



Agenda Memo

Crest Hill, IL

Meeting Date: September 16, 2024

Submitter: Dave Strahl, Interim Human Resources Manager

Department: Human Resources

Agenda Item: Consideration of Revised Employee Handbook Language –
Tuition Reimbursement Policy and Meal Reimbursement Policy

Summary:

Tuition Reimbursement: Staff had proposed several modifications to the Tuition Reimbursement Policy to address concerns of accounting control and additional oversight for utilization of the benefit among employees. This had been discussed at the workshop on August 26, 2024, with several recommendations from the city council to be included in the draft policy.

The recommended modifications from the city council included the following:

- Add language to confirm that no classes would be undertaken during the normal workday.
- Add language that requires online classes must be accredited prior to consideration.
- Add language clarifying the requirement of reimbursable expense is limited to the average cost for the same class at a public institution if the class were to be taken at a private institution.
- Add a sign off for the Human Resources Manager as part of the application form.
- Include a promissory agreement for the employee to sign as a requirement for repayment if the employee does not meet the tenure requirements that match the repayment criteria.
- Require the city council to be notified of employees that take classes on a periodic basis.

Meal Reimbursement: Staff recommended several modifications to the policy to correct the confusion between meal reimbursement and meal per diem amounts. Additional language was included in the policy to require receipts to confirm meal payments did not include any prohibited items.

Recommended Council Action: Approval of the proposed changes and incorporation into the Employee Handbook.

Financial Impact: Minimal. Does clarify the process to reduce excessive expenditure exposure in the future.

Funding Source: Not Applicable.

Budgeted Amount: Not Applicable.

Cost: Minimal. Does clarify the process to reduce excessive expenditure exposure in the future.

Attachments: Draft policies with redlines showing changes.

CURRENT POLICY:

TUITION REIMBURSEMENT

The City supports employees who wish to continue their education in order to secure increased responsibility and growth in their professional careers with the City of Crest Hill. This growth can include continuing education courses, certification programs, completion of a GED, and any professional and technical education. In keeping with this philosophy, the City has established reimbursement for educational expenses incurred through various approved institutions of learning.

Any regular full-time employee who has been continuously employed for six (6) months or more (unless directed by the City) who enrolls in a job related course of study at an accredited junior college, college or university within the State of Illinois (or through an accredited online college or university program, whether in-state or out-of-state) may qualify to have the tuition and academic fees (including books) reimbursed by the City. The employee does not need to be registered in a degree program to be eligible for this benefit. Prior written approval must be obtained from the employee's Department Head and the Personnel Officer for each such course or program of study. The Department Head and the Personnel Officer have complete discretion in determining whether the course(s) is sufficiently related to the employee's work and would improve his performance to justify the tuition reimbursement. The Department Head and the Personnel Officer have the discretion to determine the number of courses that will be taken during any given period. Employees should provide a list of courses and estimated expenses during the preparation of the budget.

Because it is in the City's interests to ensure the employee receives maximum benefit from any such courses taken, tuition reimbursement will be paid at 100% only if the employee receives a Grade "A" or "B". Grade "C" or a "Pass" grade in a Pass/Fail course will be paid at 75%. The employee is responsible for paying the educational expenses upfront. All reimbursements will be made upon proof of payment and submission of the certified transcript of the grade. Any reimbursement paid under this program will be offset by Federal/State financial aid, scholarships, grants, etc. In addition, the employee must be actively employed at the time of reimbursement.

Employees who voluntarily terminate employment, or are terminated for cause will be required to refund the City the reimbursement they received on the following basis:

- a) Prior to one (1) year from the date of reimbursement, one hundred percent (100%) of the amount reimbursed.
- b) After one (1) year but prior to two (2) years from the date of reimbursement, seventy-five (75%) of the amount reimbursed.
- c) After two (2) years but prior to three (3) years from the date of reimbursement, fifty percent (50%) of the amount reimbursed.
- d) After three (3) years from the date of reimbursement (zero percent) 0% of the amount reimbursed.

Union employees will follow applicable provisions contained in the collective bargaining agreements.

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Proposed Policy:

TUITION REIMBURSEMENT

The City supports employees who wish to continue their education in order to secure increased responsibility and growth in their professional careers with the City of Crest Hill. This growth can include continuing education courses, certification programs, completion of a GED, and any professional and technical education. In keeping with this philosophy, the City has established a reimbursement program for educational expenses incurred through various approved institutions of learning.

