

SUBJECT: PAYROLL/PERSONNEL

CHAPTER TITLE: EDUCATIONAL EXPENSE REIMBURSEMENT PROGRAM

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## I. INTRODUCTION

This program provides an opportunity for WV Department of Transportation employees to further their education and to apply and be reimbursed for eligible educational expenses. The intent of the program is to encourage employees who are pursuing education or training that will increase their knowledge and skills to benefit themselves and the WVDOT. The basics of the program are as follows:

- Only full-time permanent employees may apply.
- The education or training being pursued must be directly related to degree programs that qualify you for a WVDOT job classification.

- To ensure adequate time for review and approval, the Application must be submitted before the last date of the semester in which the applicant is enrolled.

Employees must apply and be approved to participate in this program.

- Approved employees must sign an agreement to work for the WVDOT a specified time in exchange for program benefits and those who voluntarily leave or are dismissed before fulfilling this requirement must reimburse the WVDOT on a pro-rata basis.
- Eligible expenses are reimbursed, not advanced, and include routine enrollment costs, such as tuition and related fees and supplies.
- Ineligible expenses include: books; transportation; parking; room or board; license or certification fees; registration; subscriptions to publications; membership fees; or costs associated with attending any conference, convention or meeting of any group or organization.
- Reimbursement is limited to six credit hours (or equivalent) per semester for courses in which an acceptable grade is achieved.
- Participants with unacceptable grades in a course will not be reimbursed for that course.

The Educational Expense Reimbursement Program is not associated with or to conflict with any other educational expense reimbursement or scholarship offered by an individual WVDOT agency. An employee may not receive reimbursements from this program and monetary benefits for the same course expenses from any other reimbursement source, grant, or scholarship.

## **II. EDUCATIONAL EXPENSE REIMBURSEMENT POLICIES**

### **A. EMPLOYEE ELIGIBILITY**

In order to be eligible for educational expense reimbursement, employees must be in permanent, full-time status (past their probationary period) and should be in good standing. While there are no rigid program restrictions regarding an employee's work performance or behavioral record, their supervisors must approve the application. Applicants should be aware that these factors may be used to weigh their eligibility or worthiness for this program. This will have greater significance if there are more applicants than funds available to reimburse them, and a decision must be made that will deny one or more applications for that reason (lack of funds). In that situation, applicants who have a good work performance rating and few disciplinary problems will be regarded higher than those with less favorable records.

Employees should be reasonably sure that they can acquire the money that will be needed to initially pay for the education being pursued. Reimbursement funds are just that - they cannot be advanced to pay for the education up front. Applicants who apply but ultimately do not take or complete the coursework may prevent other employees from receiving approval when funds are limited.

### **B. EDUCATION QUALIFYING FOR REIMBURSEMENT**

The education being pursued must be in a field or degree that is directly related to degree programs that qualify an employee for a WVDOT job classification or related to maintenance or improvement of the employee's existing job responsibilities in order to be reimbursable. Furthermore, courses of study will be in one of the following categories and may include online courses.

**1. Undergraduate:**

This is formal education at a lower level than a master's degree and may include:

- a. G.E.D. or the State External High School Diploma program;
- b. Courses for college credit which may lead to an undergraduate degree (A.A., A.S., B.A., or B.S.), although the degree need not necessarily be the applicant's goal;
- b. Online courses

**2. Graduate:**

Courses in this category are for college credit and may lead to one of the following degrees (although the degree need not necessarily be the applicant's goal):

- a. Masters;
- b. Doctorate;
- c. Online courses

**3. Trade, Technical, Industrial:**

These classes typically lead to some sort of certification or licensing (such as, CPA, PE, EIT, PHR, etc.) rather than college credit. Employees must take review classes (in preparation for the licensing exam) on their own time, not during work hours. For reimbursement of review classes, the employee must pass the license/certification exam (only one reimbursement per each review class is allowed.) Online courses may also be taken.

