

EMPLOYEE EDUCATION, TRAINING, AND TRAVEL POLICY

POLICY NUMBER: CEMS-015

PURPOSE:

The City supports employee learning and professional development. Education, training conferences, and other learning opportunities help employees improve their job performance, prepare for future responsibilities, and provide high-quality service to the public.

POLICY:

1. Eligibility: Active, full-time employees who have successfully completed their probationary period and have satisfactory job performance may apply for tuition assistance, training, or travel expense reimbursement.

Approval is subject to:

- Available department funding
- Department needs
- Relevance to the employee's current position or a position the employee could reasonably advance to

The City reserves the right to limit or deny approvals based on funding availability or operational needs.

2. Approval Requirements: Employees must receive prior approval before registering for or attending any course, seminar, conference, workshop, meeting, or educational program that requires City funding or travel.

Depending on the type of request, approvals may include:

- Department Head
- Finance
- Human Resources
- City Manager or designee

Employees must submit all required forms before enrolling, registering, or traveling.

3. Types of Assistance: The City may provide financial assistance for:

- Job-related training courses
- Professional certifications
- Conferences and seminars
- College, university, technical school, or high school equivalency courses
- Required books, fees, and registration costs
- Travel costs associated with training

Courses must be directly related to the employee's current job duties or a position for which the employee may qualify in the future. Training that is required to maintain job responsibilities or as a part of normal departmental operations will be funded through the department's training and not these programs.

4. Employees receiving assistance must:

- Obtain all required approvals before enrolling or traveling.
- Submit required forms and supporting documentation.

- Notify Human Resources if they withdraw from or change a course or training.
- Provide proof of completion and grades when required.
- Follow all City travel and reimbursement procedures.
- Use City funds responsibly.

5. Exceptions: The City Manager or designee may approve exceptions to this policy when circumstances justify a different course of action.

TUITION ASSISTANCE:

Tuition Assistance eligible expenses may include:

- Tuition
- Required fees
- Required textbooks

Employees are encouraged to research their eligibility for the Virginia Tuition Assistance Grant (VTAG) Program and any other available financial aid or grant opportunities before requesting tuition assistance through the City.

Employees must obtain approval by submitting a Tuition Assistance Reimbursement Pre-Enrollment Request before enrolling in courses. This process determines the employee's eligibility for tuition assistance.

Employees may enroll in more than one course each fiscal year, subject to funding limits. To qualify for reimbursement, employees must successfully complete the course and provide documentation of completion. Minimum passing requirements are:

<u>Course Type</u>	<u>Minimum Requirement</u>
Undergraduate Courses	Grade of C (2.0) or higher
Graduate Courses	Grade of B (3.0) or higher
Pass/Fail Courses	Pass
Non-credit Courses	Certificate of Completion

Employees must submit a Tuition Assistance Reimbursement Request Form, along with proof of the course cost, a receipt or canceled check showing payment, and documentation of the final grade from the educational institution, within 30 days of completing the course. Employees with 5 or more years of service are eligible to request course prepayment. If the City pays for a course in advance and the employee withdraws, does not complete the course, or does not meet the required passing grade, the employee must repay the amount paid by the City.

Tuition Assistance Limits: Maximum annual reimbursement amounts are based on years of service and reimbursed each fiscal year:

<u>Years of Service</u>	<u>High School, Technical School, or Undergraduate Courses</u>	<u>Graduate Courses</u>
1–5 Years	\$1,000 per year	\$1,800 per year
5–10 Years	\$2,000 per year	\$3,600 per year
More than 10 Years	\$4,000 per year	\$5,250* per year

*Non-Taxable Limit

If a lower-cost local option is available, the City may limit reimbursement to that amount.

Other Educational Funding: Employees must report any scholarships, GI Bill benefits, veteran benefits, grants, or other educational assistance they receive. City assistance may be reduced if other funding sources are available.

Service Commitment and Repayment: Employees who receive tuition assistance agree to remain employed by the City for at least one year per funded course. If employment ends before the one-year commitment is completed, the employee must repay the unused portion of the assistance on a prorated basis.

STUDENT LOAN ASSISTANCE PROGRAM:

To support workforce retention, the City may provide eligible employees with student loan assistance of up to \$3,000 per calendar year, with a lifetime maximum benefit of \$15,000, subject to available funding.

Eligibility:

- Have completed five (5) years of continuous service with the City.
- Hold an associate's, bachelor's or master's degree from an accredited college or university, or certification in a recognized trade, in a field directly related to your current job duties.
- Have an outstanding qualifying student loan balance.
- Be in good standing on all qualifying student loans (not in default).
- Must have satisfactory job performance with no disciplinary actions on file.

Student loan assistance is subject to annual budget appropriations and is not a guaranteed employee benefit.

Employees with federal student loans are encouraged to explore the Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) Program, which may forgive the remaining balance of eligible federal student loans after meeting the program's qualifying employment and payment requirements. Additional information is available through the U.S. Department of Education, Financial Student Aid website.

TRAINING:

Employees may attend job-related short courses, seminars, college courses, conferences, meetings, etc. that may or may not require travel with prior approval from the City Manager, or designee.

Approved registration and conference fees may be paid by the City when funding is available.

TRAVEL:

Travel Expenses: Approved travel related to training or education may be reimbursed. Employees are expected to use the most cost-effective travel option available. Requests for planned travel must be submitted on the Travel Authorization Form. Refer to the Payroll and Timekeeping Policy on how to record hours worked for travel time.

Transportation

- The most cost-effective travel option should be utilized first.
- City vehicles should be used whenever available.
- Approved mileage will be reimbursed at the current IRS mileage rate.

Lodging

- Reasonable lodging expenses may be reimbursed when overnight travel is approved.
- The City will pay only the employees' share of lodging costs.
- Any additional costs for family members or guests are the employee's responsibility.

Meals: Meal reimbursement is available at the Department Head discretion when meals are not included in the registration fee. Meal reimbursement rates are established and approved by the City Manager, or designee.