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Contra Costa County 2008-2009 Grand Jury Report 0909

**HARSH ECONOMIC TIMES DICTATE CITY
TRAVEL PRACTICES BE FINE TUNED.**

TO: Contra Costa County City Councils

SUMMARY

An important responsibility of the Grand Jury is the oversight of cities' spending activities. These include not only city budgets but also adopted practices that affect spending programs. Cases of unauthorized credit card use and other instances of misused funds for travel and meeting expenses prompted the Grand Jury to direct its attention to review the travel expenditures, meeting practices, and documentation procedures of the 19 incorporated cities in Contra Costa County.

The Grand Jury developed a survey which was sent to each city with questions relating to travel and meeting expenses. Cities varied in travel and meeting regulations and how those regulations were administratively applied. Cities ranged in population from less than 25,000 to greater than 100,000.

The intent of the survey was to identify information relating to cities' credit card and travel practices. These guidelines may be different for elected officials than for city staff members.

After conducting the survey of the 19 incorporated cities within Contra Costa County, the Grand Jury was satisfied with the quality of each city's travel policy. The Grand Jury found several outstanding examples of procedures and guidelines and are offering them as best practice enhancements for each city to consider.

FINDINGS

1. Cities in Contra Costa County range in population from less than 25,000 to more than 100,000.
2. Two cities responded that they did not have separate travel and expense policies for elected officials.
3. Twelve cities responded that they required proof of attendance at city-paid events such as conferences and seminars.

4. Four cities did not require receipts for reimbursement of travel expenses.
5. Some cities responded to the survey with answers that were not consistent with their written policies.
6. Cities were budget conscious about arranging for transportation, hotel accommodations and other traveler needs, but guidelines varied significantly.
7. All city managers possess and use city credit cards. The control policies for using the cards appear to be adequate.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That elected officials be included in travel and expense policies.
2. That attendees to city-paid conferences and seminars provide proof of attendance and deliver a report when appropriate.
3. That all cities, at minimum, follow IRS documentation guidelines for any expenses as an audit control and for budget planning.
4. That management review and communicate city travel procedures on an annual basis to update and eliminate contradictions.
5. That city guidelines promote the use of web sites to obtain the lowest rates available and to leverage government and group rates. A partial list of the government websites includes:
 - State Association of Counties www.csac.counties.org
 - State of California website www.ofa.dgs.ca.gov
 - California Travel Smart www.catravelmart.com
 - League of California Cities www.cacities.org/travel

REQUIRED RESPONSES:

Findings: None (all cities responded by survey)

Recommendations: 1 through 5

Antioch, Brentwood, Clayton, Concord, Danville, El Cerrito, Hercules, Lafayette, Martinez, Moraga, Oakley, Orinda, Pinole, Pittsburg, Pleasant Hill, Richmond, San Pablo, San Ramon and Walnut Creek.