

Summary of Proposed Updates

Blount County Government Employee Handbook

The Blount County Government Employee Handbook has been reviewed thoroughly and updated. The updated handbook was reviewed and approved by the County Attorney on May 12, 2023.

The Human Resources Department suggests the following changes and edits:

- *Updated the Conflict-of-Interest Policy as required for federal grant administration:*

Conflict of Interest

Employment with Blount County Government is a public trust. Employees must not have any financial interest in, or receive any financial benefit from, any acquisition or expenditure related to County activities that interferes or conflicts with the full discharge of duties. If the circumstances cause a reasonable person to believe that a conflict of interest exists, the conflict or potential conflict must be reported as required by the County's Code of Ethics Policy.

As required by **2 CFR 200.318 (c)(1)**, the following applies for all procurements funded in whole or in part with any federal funding source:

In addition to the prohibition against self-benefitting from a public contract under state law, no officer, employee, or agent of Blount County may participate directly or indirectly in the selection, award, or administration of a contract supported by a federal award if he or she has a real or apparent conflict of interest. A real or apparent conflict exists when any of the following parties has a financial or other interest in or receives a tangible personal benefit from a firm considered for award of a contract:

- a) The employee, officer, or agent involved in the selection, award, or administration of a contract;
- b) Any member of his or her immediate family;
- c) His or her partner; or
- d) An organization which employs or is about to employ any of these parties.

Reporting a Conflict of Interest

- a) Any officer, employee, or agent of Blount County with an actual, apparent, or potential conflict of interest as defined in this policy shall report the conflict to his or her immediate supervisor, or shall report to Human Resources if an Elected Official. A conflict-of-interest form must be completed and filed with the County Clerk's Office as required by the County's Code of Ethics Policy.
- b) If federally funded, any such conflict shall be disclosed in writing to the federal award agency or pass-through entity in accordance with applicable Federal awarding agency policy.

For additional information on Conflicts of Interest, please refer to the Purchasing Department's Policy and Procedure Manual available at <https://www.blounttn.org/165/Purchasing>.

- Added a Gifts and Contributions Policy as required for federal grant administration:

Gifts and Contributions

Employees may not solicit or accept, either directly or indirectly, for yourself or for any member of your household, any gift, gratuity, service, favor, entertainment, lodging, transportation, loan, loan guarantee, or anything above a nominal monetary value from any person who:

- has, or is seeking to obtain, contractual or other business or financial relations with the department or agency of Blount County by which you are employed;
- conducts operations or activities that are regulated by the department of Blount County by which you are employed;
- has an interest that may be substantially affected by the performance or non-performance of your official duties.

In addition to the prohibition against accepting gifts and favors from vendors and contractors under state law, officers, employees, and agents of Blount County Government are prohibited from accepting or soliciting gifts, gratuities, favors or anything of monetary value from contractors, suppliers, or parties to subcontracts. Items valued at less than \$50.00 per fiscal year, per vendor, and exceptions which fall into one of the following categories may be accepted:

- a) Promotional items;
- b) Honorariums for participation in meetings; or
- c) Meals furnished at conferences or banquets.

***Any officer, employee or agent who knowingly accepts an item over \$50 in value allowed under this policy shall report the item to his or her immediate supervisor, utilizing the form available at <https://www.blounttn.org/1976/Management-Portal>. The supervisor shall submit the completed form to the County Clerk.*

Violations of this policy will be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including immediate termination.

- Added a Fraud, Waste and Abuse Policy as required for federal grant administration:

Fraud, Waste and Abuse

Blount County Government is committed to the responsible stewardship of its resources. Officials, agents, and employees are responsible for maintaining a work environment that promotes ethical and honest behavior. It is the responsibility of Blount County Government to establish and implement internal control systems and procedures to mitigate and detect irregularities, including fraud, waste and abuse. Employees at all levels should be aware of the risks and exposures inherent in their areas of responsibility, and shall establish and maintain proper internal controls to provide for the security and accountability of all resources entrusted to them. Pursuant **to TCA 39-16-402, 4-35-107, 8-4-501, 8-19-501, and 8-50-116**, Blount County Government has established procedures for reporting fraud, waste,

and abuse as well as Internal Control systems to safeguard the County's resources. For more information regarding Blount County Government's internal control system, or to report fraud, waste or abuse, please visit <https://www.blounttn.org/954/Accounting-Budgeting>.

**Any official, agent or employee with knowledge of, or having witness to, any fraud, waste or abuse of any County resources shall report the instance. Instances of fraud, waste, or abuse can be reported without fear of retaliation. The County will protect the confidentiality of employees making complaints about suspected violations of this or any other County policy, to the extent possible consistent with our investigation and applicable law.*

- ***Added a Personal Relationships Policy as suggested by County Attorney:***

Personal Relationships

Romantic or sexual liaisons that develop among employees in the workplace may be potentially disruptive to County business. The County will intervene and discuss romantic or sexual relationships with involved employees. Remedial measures, up to and including transfer or immediate termination may be taken if the County decides such action is in its best interest.

Managers or supervisors are expressly prohibited from dating or becoming similarly involved with any employee within their sphere of responsibility. In the event the County becomes aware of such a relationship, the supervisor or manager will be subject to immediate termination.

- Added Compensation Policies as suggested by Management Advisory Group as a part of the County's recent compensation and classification study.



