

Tuition Assistance Program (05-03)

The Pierce County Library System's mission is to bring the world of information and imagination to all people of our community.

A. POLICY STATEMENT

The Pierce County Library System fosters a learning culture by providing its employees opportunities for intellectual growth and skills development. The Tuition Assistance Program is one means of providing those opportunities.

B. PURPOSE

The **Tuition Assistance Program (TAP)** is intended to encourage employee development through the pursuit of educational programs leading to a degree; skilled craft or trade training leading to a certificate or license; or coursework to renew and update skills. This program is further intended to benefit those employees and the library system by giving participants the opportunity to broaden their backgrounds, improve job knowledge, better prepare themselves to meet community needs and advance within the organization. The program is not intended to replace specific training courses and continuing education opportunities provided by the library system. Receipt of tuition assistance in no way guarantees continued employment with the Library or appointment to Librarian or other positions upon degree completion.

C. PROCEDURE

1. PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION

Educational assistance is primarily intended for the reimbursement of tuition and book expenditures; however, other costs will be reviewed upon request. Application fees, travel costs, transcripts, or graduation fees are not reimbursable under the program. Assistance will be made on a reimbursement basis only upon successful completion of course work. A grade of "C" or better must be obtained in all undergraduate programs and other related course work. A grade of "B" or better must be obtained in all graduate courses to qualify for reimbursement. In the degree program only, the maximum loan will be for the costs associated with the completion of 24 semester hours (or their equivalent) in a 12 calendar month period.

a. Midyear Funding: If funds become available during the calendar year, such funds may be offered to applicants whose funding requests were not previously granted or by competitive process as determined by the funding committee.

b. Reimbursements: Invoices for tuition, textbooks, and other approved expenses, and transcripts listing grades will be submitted to the Staff Experience Department no more than 60 days after the end of the semester or course, in order to be eligible for reimbursement. In accordance with Section 127 of the Internal Revenue Code, benefits paid to employees under this program are excluded from gross income up to the IRS-designated annual maximum amount (for 2005 this maximum is \$5,250). Any reimbursements in a plan year exceeding the annual maximum are taxable and will be reported as income on the employee's Form W-2.

2. APPLICATION PROCESS

Applicants to the program may apply for assistance in one of two areas. Applicants who want to apply for assistance in obtaining an academic degree should request assistance through the DEGREE PROGRAM. Applicants requesting assistance to obtain certifications, licensure, or to update skills should apply to the SKILLS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM. A Selection Committee, made up of the Deputy Director and Staff Experience, will review applications and determine funding awards for each of these programs. A competitive process will be held at least once a year, except in the case of mid-year funding or additional competitions as provided for above (exact dates to be announced). The number of participants and the amount awarded will be dependent on the funds available in that particular year. Priority will be given to individuals previously accepted into the program. Acceptance in one year does not, however, guarantee continued funding in future years.

a. Eligibility Criteria for Degree Program: In order to be eligible for educational assistance in the degree program, an employee must meet the following minimum criteria:

1. The employee must have been employed by the Library for at least twelve months, be in a regular (full-time or part-time) position or in a temporary position with a duration of at least 6 months, and must have completed at least 1,040 hours of service by the time of the award.

2. The employee must be enrolled and/or provisionally accepted as a degree seeking student at an accredited institution.

3. The employee's most recent performance evaluation must be satisfactory or better as of the date of the award and throughout participation in the program. An employee may be dropped from the program if less than a satisfactory overall performance rating is received.

b. Eligibility Criteria for Skills Development Program: In order to be eligible for educational assistance in the skills development program, an employee must meet the following minimum criteria:

1. The employee must have been employed by the Library for at least twelve months, be in a regular (full-time or part-time) position or in a temporary position with a duration of at least 6 months, and must have completed at least 1,040 hours of service by the time of the award.

2. The employee's most recent performance evaluation must be satisfactory or better as of the date of the award and throughout participation in the program. An employee may be dropped from the program if less than a satisfactory overall performance rating is received.

c. Criteria for Ranking All Applicants: The following criteria will be used to rank all candidates after their eligibility for either program has been determined:

1. Consideration will be given to applicants who are seeking a degree, license, certificate, or course work which is relevant to and will provide significant benefits to the library.

2. Consideration will be given to employees who have demonstrated their commitment to the organization and their future potential, either in their current positions or in other library related activities.

3. Consideration will be given to candidates who have already demonstrated substantial commitment to their educational goals by their record of school attendance and achievement prior to application into this program.

d. Program Acceptance: Successful applicants will be notified within 30 days of application deadline. Based on funding availability and number of successful applicants, the Selection Committee will, in that notification, state the estimated percentage of each applicant's total approved costs that will be covered by TAP.

3. OTHER REQUIREMENTS

a. Employment requirements: If an employee resigns or is terminated from qualifying employment with the library prior to the completion of previously approved course work, they will not be eligible to receive reimbursement. Exceptions may be made in lay-off situations.

1. Degree Program If an employee resigns or is terminated from qualifying employment with the library prior to six (6) months of employment and 520 hours of service after the completion of a funded degree, the employee will be required to reimburse the TAP on a pro-rated basis (25% for each 130 hours lacking).

2. Skills Development Program If an employee resigns or is terminated from qualifying employment with the library prior to six (6) months of employment and 520 hours of service

after the completion of a funded certification, license, or coursework, the employee will be required to reimburse the TAP on a pro-rated basis (25% for each 130 hours lacking).

b. Program Requirements: Employees accepted for the TAP agree to notify the Selection Committee when they drop or cancel an approved course. Employees accepted for the TAP who do not fulfill their original education plans or agreement (such as consistently unacceptable grades, dropping, canceling classes without informing the TAP committee, or failure to attend class) may be dropped from the program at the discretion of the committee and will be required to re-apply in order to receive subsequent funding approval. Participants may also be dropped from the program in cases where they remain in a leave without pay or other non-work status for thirty days or more.

c. Application Requirements: Applications for both programs are available on the Staff Web and are accepted for processing during the two months prior to application deadline. Funding of this program is based on the fiscal year beginning in January. Applications must be filled out completely prior to committee review or they will be subject to rejection. Responsibility for obtaining all required information (including signatures), meeting program requirements and submitting the application on time is solely that of the applicant.

d. Double reimbursements: Applicants may not apply for total combined assistance (including funding from other sources) that would create a total reimbursement greater than 100% funding of tuition, books and other costs relevant to the course or program.

e. Work schedule: Applicants acknowledge that the library will not pay for time spent attending classes, transportation or other activities related to the coursework. Applicants agree to adjust work schedules with the endorsement of their supervisor and not perform homework or other coursework during working hours. There may be exceptions where coursework directly relates to the library's business or specific projects and activities.

Originally approved by Neel Parikh, Library Director in 2001; Last revised & approved 08/15/2005.