

**WHATCOM COUNTY
EMPLOYEE'S PERSONNEL
HANDBOOK**



Approved by the County Executive
August 2, 2021 and adopted by
Resolution 2021- 028 of the County Council

August 10, 2021



Whatcom County Employee's Personnel Handbook

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to new and current Whatcom County employees!

This Handbook provides a road map to standardized personnel policies and procedures which affect County employees. The Handbook links to source policy documents. It is not to be construed as a contract or covenant of employment. Nothing in this Handbook supersedes county code, collective bargaining agreements, employment resolutions, or administrative policies.

ABOUT THE COUNTY

Whatcom County is a Home Rule County with the Legislative and Executive functions as separate branches of government. Whatcom County voters elect a non-partisan seven-member, part-time County Council and a full-time County Executive. The [County Charter](#) also establishes elected offices of the County Auditor, Assessor, Treasurer, Sheriff, and Prosecuting Attorney.

The County Council performs the **legislative** functions of the County through ordinances and resolutions and establishes compensation for all employees except elected officials. The County Executive serves as Chief Executive Officer, supervising all **administrative and executive** departments, presenting the annual budget, and signing all contracts. A third branch of government, the **judicial** branch, is steered by elected judges in Superior Court and District Court.

The County's organizational charts with detailed information about departments, finances, and operations are published in the [County Budget](#).

PERSONNEL SYSTEM & POLICIES

County Code [Chapter 3.04](#) describes the Personnel System administered by the [Human Resources \(HR\) Division](#) of the [Administrative Services Department](#) under the direction of the County Executive.

1. Collective Bargaining Agreements

Unless you are an elected official or exempt from union membership, your position is covered by a collective bargaining agreement, and you are eligible to be part of a collective bargaining unit. Each unit, through its union or guild representative, negotiates agreements with the County consistent with [RCW 41.56](#).

The Human Resources Manager and staff promote positive labor-management relations, resolve grievances and personnel problems, coordinate negotiations, and assure compliance by all departments with provisions of the collective bargaining agreements.

A contracted [Professional Negotiator](#) provides expertise and serves as spokesperson for the County at the bargaining table, working collaboratively with labor representatives and following the direction of the County Council and County Administration.

[Collective Bargaining Agreements](#) establish policies related to wages, benefits, hours, and working conditions for represented employees. Agreements are posted online and are easy to search using key words. The duration of agreements may be one or more years. Once expired, terms of the agreement remain in place until the County and the bargaining representative complete negotiations for a new agreement.

- **Teamster’s Master** (professional, technical, clerical, and certain supervisory positions; general government employees in departments except Council, Executive, HR)
- **Deputy Sheriff’s Guild** (patrol deputies and sergeants)
- **Teamster’s Corrections** (deputies and sergeants)
- **WA State Nurses Association** (nurses and supervisors)
- **PROTEC17** (environmental health specialists and supervisors)
- **Inland Boatmen & Masters, Mates & Pilots** (ferry operators and crew)
- **Fraternal Order of Police** (sheriff & corrections management)
- **AFSCME Council 2** (public defender attorneys)

2. Unrepresented Resolution

The County Council adopts salaries, benefits, and employment policies for employees who are not represented by a union or guild in the [Unrepresented Salary & Policy Resolution](#).

This resolution applies to the following groups of employees:

- Department Heads
- Managers
- Professional and Supervisory
- Support
- Undersheriff
- Court Reporters
- Public Health Officer
- Court Commissioners

3. Elected Officials Salaries

Every two years, the [Salary Commission](#) sets [salaries for elected officials](#), **County Executive, Treasurer, Assessor, Auditor, Prosecuting Attorney, County Council, Sheriff**. The [Washington Citizen’s Commission on Salaries for Elected Officials](#) sets the District Court and Superior Court Judges’ salaries. Elected Officials and District Court judges are eligible for benefits under the [Unrepresented Resolution](#).

4. Administrative Policies and Procedures Online (APPOL)

The Administrative Services (A.S.) Director oversees the development, adoption, and publication of administrative policies and procedures per County Code [2.76.030](#).

