

Section 5

EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT

5.1 IN-HOUSE TRAINING AND EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE

Under the direction of the City Manager, the Human Resources Director will foster and promote in-service training of employees for the purpose of improving the quality of services rendered to the City and to assist employees to equip themselves for advancement. The City also offers funding for educational purposes through a Tuition Reimbursement Program.

Tuition Reimbursement Program

Purpose

To establish policy and procedures for the administration of a Tuition Reimbursement Program.

Policy

The City of Melbourne recognizes the importance of providing educational assistance opportunities to City employees and has established guidelines for the administration of a tuition reimbursement program. Eligible employees may be reimbursed for undergraduate or graduate programs of study taken at fully accredited colleges or universities. Accreditation must be documented by an accrediting association. Courses of education or training must be in areas related to a City career field and must meet eligibility requirements.

Eligibility

To be eligible for participation in the Tuition Reimbursement Program, an employee must:

- a. Be actively working in a regularly scheduled, full-time budgeted position scheduled for a minimum of one year of continuous service and have successfully completed probation at the beginning of the quarter/semester for which tuition reimbursement is requested.
- b. Enroll (or will enroll) in an accredited educational institution.
- c. Enroll in an undergraduate or graduate program of study. Courses of education for doctoral programs of study are not eligible.
- d. Be participating in a degree program that is directly related to professional development and career progression in the employee's current City job or field of

study. The employee must demonstrate the relationship between their current city job and the justification for degree attainment. The course should also be related to a current City position within the employee's realistic promotional line.

- e. Enroll in course(s) that meet during the employee's off-duty time.
- f. Submit the Tuition Reimbursement application to the Department Director for approval PRIOR TO the beginning of the quarter/semester/coursework for which tuition assistance is requested. A tuition reimbursement application shall be submitted for each quarter/semester for which tuition reimbursement is requested.

Ineligibility

- a. Employees who have a documented performance improvement plan (PIP) within one year of the request are not eligible to participate in the Tuition Reimbursement Program.
- b. Employees on leave-without-pay status are not eligible to participate in the Tuition Reimbursement Program.
- c. Employees participating in the DROP program are not eligible for participation in the Tuition Reimbursement Program.
- d. An employee who has submitted a resignation is not eligible for the tuition reimbursement program. If that employee retracts their resignation they shall remain ineligible for the tuition reimbursement program for a period of 12 months.

Responsibilities

- a. The Department Director is responsible for reviewing the employee's request for participation in the Tuition Reimbursement Program. Upon receipt of the Tuition Reimbursement Program Application, the Department Director will provide his/her recommendation(s) in writing to the Human Resources Department. The employee's Department Director will also provide input through discussion with the Human Resources Department.
- b. The Human Resources Director (or designee) is responsible for approving/denying program participation (unless otherwise stated in a collective bargaining agreement).
- c. The Human Resources Director (or designee) is responsible for verifying that an employee has received a passing grade of "B" or higher (or its equivalent where letter grades are not used), that completion of the appropriate course(s) is documented, and that reimbursement is appropriate.

- d. Employees are responsible for the timely submission of the Request for Reimbursement to Human Resources, to ensure the requests for reimbursement are accurate and for submitting proof of payment, financial aid statement and passing grade as part of the reimbursement request.
- e. It is the employee's responsibility to establish program eligibility prior to the add/drop period for the quarter/semester for which reimbursement is requested or the full tuition costs will be the employee's responsibility. If, for any of the reasons stated in this policy, an employee or his or her coursework is not accepted for tuition reimbursement, and the employee did not confirm his or her eligibility for the Human Resources Department prior to the add/drop period, then the employee will be responsible for all financial obligations/commitments.

Maximum Fiscal Year Reimbursement

The Tuition Reimbursement Program fiscal year limit is subject to City of Melbourne fiscal year appropriations.

An employee may receive up to a maximum of \$2000 per fiscal year.

If budgeted funds remain after all reimbursements are processed in the fiscal year, these funds will be distributed to eligible employees who qualify for additional reimbursement.

Additional reimbursement will be provided to employees who received the \$2000 maximum in accordance with policy, but did not receive total reimbursement for the cost of their courses. Employees who qualify will receive equally distributed funds up to the cost of their tuition.

The availability of funds for additional distribution will be determined by September 15 of each fiscal year.

The Tuition Reimbursement Program will not duplicate other financial aid programs such as Pell Grants, Veteran's Administration Benefits, Scholarships, etc. It is the employee's responsibility to obtain necessary documentation from the school regarding VA benefits, grants, scholarships, etc. and submit such documentation to the Human Resources Department with each tuition reimbursement application. Any financial aid received will be deducted from the tuition reimbursed by the City. *For example, if an employee's tuition amount is \$500.00 and he/she receives a \$100.00 Pell Grant, VA Benefit or Scholarship, the City will reimburse \$400.00.*

IRS Disclosure (this section may not pertain to a policy with reimbursement limit(s)).

