City of Winder Personnel Policy Manual
Title: Education Assistance
Date Issued: 12/2019
Policy: 022

12/11/19
Mayor

City Administrator

22.10 Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to provide financial assistance to full-time employees seeking job related degrees for career advancement within the City.

22.11 Employee Eligibility

A. The employee must have a minimum twelve (12) consecutive months of full-time service with the City of Winder and be off of probation. Temporary and part-time service does not apply toward the twelve-month requirement.
B. Employees on extended leave of absence (excluding absence due to worker compensation) are not eligible to apply for education assistance.
C. Participation in the program is subject to approval and is not guaranteed for any employee.

22.12 Educational Criteria

A. The course selected must be related to the employee's present position or career path within the City of Winder.
B. Classes shall be taken towards accomplishing a degree (i.e. Associates, Bachelors and Masters). Certificate programs related to the employee's position or career advancement with the City should be requested through department training.
C. Degree courses shall be offered through a recognized accredited college, university, business or technical school recognized by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.

1. On-line degrees – The City of Winder does not recognize on-line degree programs from schools without a physical campus and/or schools established after January 1, 2000.
2. The Personnel Officer shall make the determination for eligibility to schools outside of the State of Georgia's colleges and technical school system based on the educational criteria.

D. Employees must use personal time to attend classes and complete assignments. Employees shall also refrain from using City equipment and resources without the written authorization from their department head.

22.13 Application Procedures

A. Pre-approval is required to participate in the Education Assistance Program.

B. Employees must submit a written estimate of their tuition reimbursement expenses to the Human Resources Department per the deadlines as determined for the fiscal year in which they will attend the course(s). If an employee submits for tuition reimbursement for courses that were not submitted prior to the deadline, reimbursement may or may not be granted depending upon the availability of funds in the City's annual operating budget and approval by the Department Director and Human Resources.

C. The Personnel Officer along with the employee's Department Head's approval must be obtained prior to any course registration to make sure the employee's educational program meets all requirements.

D. If there is a change in the course(s) approved on the "Educational Assistance Pre-Approval Form", the employee must inform the Personnel Officer and await written approval before enrolling in the new course.

E. Human Resources may request an explanation of the applicability to the employee's current duties and/or potential career advancements as part of the approval process. Degrees and courses are required to be job-related or will enhance the employee's career opportunities within the City of Winder.

F. The Human Resources Department is responsible for tracking and monitoring all requests.

22.14 Approval of Application

A. The Department Head will review the request for Education Assistance, confirming the employee meets eligibility criteria and that attendance for courses requested will not conflict with the employee's assigned schedule.

B. If education assistance is denied, the employee may contact the Human Resources Department for clarification of the decision.

C. If the employee is actively enrolled in an approved degree program by the City and has received prior education assistance for the same program (and has been denied Education Assistance for reasons other than financial availability of the City), the employee may appeal the decision in writing to the City Administrator within ten (10) business days from being denied. The City Administrator shall make a determination within five (5) business days and this decision shall be final.

22.15 External Educational Assistance

A. All City reimbursement applies to the actual costs incurred by the employee over and above any financial assistance the employee receives from other student aid programs and/or scholarships. The Employee who receives external funding from another entity (e.g., scholarships, grants, GA HOPE, stipends, GI Bill, etc.) may only apply for City Education Assistance for tuition and fees not covered by other funding sources.

B. Proofs of exhaustion may include current financial aid transcripts or official documentation from the school that states the employee is not eligible for aid.

C. If the employee fails to inform the City of Winder of financial aid collected through a federal, state or other institutional program, the course will be considered ineligible for reimbursement under this policy. The employee will

also be subject to reimburse the City for all education assistance paid and will not be eligible for future assistance.

22.16 **Reimbursement Guidelines**

A. The City will provide up to $2,000 per fiscal year per employee to help defray qualifying education expenses from authorized accredited institutions.

B. The employee will pay all initial expenses related to tuition and other costs in advance and will be granted reimbursement only after the grade has been received. Such reimbursement is based on the employee's official school grade report or transcript.

C. The employee must provide satisfactory completion of the approved class defined as a grade of "B" or higher. Courses graded as "pass/fail" will be reimbursed only if the course uses the "pass/fail" as a mandatory grading requirement and a "pass" grade is received for degree credit. Courses where the employee has withdrawn are not eligible for reimbursement.

D. In the event that an employee terminates employment for any reason while enrolled in an approved course, the course will not be reimbursed.

G. Expenses not eligible for reimbursement are:

1. The City will not reimburse for elective courses under the category of Arts, Media Studies, Music, Theatre, or Recreation.
2. Tools and supplies, to include but not limited to: calculators, computers, binders, notebooks, folders, flash drives, ink cartridges, or supplies that you can keep after completing the course of instruction.
3. Athletic expenses.
4. Meals.
5. Lodging, room and board.
6. Parking, transportation, parking permit or parking fees.
7. Pre-enrollment testing, graduation fees, transcripts.
8. Technology fees and/or internet access fees.
9. Transfer of credits from one institution to another, deferred payment or installment charges; late payments; interest charged on loans from banks or credit associations to pay tuition.
10. Any other fees not directly associated with the per credit/semester hours of the approved course.

H. Text books and course materials:

1. On-line electronic course materials shall be paid at 100% up to a max of $150.00 per approved course.
2. Text books shall be paid at 75% of the established cost of the materials up to a max of $200.00 per approved course. Employees are encouraged to determine if rental or used options are available.

I. Lab fees associated with an approved course shall be included for reimbursement.

J. The Finance Department will prepare and forward a check payable to the employee within fifteen (15) business days of receiving all completed documentation from the Human Resources Department.

22.17 Timely Submission of Documentation

If an employee fails to submit required reimbursement documentation within thirty (30) days after completion of a course, the reimbursement will be treated as though the course was not completed with the allotted timeframe. If a delay in providing the required documentation cannot be avoided, the employee must notify the Human Resources Department within the thirty (30) days allocated in order to obtain an extension to submit documentation for reimbursement.

22.18 Proficiency Examinations

A. Proficiency examinations such as the College Level Examination Program (CLEP) are covered expenses under this policy.
B. The employee must pass the established examination and receive credit provided on an official transcript and be counted towards the approved degree program.
C. The City shall authorize a maximum of $300 per pre-approved proficiency examination.

22.19 Annual Appropriation

A. All educational assistance offered by the City is subject to the Mayor and Council approving annual funding. In the event that the Mayor and Council do not approve funding, the City is not obligated to provide educational assistance.
B. Funding of the Educational Assistance Program is limited. If funding is nearing exhaustion, reimbursement will be given in the order that completed applications are received by the Human Resources Department. If more than one employee is seeking reimbursement and both of the applications are received during the same business week, priority will be given based on full-time seniority with the City.

22.20 Tax Liability

The employee will assume all tax liability for financial assistance received in accordance with IRS guidelines. Tax consequences (if any) are the sole responsibility of the employee.