**C. LEAVE OF ABSENCE FOR EDUCATION**

Employees may apply for a leave of absence for the purpose of pursuing education. This is considered a personal leave of absence and is unpaid. As with any personal leave of absence, these are granted at management's discretion and all of the normal agency rules apply (Highways employees see DOH Administrative Operating Procedures, Volume IX, Chapter 9).

**D. USE OF DEPARTMENT EQUIPMENT**

Participants in the Educational Expense Reimbursement Program may use DOT copying machines, typewriters, calculators, computer equipment, and paper supplies for their educational pursuits during non-working hours. Internet access and e-mail may also be used for legitimate educational research and communication with schools and libraries. The applicant must submit a written request for approval to

use state-owned equipment signed by both his/her supervisor and district or divisional manager, and be approved through the program application process. However, participants are liable for any damage to any of these resources that they may cause through negligence or misuse.

## **E. RESPONSIBILITIES**

### **RESPONSIBILITIES OF APPLICANT**

Prior to applying for educational expense reimbursement, employees should understand the following rules.

- a. The applicant must agree to work within the WVDOT for one (1) month for every one (1) credit hour reimbursed. Work time is counted beginning with the end of the semester within which the credit hours were earned for the initial repayment. Subsequent repayment time will be consecutive to the initial repayment time.
- b. If the study undertaken is not measured in credit hours, this requirement will be interpreted for individual cases by WVDOT Training and Development Unit and/or the Educational Expense Reimbursement Selection Committee.
- c. The applicant will be informed as to what work repayment rules have been set before paying tuition (or other fees) and commencing study.
- d. As much as possible, like study courses will have like work repayment rules.
- e. In order for education expenses to be reimbursed, participants must meet the following minimum grade requirements:
  1. For courses that are graded on a pass/fail basis, the participant must pass.
  2. A course grade of at least "C" must be maintained for undergraduate courses.
  3. A course grade of at least "B" must be maintained for graduate courses.
- f. If a participant does not achieve the required grade, he or she will not be reimbursed for that course.
- g. Participants must obtain a WVFIMS number to be reimbursed by contacting their district or division clerk for information.

### **2. RESPONSIBILITIES OF APPLICANT'S SUPERVISOR**

- a. For initial (first-time only) applications, the immediate supervisor will complete the "Supervisor's Recommendation" portion of the Application, type a letter of justification for the employee's participation in the program, make copies for his/her records and return the original documents to the employee within five business days of receiving the application. The employee will then send originals of these documents to the WVDOT Training and Development Unit.

- b. **The immediate supervisor must return the Educational Expense Reimbursement Application (WVDOT A-1) to the employee – he/she does not have the authority to stop the application process.**

### **3. RESPONSIBILITIES OF WVDOT Training and Development Unit**

The WVDOT Training and Development Unit is responsible for screening and directing applications to the Education Expense Reimbursement Program.

- a. WVDOT Training and Development Unit must determine whether the applicant has met all of the aforementioned qualifications.
- b. WVDOT Training and Development Unit may, if desired, render an opinion on whether the applicant should be accepted into the Program.
- c. WVDOT Training and Development Unit may also recommend the length of DOT employment that should be required if the education is not measured in credit hours.
- d. WVDOT Training and Development Unit must distribute copies of each application (and any opinions offered) to all supervisory or management members of the Educational Expense Reimbursement Selection Committee. This distribution will be done well in advance of the Committee's next meeting, if possible.

### **F. EDUCATIONAL EXPENSE REIMBURSEMENT SELECTION COMMITTEE**

The Educational Expense Reimbursement Selection Committee (hereafter called "the Committee") will have the primary responsibility of approving or disapproving all applications and forwarding them to the Secretary of Transportation or designee for final approval or disapproval.

#### **1. Composition of the Committee:**

The Committee will have five members and will be composed of three supervisors or managers and two at large line employees (non-management, non-supervisory employees) from the following WVDOT agencies: two from the Division of Highways, one from the Division of Motor Vehicles, one from Public Transit, and one from WVDOT Training and Development Unit.

