



Chapter 3: EMPLOYEE BENEFITS

3.10 Tuition Reimbursement

PURPOSE:

To provide employees with the procedures to access and utilize the City of Stephenville's Tuition Reimbursement Program.

POLICY:

In recognition of the long-range contribution that additional job related education can make in continued quality service to the community, educational expense reimbursement is offered to eligible employees on a limited basis according to the following guidelines:

- Full time employees
- Must be employed with the city a continuous year before submitting an application for tuition reimbursement

A. Eligibility

1. Educational courses must be taken from an accredited college or university. For the purposes of this policy, accredited shall mean an institution of higher education recognized by the U.S. Department of Education (<http://ope.ed.gov/accreditation/search.aspx>) or The Council for Higher Education Accreditation (<http://www/chea.org/search/search.asp>).
2. The employee must have a field of study, commonly known as a major, declared with the employee's chosen college or university. Only those fields of study that, in the judgment of the employee's department director and the City Manager's Office, are related to the employee's current job classification or which will enhance the employee's potential for advancement to a position within the city are considered under this program. Single courses in self-improvement or continuing education programs not leading to a degree do not qualify under this program.
3. The maximum number of hours eligible to be reimbursed per semester is six (6)
4. To be eligible for reimbursement, completion of the course with a passing grade of "C" or better for undergraduate level is required, or "B" or better for graduate level work.
5. Employees receiving tuition assistance from a source that does not require repayment (Veteran's benefits, grants, scholarships, etc.) are required to submit reimbursement requests for the balance of the tuition not covered by the alternate source

B. Procedures and Responsibilities

An employee considering reimbursement under the terms of this program must make application to the city prior to enrollment in qualified courses. The employee must notify their division director prior to August 1st each year for budgeting purposes.

1. Tuition reimbursement will be paid only if the courses and degree plan in question have been pre-approved
2. The employee must complete and submit to their Department Director the *Application for Degree Plan Approval* form (Appendix E, Form 6), along with a complete degree plan outlining required courses and a signed *Tuition Reimbursement Agreement* (Appendix E, Form 7). The Department Director will enter a recommendation as to approval of the degree plan and then forward the application to the Human Resources Department. The Human Resources Manager will review the application for completion and forward to the City Administrator's office with recommendations for approval
3. The decision of the City Administrator or designee is final. If the City Administrator approves the field of study, all courses in the degree plan are eligible for reimbursement subject to the availability of funds in the City's Annual Operating Budget. Reimbursement will be paid at 100% of the eligible tuition rate up to a maximum of \$1,200 annually
4. Eligible tuition rate is defined as the resident tuition rate established by the state or county college attended for undergraduate or graduate level work. If attendance is at an institution other than a state or county college, reimbursement will be based on the average tuition rate for state schools within the region as determined by the Human Resources Department
5. Mandatory fees shall be reimbursed at 50%, excluding late fees and interest for delayed payment plans. Eligible fee rate is defined as the resident fee rate established by the state or county college attended for undergraduate or graduate level work. If attendance is at an institution other than a state or county college, reimbursement will be based on the average fee rate for state schools within the region as determined by the Human Resources Department
6. Prior to the commencement of each semester, the employee must submit a *Course Pre-approval Request* (Appendix E, Form 8) to the Human Resources Department notifying the City of the courses to be taken that semester
7. Upon completion of the course the employee must submit original tuition and textbook receipts, grade reports, and the *Reimbursement Request* (Appendix E, Form 9) to the Human Resources Department for reimbursement within 30 days of the final grade report to be eligible for reimbursement
8. Books and course materials will be reimbursed with appropriate receipts up to, but not exceeding, the amount of the tuition reimbursed for the course
9. The employee who receives tuition reimbursement must remain in service to the City, as a full time employee, for at least two (2) years beyond the date of reimbursement; otherwise, all sums for tuition and books paid by the City over the past two (2) years must be refunded to the City. As a condition of receiving tuition reimbursement, the City may deduct any sums owing from the employee's final paycheck from the city

10. The Employee agrees to refund the City of Stephenville the full amount of the tuition and book reimbursement provided during the year preceding voluntary resignation. An employee applying for tuition reimbursement will sign a ***Tuition Reimbursement Agreement (Appendix E, Form 7)*** acknowledging the requirements and agreeing to such
11. Under no circumstances will the City pay any employee more than \$1,200 per year. (*Refer to Guideline #3 above*)

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The Tuition Educational Assistance Program promotes the City's goals of improving customer service and investing in the workforce. The City provides financial assistance to employees who take job-related, City career enhancing credit courses at accredited, degree-granting schools and institutions of higher learning. The Tuition Educational Assistance Program does not provide assistance for staff development training or continuing professional education. There is nothing in this policy intended to change or modify the at-will status of City employees or to create or confer expectation of continued employment to any employee.

