

Tuition Assistance Policy

POLICY NUMBER: HR-18-02

TYPE OF POLICY: Human Resources and Personnel

EFFECTIVE: October 1, 2022

The most current version of this policy will always be the online version.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidance to Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) employees seeking tuition reimbursement.

BACKGROUND

The Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) was developed in accordance with [Government \(Gov't\) Code Ch. 656](#) and is intended to support employees who complete coursework through accredited institutions of higher learning. This policy applies to all TPWD employees.

POLICY STATEMENT

TAP's primary objective is to further the interest and mission of TPWD. In accordance with [Gov't Code §656.047\(b\)](#), TPWD adopted rules establishing criteria for program eligibility and enrollment and final authorization and approval of tuition reimbursement by the Executive Director before an employee is reimbursed for successfully completing a training or education program.

- Reimbursements are not guaranteed and are subject to funding availability.
- The completion of coursework does not guarantee promotion or continued employment.
- Approval of participation in TAP does not guarantee tuition reimbursement.

ELIGIBILITY

To be eligible for TAP, at the time of application and when requesting reimbursement, an employee must:

- Be a regular full-time or part-time TPWD employee for at least 12 consecutive months immediately preceding the request.
- Have had no disciplinary actions or been on probationary status in the last 12 months.
- Have earned a minimum overall job performance rating of "meets expectations" in the most current performance appraisal.
- If pursuing a degree through a college, university, or trade school, have a major or degree path that relates to a current or prospective career at TPWD.
- Pursue coursework in a field of study related to their current duties, prospective duties, or any career at TPWD. Elective courses must directly relate to TPWD business.

ENROLLMENT

To apply for tuition reimbursement, eligible employees must complete the Tuition Assistance Application Form (PWD-0911). The form must:

- be completed in its entirety.
- be accompanied by the employee's most recent FJD.

- be accompanied by a memo or development plan documenting their TPWD career goals when the courses requested are related to prospective job duties or a career with TPWD (as opposed to current duties).
- be approved by the employee's immediate supervisor and the Division Director. *Employees are encouraged to initiate the process as early as possible to ensure necessary approvals are obtained.*
- be submitted, along with supporting documentation, to the Human Resources (HR) Division for verification **no later than 30 days prior** to the employee's enrollment in the education program.

Upon HR verification, the HR Division staff:

- reviews the request.
- submits a memo summarizing the request along with the Tuition Assistance Application and supporting documents to the Executive Office for approval by the Chief Operating Officer (COO) and the Executive Director.

Once the request is approved/disapproved by the Executive Director, the application packet is returned to and maintained by the HR Division, with a copy sent to the requesting employee and the employee's immediate supervisor.

REIMBURSEMENT

Completion and approval of the Tuition Assistance Application (PWD-0911) does not guarantee tuition reimbursement. Final approval for reimbursement is made by the Executive Director.

- Employees with an approved TAP application must submit the following to the HR Division **no later than 3 months following** the satisfactory completion of their course or certificate program:
 - a completed Tuition Assistance Reimbursement Request form (PWD-0911A);
 - an itemized pay statement displaying the cost of tuition and the payment(s) made; and
 - a copy of the employee's transcript displaying the grades for the approved TAP courses.
- HR reviews the reimbursement documentation to validate eligibility and routes the packet to the Executive Director for final approval.
- Budget/purchasing positions within each division should assist requestors with the purchasing paperwork required to be sent to Accounts Payable. The employee must submit an approved purchase order and the approved TAP packet for Accounts Payable to process reimbursements.

Reimbursement Criteria

Each TPWD Division may set aside a maximum of 2% of their operating budget, or \$25,000 (whichever is more), per fiscal year for tuition assistance. Allocation of tuition assistance funds are at the discretion of each Division Director and must be approved on a per-employee basis by the Executive Director or designee. Documentation of each approval is retained by the HR Division. The following criteria outline eligibility for tuition reimbursement:

- The educational institution must be accredited and listed with the Council of Higher Education (CHEA) or the United States Department of Education (USDE).
- Only the cost of tuition associated with course credit hours or approved certifications that is paid out of pocket by the requestor (above and beyond any applicable grants and/or scholarships) is eligible for financial reimbursement.
- Additional expenses associated with student-related costs (e.g., books, software, computer equipment, parking fees, distance learning fees) are not eligible for reimbursement.
- Employee may request no more than \$1,000 per semester/academic term for academic coursework tuition.
- Employee must demonstrate satisfactory completion of approved courses.
- The total amount of tuition reimbursement per full-time employee may not exceed \$3,000 per fiscal year. Part-time employees may be reimbursed on a proportional basis.

Grade Requirements

If an employee withdraws from a course or receives an “incomplete,” the tuition for that course is not reimbursable. To be eligible for reimbursement, employees must submit documentation of grades as follows:

- The minimum acceptable grade for undergraduate courses is a “C” or “Pass” for courses graded pass/fail.
- The minimum acceptable grade for graduate courses is a “B-” or “Pass” for courses graded pass/fail.

Any fees associated with obtaining this required documentation is not reimbursable.

College Level Equivalency

- An employee's division may reimburse the employee for the cost of each College Level Examination Program test (or a similar process) if the employee achieves a score sufficient to waive a course requirement or receive college credit in lieu of taking a course, and the course would otherwise have been eligible for tuition reimbursement.
- Employees seeking reimbursement for College Level Equivalency tests (or a similar process) must follow the same the application and reimbursement request processes as outlined in this policy.

Recordkeeping and Accountability

The HR Division maintains all records pertaining to tuition assistance, including:

- Copies of Tuition Assistance Application (PWD-0911) authorized by Division Directors, COO, and Executive Director.
- Copies of Tuition Assistance Reimbursement Request (PWD-0911A) and associated documentation when authorized by the Executive Director.
- General statistics including the number of requests for tuition assistance made and authorized, the number of reimbursements authorized, and the academic institutions attended, the degree programs pursued, and the employees' respective divisions or work units.

- The certification earned by each employee through the training or education program ([Gov't Code §656.047](#)).
- When the fiscal year expenditures for tuition reimbursement and other combined training exceeds \$5,000 for any one employee, TPWD is required to report to the Legislative Budget Board by August 31 of each fiscal year:
 - The name of each employee for which the agency spent more than \$5,000 in that fiscal year for tuition reimbursement and/or training.
 - The amount spent on each employee.

DEADLINES

Eligible employees must complete all documentation within the required timeframes listed below. The responsibility for maintaining proper documentation falls upon those cited in this policy. Completed documentation must be submitted according to the following timelines:

- Tuition Assistance Application (PWD-0911) - Completed application and supporting documentation should be submitted to the HR Division at least 30 days prior to enrollment.
- Tuition Assistance Reimbursement Request (PWD-0911A) - Completed request and supporting documentation should be submitted to the HR Division within 3 months following the successful completion of the course(s).

HISTORY

Original publication date and subsequent revisions:

- 2022 October 1: revised to include Executive Office pre-approvals for tuition reimbursement
- 2018 July: revised
- 2004 November: revised
- 2003 September: original effective date