Any regular full-time employee who has been continuously employed for six (6) months or more (unless directed by the City) who enrolls in a job related course of study at an accredited junior college, college or university within the State of Illinois (or through an accredited online college or university program, whether in-state or out-of-state) may qualify to have the tuition and academic fees (including books) reimbursed by the City. The employee does not need to be registered in a degree program to be eligible for this benefit. Prior written approval must be obtained from the employee's Department Head, ~~and the Personnel Officer and City Administrator~~ for each such course or program of study to ensure the proposed course of study is job related. Furthermore, approval of a course does NOT guarantee future approval for future courses to complete a specific degree program. Continuation in any program is dependent on budgetary constraints and future individual approval(s) for each class. The Department Head, ~~and the Personnel Officer and City Administrator~~ have complete discretion in determining whether the course(s) is sufficiently related to the employee's work and would improve his/her performance to justify the tuition reimbursement. The Department Head, ~~and the Personnel Officer and City Administrator~~ have the discretion to determine the number of courses that will be taken during any given period. Employees should provide a list of courses and estimated expenses if a course of study is included as part of the request for consideration during prior to the preparation of the budget. This course of study will include all related courses to complete the program and estimated expenses for each course. All requests MUST be submitted in writing using the Tuition Reimbursement Application Form and the completion of a Promissory Note. Any reimbursement will not exceed the average tuition cost for public universities in the state. The employee must provide the average tuition cost information for public universities that offer a particular course. If the employee wants to take a course offered through a private educational institution the city would only reimburse the employee for the average public university cost. Any difference would be the responsibility of the employee. This includes any on-line or remote classes. Reimbursement will NOT be considered for more than two classes/courses per semester. The employee will not be allowed to undertake a course of study that conflicts with the employee's normal workday, unless specifically approved by the employee's department director and city administrator in writing. The employee shall not be released from their normal workday to complete course work without express written approval of the employee's department director and city administrator. The employee shall not complete course work while at work during normal working hours.

Because it is in the City's interests to ensure the employee receives maximum benefit from any such courses taken, tuition reimbursement will be paid at 100% only if the employee receives a Grade "A" or "B". Grade "C" or a "Pass" grade in a Pass/Fail course will be paid at 75%. The employee is responsible for paying the educational expenses upfront. All reimbursements will be made upon proof of payment and submission of the certified transcript of the grade. Any reimbursement paid under this program will be offset by Federal/State financial aid,

scholarships, grants, etc. In addition, the employee must be actively employed at the time of reimbursement.

Employees who voluntarily terminate employment, or are terminated for cause will be required to refund the City the tuition reimbursement they received on the following basis:

- a) Prior to one (1) year from the date of reimbursement, one hundred percent (100%) of the amount reimbursed.
- b) After one (1) year but prior to two (2) years from the date of reimbursement, seventy-five (75%) of the amount reimbursed.
- c) After two (2) years but prior to three (3) years from the date of reimbursement, fifty percent (50%) of the amount reimbursed.
- d) After three (3) years from the date of reimbursement (zero percent) 0% of the amount reimbursed.

This repayment schedule is based on the timing of each course taken and reimbursed not the overall degree program, if applicable. Union employees will follow applicable provisions contained in the collective bargaining agreements.

Tuition Reimbursement Application Form

Employee Name: _____

Department: _____ Date of Hire: _____

Name of School or Vendor: _____

Title of Class/Program: _____

Days/Times of Class/Program: _____

Course Description (Attach information from brochure, website, catalogue): _____

All Cost(s)/including books, etc.: _____

Average Cost of Course of Public Universities in Illinois for Similar Class (attach documentation): _____

Describe this course/class/program will benefit your professional growth and applicability to your job duties at the city (attach additional pages as necessary): _____

Employee Acknowledgement: By submitting this form with my signature I understand the tuition reimbursement policy as outlined in the city handbook and understand that I accept the repayment policy as described in the handbook. I further acknowledge that city approval for any one request or course does not guarantee continued approvals for any course of study I may undertake.

