

REIMBURSEMENT: Tuition Reimbursement Policy

#F07-01

Date of Adoption: September 12, 2007

Introduction and Purpose

The Lenawee County Tuition Reimbursement Program is designed to encourage and assist employees in furthering their educational qualifications and professional development in subjects and fields which are directly related to the County's operations, activities and objectives, and which will improve their job performance.

Administration

The Tuition Reimbursement Program is administered by the Lenawee County Administrator in accordance with the parameters described herein. The Administrator shall establish guidelines and directives supplemental to this policy as may be necessary to ensure fair and equitable distribution of tuition reimbursements, to provide sufficient reserves to meet reimbursement commitments and to maintain the overall integrity of the Tuition Reimbursement Program.

Eligibility Requirements

Any employee who is eligible for benefits with the County may apply for tuition reimbursement. In order to be eligible, courses and/or degree programs must be related to an employee's current or probable future position with Lenawee County. In addition, courses must be taken at accredited educational institutions before or after work hours. In order to receive reimbursement, applicants must be employed both when the tuition reimbursement application is filed and when reimbursement is issued. Employees on leave of absence without pay and part-time non-eligible employees, for example, are not eligible for this benefit. Reimbursements cannot be paid to individuals after the date of separation from the County.

Employees shall not be reimbursed for course work fully reimbursed or paid by tuition payment support from other sources, such as, but not limited to, scholarships, fellowships, veteran's educational benefits, Federal, State, Local educational grants or any other form of tuition support.

Eligible applicants receiving a portion of the tuition costs requested from other sources, but less than the maximum amount of reimbursement allowable under this policy, are eligible for County reimbursement of the difference between the other sources's payment and the maximum reimbursement allowable under this policy, up to but not exceeding the total cost of tuition.

Caution: Application for and/or acceptance of Lenawee County Tuition Reimbursement by an employee not eligible for employee benefits or reimbursed or paid by other sources may be considered a misappropriation of County funds and cause for disciplinary action up to and including dismissal from County employment.

Course work Eligibility

Course work shall be limited to programs offered by universities, colleges, business schools, trade schools and school systems only approved by a State Board of Education and accredited by the primary, nationally recognized accrediting association for each type of institution. The applicant shall provide documented evidence that his or her school meets this requirement on request of the Lenawee County Administrator. Course work in non-degree programs that leads to licensure or certification for use in employment with the County will also be accepted.

No reimbursement will be allowed for course work taken on work time for which the employee is being compensated by the County. Course work taken while the employee is on annual leave (vacation) may be reimbursable if in accord with other provisions of this policy.

Work Relatedness: Course work should be directly related to the applicant's present job, approved by their respective standing committee and department head, and directed towards improving the applicant's knowledge and performance on the job, or related to probable future County employment. Probable future County employment shall be defined as a position or positions the employee is likely to be transferred to or promoted to based on reasonable evidence in the applicant's employment history and/or County experience with employees. The applicant must identify the job he/she chooses to work toward and one likely to be achieved on the Tuition Reimbursement Application.

Course work not directly related to the employee's present or probable future County employment, but required for a degree which is related to present or probable future County employment shall qualify for reimbursement within the intent of this policy. The applicant may be required to provide reasonable evidence that the non-related coursework cannot be substituted by related coursework to achieve the same degree.

Reimbursement Procedure

Completion of the application form and meeting the application filing requirements, as well as receipt and grades filing deadlines, is the sole responsibility of the applicant. Applications requesting tuition reimbursement should be filed prior to the starting date of class to confirm reimbursement. Applications will be accepted up to

thirty (30) days beyond the starting date of class but under such circumstances reimbursement cannot be guaranteed. All applications submitted will be approved on a first come, first serve basis to the extent funding is available. *The employee is urged to protect their investment by confirming reimbursement before the class starts and before they have committed their own funds.*

Grades and tuition receipts must be submitted to the Lenawee County Administrator no later than sixty (60) days after the last meeting of the class as noted on the application for reimbursement, except a grade of "I" or incomplete will not be considered for any reimbursement until after successful completion. It is still necessary, however, to submit the incomplete grade within the sixty (60) day period to keep your application active. Also, if for any reason you cannot submit your grades within the filing time frame, e.g., computer error, notify the Lenawee County Administrator in writing as soon as possible, stating the reason for the delay. Failure to meet this filing deadline may result in disqualification for reimbursement.

