



ADMINISTRATIVE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Policy: Tuition Assistance Policy
Creation Date: October 18, 2011
Revision Date: August 5, 2013; May 30, 2015; November 6, 2017
Prepared By: HR Department
Approved By: City Manager
Legal Review: Elizabeth Ruhmann

POLICY: TUITION ASSISTANCE (TAP)

It is the policy of the City of El Paso to encourage employee development by sharing costs of approved courses and educational programs for full-time and part-time employees who have successfully completed their original probation with the City of El Paso. This benefit is extended to employees who take courses that are related to either their current position, or to a position or career within the City of El Paso.

Applies to:

Policy Applies To:	Policy Does Not Apply To:
Full-Time Employees	Original Probationary Employees
Part-Time Employees	Temp/Seasonal Employees
*Contract Employees	Interns
Civil Service Employees	Trainees
Uniform Employees	Volunteers
*Unclassified Employees	

*Receiving leave accruals and benefits, and upon completing six (6) months of continuous employment

Course and/or Certification Criteria:

- A. The courses must be included in a degree plan; or, for certification purposes, the certificate/license must come from a nationally accredited college, university, trade school or technical institution.
- B. Professional organizations that grant certificates or licensing may also be considered on an individual basis, as recommended by the employee's department director, and upon prior approval by the Human Resources Director or designee.
- C. Required sitting fees for examinations leading to certifications may be included under this program, upon prior approval by the Human Resources Director or designee.

- D. Seminars, conferences, and other courses that are a requirement of the employee's department are not eligible for tuition assistance. These courses are the responsibility of the employee's respective department, the individual, or both.
- E. All courses and certifications are subject to approval by the Human Resources Director or designee.

Guidelines:

- A. Funds will be distributed on a first-come-first-serve basis depending on fiscal year funding availability. The City of El Paso reserves the right to suspend or restrict tuition assistance based on the availability of funds.
- B. The City will assist employees in obtaining a maximum of one undergraduate degree and one graduate degree.
- C. Assistance is limited to two (2) academic courses per semester or mini-mester, and a maximum of five (5) courses per fiscal year or 15 credit hours, whichever comes first.
- D. Tuition Assistance will be calculated at 80% of the University of Texas at El Paso rate for mandatory tuition/fees, unless the requested tuition assistance is less. These charges will not exceed specified fees at the University of Texas at El Paso.
- E. Part-time employees will be eligible for assistance at a pro-rated amount based on the number of hours worked per week, as follows:
 - i. 30 hrs to 39 hrs will be paid at 80%
 - ii. 20 hrs to 29 hrs will be paid at 40%
 - iii. Less than 20 hrs will be paid at 20%
- F. Approved certificate and licensing exams will be reimbursed at the total cost of the exam, up to a maximum of \$1000 per employee each fiscal year. Licensing exams leading to certification or licensing must be evidenced with official documentation supporting successful completion.
- G. Ineligible expenses include but are not limited to the following: *Cost of living expenses, textbooks, equipment, materials, placement tests, preliminary tests or tests for advancement, travel, late registration fees and parking.*
- H. For employees receiving financial assistance from the federal government, Veteran's Administration, scholarships, grants or any other sources (excluding loans), the tuition assistance amount will be calculated on the cost not covered by the financial assistance.
- I. **Undergraduate level** courses taken for academic credit must be successfully completed as evidenced by a transcript or grade report indicating a grade of "C" or better. **Graduate level** courses must be completed with a grade of "B" or better. If a course is non-graded, documentation of "satisfactory performance" or a "passing grade" must be submitted. In all cases, grades of "I" (Incomplete) will not be reimbursed, and if funds were advanced for the class(es), those funds must be repaid in full. TAP participation will cease until the account is repaid and in good standing.

- J. Tuition Assistance Program funds will not be available to employees on "Leave Without Pay" status.
- K. If courses are available during non-working hours, the employee shall attend the course offered around their regular work schedule. However, if the only course available is during working hours, the department director may consider a flextime schedule, or adjust the employee's pay accordingly without affecting position duties or part-time/full-time status.
- L. Fire Science and Peace Officer Tuition Exemption Program: Fire and Police employees taking courses that are not covered under the Fire Science and Peace Officer Tuition Exemption Program (see Texas Education Code §§ 54.353-.3531), and which are in keeping with the qualifying criteria of this policy, may receive TAP assistance for the portion of tuition not covered under the statutory program.
- M. Enterprise Departments will reimburse the City of El Paso for the cost of tuition assistance expended for/to their employees.

