

## **Educational Assistance Program Guidelines**

On October 22, 2022, the City Council approved Ordinance No. 26-22 which added Section 16-39 Educational Assistance Program for city employees. Guidelines for city employees to apply for the Educational Assistance are as follows:

- (1) *General purpose.* To develop a better educated and more highly skilled city workforce.
- (2) *Statement of policy.* It is the policy of the city to provide tuition assistance benefits to help employees pay for the cost of courses related to the employee's current job or future advancement opportunities within the city (upon the availability of funds annually budgeted and in accordance with the guidelines as shown below). Executive MBA and PHD programs are not covered under this policy.
- (3) *Procedures.*

*Eligibility.* Any full-time city employee who has been employed by the city in a regular full-time capacity for at least 12 consecutive months of continuous employment on a regular, full-time basis prior to the beginning of the course for which educational assistance is sought may apply to participate in the program. This policy does not apply to contract, temporary or part-time employees. Initial approval of a course of study does not obligate the city to future/continued approval of courses in that course of study. Approvals are only valid for the course and quarter / semester given.

Before an employee requests reimbursement through the city's educational assistance program, an employee must apply for educational scholarships (ie. Georgia Hope Scholarship, GI Bill, etc.) or submit evidence that the employee is not eligible to receive said educational scholarships.

- (4) *Types of courses.* The following courses are reimbursable depending upon the availability of city funds and approval by the respective Department Head and City Manager:
  - a. Courses that are part of a structured program to assist the employee in attaining his or her high school diploma or equivalent (GED);
  - b. Technical or skills courses offered through accredited technical schools if an employee's Department Head and the City Manager determine that the courses relate to the employee's current work assignment or potential promotional opportunities.
  - c. Undergraduate and graduate courses offered through accredited colleges or universities approved by the city if an employee's Department Head and the City Manager determine that the courses relate to the employee's current work assignments or potential promotional opportunities.
  - d. Courses that are part of an approved degree-related program which is related to the employee's current job or future advancement opportunities within the city.
- (5) *Scheduling of courses.* Employees are expected to attend courses on their own time.

- (6) *Amount of reimbursement.* Tuition reimbursement will be provided for no more than two courses per academic term per eligible employee.

Tuition, registration fees and required lab fees will be reimbursed according to the following schedule:

Grade Received	Reimbursement Percentage
A or P (for "Pass/Fail" courses)	100%
B	80%
C	60%
D, F, W (withdraw), W/F (withdraw failing) or Incomplete	0%

Reimbursement applies only to tuition, registration fees and required lab fees. The city will not reimburse employees for books, activity fees, parking, meals or other related expenses.

Employees who receive other forms of financial aid, such as private scholarships or grants, assistance from a government agency, and/or veterans' benefits will be reimbursed only for the difference between reimbursable expenses and the aid received from elsewhere (times the applicable percentage above). Employees who receive other assistance must provide evidence of such assistance to their Department Head who will submit this information to the Human Resources Director for review and final approval will be by the City Manager. At the request of the Department Head, Human Resources Director or the City Manager, the employee may be required to provide documentation (letter) from the institution they are attending verifying receipt/non-receipt of funding from alternative sources.

- (7) *Effect of employment termination.* To be reimbursed, employees must still be employed full-time by the city when evidence of satisfactory course completion is submitted to the city.
- (8) *Submission of request.* Before registering for a course/degree program, an employee must submit a request for tuition reimbursement to his or her immediate supervisor prior to the start of the course. The employee must attach a copy of the course description from the course catalog or other publication along with the cost of said course. The employee and immediate supervisor will discuss the relevance of the course(s) to the employee's position and/or future goals with the city before submitting the request to the respective Department Head.

Employees enrolled in a degree program at an accredited college or university must be able to demonstrate how the degree will apply to their position.

- (9) *Department Head's role.* The Department Head will review the request and either approve or deny the request in writing and sign the employee's memorandum request for reimbursement. If the document is approved by the Department Head, the documents will then be forwarded to the Human Resources Director for review and then to the City Manager for approval/denial.
- (10) *City Manager's role.* The City Manager will review the request and decide whether or not the course fulfills the requirements of the policy and whether or not adequate funds

are available. He or she will either approve or deny the request and sign it. At this point, the original request will be returned to the respective Department Head who will notify the employee of the decision. Another copy will be kept in the employee's personnel file.

- (11) *Registration.* The employee may register for the course once the application is approved. The city is not responsible for any costs an employee may incur unless they have specific written approval from the City Manager.
- (12) *Evidence of satisfactory completion.* Upon the completion of the approved course(s), the employee is required to submit certified transcripts of his or her grade(s) and cancelled check(s) or receipts for the approved course(s) to the Department Head. These documents must be attached to the original "request for tuition reimbursement" document. These documents should be submitted within 30 days of completing the course(s) to the Department Head. Failure by the employee to submit said documents within 30 days of completing the course may result in non-reimbursement for the course(s) attended.
- (13) *Authorization and payment.* The Department Head and/or City Manager (as applicable to amount requested reimbursed) will authorize disbursement to the employee (provided all applicable prior approval have been met and criteria adhered to).
- (14) *Reimbursement of city costs if employee resigns.* If an employee who has received funds through the city's educational assistance program for tuition reimbursement leaves the city's employ within two years of receiving these funds, he/she will be required to reimburse the entire amount to the city. The city will be authorized by the employee to collect from him or her, either directly or by payroll deduction, the amount received within the previous two years by the employee for educational assistance.