


UNIFIED PERSONNEL SYSTEM

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Peggy Rowe
Director

TO: The Honorable Chair and Members
of the Unified Personnel Board

FROM: Peggy Rowe, Director of Human Resources 

SUBJECT: Change to Personnel Rule XVIII. Employee Training

DATE: February 27, 2013

Recommendation:

Raise the annual maximum reimbursement employees are eligible to receive to \$2,800 per fiscal year and eliminate the present cap on individual courses.

Background:

Pinellas County's Tuition Reimbursement Program has enabled hundreds of county employees to develop their knowledge and skills by participating in educational opportunities outside of work hours. The program has not been revised or amended since 2006. Since that time, tuition costs have increased and delivery approaches and methods for learning programs have evolved. Existing Tuition Reimbursement Program restrictions deter some employees from pursuing valuable developmental opportunities.

In response to these recognized shortfalls and requests from several employees, the Human Resources Department surveyed tuition reimbursement practices of several other organizations. The majority of these employers no longer impose reimbursement limits on individual courses. Pinellas County presently limits reimbursement to \$400 per course for undergraduate or technical courses, and \$800 per course for graduate level courses, with a combined maximum total of \$2,400 per Full-Time employee each Fiscal Year. This recommendation removes the course limit and raises the annual reimbursement limit from \$2,400 to \$2,800 per full-time employee per Fiscal Year. Part-Time employees would be limited to \$1,400 per Fiscal Year.

Rule XVIII has been revised to reflect the recommended changes and to simplify the administrative process for approval. Approving these changes would open the doors to additional developmental opportunities for many employees. As we continue to update all of the Personnel Rules, we will incorporate these changes into the revisions.

Rule XVIII. Employee Training

The Director of Human Resources shall foster and develop a training program for employees of the County Service. The purposes of this program are to increase employee effectiveness and operational efficiency, and to assist employees in preparing themselves for positions of increasing difficulty and responsibility.

Employee participation in the training program is encouraged but shall be voluntary. Training meetings and courses conducted by the Human Resources Department may be held on the employee's own time or, with the approval of the Department Head, during official working hours. Course-work taken through Job Enhancement or Career Development Tuition Reimbursement programs shall be on the employee's own time. Approved leave may be taken to satisfy this requirement, provided the employee does not exceed 40 hours of accumulated work and leave during any week of the training, except as approved by the Department Head.

A. Tuition Reimbursement Through the Job Enhancement Program

One of the principal components of the overall training program is the Job Enhancement Program. This is designed to assist employees by providing financial assistance to pursue educational courses on their own time which will broaden, update or otherwise improve their professional job performance; provided that such education is related to current job responsibilities and will show a direct benefit to Pinellas County.

Classified Service employees who have completed at least one year of permanent employment or exempt service employees are eligible. Eligible employees may pursue off-duty educational or vocational courses which will directly benefit the County in relation to the position they currently hold. Approval will be contingent upon the concurrence of the employee's Department Head or designee, the Director of Human Resources or designee, and the availability of budgeted monies from the County General Fund.

B. Tuition Reimbursement Through the Career Development Program

The Career Development Program is established to assist in the career growth of County employees. This program differs from the Job Enhancement Program in that employees are pursuing courses or a course of study that improves their knowledge, skills, or abilities for other positions within the County Service. The goals and objectives of the program are as follows:

- To ensure that a qualified and motivated County work force is being developed for years to come.
- To foster mutual long-term employment commitment between the County organization and individual employees through common goals and objectives.
- To help eliminate a minority or gender imbalance or underutilization in the County work force.
- To assist employees in developing and following through on career plans.
- To maintain and improve employee morale and productivity.

Classified Service employees who have completed at least one year of permanent employment or exempt employees pursuing a career path that is beneficial to County Government are eligible. There must be a reasonable probability of completion, after which the employee will be competitive for placement on an Eligible Register. Approval will be contingent upon the concurrence of the employee's Department Head or designee, the Director of Human Resources or designee, and the availability of budgeted monies from the County General Fund.

C. General Policies and Procedures

The following enrollment conditions apply:

- Employee may be required to complete a career plan interview with the Human Resources Department if career goals are not clearly stated or understood (Career Development Only).
- Coursework must be taken on employee's own time.
- It is recommended that the request to enroll be submitted at least ten (10) days prior to first day of class in order to obtain confirmation of eligibility for reimbursement. Anyone who enrolls and pays for training prior to receiving confirmation of acceptance from the Human Resources Department risks bearing the cost of the program. The Human Resources Department will not consider any enrollment request received more than thirty (30) days after the course completion date unless due to an administrative error which occurs after the request has been submitted by the employee.

Reimbursement requires the adoption by the Board of County Commissioners of an appropriate Resolution, the administrative processing for which will be initiated by the Director of Human Resources. The legal basis for such disbursement of public funds for purposes of this kind is Chapter 65-2105, Laws of Florida and Chapter 77-642, Laws of Florida, and Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners' Resolution 83-225.

Acceptance into either program may be also restricted because of available funds. Such funding may restrict participation to certain pay grades, classifications, programs, or other variables.

Employees whose enrollment is approved will be reimbursed up to a maximum of Twenty-eight Hundred Dollars (\$2,800) for full-time employees or Fourteen Hundred Dollars (\$1,400) for part-time employees per Fiscal Year, provided that upon completion of the course they can produce a receipt for payment, and a certified record showing that they successfully completed the course. A passing grade of "C" or better is required for undergraduate courses, or "B" or better for graduate courses. When grades are not given, a certified record of satisfactory completion shall be acceptable. Employees may be reimbursed for tuition costs, registration, fees, and books.

Employees may participate in either or both tuition reimbursement programs provided they meet the eligibility criteria. However, reimbursement is limited to a combined total of \$2,800 for full-time employees or \$1,400 for part-time employees per Fiscal Year; regardless of which program(s) employees use.

Portions of reimbursements may not be split between, or carried over to, different Fiscal Years. The governing date for determining the Fiscal Year to which reimbursement limits will be applied is the completion date of the course(s) taken.

D. Certified Public Manager Program

Florida's Certified Public Manager (CPM) program is intended for employees in management or management staff positions. Employees who are nominated by their Department Head and approved by the Director of Human Resources will have the full tuition costs for these classes reimbursed to them upon successful completion if they enroll for a class level presented by an external organization. In situations where the County contracts to provide an in-house class level, tuition costs will be borne by the County with the employee obligated to reimburse the County should they fail to satisfactorily complete the class. Attendance at these courses may be either on employees' own time or, at the discretion of their Appointing Authority, during official work time.

Acceptance into this program may also be restricted because of available funds. Employees who are approved to attend must provide a certified record showing successful completion of the course in order to be reimbursed for the expense.