

Tuition Assistance Guidelines

A. The purpose of tuition assistance is to develop a better educated workforce. Agencies may or may not participate in this program. Agencies may be more restrictive in establishing their individual programs than these guidelines provide.

B. Only employees in FTE positions, temporary grant positions, and time-limited project positions with at least six months of state service may be eligible for tuition assistance.

C. Part-time employees must work at least 30 hours per week to be eligible for the program.

D. Tuition assistance may be provided for no more than six credit hours per academic term per employee.

E. Employees who participate in the program are required to work the normal number of hours in their regular workweek. However, agencies should work with employees to let them make up work time, adjust schedules, and/or allow them to use annual leave to accommodate class schedules.

F. Tuition assistance will only be provided to state employees who attend accredited institutions of higher learning offering courses within South Carolina. Employees should be accepted for admission to those institutions and courses must be taken for academic credit but do not have to be taken toward the completion of a degree.

G. Employees must pass the course(s) taken to have tuition costs reimbursed by an agency. Employees who fail the course(s) will not be reimbursed. This does not apply to course(s) required by the agency.

H. Tuition and laboratory fees may be reimbursed in full or in part by the agency based on each agency's specific policy. Books and any other fees will not be paid by the agency unless the agency is requiring the employee to attend the course.

I. Agencies electing to use the program must fund it from existing agency budgets. No new money will be allocated for the program.

J. Agencies will ascertain whether employees who apply for the program are eligible for any other educational or scholarship funds. If an employee is receiving other assistance that does not require repayment, i.e. scholarships, the agency may reimburse the employee for eligible costs incurred while participating in the program as long as the reimbursement and other funds received does not exceed the total cost of the course(s) taken. If the employee is receiving other assistance that must be repaid, i.e. student loans, an agency may allow an employee to receive tuition assistance.

K. Agency heads or their designee will develop and publish a policy outlining the details of the program and how it will be administered. As part of this policy, a formal agreement will be developed for use between the recipient of tuition reimbursement and the agency outlining the limits, requirements and responsibilities of both parties. Agencies would have the right to limit the program based on financial and staffing considerations. The agency head or his designee

would also determine where the program will be administered and how recordkeeping and bookkeeping will be accomplished.

L. Agencies will establish the basis on which state employees will be selected for the program and such selections will not be subject to appeal or review. Selection must be non-discriminatory and selection criteria must include a non-discriminatory clause. Agencies will establish whether tuition payment will be sent to institutions of higher learning prior to course completion or whether the reimbursement will be given directly to employees as required by the agency's policy.

M. Current regulations of the Internal Revenue Code require that certain criteria be met in order for the plan to qualify as nontaxable to the employee. The determination of whether a plan meets the exclusion criteria will be the responsibility of the agency head or his designee. In cases where a determination cannot be easily made, agencies may seek an individual ruling from the Internal Revenue Service.

N. For plans that are determined to be nontaxable, the agency can make payment directly to an institution on behalf of an employee. In order for this payment to be made, the agency head or his designee will have to certify that the disbursement is in compliance with the guidelines of the Internal Revenue Service for nontaxable plans and include the employee's name and present job title along with an invoice from the institution that provides the title of the course.

For plans that are determined to be taxable, the payment must be made directly to the employee through the agency's payroll. This must be done in order to properly withhold the appropriate taxes and include the information on W-2 forms.

O. Individual exceptions to these guidelines may be approved by the Department of Administration's Division of State Human Resources based on cost savings by the agency.

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