

ADMINISTRATIVE REGULATION

Effective Date: July 1, 1990

Administrative Regulation: 1-9

Revision Date: November 18, 2021

Supersedes: November 1, 2020

Approved By: William H. Ashton II

Subject: Education Assistance Program

I. Purpose

This Administrative Regulation sets forth the policies and procedures concerning the employee educational assistance program and applies to non-probationary regular status full time and part time employees. This program is a benefit designed to attract and retain qualified persons for town service, broaden the knowledge of employees in their fields and to provide an avenue for career progression within the town. This program is contingent upon annual appropriation of funds and is subject to change at any time. If budgeted funds are exhausted for the year, educational assistance stops prospectively until funding is refreshed. No funds shall be committed for which there exists no funding.

II. Policy

- A. The administration of the educational assistance program is assigned to the Director of Human Resources, with final approval given by the Town Manager.
- B. The program is available to non-probationary regular status full time and part time employees who wish to voluntarily pursue educational advancement. It does not apply to courses or training that are required by the town. It also does not cover professional licensing. Any course, training, licensing, or certification that is required by the town will be covered by travel and training funds within each department.

Courses reimbursed under this program must be taken on the employee's own time, with the following exception. Employees participating in the George Mason University Northern Virginia Public Service Fellows Program may use regularly scheduled work time to travel to and participate in classes as required by the Fellows Program. Travel and class time to participate in the Fellows Program outside of regularly scheduled work hours will be on the employee's own time.

All courses must be approved prior to enrollment. A course does not need to be part of a degree program, but should be offered by an accredited institution, i.e., a

ADMINISTRATIVE REGULATION

university or community college; or a course/exam to earn a GED and must be a course relating to the employee's current position or posture for a promotional opportunity; or a mandatory course requirement in a job-related degree program.

- C. Specific town required training, workshops and conferences shall be provided through the individual department travel and training accounts rather than through the educational assistance program.
- D. Professional development courses, as applicable to your position, of significant cost such as, but not limited to Leadership Fairfax, LEAD program, SOAR program etc., may be approved by Human Resources or the Town Manager for payment under this policy, depending on type of development and funding levels. Requests for significant professional development courses to be considered may be emailed or written to the Director of Human Resources.
- E. If budgeted monies are not adequate to fund all applications, the Town Manager will establish priorities based upon the needs of the town.

III. Procedure

A. Eligibility

- (1) All non-probationary regular status full time and part time employees.
- (2) If an employee is eligible for, or is receiving educational benefits, under the G.I. Bill, scholarships, or other forms of tuition assistance, any assistance paid by the town must not exceed the maximum per credit reimbursable amount or the difference between the amounts paid under the other resource and the total cost of the course(s).
- (3) Employees must earn a grade of "C" or better ("pass" in pass/fail courses) for undergraduate studies and a "B" or better for graduate work to be eligible for reimbursement.

B. Application Procedure

- (1) Applications must have initial department head approval, then be submitted to the Director of Human Resources **prior** to enrolling in the class.
- (2) The application will be reviewed by the Director of Human Resources and verified for job relatedness.

ADMINISTRATIVE REGULATION

- (3) After verification by the Director of Human Resources, the application will be submitted to the Town Manager for final approval.
- (4) A copy of the processed application will be returned to the employee. If approved, the employee will be eligible for tuition reimbursement.

IV. Reimbursement

A. Reimbursement Rates

Reimbursement rates are based on in-state tuition rates at George Mason University. An eligible employee enrolled in undergraduate coursework may be reimbursed for the cost equivalent of up to seven (7) credits per calendar year, at current George Mason in-state tuition rates for undergraduate levels. Eligible employees enrolled in graduate course work may be reimbursed for the cost equivalent of up to six (6) credits as determined under the 'Schar School of Policy and Government-other graduate programs' schedule. See the George Mason website or contact your HR department for current tuition rates.

Employees selected to participate in the Fellows Program must take courses as specified by the program and will be reimbursed the tuition for these courses. Employees are responsible for paying applicable taxes on any reimbursement over the maximum allowed under Internal Revenue Code 127.

Reimbursement will be made for tuition and testing fees only. Reimbursement will not be made for student fees, additional course fees, laboratory fees, textbooks, supplies, transportation, parking stickers, registration, etc.

B. Reimbursement Procedures

- (1) Within 30 days of course completion, the employee will forward to the Director of Human Resources proof of cost of the course, receipt or canceled check and evidence of final grade from the educational institution.
- (2) Following review of documents submitted, the Human Resources Department will proceed to request for payment to the Department of Finance.
- (3) Reimbursement will not be made for any courses that did not receive prior authorization as stated in this administrative regulation.

ADMINISTRATIVE REGULATION

V. Responsibility

- A. The Director of Human Resources will administer the program and maintain a record of all courses taken.
- B. The Town Manager will approve or disapprove all requests for educational assistance under the program.
- C. An employee who participates in this program and receives tuition reimbursement is obligated to a one-year employment commitment to the town following the town's reimbursement to the employee. If employment with the town terminates prior to the one-year obligation, the employee will be required to reimburse the town for the tuition assistance provided, reduced at a rate of 1/12 of the total cost for each full month of service completed following the completion of the course. A regular status employee who is separating from their position and converting to a temporary or part-time flexible position will be required to pay back applicable reimbursements. The application for the tuition assistance program is a consent form for recovery of expenditures in the event of termination. In this case, the balance owed may be deducted from employee's paycheck(s) and any wages or unpaid leave otherwise owed. If sufficient funds are not available to pay the amount owed the town from the wages or unpaid leave due to the employee, the excess amount not payable from the wages or unpaid leave shall be paid directly to the town by the employee. In the event the terminating employee fails to pay the balance owed upon demand, the employee shall be responsible for all costs and expenses incurred by the town, including attorney's fees.
- D. An employee who is selected for and participates in the George Mason MPA Cohort Fellows Program is obligated to a two-year employment commitment to the town following the completion of each course. If employment with the town terminates prior to the two-year obligation, the employee will be required to reimburse the town for the tuition assistance provided, reduced at a rate of 1/24 of the total cost for each full month of service completed following the completion of the course. The application for the tuition assistance program is a consent form for recovery of expenditures in the event of termination. In this case, the balance owed may be deducted from employee's paycheck(s) and any wages or unpaid leave otherwise owed. If sufficient funds are not available to pay the amount owed the town from the wages or unpaid leave due to the employee, the excess amount not payable from the wages or unpaid leave shall be paid directly to the town by the employee. In the event the terminating employee fails to pay the balance owed upon demand, the employee shall be responsible for all costs and expenses incurred by the town in collection of the debt, including attorney's fees.

ADMINISTRATIVE REGULATION

- E. An employee who is selected for and participates in the George Mason MPA Cohort Fellows Program who voluntarily withdraws from the program after taking any courses will be required to reimburse the town for applicable funds paid by the town for that program. Exceptions may be made by the Town Manager if the withdrawal was due to extenuating circumstances.



William H. Ashton II
Town Manager