Employee Signature: _____ Date: _____

Approvals – to be obtained prior to enrolling in any course(s):

☐ Approved ☐ Not Approved

Department Head Signature _____ Date _____

☐ Approved ☐ Not Approved

Human Resources Manager Signature _____ Date _____

☐ Approved ☐ Not Approved

City Administrator Signature _____ Date _____

Comments: _____

Promissory Note

I acknowledge by signing this Promissory Note that I agree to the terms of the City Tuition Reimbursement Program. I further acknowledge and understand the terms of the repayment schedule as outlined in the Tuition Reimbursement Policy and agree that I will repay any funds expended by the city for Tuition Reimbursement and further agree that the city may utilize any funds that the city might payout at the termination of my employment to account for any outstanding funds owed at the time that employment ends, either voluntarily or involuntarily. For example, if my employment ends before meeting the tenure requirements for tuition repayment, I authorize the city to utilize any final paycheck funds or benefit payout funds to satisfy any outstanding tuition reimbursement payment the city provided to me. I further acknowledge and agree that if there are not sufficient funds from any final paycheck or benefit payout, I will repay the city any outstanding funds over a period of not more than 12 months from the date of end of employment, unless another repayment schedule is mutually agreed to. I further acknowledge that if I do not enter into a repayment schedule nor repay the city based on the funds available in my final paycheck and any benefit payouts, I understand the city will undertake any means necessary to collect the debt and through such efforts my credit rating may be impacted by those efforts.

Repayment Schedule based on Tenure. If the employee leaves city employment for any reason after the date of the reimbursement the repayment shall be based on the schedule below:

- a) Prior to one (1) year from the date of reimbursement, one hundred percent (100%) of the amount reimbursed.
- b) After one (1) year but prior to two (2) years from the date of reimbursement, seventy-five (75%) of the amount reimbursed.
- c) After two (2) years but prior to three (3) years from the date of reimbursement, fifty percent (50%) of the amount reimbursed.
- d) After three (3) years from the date of reimbursement (zero percent) 0% of the amount reimbursed.

Employee Name (Printed): _____

Employee Signature: _____

Date: _____

A promissory note is REQUIRED for each course requested for reimbursement at the time the Tuition Reimbursement Application is submitted for consideration.

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Current Policy

Meals

Meals during the events that are not made available as a part of the registration fees are reimbursable. Meals while traveling, the day before or following the day in which the last official function is held may be reimbursable with prior approval. Employees are encouraged to attend all functions for which meals are provided as a part of the registration fee. Only meals occurring during work or travel time are eligible for per diem reimbursement.

The per diem schedule for breakfast, lunch and dinner is as follows:

Breakfast	\$10
Lunch	\$15
Dinner	\$25

When travel is required to a part of the country where the listed per diem rates may not be sufficient, the City Administrator may grant exception to this policy. Prior approval is required and receipts must be submitted with Travel and Expense Report. Failure to do so may result in reimbursement ineligibility.

Miscellaneous Expenses

Reasonable miscellaneous expenses such as taxi fares, parking, tolls, tips, etc. are generally reimbursable. Some expenses for the day immediately preceding the first official function and the day following the day in which the last function is held may be reimbursable with the approval of the Department Head.

Non-reimbursable expenses

Some travel expenses are not reimbursable. Some examples of non-reimbursable expenses include:

- a) Alcoholic beverages
- b) Entertainment
- c) Early check-in or late check-out charges, unless appropriate circumstance exist and are pre-approved by the Department Head.
- d) Parking tickets or traffic tickets

- e) Pay per view movies
- f) Expenses incurred by a spouse, dependents and/or additional guests
- g) Any non-work related charges

Following an employee's return to work, the employee shall itemize expenses as required on the Travel and Expense Report. Completed purchase orders and Travel and Expense Reports must be submitted to the employee's Department Head within five (5) business days after the employee's return to work. All receipts must be submitted with the Travel and Expense Report including documentary evidence for expenses such as taxis and parking. When two (2) or more employees on City business jointly incur expenses, each participant, when practical, will pay and report individual expenses. Where this is not practical, the employee requesting reimbursement shall list the names or identify the group of other employees for who expenses being reported have been incurred. If certain required receipts are not available, a statement signed by the employee documenting the amounts paid may be acceptable.

Proposed Policy

Meals

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The per diem schedule for breakfast, lunch and dinner is as follows:

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The employee will request the meal daily per diem based on the number of meals necessary during the training or conference time. Employees are required to submit itemized, printed receipts from the vendor providing the meal upon return as part of the reporting of travel expenses report. No handwritten receipts will be considered sufficient for verification of meal expenditure. Submission of receipts is required to ensure no per diem expenses were utilized for prohibited items. If through an audit it is determined that the employee utilized per diem meal expenses for prohibited items, the employee may be disciplined and prohibited from future training/travel and/or the per diem privileges will be removed for future travel requests. When travel is required to a part of the country where the listed per diem rates may not be sufficient, the City Administrator may grant exception to this policy. Prior approval is required and receipts must be submitted with Travel and Expense Report. Failure to do so may result in reimbursement ineligibility.

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