- a. The Secretary of Transportation will appoint two of the three supervisor/manager members from any (or any combination) of the named DOT agencies. The third supervisor/manager member will be the representative from WVDOT Training and Development Unit.
- b. The two line employees will be appointed by the supervisor/manager members. They may be from any (or any combination of) WVDOT agencies.
- c. Any supervisor/manager may request that another person of comparable rank substitute for him or her, subject to the approval of the other supervisor/manager members and of the Secretary of Transportation (or designee). However, the three to two ratio of supervisor/manager employees and line employees must be maintained.

d. The WVDOT Training and Development Unit representative will serve as Chairperson of the Committee.

2. Frequency of Meetings:

a. The Committee Chairperson will call meetings on an as-needed basis.

3. The location of meetings will be determined by mutual agreement of the supervisory/management members of the Committee. The rotation of meeting locations, to fairly accommodate members' travel requirements, is suggested.

4. The Committee will decide what constitutes an "approval" vote (simple majority, unanimous, etc.). Whatever method is used, the following points must be considered:

a. The applicants' immediate supervisor's recommendation;

b. The WVDOT Training and Development Unit's representative's recommendation(s), if given;

c. The work reputation of the applicant;

d. The worth of the skills or knowledge to be offered to the DOT;

e. If there are more applicants than funds available for reimbursement, the worthiness of one or more applications in relation to the others.

f. Any member can abstain from voting if they feel uncomfortable about making a decision on any application.

### **III. EDUCATIONAL EXPENSE REIMBURSEMENT PROCESSES**

#### **A. APPLYING FOR EDUCATIONAL EXPENSE REIMBURSEMENT**

1. The applicant will complete the top portion of the Educational Expense Reimbursement Application (WVDOT A-1) and forward it and a letter of justification to the immediate supervisor.

a. The letter of justification will be a brief, informal statement of why the applicant believes himself or herself qualified to participate in the program and why the education sought will be of value to the WVDOT. No specific format is required for this letter.

b. If a Personal Leave of Absence will be needed, this should be requested at the same time (see DOH Administrative Operating Procedures, Volume IX, Chapter 9).

c. To ensure adequate time for review and approval, the Educational Expense Reimbursement Application (WVDOT A-1) must be submitted before the last date of the semester in which the applicant is enrolled.

d. Application forms must be submitted according to the policy requirements prior to enrollment in any Review or GED course (on-line or classroom).

2. For initial (first-time only) applications, the immediate supervisor will complete the "Supervisor's Recommendation" portion of the Application, type a letter of justification for the employee's participation in the program, make copies for his/her records and return the original documents to the employee within five business days of receiving the application. The employee will then send originals of these documents to the WVDOT Training and Development Unit. **The immediate supervisor must return the Educational Expense Reimbursement Application (WVDOT A-1) to the employee – he/she does not have the authority to stop the application process.**

3. **The WVDOT Training and Development Unit representative will review the application to ensure that the Application has been properly completed and that the applicant is otherwise qualified to participate in the Program. The WVDOT Training and Development Unit representative may write a recommendation statement considering the applicant, the acceptability of the education, and, if the education being pursued is not college, the work repayment that should be required of the applicant. Upon completion of this review, the WVDOT Training and Development Unit representative will forward copies of the non-college course applications (and any opinions offered) to all Selection Committee members prior to the meeting.**

#### **B. REVIEW OF EDUCATIONAL EXPENSE REIMBURSEMENT SELECTION COMMITTEE**

1. Committee members may, by request, review the non-college course applications and any recommendations prior to the next meeting. The WVDOT Training and Development Unit representative is authorized to recommend and approve all returning participant college course applications and will notify the Selection Committee of all such recommendations via e-mail. Any applications not approved will be submitted to the Selection Committee at the next meeting.

2. At the meeting, the Chairperson will moderate a discussion of all known relevant information about the applicant, the proposed course of study, the length of DOT employment that should be required of the applicant after completing study, and the applicant's agency's ability to fund the reimbursement.