Blount County Government Human Resources Department

Compensation Policies

The following policy outlines the administration of pay changes based upon the category of change. All final decisions on the administration of pay are subject to approval by Blount County Commission. In all instances of employee/job reassignment, the employee would be placed in the range, not to exceed the maximum of the range unless specifically stated. Unless otherwise stated, any change in pay would be effective with the next full pay period.

A. Reclassification

1. When a job has been reclassified to a higher pay grade, the employee's salary shall increase at least 5% in the new pay grade that includes the new salary but is not more than the maximum salary of the new pay grade.

If the reclassification results in an upgrade of one pay grade, the employee's pay will be moved upward by 5%. An upgrade of two or more pay grades will increase the employee's pay by an additional 2.5% increase for each additional pay grade, up to a maximum of 15%. Any increase of more than 10% would require documentation by the department or agency and a supporting recommendation from Human Resources.

For general reclassifications resulting from an internal or external compensation study, or as a result of the normal budget process review, if the employee has been in the position on or before the first day of the fiscal year, the effective date of any approved change will be the first day of the fiscal year, or the effective date of implementation as approved by the County Commission.

Otherwise, for an individual reclassification, completed outside the normal budget cycle, the effective date of the pay increase will be consistent with the next full pay period. Reclassification or changes in pay grade, whether resulting from an internal or external compensation study or individual change in pay grade, **shall not be** retroactive with respect to calculating the new salary.

Internal Equity Adjustments are not tied to performance measures. ***The leadership may determine an Internal Equity Adjustment strategy that is separate and apart from the guidelines that cover reclassification.***

Internal Equity Adjustments, resulting from an internal or external comprehensive review, can be to a higher or lower pay grade and are not considered a reclassification, promotion or demotion.

2. When a job has been reclassified to a lower pay grade, the affected employee(s) shall have their pay grade adjusted accordingly. The effective date will be the day following the Board of Commissioners adoption date and the change will be reflected in the next full pay period.

If after the pay grade adjustment, the employee(s) salary is greater than the maximum salary of the new pay range, the employee will continue to be paid at the higher rate of pay. The salary would be "frozen" and the employee is typically ineligible for any pay adjustment until the range "catches up" with the salary and allows for movement.

B. Promotion

1. When an employee is promoted as a result of a job change or job progression to a higher pay grade position within the same or to a different salary schedule, the salary placement within the new pay grade shall be determined as follows:

- *apply 5% on the salary of the previous grade/schedule and salary for promotions of one paygrade, and an additional 2.5% for each additional pay grade up to a maximum of 15%.*

The resulting pay will be no less than the minimum of the new pay grade and no less than a 5% salary increase, but not more than the maximum salary of the assigned pay grade. The effective date will be the day of approval.

2. There may be times when the uniqueness of an individual job and level of necessary skills required by the County may require a higher salary schedule placement than stipulated in this section. Under such circumstances, the County Mayor/HR Director *may approve a higher salary placement within the assigned pay grade, based upon necessity and requirements of the position and not on the qualifications of the incumbent.*

C. Lateral Transfer

A lateral transfer occurs when an employee is transferred from one job class to another in the same pay grade. When there is no change in pay grade there shall be no adjustment in base salary. A lateral transfer is not considered a reclassification or a promotion.

Temporary Assignment(s)

1. "Acting" or temporary assignment(s) occurs when the County recognizes a critical job assignment need that must be met and cannot be met through the normal recruitment process. This can occur when an unexpected vacancy occurs; when a mission critical job cannot be filled in a timely fashion; or when a mission objective changes abruptly and requires an immediate action.

2. Temporary or "acting" assignment(s) are anticipated to last more than 30 days, but less than 6 months. The purpose of a temporary or "acting" assignment is to fill a vacancy and not to assume the duties of another employee who is on approved leave, i.e. vacation, holiday, medical, or other short-term absence(s).

3. If the position assigned is lower in pay grade (or substantially equivalent pay range) this would not result in a lower salary for the assigned employee even if the employee's salary exceeded the maximum of the new pay range.

4. If the position assigned is higher in pay grade and extends beyond 30 days, but less than 6 months, there should be a 5% "temporary assignment" pay adjustment for the first pay grade and 2.5% for each additional pay grade to a maximum of 15% or the minimum of the grade, whichever is higher. The employee's salary shall not exceed the maximum of the assigned range. Employees receiving temporary assignment pay shall sign an agreement acknowledging the understanding that they are receiving "Temporary Assignment Pay" and also acknowledging that when the temporary assignment ends, the "assignment pay" will also end.

- ***Updated Systems Integrity, Security, Encryption Policy as advised by Auditor from TN State Comptroller's Office.***

System Integrity, Security, and Encryption: All System passwords and encryption keys must be kept confidential at all times. Employees may not install password or encryption programs without the

written permission of our Systems Supervisor. Further, employees are prohibited from the unauthorized use of passwords and encryption keys belonging to other employees to gain access to the other employee's messages, information, or communications.

- ***Updated Holiday Policy for non-exempt personnel required to work the holiday.***

Hours worked by non-exempt employees required to work the holiday will be added to the employee's holiday bank for later use.

- ***Clarified Sick Bank policy with regard to pregnancy.***

Grants of sick leave from the Sick Leave Bank will not be made to any members due to elective and/ or cosmetic surgery, normal pregnancies or normal periods of time away from work due to childbirth, illness of any member of the participant's family, or during any period the member is receiving workers' compensation.