Administrative Policies and Procedures Online (APPOL) provides the official record. Using a log-in to access [Inside Whatcom](#), employees may view and print any APPOL document.

Use the Printer Friendly feature in the drop-down menu under the gear symbol.

Use the Search tool to locate policies by topic.



This button at the bottom of the home page serves as a quick link:



The [Human Resources](#) section of [APPOL](#) covers topics related to Personnel System goals.

[Attendance & Time Off](#)

[Classification & Compensation](#)

[Performance Management](#)

[Discipline & Rules](#)

[Employee Benefits](#)

[Employee Safety & Health](#)

[Employment & Separation](#)

[Personnel Administration](#)

[Miscellaneous Personnel](#)

[Risk Management](#)

5. Executive Orders

The County Executive also adopts administrative policies and procedures by [executive order](#). These are usually shorter-term policies with Countywide impact.

6. Departmental Policies and Procedures

Department Heads may set standards for operations within their departments so long as those policies do not conflict with County Code, collective bargaining agreements, employment resolutions, or administrative policies. See [Controlling Departmental Operations](#).

HIGHLIGHTING KEY POLICIES

Whatcom County is an **equal opportunity employer**. Participation of individuals of diverse ages, races, religions, cultures, abilities, and personalities contributes to our organization's success. Whatcom County recruits, selects, trains, promotes, and compensates employees and applicants without regard to race, color, national origin, sex, creed or religion, disability, age, marital status, sexual orientation (including gender identity), veteran status, or any other characteristic prohibited by law. See [Promoting Equal Employment Opportunity \(EEO\)](#).

Whatcom County will not discriminate against qualified employees or applicants with a sensory, physical, or mental disability, unless the disability cannot be reasonably accommodated and prevents proper performance of an essential element of the job. The County provides reasonable accommodation to qualified individuals with disabilities as defined by the American with Disabilities Act (ADA). See [Providing Reasonable Accommodation](#).

Whatcom County promotes a **respectful work environment**. Supervisors will review the [Prohibiting Harassment](#) policy with all new employees. Employees are encouraged to report harassment or observation of harassment to a supervisor, department head, or to Human Resources. The County promptly investigates harassment complaints. Whatcom County requires all new employees to take Preventing Harassment training. See also [Preventing Violence in the Workplace](#).

Whatcom County places a high value on employee safety and is committed to providing a **safe workplace**. Your supervisor will provide a general safety orientation and on-going job-specific safety training. All employees should periodically review the [Accident Prevention Program](#). See also [Reporting Accidents & Incidents](#).

Whatcom County is a **drug-free workplace** to provide a safe work environment, to discourage alcohol and drug abuse, and to encourage treatment, recovery and return to work of employees with substance abuse problems. The County's [Employee Assistance Program](#) offers confidential support and resources at no cost to employees and their household members 24 hours a day/7 days a week.

Whatcom County prohibits **smoking** and **vaping** indoors or within 25 feet of building entrances, windows, and air intakes. The Health Department enforces the Washington State Clean Indoor Air Act. For [more information](#), call (360) 778-6000 or [email](#) the Health Department.

EMPLOYEE'S REFERENCE INFORMATION

Legal Notices

The County posts information about certain laws and employee rights [online](#), for example:

- Paid Family & Medical Leave (PFML)
- Family & Medical Leave Act (FMLA)
- Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act (COBRA)
- Health Insurance Portability & Accountability Act (HIPAA)
- Uniformed Services Employment & Reemployment Act (USERRA)
- Affordable Care Act (ACA)

Benefits

Whatcom County offers a comprehensive benefits package with medical, dental, and vision coverage for employees, spouses and eligible dependents, life insurance for the employee, and employee assistance services for everyone in the employee's household. County employees participate in retirement plans administered by the Washington State Department of Retirement Systems (DRS). The County offers optional tax-deferred retirement savings plans. Other benefits are described in the applicable collective bargaining agreement or unrepresented resolution. Links to benefit providers are organized by [employee group](#) on the County's web site.