A. GENERAL INFORMATION

1. The program is available to regular, full-time employees to improve qualifications in their present position and to prepare them for more responsibility with the City of Cleburne. This policy does not apply to employees in their new-hire introductory period or on disciplinary probation.
2. The City will reimburse specific expenses for college-level education courses, GED preparation, and certifications that provide additional expertise to City employees. This policy does not cover classes, certificates or licenses that are required by the employee's present position or that would be considered ordinary training. These types of expenses should be covered by the division's training budget, at the Director's discretion, or the employee directly.
3. This policy is not an expressed or implied guarantee of benefits. All requests for reimbursement made thru the Tuition Educational Assistance Program will be considered on a first come first serve basis. Initial payment and continuation of such benefits is dependent upon budget funding availability and class approval.
4. Benefits may be temporarily suspended or permanently terminated at any time, upon the determination of the City Manager, based on the availability of funding.
5. Employees are not guaranteed additional salary consideration or promotion for completion of courses paid for by the City of Cleburne.

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B. DEFINITIONS

1. A course or educational program is a class of instruction taught at or by an accredited college, university, or trade school recognized by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.
2. A tuition educational assistance participant is an eligible full time employee who has submitted a Tuition Reimbursement Application and been approved. (Refer to Requirement Section for eligibility requirements).

C. ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS FOR REIMBURSEMENT OF COLLEGE CREDIT COURSE WORK

1. The benefit is available to regular, full-time employees that have completed the introductory period, and have no recorded policy violations within the one hundred eighty (180) days prior to the beginning of the class(s) for which registration is being sought.
2. Employees may apply for Tuition Educational Assistance prior to the expiration of the probationary period, as long as the first day of class does not occur prior to the employee's one (1) year anniversary or the end of the disciplinary probation.
3. Employees must sign a formal agreement, in which the employee agrees to remain employed by the City of Cleburne for two (2) years from the date of reimbursement, or the employee will be responsible for paying all or part of reimbursement of Tuition Assistance funds back to the city as determined by the City Manager.

D. PROCEDURES/RULES

1. The City Manager will make the final decision regarding any situation not addressed within this policy.
2. All courses reimbursed under this program must be taken on the employee's own time. If a class is only available during an employee's normal work hours, the employee may request a flexible schedule from the division manager. A memorandum outlining the employee's flexible work schedule must be signed by the employee, approved by Department Director and forwarded to the Human Resources Department with a completed Tuition Educational Assistance Program Application. When there is a conflict between classes and the employee's job responsibilities, the job responsibility must come first. Flexible schedules shall not cause

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any undue hardship to the department or city in any way. Approval for participation in the tuition educational assistance program does not guarantee the ability to take courses during normal work hours.

3. Employees are to provide formal proof of the courses they are taking or have taken for the purposes of education assistance.
4. Employees who are receiving Tuition Educational Assistance at the time of an injury, whether work related or non-work related, are expected to continue with school during the absence, unless the physician documents that they are unable to do so. If it becomes necessary for the employee to withdraw or take an incomplete for the course, they will have one hundred eighty (180) days following the date of return to full duty to re-enroll and satisfactorily complete the course. Exceptions may be made if the course is not available during that time frame. If not, the employee will be liable for returning any advance monies they received for the semester they did not complete.
5. Dropping of a class(s) at any time is not acceptable. An employee who drops a class will not be eligible for Tuition Educational Assistance for twelve (12) months after the initial drop date. The employee will be responsible for paying back City funds used for a dropped class through payroll drafts within sixty (60) days.

E. COURSE CRITERIA

1. Course must be in the pursuit of a degree that is job related or would benefit the City as determined by the City.
2. The course must prepare the employee for change(s) in duties and responsibilities in current position or in preparation for a more advanced position.
3. The course must be offered by an accredited educational institution that is recognized by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (Commission of Colleges). Specialized courses not recognized by the Association may be considered if directly related to the employee's responsibilities or required in order to complete a degree plan (i.e. elective courses).
4. Employees must obtain a course grade equivalent to a C or better to be eligible for reimbursement. The City will not accept a pass or fail option. Reimbursement will not be

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provided for classes not completed successfully. The entire cost of a failed class must be paid back to the City by payroll draft within sixty (60) days of the failed course.