TAP Application Requirements:

- A. Employees must certify that they have read the Tuition Assistance Policy in its entirety when applying for assistance.
- B. Employees must complete and submit a "TAP" application in person to the Human Resources Department, no later than **thirty (30) calendar days** prior to the start of the course. A current transcript and degree plan must accompany the application.
 - i. These documents must be resubmitted if there are any changes in degree program, or change in employment status.
- C. Applications for certificates or licenses must be accompanied by supporting information on the workshop or licensing program.
 - i. Applications must have a recommendation and signature from the employee's department director and must be submitted each time the employee is seeking assistance.
- D. The Human Resources Director will approve the authorized assistance in accordance with this policy and procedures.
- E. Once accepted into the Tuition Assistance Program, the employee must complete and submit the "Request for Course Approval and TAP Reimbursement" form or the "Request for Tuition Assistance Advance" form for each class for which they seek reimbursement, as described below.

TAP Reimbursement Requirements for Degree Program:

- A. **Within fifteen (15) calendar days** prior to the start of the course(s), employee must submit the "Request for Course Approval and TAP Reimbursement" form to the Human Resources Department. The forms must be accompanied by a current schedule of

classes, and an itemized bill that identifies all financial aid offered; regardless of whether the financial aid funds are accepted or declined.

- B. **Within forty-five (45) calendar days from the date of the completion of the course(s),** an official grade report for the course(s) must be submitted in person to the Human Resources Department.
- C. **Upon receipt of the passing grade(s),** the TAP reimbursement will be processed and tuition assistance monies will be deposited into the employees account.
- D. **Employees who drop or fail a course must notify the Human Resources Department within five (5) calendar days of the action to cancel the TAP Reimbursement process.**

TAP Advance Requirements for Degree Programs:

- A. **Within fifteen (15) calendar days prior to the start of the course(s),** the employee must hand deliver a "Request for Tuition Assistance Advance" form for each advance payment sought to the Human Resources Department. This documentation must be accompanied by an official schedule of class(es) for which the employee is enrolled, the cost per class (itemized), and any financial aid that is being accepted or declined.
- B. Upon approval of the Advance Request, a check will be processed and deposited into the Employees account to pay for tuition.
- C. **Within forty-five (45) calendar days from the date of completion of the course(s),** the official grade report or documentation of successful completion of the course(s) must be submitted in person to the Human Resources Department to complete the advance payment request process.
- D. Failure to present passing grades for a TAP Advance **within forty-five (45) calendar days** of class completion will automatically initiate the process of collection from employee's paycheck for the total amount advanced. Please see "Repayment of TAP Funds."
- E. Employees who drop or fail a course must notify the Human Resources Department **within five (5) calendar days** of the action so that TAP Repayment process and paperwork may begin.

TAP Payment Requirement for Certification/Licensing Programs:

- A. **Within fifteen (15) calendar days prior to the start of the course(s),** employee must submit the "Certification/License Request for course approval and TAP Reimbursement" forms in person to the Human Resources Department. This form must be accompanied by certification/licensing exam specifics, such as dates of exams, etc.
- B. **The TAP Certification/Licensing assistance** is also available in both Reimbursement and Advance forms, and employees should follow the same procedures as set forth above for degree programs.

- C. **Within forty-five (45) calendar days from the date of the exam for Certification or Licensing**, the official grade report or documentation of successful completion of said exam must be submitted in person to the Human Resources Department for completion of the TAP process.
- D. Employees who do not take the exam for certification or fail the exam must notify the Human Resources Department **within five (5) calendar days** of the action in order to begin the repayment process if it was an advance, or to cancel paperwork for reimbursement.

Repayment of TAP Funds:

- A. Employees who drop or fail a course after receiving advanced tuition assistance for that course shall repay the amount in four (4) equal payments. Said amounts shall be deducted from the employee's paycheck through payroll deductions. During the repayment period, the employee may NOT participate in the Tuition Assistance Program until the debt is repaid in full.
- B. Any employee who receives tuition assistance and leaves City employment, voluntarily or involuntarily (except for non-voluntary military assignment), shall repay the City the full tuition assistance amount paid to him/her during the year immediately preceding the effective date of separation. The repayment will be deducted from the employee's final paycheck, payout check, or as otherwise agreed by and between the City and the employee.

Appeal Process:

- A. If an employee believes that the TAP policy was not correctly applied, the employee must personally submit his/her written appeal to the Human Resources TAP Administrator **within ten (10) calendar days** of the objected action. The appeal needs to clearly state the employee's objection(s) and provide their justification.
- B. The TAP Committee will meet to review the matter **within ten (10) calendar days** of submission of the appeal. The TAP Committee will be comprised of the following:
 - I. The City Manager or designee,
 - II. The Human Resources Director or designee,
 - III. Other members agreed to by the above.
- C. The TAP Committee's decision shall be final.

TAP Forms are available in the My.elpasotexas.gov website. All "Request for Tuition Assistance Advance" forms must be completed in person at the Human Resources Department.

APPROVED BY:



TOMAS GONZALEZ, City Manager

DATE: 11/8/17