


<h1>City of Austin</h1>	
	Policy Name DRAFT City Council Office Budget and Expense Policy
	Resolution Number 26-XX
	Effective Date January 22, 2026
	Revision Date V4 (12/19/25)

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to establish a policy relating to City Council Office expenses and to outline and affirm guidelines for the use of public funds by elected officials in the performance of their official functions. The policy is to ensure that expenses are reasonable and in the interest of the public, while maintaining transparency, fiscal stewardship and accountability. The policy is intended to apply to the Mayor and City Council Members (collectively “City Council Members”), as well as employees supporting a City Council Office.

Scope

This document is intended to reflect multiple administrative and operational directives across the organization relating to City expenses. It applies to all taxpayer funds allocated to City Council Office budgets. It is not an exhaustive list and is subject to change.

It is the responsibility of the City Council Office to communicate with the City Council Liaison for any questions, clarifications, or predeterminations of expenses as may be necessary to ensure compliance with this City Council Office Expense Policy.

Definitions

Elected official – The **Mayor** and the **City Council Members**.

City Council Liaison – The Chief Financial Officer or their designee will serve as the liaison to the City Council to assist with and address administrative matters under this policy.

City Council Office Budget – The budget adopted by the City Council as part of the annual budget adoption process that is designated for the Mayor and each City Council office to carry out the functions of the office.

Public Purpose – An objective or activity that primarily benefits the general public, community, or taxpayers rather than specific individuals or private interests. An expense meets a public purpose when:

- It advances a municipal governmental function, is a part of a public mission or program, or promotes or represents the City.

- It is performed in the role of Public Official and does not result in a solely personal or private benefit. A public purpose can exist even if there is an ancillary, incidental, or corresponding private benefit.

Guiding Principles

Expenses should:

- Be fiscally responsible
- Provide a good or service that is of like value to the expense made
- Defray the cost of carrying out the functions of an elected official
- Comply with applicable laws, regulations, and procurement policies
- Be documented with appropriate receipts and justifications
- Be subject to audit and public disclosure
- Comply with the governing policies and procedures listed in the Appendix to this policy

Public Accountability

Expenses should reflect a commitment to:

- Stewardship of public resources
- Transparency in decision-making
- Avoidance of the appearance of impropriety, excess, or personal benefit
- Alignment with community values and expectations

Reporting

- Austin Financial Services will provide the Mayor and each City Council office with a monthly report of all expenses, including purchasing card (ProCard) expenses, for review and to identify any discrepancies. Discrepancies should be reported to the City Council Liaison to correct or address as necessary.
- City Council Office expense reports shall be made available to the public and reviewed by the City's Office of Budget and Organizational Excellence and updated on an annual basis, as well as ProCard reporting on a quarterly basis.

Training

- Elected officials shall receive training by the City Council Liaison within 30 days of assuming office on these policies and all relevant laws governing City business.
- Employees supporting City Council Office activities shall receive training by the City Council Liaison within 30 days of the date of hire on these policies and all relevant laws governing City business.

Enforcement

- If the City Clerk receives a written complaint alleging a violation of this City Council Office Expense Policy, the City Clerk shall forward this information to Austin

Financial Services, the City Auditor, and the Council Member alleged to have committed a violation for investigation and appropriate enforcement action, if warranted.

Policy Review

- This policy will be reviewed and updated at least every 3 years.

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Expenses by Category

Note that the examples given in each category below are not an exhaustive list of permissible or impermissible expenses. Documentation and receipts, where applicable, are required for all transactions. Consult with the City Council Liaison or related policies listed in the Appendix as needed. Those policies listed in the Appendix are incorporated herein.

Expense	Permissible	Prohibited
General	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When goods or services are available through an existing City contract, City Council offices should make every effort to purchase from these contracts. Definitions of allowable uses including purchases, travel use, and spending limits, are contained in the ProCard Policy Manual in the appendix. The requirements of the ProCard Manual are a part of this policy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gifts for staff, colleagues, contractors, or constituents (unless pre-approved for official or ceremonial recognition purposes). Donations or contributions outside of the City organization, such as nonprofit organizations. Transfers of funds to other City Council Office budgets or departments. Expenses identified in Texas Election Code Chapter 255 related to political advertising. The City of Austin is tax exempt. Employees are responsible for ensuring the merchant does not include sales tax in a transaction when applicable.
Office Supplies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Office supplies, software, and standard equipment used in the City Council Member's office. Ceremonial and protocol items. Telephone and cell phone expenses for public performance of official duties. Furniture is allowable through the City's master agreement. Furniture may be purchased from alternative vendors with documentation demonstrating a lower cost. Goods or services over \$3,000 require three (3) quotes prior to purchase. Goods and services do not include travel, flight, or room and board. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gifts for staff, colleagues, contractors, or constituents (unless pre-approved for official recognition purposes).

Expense	Permissible	Prohibited
Hospitality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hospitality expenses may include food, ice, or catering services for prepared foods to be used at community engagement and outreach events as well as office meals for the purpose of keeping the team together for a City purpose. Working meals to facilitate keeping the workgroup together to advance or complete a task or project. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Personal expenses or items for personal use, including food/beverages that are not for a specific City purpose. Alcoholic beverages.
Software and IT Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Software and minor computer hardware may include the purchase of information technology items like laptops, monitors, or minor software licenses such as software that the City owns and not a subscription service for software. All software purchases should be coordinated with Austin Technology Services to ensure they comply with all cybersecurity requirements and avoid duplicate resources. 	
Printing and Publication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Duplicating, printing, postage, courier service, and express mail expenses. Newsletters to constituents that are not campaign communications, as determined by Texas Election Commission rules, regulations, or opinions. Nonpolitical advertising. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Political or campaign-related expenses, including but not limited to printed materials in which an elected official's image is more than 20% of a single page and/or uses more than eight personal pronouns (Texas Elections Code Chapter 255.003).
Travel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> City business, professional development (e.g. conferences, seminars), or promotion and/or representation of the City in an official City capacity (e.g. sister cities engagements, speaking engagements). Changes to travel expenses, including airfare and hotel charges, may not be charged to the City or subject to reimbursement without written documentation outlining the City purpose for the change. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> First-class, business-class, or luxury travel accommodations without justification. Travel to a destination that does not serve a City purpose.