F. APPLICATION INFORMATION

1. Employees are required to complete a Tuition Reimbursement Application and Tuition Reimbursement Agreement thirty (30) days in advance of the first day of the school term or starting course date. A copy of the course description from the school catalog, website, or course registration form will need to be attached to the application in order to be considered. Employees will be paid fifty (50%) percent of the eligible tuition and books at the beginning of the course. The remaining fifty (50%) percent of the tuition will be paid when a Tuition Reimbursement Request and a Grade Verification form, with a grade C or better, has been submitted and approved by the Human Resources department.
2. Employees applying for assistance are eligible for a maximum of one thousand five hundred dollars (\$1,500) per college semester or three thousand dollars (\$3,000) per fiscal year. Funds are payable only after all criteria are met in accordance with this policy. The City will pay one hundred (100%) percent of tuition and book costs as reflected on the fee and book receipts, up to the maximum. Supplies or any other expenses in connection with courses are not eligible for reimbursement.
3. It is the employee's responsibility to inform the Human Resources Department if he/she is receiving financial assistance by any other source. In the event of partial scholarships or grants, reimbursement will be calculated based on the actual expense to the employee. Failure to inform the Human Resources Department will result in disqualification from participation in the Tuition Assistance Program and may subject the employee to disciplinary action.
4. Any changes to a degree plan must be submitted and approved prior to registration.
5. Tuition Educational Assistance will be paid only once for each approved course. The City of Cleburne will not pay for courses for which Tuition Educational Assistance has already been received by the employee.
6. An employee will be eligible for tuition assistance for only one (1) associate degree and one (1) undergraduate degree. Any exception must be for the benefit of the City and would

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require City Manager's approval. A master's degree must be specifically applicable to City advancement and must be approved in advance by the City Manager.

G. SERVICE REQUIREMENTS/REPAYMENT OBLIGATIONS

1. Requirements for continued service with the City after course completion are an assurance that the City will benefit from employee participation in this program. If an employee leaves City employment for any reason before a service requirement is completed, the employee must repay to the City all of the tuition that was paid to the employee.
2. If the employee has worked less than two (2) year of the service requirement, the employee will repay to the City the full amount of the reimbursement payment made to the employee.
3. A two (2) year service requirement begins on the reimbursement check date. A separate two (2) year service requirement must be completed for each reimbursement payment made to the employee.
4. A service requirement is not an assurance of continued employment by the City. If a termination of employment occurs, voluntary or involuntary, and a repayment amount is owed by the employee, and the employee does not otherwise repay the amount, the employee agrees to have the repayment amount deducted from the employee's paychecks that are issued after the termination decision occurs. Any remaining balances owed to the City shall be paid immediately following notification to the employer.
5. Repayment of tuition assistance if employee drops or fails to complete the course prior to completion or obtains an average grade below C will be made by a payroll deduction. The employee will be responsible for paying back any used City funds with in sixty (60) days.
6. Employees are not responsible for reimbursement to the City in the following circumstances:
 - a. Position is eliminated due to a reduction in forces
 - b. Work shift changes initiated by management that prohibit the employee from completing course(s)
 - c. The employee is involuntarily called to military service

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- d. Other reasons which are determined to be out of the control of the employee, left to the discretion of the City Manager

**ADMINISTRATIVE DIRECTIVE
NO. 65
HIGHER EDUCATION INCENTIVE PROGRAM**

Higher education is a very important aspect of any employee's current job performance and future ability to advance within the City organization. Therefore, the City wants to encourage its employees to continue their education by enrolling in colleges for undergraduate or post-graduate courses. Under this policy, an employee may take college courses which are either related to their job duties, or designated in a degree plan approved by their supervisor.

The City will reimburse the employee for actual costs as follows:

100% for a grade of A
80% for a grade of B
70% for a grade of C

Eligibility: Reimbursement is for actual costs of tuition and books, not to exceed the normal costs for comparable courses at area colleges (Texas Tech, UTPB, Howard College, LCU, etc.) Only full time permanent employees who have completed their probationary period prior to beginning the course are eligible for reimbursement.

Additional Longevity Incentive: As an added incentive, employees who have been employed with the City for more than five years may seek an advance toward the actual costs of tuition and books for eligible classes. For first time program applicants, advances may be granted for the lesser of 50% of the actual costs of the class or 50% of the employee's net pay, so long as the employee does not have an outstanding Payroll Advance under Administrative Directive 68. Once the class is completed, the employee will be reimbursed for any additional amounts applicable to the grade received. For those who have previously participated in the program, advances may be granted for a percentage of the actual costs of the class equal to the percentage of reimbursement or advance the employee received for their last class taken under this program. The advance payment option is also available to employees having less than five years of service with the prior approval of the City Manager.

Repayment: If an employee does not complete a class for which he or she received an advance, or does not make a grade of C or above in the class, the advance must be repaid in the same manner as a Payroll Advance under Administrative Directive 68. If an employee receives an advance for a higher percentage than the final grade received for the class, he or she must repay the additional amount advanced in the same manner as a Payroll Advance under Administrative Directive 68. If an employee that receives a higher education incentive leaves employment with the City for any reason within twenty-four months of completion of the last class an incentive was paid for, the employee agrees to pay back the funds in full through a deduction from the last paycheck with any additional amount due to be paid in a lump sum at the time of termination.

Course assignments may not be done during working hours or using City equipment. An employee may attend class during working hours with the approval of his/her supervisor,

provided that the employee uses vacation or compensatory time or the supervisor adjusts the employee's work schedule to make-up the time in class.

Approval: The employee's supervisor and the City Manager must approve all courses under the program. The City Manager shall make all final decisions regarding eligibility and appropriate advance or reimbursement.

Approved: 
_____ City Manager

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