Personal Data and Status Changes

If you have a change in marital status, name, address, dependents, [submit the applicable form to Human Resources](#) within 30 days so that we can update your records, send you important tax and payroll information, and make any necessary changes to your benefits.

Time Off

County employees have many options for paid and unpaid time off by County policy and state and federal law. See [collective bargaining agreements](#), [unrepresented resolution](#), and [Attendance & Time Off policies](#).

Meal and Rest Periods

Whatcom County complies with federal and state regulations and collective bargaining agreements regarding meal and rest periods. Unless your position is exempt from overtime, you will not be required to work more than five consecutive hours without a 30-minute meal break. A 15-minute rest period will be provided for every four hours of working time. If you know in advance you may not be able to take your scheduled break or meal period, let your Supervisor know. Also, notify your Supervisor if you were unable to take a meal or rest period.

Paychecks

Employees submit timesheets weekly. Whatcom County issues paychecks every other Friday. Whatcom County requires new employees to authorize payment deposit by electronic funds transfer (EFT). Each employee will inspect weekly paychecks for accuracy and will immediately [report possible errors](#).

Internal Job Opportunities

Whatcom County offers many promotional opportunities to qualified internal applicants before advertising externally. Employees can use the "[Notify Me](#)" tool on Inside Whatcom to receive notices of open positions.

Personnel Files

Whatcom County Human Resources (HR) maintains the official personnel files for all employees except the Sheriff's Office. Personnel files are in a safe, locked room in the HR Suite (Courthouse 107). Supervisors and others in management may access official personnel files for employment-related decisions. You may review your personnel file with reasonable notice to HR during normal office hours in the presence of a County representative.

Job Descriptions & Work Expectations

You can search County [job descriptions online](#) by title, department, group, and text. See also [Monitoring Work Expectations](#) and [Establishing Standards of Conduct](#).

Travel

Before traveling on county business, make sure you have a clear understanding with your supervisor about what portion of your travel time may be paid and which expenses are eligible for reimbursement. See [Reimbursing Travel Expenses](#).

Public Records

Nearly every record you create as an employee (letters, electronic data, emails, texts) may be produced if there is a public records request. The purpose of the Public Records Act or "Sunshine Law," [RCW 42.56](#), is to shed light on government. While some information may be redacted (SS#, home address, references to medical conditions), employees may be surprised by the extent of the County's obligation to share records. Requests for Public Records are tracked by the Public Records Officer and requestors must get at least a preliminary response within five days or the County may face penalties. Be sure and ask your supervisor how this law may impact your job.

Cybersecurity

Cybersecurity is a growing concern and presents risks for our organization which are increasingly hard to manage. Employees should shut down their work computer daily for security updates, use strong passwords, not attach non-County printers/devices to the County's computer system, and carefully evaluate every email. It's easy to make a mistake and click on a link in an email that looks legitimate but is really from a cybercriminal. If you receive an email that looks out of the ordinary, forward it **as an attachment** to the [IT Service Desk](#) for evaluation.

Political Activity

Whatcom County recognizes the right of employees to express their views as citizens, to pursue legitimate involvement in the political system, and to vote as they please, provided that no County employee will expend public funds, or supplies, or work towards the campaign of any candidate or issue while on county time unless the activity is permitted by law. See [County Code 3.04.060](#).

Complaints

Depending on the kind of concern, Whatcom County provides multiple avenues for reporting and resolving problems:

- [Reporting Accidents & Incidents](#)
- [Reporting Unsafe Working Conditions](#)
- [Preventing Harassment](#)
- [Reporting Discrimination](#)
- [Reporting Improper Governmental Action](#) (Whistleblower Complaint)
- Filing Grievances (see relevant [Collective Bargaining Agreement](#))
- Other ([Complaint Form](#))

See [Reporting & Resolving Complaints](#)

Other Links

[Using Computer Systems](#)

[Issuing Employee Identification & Access Badges](#)

[Permitting & Using Employee Parking Downtown](#)

[Emergency Policies & Procedures](#)

[Payroll](#)

Please direct questions to Human Resources hr@co.whatcom.wa.us or (360) 778-5300.