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Continuing Education Assistance Program	ACA Standards: 5-ACI-1D-07, 5-ACI-1D-22, 4-ACRS-7B-19, 4-APPFS-3A-20		
Steven Harpe, Director Oklahoma Department of Corrections		Signature on File	

Continuing Education Assistance Program

The Continuing Education Assistance Program is provided for full-time employees of the Oklahoma Department of Corrections (ODOC) who have been employed for at least one year. (5-ACI-1D-07, 5-ACI-1D-22, 4-ACRS-7B-19, 4-APPFS-3A-20, 74 O.S. § 840-3.1A, 74 O.S. § 846, 74 O.S. § 1733, 74 O.S. § 1734)

I. Education Assistance Program Reimbursement

Tuition reimbursement will be provided to continuing education courses that improve skills directly applicable to the employee's field of work or are beneficial to the mission and needs of the agency. Employees who elect to take courses and receive tuition assistance will continue to meet the full responsibilities of their positions. Courses will not interfere with availability for scheduled work or negatively affect work performance.

A. Eligibility for the Education Assistance Program

1. Courses and/or programs eligible for tuition reimbursement will meet at least one of the following criteria and will be approved by the chief People Officer or designee:
 - a. Courses eligible for college credit that are within the employee's field of work;
 - b. Courses that are a prerequisite to obtaining certifications related to the employee's field of work;

- c. Courses required for continuing education to maintain certification or license; or
- d. Courses providing an opportunity for furthering the employee's education that will improve skills directly applicable to job responsibilities and approved by the chief People Officer or designee, and the division chief.

B. Application to the Education Assistance Program

- 1. Employees requesting to participate in the program will submit a completed "Education Assistance Application" ([Attachment A](#), Web Link). Approval or denial of an employee application will be based on the criteria listed in Section I. A. 1. Items a - d. of this procedure and completion of the assistance application. Approval of an assistance application is not a guarantee of reimbursement. Utilizing the assistance application form found online, the employee will upload the following documents:
 - a. A copy of each course syllabus, degree sheet, program acceptance letter, or similar document detailing the course description and all the essential information about your college course(s)/program. This document will list the topics of study and student learning outcomes;
 - b. A copy of the course schedule with student name detailing the end date of the course (if applicable); or
 - c. "Supervisor Recommendation and Approval Letter" ([Attachment C](#), attached) outlining the benefit of the education to the agency, completed and signed by current supervisor and facility head/unit head.

C. Reimbursement Criteria and Eligibility

- 1. To request a reimbursement, employees will follow the process outlined in Section IV. of this procedure to provide documentation from their university, college, or program on the courses completed, credit hours earned, tuition charges, proof of payment and/or proof of payment plan and final grade received no later than 90 days after course completion. No reimbursements will be granted for requests submitted after the 90-day period. The documentation will be placed in the employee's personnel file.
- 2. Upon successful completion of the approved course(s) and submission of required documentation within designated

timeframes, employees may be reimbursed if the following criteria is met:

- a. If course work resulting in a final cumulative grade point average (GPA) of 2.5 or higher with a least a 2.0 or higher in each course, 100% of the amount equivalent to the resident tuition for course work at an accredited college or university.
- b. If courses in which letter grades are not given, course work resulting in certification or satisfactory completion, (e.g., "P", "S", or certificate of completion), 75% of the amount equivalent to the resident tuition for course work at an accredited college, university or approved program.
- c. Reimbursement will be limited to a calendar year maximum of \$5,000. The payment date, rather than the date the course was completed, determines to which calendar year the reimbursement is applied. Reimbursement is subject to a \$15,000 lifetime career benefit cap. The lifetime career benefit of \$15,000 and the total amount of tuition reimbursement will not exceed funds set aside for this purpose in the budget and will be reviewed and approved on an annual basis.
- d. Unless special circumstances warrant, only classes scheduled during non-working hours will be approved for reimbursement. Requests for special circumstances will be included in the applicant's "Supervisor Recommendation and Approval Letter" ([Attachment C](#), attached). Documentation of the special circumstances will be placed in the employee's personnel file along with other documentation required for tuition reimbursement.
- e. Employees eligible to receive scholarships or fee waivers through other governmental or private programs will take advantage of those programs prior to applying for the Education Assistance Program. In no case will total awards from all sources exceed 100% of the cost of course(s).
- f. Former employees are not eligible for reimbursement regardless of their active status at the time the class was taken (74 O.S. 1731 – 1734).
- g. Employees will not have received any formal discipline within one year of making an application to the program or while enrolled.