Expense	Permissible	Prohibited
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All travel requests should be submitted via the Travel Authorization Form with appropriate supporting documents at least 14 days prior to the departure date noted on the request. Travel requests should be reviewed by the City Council Liaison and should include the municipal purpose of the proposed trip. 	
Professional Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conferences, seminars, and training expenses, including corresponding transportation and boarding, if applicable. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> First-class, business-class, or luxury travel accommodations without justification. Travel to a destination that does not have a City purpose.
Memberships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Registrations and membership dues to community service or civic organizations when representing the City in capacity as an elected official. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Registrations and memberships not required for the elected position.
Subscription	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Subscription to periodicals, newsletters, and other media that provide information to the elected official to better carryout their duties and are relevant to the activities of the City Council Member's office. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Subscriptions that do not provide relevant information to the City Council Member's office (e.g. streaming platforms, periodicals unrelated to duties).
Professional Licenses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> N/A 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prohibited.
Procurement Card	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ProCard expenses are subject to Administrative Bulletin 95-04. ProCards may be issued to City employees engaging in official City business on behalf of an elected official. The City Council Liaison will support the City Council offices with ProCard purchases and reporting. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ProCards may not be used for the purchase of gifts or alcohol.
Donations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Donations are considered received by the City. Donations valued over \$1,000 – whether as a single donation or in aggregate from a single source – must 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Donations of public funds made by a City Council Member are considered gifts by the City and are expressly prohibited as a gift of public funds (Texas Constitution, Article III).

Expense	Permissible	Prohibited
	<p>be reported to the City Clerk by September 30 of each year.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> If elected officials have accepted an offer of any trip or excursion from a person or entity other than the City, such a trip is considered a donation to the City. The donation must be reported to the City Clerk before embarking on the trip or excursion with the following information: 1) name of the sponsor; 2) the place(s) to be visited; 3) purpose of the trip or excursion; and 4) the date and duration of any such trip or excursion. Within 15 days from such trip or excursion, the elected official shall report to the City Clerk the approximate value of the trip or excursion. [Austin City Code 2-7-72(F)]. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Donations made to the City may not be earmarked for use by specific City Council Members.
Gifts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gifts are considered received by an individual. City officials may accept gifts of less than \$50 in value. Gifts received above \$50 should be reported to the City Clerk by September 30 of each year. The requirements of the Administrative Bulletin on Gifts or Favors are a part of this policy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> City officials are not permitted to accept gifts of any value if it might reasonably tend to improperly influence an individual in discharging their official functions. Further, gifts of any value are not permitted if the individual should know that it has been offered with the intent to improperly influence or improperly reward official conduct.
Reimbursements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expenses incurred by an elected official or City employee may be eligible for reimbursement if documentation is provided demonstrating the expense is for a City purpose. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sales tax is not reimbursable by the City in instances in which the City of Austin’s tax-exempt status is applicable.
Unexpended Balance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unexpended appropriations above \$50,000 may not carry forward to the next fiscal year unless expressly authorized during the biennial budget process. Any surplus remaining in a City-funded Council office account at the end of a fiscal year must revert to the fund from which the monies were appropriated unless expressly authorized during the biennial budget process. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expenses from a City-funded City Council office account may not exceed the amount allocated through the budget process for that City-funded City Council office account. City Council Members who exceed the budgeted amount of their City-funded City Council office account shall be personally liable for the amount exceeded.

Expense	Permissible	Prohibited
		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Funds may not be transferred from one City-funded City Council office account to another City-funded City Council office account.• Unexpended funds that are carried forward should not be used for ongoing expenses such as personnel.
Campaign Contributions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Prohibited.
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• An individual ticket for a City Council Member to events that are related to City business where the City Council Member is attending as a representative of the City.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tickets for a City Council Member to events that are intended to influence official conduct.

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Appendix A

Governing Policies

[Texas Constitution](#)

[Texas Election Code Chapter 255](#)

[Texas Elections Commission Guide to the Prohibition Against Using Political Subdivision Resources For Political Advertising in Connection with an Election](#)

[Austin City Code 2-7-72\(G\)](#)

[Ethics and Compliance Policies](#)

[Administrative Bulletins Library](#)

Administrative Bulletin 84-04: Personal Vehicle Use Reimbursement

Administrative Bulletin 95-04: City of Austin Credit Card Policy

Administrative Bulletin 02-03: Records Center Storage Costs

Administrative Bulletin 06-02: Guidance for Using City Funds to Buy Meals for City Employees

Administrative Bulletin 07-07: Authorized Use of Public Funds for Employee Recognition Events; Commemorative Retirement Gifts; Charitable Events; and Gratuities

Administrative Bulletin 07-11: Business Expense Reimbursement

Administrative Bulletin 14-03: Gifts or Favors

Administrative Bulletin 25-04: Department Sponsorship of Events Policy

ProCard Policy Manual

Procurement Manual

Travel Policy

[Certificate of Exemption](#)

[Vendor Search](#)