If an employee receives educational assistance benefits under this program, \$5,250 (or amount based on current tax law) of benefits each year can be excluded from taxation.

Generally speaking, tax must be paid on the amount over \$5,250 (or the amount based on current tax law) because it is considered income. The City must include in an employee's wages (Form W2, box 1) the amount that must be included as income.

Reimbursable costs

Reimbursement shall include only tuition costs and is not authorized to cover the cost of normal academic expenses. Items that are ineligible for reimbursement include but are not limited to:

- a. Computers, calculators, supplies or special equipment;
- b. Class changes that have not had prior approval from the Human Resources Department Tuition Reimbursement designee;
- c. Fees for late registration, course changes, class withdrawal, incomplete grades, technology access, student activity, campus access or textbook shipping and handling
- d. Textbooks
- e. Financing and installment service charges
- f. Exam fees and review courses (e.g. CPA, CPM, LAW)
- g. Seminars, conferences, workshops, lectures, forums, trade school certifications
- h. For employees seeking an Associates, Bachelor or Master's degree, the cost associated with obtaining professional certification courses or exams
- i. Continuing education or Trade School classes
- j. Mandatory employee training or
- k. Food, travel and parking expenses.

Approval/Denial of Application

The Human Resources Department will review all Tuition Reimbursement Program Applications received and approve or deny based on:

- Department Director Recommendation,
- Department Director Discussion with Human Resources representative,
- Eligibility of the employee,
- Eligibility of the educational institution,
- Eligibility of field of study,
- Timeliness of the application,
- Availability of City-sponsored training alternatives,
- Available budget

Notification to Employee & Department Director

All employees will receive notification of approval or denial in writing with a copy provided to the Department Director. The Human Resources designee will schedule a meeting with

the employee to discuss if the application was denied (meeting with the HR department is not a requirement for the employee).

Payment Documentation

In order to receive reimbursement, the employee is required to submit the following:

- a. Proof of payment
- b. Documentation from the school reflecting the cost per credit hour, total credits, name of course, dates of course, and amount paid
- c. Documented proof of all/any financial aid received
- d. When the required documentation is received, the Human Resources Department will approve payment, which will be made upon receipt of grades at the end of the course(s) through Accounts Payable – Finance Department.

If funds budgeted for this benefit become depleted through employee application for reimbursement, then only those employees who have approval for reimbursement prior to the exhaustion of the funds will receive such reimbursement.

Whether the payment will be taxable depends on current tax law, and payment of the tax is the employee's responsibility.

Payment reimbursements in the amount of 100% shall be made for all completed courses with a grade of B or higher.

Any completed courses with a grade of C or lower, or any course not completed, shall be ineligible for reimbursement under the City's Tuition Reimbursement Program.

In cases where the course provides a pass - fail grade instead of a structured alphabet or numerical grading system the City shall reimburse only those employees who receive a passing grade.

Self-paced programs must be completed within three months of registration. Failure to complete the course within the three months will result in non-reimbursement of funds.

An employee who fails to submit proof of grade within the required time frame forfeits the next semester's tuition reimbursement opportunity even if the Tuition Reimbursement Application has already been submitted and approved.

Extensions may be granted by the Human Resources Director (or designee) to allow for the completion of coursework in such cases as thesis research. Such extensions must be obtained within 30 calendar days after the close of the quarter/semester for which tuition reimbursement was approved.

Separation from City Employment

An employee who receives reimbursement under the provisions of the Tuition Reimbursement Policy is expected to remain in regular, full-time employment with the City of Melbourne for a minimum of one year following the last reimbursement. If an employee voluntarily resigns employment, retires, is not reappointed, or if employment is terminated for cause, the employee must reimburse the City for all funds expended according to the following schedule:

Within one year – 100% of reimbursements

More than one year, less than two years – 50% of reimbursements

Irregular Work Schedule

Employees are expected to schedule class attendance and the completion of study assignments outside of their regular working hours.

Employees will not be given paid time off, other than vacation/annual leave to attend educational classes or to complete study assignments.

In cases where productivity and proper supervision of employees are not adversely affected, management may approve changes in the work schedule to accommodate the pursuit of educational opportunities; however, it is expected that educational activities will not interfere with employee's work.

Any unsatisfactory job performance during class enrollment will result in forfeiture of participation in the Tuition Reimbursement Program and/or disciplinary action up to and including termination.

No exceptions to this policy will be entertained, reviewed or accepted.