

<b><u>Document:</u></b>	<b><u>Title:</u></b> Tuition Reimbursement – Administrative Guidelines & Procedures	<b><u>Effective Date:</u></b> 10/01/2016
<b><u>Prepared By:</u></b> Angelique Clifford, Employee Benefits Division Supervisor Nicole Evans, Interim Benefits Manager	<b><u>Reviewed By:</u></b> Ricky Bransford, Interim Chief HR Officer	<b><u>Reassessment:</u></b> January
<b><u>Standard:</u></b> IRC §127	<b><u>Approved By:</u></b> Ricky Bransford, Interim Chief HR Officer Bret Waters, County Administrator	<b><u>Superseded Date:</u></b> 10/01/2022 01/31/2024

**Mandate:** Internal Revenue Code (IRC) §127 – Educational assistance programs.

**Purpose:** El Paso County has an established Educational Assistance Plan to provide tax-free reimbursements for educational assistance payments pursuant to IRC §127 of the Internal Revenue Code. The plan is available to employees under these guidelines and limitations.

**Scope:** This guideline applies to all El Paso County employees. Elected Offices may have guidelines or policies which may vary from these. Any alternative procedures must be provided in writing to Human Resources.

**Responsibilities:** El Paso County expects employees to follow these guidelines and to abide by the regulations set forth under IRC §127 in accordance with Internal Revenue Service’s Publication 15B.

## **1 Purpose**

- 1.1 El Paso County has an established Educational Assistance Plan to provide tax-free reimbursements for educational assistance payments pursuant to IRC §127 of the Internal Revenue Code. The plan is available to employees under these guidelines and limitations.

## **2 Eligibility**

### **2.1 Eligible Applicants**

- 2.1.1 Full-time employees who have not been placed on a Corrective Action Plan (CAP) or undergone disciplinary measures (as outlined in Chapter 7) within the last 12 months are entitled to participate in the Employee Tuition Program contingent upon available funding. Elected Officials are excluded from program eligibility. Additionally, payback obligations are applicable if an employee resigns or is terminated for any reason. Oversight of the Employee Tuition Program falls under the purview of the Employee Benefits Division within the HR Department.

### **2.2 Eligible Educational Institution**

- 2.2.1 An accredited educational institution or program is required in order to be eligible for tuition reimbursement. To determine whether an educational institution is accredited and eligible for tuition assistance, visit the U.S. Department of Education's website: <http://ope.ed.gov/accreditation/>.

### **2.3 Coursework and Eligible Courses/Certifications**

- 2.3.1 Courses that are required for professional certificates, associates, bachelors, masters, or doctorate degrees that relate to a field in which the County normally recruits employees are eligible for reimbursement. Doctoral degrees must have the approval of the employee's Department Director (or designee) and the County Administrator.
- 2.3.2 Courses for obtaining and maintaining a professional certificate that is not through an accredited college or university (as stated in section 2.2) must be approved by the Department Director (or designee) and paid for out of that department's budget. The cost for any test to obtain the professional certificate will be treated the same.
  - 2.3.2.1 Any testing fee to obtain a professional certificate will also be at Department Director (or designee) discretion.
- 2.3.3 Coursework completed must be on the employee's own time and not during work hours.

### **2.4 Application and Allocation of Funds and Verification of the Use of Funds**

- 2.4.1 Employees may apply for Tuition Reimbursement after completion of the course. Employees may also submit for pre-approval prior to enrollment in the course.
- 2.4.2 Employees must provide the following to the El Paso County Employee Benefits Division for consideration of reimbursement:

- 2.4.2.1 Completed and/or signed copies of the El Paso County Tuition Reimbursement Request Form, Terms and Conditions, and Commitment Form.
- 2.4.2.2 Verification of satisfactory completion of the course(s) (i.e., an unofficial transcript from the educational institution). A minimum grade of “C” is required for course reimbursement. Failure to meet this requirement disqualifies the employee from receiving reimbursement for the course. A review will occur for satisfactory completion of each course. For example, if an employee takes two courses in one semester and receives an “A” in one course and a “D” in another course, only the course in which the employee receives an “A” is considered for reimbursement. In the case of courses graded on “pass” or “fail” criteria, a “fail” score will disqualify the employee from receiving tuition reimbursement for the course.
- 2.4.2.3 A copy of the completed course(s) syllabus.
- 2.4.2.4 A copy of the employee’s receipt from the university, documenting an itemized list of all expenses incurred and paid by the employee.
- 2.4.3 For consideration of reimbursement, documentation must be received within 60 days of completion of the course, based on the dates outlined in the El Paso County Tuition Reimbursement Request Form. Applications submitted after the 60-day deadline will be ineligible for tuition reimbursement.
- 2.4.4 In the event an employee completes a course(s) but does not receive their final grade(s) from the educational institution before the end of the deadline, the employee remains eligible to receive tuition reimbursement as long as the Employee Benefits Division receives all other required documentation prior to the application deadline. Distribution of reimbursement will occur after submitted grade(s), if the grade(s) met minimum requirements and the packet met all other required guidelines.
- 2.5 Tuition Reimbursement Amount and Eligible Use of Funds
  - 2.5.1 Employees may be eligible to receive the following maximum reimbursement amounts per calendar year:
    - 2.5.1.1 Up to \$5,250 per calendar year (with a maximum of \$2,625 per semester, \$1,750 per trimester and \$1,312.50 per quarter).
    - 2.5.1.2 Tuition reimbursement is entirely dependent on the amount appropriated in the calendar year’s budget; in the event all funds are distributed before the end of the calendar year, applications are held for review for consideration in the next calendar year.
  - 2.5.2 Employees are encouraged to submit their completed applications as early as possible. The date of submission determines the order of your reimbursement approval.
  - 2.5.3 The calendar year payment maximum for each employee is determined by the course completion date.
  - 2.5.4 In the event an employee completes a course and the final grade received is after a given calendar year, the employee will remain eligible to receive tuition reimbursement. Reimbursement will count for the calendar year in which the employee took the course, provided all other required documentation was provided to the Employee Benefits Division within 60 days of completion of the course. For example, if an employee completes an eligible course on 10 December 2017 but the grade is received on or after 1