- h. Employees will have an overall rating of “achieved expected results” or higher on their most recent ODOC performance review.

II. Processing Education Assistance Requests

Education assistance requests will be processed by designated professional development representatives. A bi-annual communication will be disseminated to all staff utilizing the statewide broadcast system. This communication will include a link to the procedure and the QR code for the application.

- A. The professional development representative will verify all documents are in order, accurate, and complete. The professional development representative will also verify the eligibility of the employee for the program. The professional development representative will verify that the requirements outlined in Section I. items A-J of this procedure are met. If any items/signatures are missing, the professional development representative will notify the employee what they need to do to complete the application process.

III. Notification Process

The professional development representative will be responsible for notifying employees of decisions made regarding applications.

- A. If the employee has any disqualifying factors, the professional development representative will notify them their application is not approved.
- B. If the application is approved, the professional development representative will notify the employee that their application has been completed and accepted for consideration based on the availability of funding through the “Notification of Continuing Education Assistance” ([Attachment E](#), attached).
- C. Once the application is approved, the professional development representative will request the employee complete the “Financial Reimbursement for Continuing Education Assistance Participant Agreement” ([Attachment F](#), attached). (74 O.S. 846)

1. Required Payback Period

An employee’s signature on the “Financial Reimbursement for Continuing Education Assistance Participant Agreement” ([Attachment F](#), attached) certifies the employee’s understanding of an agreement to the following:

- a. There will be a required payback period of 2,000 hours of full-time employment with the Oklahoma Department of

Corrections for each \$5,000 of qualified education expenses paid by the agency; and

- b. If an eligible employee terminates service with the agency prior to the expiration of the required payback period, the employee is required to reimburse the agency for the amount of the qualified education expense. If the employee performs fewer than the number of hours of service required for the full amount of the expense paid, the agency will be reimbursed on a pro rata basis based upon the actual number of hours of service performed by the employee.

IV. Requesting Reimbursement

- A. Upon successful completion of approved coursework, the employee will submit the “Request for Financial Reimbursement of Educational Expenses” ([Attachment G](#), attached) to professional development along with the following documents:
 1. University or college courses, or approved program completed;
 2. Credit hours earned, if applicable;
 3. Tuition charges;
 4. Most recent ODOC performance review (an HR representative will provide documentation for the employee to professional development);
 5. Proof of payment; and
 6. Final grade received—will meet requirements outlined in this procedure.
- B. Once the professional development representative has verified the employee is eligible for reimbursement, they will forward the documentation to the chief People Officer, or designee, for approval.

V. References

74 O.S. § 840-3.1A

74 O.S. § 846

74 O.S. § 1731 – 1734

VI. Action

The Administrator of Professional Development will be responsible for compliance with this procedure.

The chief People Officer will be responsible for the annual review and revisions.

Any exception to this procedure will require prior written approval from the agency director.

This procedure will be effective as indicated.

Replaced: None. This is a new procedure.

Distribution: Policy and Operations Manual
Agency Website

<u>Attachments</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Location</u>
Attachment A	Education Assistance Application	Web Link
Attachment C	Supervisor Recommendation and Approval Letter	Attached
Attachment E	Notification of Continuing Education Assistance	Attached
Attachment F	Financial Reimbursement for Continuing Education Assistance Participant Agreement	Attached
Attachment G	Request for Financial Reimbursement of Educational Expenses	Attached