3. After discussion, the Committee will decide whether to recommend the Application for Educational Expense Reimbursement or not. At this point, the Selection Committee Chairperson will complete the "Selection Committee Decision" box on the Educational Expense Reimbursement Application (WVDOT A-1) and (whether approved or not) forward the application to the Secretary of Transportation (or designee). Selection Committee members may request copies of any approved applications.

4. If disapproved, the Selection Committee Chairperson returns only the completed application to the applicant and provides a copy to the WVDOT Training and Development Unit.

5. The Selection Committee Chairperson will create and maintain a record of the discussions and decisions made.
6. The WVDOT Training and Development Unit will retain all pertinent files.
7. The WVDOT Training and Development Unit will create the WVDOT Educational Expense Reimbursement Agreement (WVDOT A-2) for the applicant and forward it with the application to the Secretary of Transportation for approval and notarized signature.
8. The WVDOT Training and Development Unit will initiate all requests for reimbursement

### **C. REVIEW OF THE SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION**

1. Upon receipt of an Application for Educational Expense Reimbursement (WVDOT A-1) from the Committee, the WVDOT Secretary (or designee) will review the Application and complete the last box, "Appointing Authority's Decision".
2. If approved, the Secretary (or designee) signs (before a notary public) the Educational Expense Reimbursement Agreement (WVDOT A-2) and returns both documents to the WVDOT Training and Development Unit.
3. The WVDOT Training and Development Unit forwards the approved original Application and the Educational Expense Reimbursement Agreement (WVDOT A-2) to the Director of Human Resources, along with a memo to be signed by the Director, who then returns the documents to the WVDOT Training and Development Unit for mailing.
4. The WVDOT Training and Development Unit makes copies of all documents for the applicant's official file and mails the agreement to the applicant along with instructions for him/her to review and sign the agreement with a witnessing notary public.

### **D. EMPLOYEE OBLIGATION IN EDUCATIONAL EXPENSE REIMBURSEMENT**

1. Upon receipt of the fully approved application and agreement, the applicant must sign the Agreement (before a notary public), make a copy for his/her records, and returns the original agreement to the WVDOT Training and Development Unit.
2. If the employee should decide to withdraw from a course for which reimbursement has been approved, he or she must notify the WVDOT Training and Development Unit.
3. At the completion of the course of study, the participant will complete and submit a Request for Expense Reimbursement Payment (WVDOT A-3) form to the WVDOT Training and Development Unit, with the following attachments:
  - a. Final grade documentation
  - b. Final tuition statement

4. The WVDOT Training and Development Unit will process and forward these documents to the Transportation Finance Division, Accounts Payable Section.

a. If any required documentation is missing, the WVDOT Training and Development Unit will contact the participant and request the documentation.

b. If the necessary conditions have not been met, and there is no way to meet them at this point (i.e. the participant has failed to make the necessary grade), the WVDOT Training and Development Unit will notify both the participant and his or her organization supervisor in writing, a copy of which will be kept in the applicant's file.

5. If the participant voluntarily leaves WVDOT employment or is dismissed (fired) before his or her working obligation is fulfilled, he or she must arrange a repayment plan with Finance Division, Accounts Receivable Section and notify the WVDOT Training and Development Unit.

a. Accounts Receivable Section, with the approval of the DOT Business Manager, is free to arrange an installment or time-repayment schedule with the participant, if necessary.

b. If the employee leaves the agency involuntarily (i.e. "laid-off"), no refund is required during the time of department unemployment, however, payment will resume upon re-employment at WVDOT.

6. If the participant voluntarily leaves WVDOT employment or is dismissed before completing the work repayment obligation without making the appropriate arrangements, the participant's organization manager must: a) notify the WVDOT Training and Development Unit and b) request that Finance Division, Payroll Section hold the participant's last paycheck. If the amount owed is more than the last paycheck, the organization's manager, in conjunction with Accounts Receivable Section, must notify Legal Division that further collection action is necessary.