Applicants may be required to submit with each application a full description of the course(s) for which reimbursement is requested. The published catalogue description or other official description provided by the educational institution are required for this purpose.

Each application for tuition reimbursement must be approved by the employee's department head and respective standing committee as being relevant to the applicant's present or probable future County employment or as otherwise provided above. Applications not approved shall be returned to the employee by the department head prior to the starting date of the course or no later than five (5) working days after receipt of the application with a written explanation of why approval was not granted.

Applications for reimbursement must be approved by the Lenawee County Administrator to assure that the application is complete and in accord with the provisions of this policy that an adequate course description has been provided and that sufficient funding is available to meet the reimbursement request. Applications approved by the Lenawee County Administrator will be acknowledged by forwarding to the employee a copy of the "Reimbursement Payment Authorization Form". Applications not approved shall be returned to the employee within ten (10) working days following the respective standing committee meeting date, with a written explanation of why the coursework was not approved.

Applicants changing classes after original approval must notify the Lenawee County Administrator in writing stating the reason for change and submitting a description of the course for which reimbursement is requested. Changes from coursework already approved may invalidate reimbursement approval if the substitute coursework cannot be related to the employee's present or probable future County employment or as otherwise provided in this policy.

Course Work Documentation

Only original reimbursement documents can be accepted by the County Administrator. Original applications, tuition payment receipts and grades or other original proof of successful class completion must be submitted to the Administrator's office to complete a tuition reimbursement transaction. Employees who wish original documents returned should forward the original documents along with a duplicate copy. Original documents will be returned only if they are accompanied by a legible duplicate copy. Coursework documentation shall be maintained with the employee's reimbursement records.

Applicants will be reimbursed for the actual cost of tuition, up to the maximum cost per credit hour as established by the Lenawee County Board of Commissioners in the annual budget process. Applicants are required to submit proof of tuition payment. Institutional tuition payment receipts serve this purpose best, although cancelled tuition payment checks are an acceptable substitute. Applicants may be required to verify that their tuition reimbursement request includes only tuition costs.

Applicants are required to submit proof of successful completion of coursework before reimbursement payment can be authorized. Successful completion is defined as attaining a minimum grade of C (equivalent to 2.00 grade on a scale of 4.00). Course withdrawals or failures are not reimbursable. Institutional grade reports serve this purpose best. A letter from the applicant's course teacher or instructor, on institutional letterhead, verifying successful completion, is an acceptable substitute.

Reimbursement Limitations

Reimbursement request approvals are contingent upon the availability of Tuition Reimbursement funds specifically budgeted in the department for this purpose. Should funding become insufficient to meet reimbursement requests due to increased demand, budget cutbacks or for any other reason, reimbursements will be processed on a first come first served basis. Public Act 621 of 1978, the Uniform Budgeting Act, prohibits payment of reimbursements in excess of the funds specifically budgeted for this purpose.

Tuition will be reimbursed for no more than two (2) courses each session, nor four (4) courses annually. Employees who apply for and who receive tuition reimbursement shall receive same in the form of a loan to be excused by the County as follows:

1. The obligation to repay the loan shall be excused at the rate of twenty (20%) percent per year for each year of employment with the County by the employee following the date of reimbursement by the County.
2. If the employee terminates employment with the County before working five (5) years from the date of the loan, the amount outstanding will become immediately due and payable. Such amount outstanding will be deducted from the employee's final paycheck.

Reimbursement rates shall be determined by the County Board of Commissioners in conjunction with the annual budget process as authorized in the adopted General Appropriations Act.

Reimbursement Not Allowed

There shall be no tuition reimbursement for seminars, conferences or other programs normally covered by a department's budget provision for travel and conference. There shall be no tuition reimbursement for any coursework, seminars, conferences or other educational programs from the Tuition Reimbursement Account for employees pursuing course work toward a Masters Degree, PhD, or equivalent advanced degree.

Tuition costs only are reimbursable under this program. The applicant may be required to provide evidence that the following items are not included in the reimbursement request, or a cost breakdown on items that are covered by tuition payment:

- Books
- Lab Fees
- Enrollment Fees
- Student Activity Fee
- Material Fees
- Non-Resident Fees
- Other Fees

The cost of such items included under tuition payment shall be deducted from tuition reimbursement, if not already excluded by the applicant in their reimbursement request.

For further information, contact the Lenawee County Administrator.