monthly Lodging Only

Distant team members who do not want to commute weekly between their home location and the NC FAST project office can elect monthly lodging. The NC FAST project will book and directly pay for local monthly lodging, including basic kitchenette facilities. Any incidental charges or fees (and taxes on those amounts) incurred at the accommodations are the responsibility of the team member. Such charges include, but are not limited to, telephone calls, movies, snacks, and laundry.

The distant team member is allowed a number of reimbursed round trips per month between his or her home (mileage is reimbursed based on the closer the member's permanent duty station or home) and the NC FAST project office, as described in Section 6.0.0. The number of reimbursed trips is flexible; however, the total cost of monthly lodging and travel/meal reimbursements must not exceed the total cost for 'Four Nights Lodging per Week' as described in Section 1.0.0, above.

Daily travel between the lodging and the NC FAST project office is not reimbursed and meals are only reimbursed when traveling to or from their home/permanent duty station (see Section 7.0.0) or when the team member is required to work beyond a normal business day (see Section 7.0.0).

Monthly lodging reduces the state's project costs by eliminating approximately $500 per month in meal reimbursements per team member and reducing lodging costs by purchasing blocks of time with the accommodations. The team member benefits by having "permanent" lodgings instead of changing accommodations each week and reduced out-of-pocket expense.

3.0.0 Daily Travel in Lieu of Lodging and Meals

Distant team members who live close enough to the NC FAST project office may wish to commute from their home instead of staying in local lodgings during the week. The NC FAST project will offer these team members daily mileage from their home or permanent duty station (whichever is closer). Except for travel for NC FAST business reasons, lodging during the week will not be allowed and meal reimbursements will be allowed only when the team member is required to work beyond a normal business day as described in Section 7.0.0.

Daily travel in lieu of lodging and meals reduces the state's project costs by eliminating approximately $1,500 per month in lodging and meal reimbursements per team member (the savings are offset by increased daily travel costs). The team member benefits by returning home each day instead of spending time away and receiving compensation for the extended length of their commute.

4.0 Relocation

Because of the short-term nature of most of the NC FAST team positions, relocation of distant team members is not generally allowed. However, relocation may be the best economic and personal option for a team member and the NC FAST project. The NC FAST Project Director will consider such requests on a case-by-case basis before seeking approval from DHHS executives. Notwithstanding anything else in this document, any relocation package must conform to the appropriate North Carolina General Statutes, Office of State Budget and Management policies, Office of State Personnel policies and rules, and DHHS policies and procedures.

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