



CITY OF SPRINGFIELD TUITION REIMBURSEMENT PROGRAM POLICY

Introduction

The City of Springfield encourages its regular full-time employees to further their technical and professional development by providing financial assistance for job-related training and educational course work. The amount and availability of funding for the Program may vary from fiscal year to fiscal year depending on budgetary constraints. Completion of course work provided by accredited institutions may be reimbursed when such instruction is directly related to the employee's work or career development with the City.

Eligibility

A regular full-time employee who has completed his/her probationary period is eligible to receive tuition reimbursement assistance for vocational, undergraduate, and graduate level courses, including mandatory fees, which are directly related to the job the employee is currently performing. Degree programs and courses eligible for reimbursement include those offered by an accredited institution of higher learning (college, university, or technical school), those offered as part of an adult continuing education program, or those offered by a professional educational or training company or facility. Correspondence or on-line courses are eligible only if specifically permitted by the employee's supervisor.

Elective courses will be reimbursed if they fall within the job- or city-related benefit criteria described below; however, the City will not provide reimbursement for courses that are taken solely for the employee's benefit or personal enrichment. Books, mileage, lodging, special materials or equipment, or other incidental expenses are not reimbursable. The Program is not intended to apply to workshops, professional conferences, seminars or other short-term training.

Other factors that will be considered are the employee's past work performance and disciplinary record.

Demonstration of City-Related Benefit

This policy will be judiciously interpreted in determining whether a degree program or course of study provides a benefit to the City, either job-related or career-related, which is demonstrated as follows:

Job-Related:

- It directly supports or improves skills for current job assignments, duties, or responsibilities.
- It is required to meet the educational qualifications for the employee's present job assignments.

Career-Related:

- It directly prepares the employee for advancement within the employee's current department, occupation, or City organization.
- It directly develops the administrative or management capacity of the employee.

Scheduling of Courses

Whenever possible, the scheduling of courses must not interfere with the employee's normally assigned hours of work, and preference will be given for night classes. Hours in classes attended after an employee's normal work hours will not be counted as hours worked or credited toward compensatory time or leave. Courses scheduled during work hours may be approved if the following conditions apply:

- The course is not offered outside the employee's normal working hours; and
- The employee's attendance at class is deemed by the supervisor not to interfere with his/her job or the operations of the department.

If approval to attend class during normal working hours is given, every effort should be made to schedule classes during the employee's lunch time to minimize time away from work. Supervisors are responsible for monitoring the employee's absence and shall require the employee to make up time missed from work.

Possible Exceptions for Collective Bargaining Agreements

Collective bargaining agreements with tuition reimbursement/educational assistance may have different requirements and procedures. A represented employee should first consult the particular contract under which he/she is covered. All provisions of this Policy that are not inconsistent with a collective bargaining tuition reimbursement/educational assistance plan shall be controlling.

Procedure for Tuition Reimbursement

A standing Tuition Reimbursement Review Committee shall be appointed by the Mayor. This committee shall consist of three (3) members: the Director of the Office of Human Resources, the Director of the Office of Budget and Management, and the Executive Assistant to the Mayor; or the designee of any said member. It is the responsibility of the Review Committee to consider the recommendations for and act on each application.

The employee must submit the Tuition Reimbursement Application (see Appendix A) to his/her supervisor, including any supporting documentation, at least thirty (30) days prior to the beginning of a semester. Requests received after coursework has begun will not be approved. In addition, all applicants must include a brief written explanation of the job- and career-related benefits of the particular course to be taken and how the City or his/her department will benefit from the course of study to be pursued (first-time applicants only). An application must be submitted for each new semester.

The supervisor shall then review the application, approve the course or program applied for, and submit a written justification to the department director or division head, defining how the course relates to the applicant's current employment and career development.

The department director/division head will then review the application and approve or deny it. If the application is approved, he/she shall provide written comments as to why the employee should be reimbursed for attending the requested course or program and forward the application to the Office of Human Resources, which shall arrange for formal review by the Review Committee.

Review Committee Evaluation

Upon receiving an application, the Office of Human Resources shall forward copies to members of the Review Committee and schedule a meeting to consider the application. The Review Committee shall evaluate the application within ten (10) working days of its receipt in accordance with the eligibility guidelines. The employee shall be notified of the Review Committee's decision by the Office of Human Resources.

Applicable Costs for Tuition Reimbursement

Approved employees may receive reimbursement for one (1) approved educational course, or four (4) semester hours, per semester, whichever is less, provided that funding is available in the City's budget. The rate of reimbursement for undergraduate and graduate coursework shall not exceed the per-credit-hour cost for undergraduate studies currently in effect at the University of Illinois Champaign-Urbana.

The employee must submit an official record or transcript of the grade received and the official billing for tuition and permitted fees to the Office of Human Resources for final determination of reimbursement. He or she is responsible for obtaining, retaining and submitting this information. Reimbursement shall be subject to the amount funded in the departmental budget; or, if the employee is a member of a bargaining unit, by the applicable bargaining unit.

An employee enrolling in college courses or training courses must disclose other financial assistance sources he/she is applying for or is receiving. The City will only consider the difference between the actual tuition cost and any received financial assistance award as the amount eligible for reimbursement. An employee who fails to disclose other sources of financial assistance in connection with his/her application and subsequent receipt of tuition reimbursement shall be subject to discipline, up to and including discharge.

Reimbursement Schedule

The amount of tuition reimbursement is based upon the employee's academic performance in accordance with the following schedule:

- Grade "A" 90% of allowed tuition and mandatory fees
- Grade "B" 70% of allowed tuition and mandatory fees
- Grade "C" 50% of allowed tuition and mandatory fees
A grade of "C" for graduate-level courses is not eligible for reimbursement.
- Grade "D" or below No reimbursement
- Grade "Pass" 50% of allowed tuition and mandatory fees

Refund of Tuition Reimbursement upon Job Separation

- 100% reimbursement Less than one year continuing employment with City
- 75% reimbursement One year to two years continuing employment with City
- 50% reimbursement Two years to three years continuing employment with City
- 25% reimbursement Three years to four years continuing employment with City
- 0% reimbursement Over four years continuing employment with City

The employee shall sign an agreement on the Tuition Reimbursement Application agreeing to the refund policy and authorizing a payroll deduction from his/her last paycheck. In lieu of the payroll deduction, the employee may elect to reimburse the City by check prior to the issuance of the final paycheck. Reimbursement shall not be required of employees who are involuntarily separated from City employment due to layoffs.

Removal from the Tuition Reimbursement Program

Employee participation in the Tuition Reimbursement Program is a privilege, not a right. Employees are expected to maintain an above-average level of job performance and avoid any significant disciplinary action. The department director/division head shall have the right to suspend any employee from the Program who fails to maintain the proper level of performance and/or conduct.

Required Education

Employees may be requested by the City, required as a condition of employment, or mandated by certain laws and regulations to take specific courses or enter into a job-related degree program. All allowable tuition and mandatory fees will be paid by the City at 100%, and the selection and participation in any such programs is at the sole discretion of the department director/division head with approval from the Mayor.

While there is no set grade or pass requirement for such education or program, progress and performance will be closely monitored by the department director/division head and if ever at a level below expectations, the employee may be removed from the program.

Prior to the commencement of any required education, the employee shall sign an agreement to the Tuition Refund Policy (see Appendix B), and those who terminate City employment prior to the completion a three year period shall be required to reimburse the City according to the aforementioned refund schedule.