January 2018 AND the employee submitted required documents in 2017 prior to the application deadline, the employee will remain eligible to receive tuition reimbursement for the 2017 reimbursement year, subject to receiving a minimum of a “C” grade.

- 2.5.5 Tuition reimbursement is for the cost of tuition (cost per credit hour) and required textbooks (or equivalent) only. These amounts do not include any taxes or fees incurred. Tuition and other expenses for which the employee receives a scholarship, grant, or any other reimbursement that covers the cost of tuition and books are not eligible for reimbursement under this program.
- 2.5.6 School supplies (e.g., computer, tablet, notebooks, pencils, pens, or comparable items), transportation (e.g., parking pass or equivalent), and room and board are the responsibility of the employee and do not qualify for tuition reimbursement. These are non-reimbursable expenses. Under no circumstances will reimbursement exceed the maximum amount in a calendar year. The EPC Tuition Reimbursement Program does not cover pre-existing student loans. Employees may only apply for tuition reimbursement for the calendar year in which they attended a course.
- 2.5.7 There is no guaranteed distribution of funds; it is expressly subject to availability.

### **3 Repayment**

- 3.1 As an express condition of receiving tuition reimbursement, the employee must acknowledge in writing that if they separate from full-time employment with the County at any time and for any reason within twelve (12) months of receiving a reimbursement, the employee will repay the 100% of the most current reimbursement received within three (3) days of separation and will repay 50% if he or she separates between twelve (12) months and twenty-four (24) months of receiving a reimbursement. The employee must also agree that if repayment is required due to separation and if the employee does not make the payment within three days after separation, the employee authorizes El Paso County to deduct the amount owed from the employee’s final paycheck.

### **4 Terms of Agreement**

- 4.1 Employees participating in the El Paso County Tuition Reimbursement Program remain bound by the terms of any agreement signed regarding participation in the program, including any provisions conditioning payment upon remaining in the County's employ, notwithstanding any contrary terms stated prior.

## Tuition Reimbursement Request Form

<b>Employee Name (Last, First MI)</b>				<b>Supervisor Name</b>	
<b>Employee #</b>	<b>Extension</b>	<b>Email</b>		<b>Department/Division</b>	
<b>Job Title</b>					
<b>Term</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Fall <input type="checkbox"/> Spring <input type="checkbox"/> Summer		<input type="checkbox"/> Quarter (10 weeks) <input type="checkbox"/> Trimester (12-13 weeks) <input type="checkbox"/> Semester (15-17 weeks)		<b>Course Start and End Date:</b>	
<b>School</b>				On-Campus <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No Online <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No Hybrid Course <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
<b>Course #</b>	<b>Course Title</b>	<b>Number of Credits</b>	<b>Days (e.g., MWF) N/A for online</b>	<b>Time of Course (e.g., 2-4 pm) N/A for online</b>	<b>Cost per Credit</b>
<b>Are you currently on a Corrective Action Plan (CAP) or have you received discipline (as defined in Chapter 7) in the previous 12 months?</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No					
<b>Are you receiving additional financial aid?</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No, I am not receiving additional financial aid  <b>If yes, provide documentation outlining the amount and a brief explanation on how it will be applied below:</b>					
<b>Degree Type</b>					
<input type="checkbox"/> Associate Degree		<input type="checkbox"/> Doctoral Degree*			
<input type="checkbox"/> Bachelor's Degree		<input type="checkbox"/> Other (Certification, accreditation, etc.)			
<input type="checkbox"/> Master's Degree		<b>Provide additional detail:</b>			
<b>Field of study:</b> _____					
* Doctoral degrees must have the approval of the employees' Department Director, or designee, and the County Administrator.					



1. Employee is not on a Corrective Action Plan (CAP) or have received discipline (as defined in Chapter 7) in the previous 12 months .
2. Employees may apply for Tuition Reimbursement at the end of each course.
3. Courses that are required for professional certificates, associates, bachelors, masters, or doctorate degrees that must relate to a field in which the County normally recruits employees are eligible for reimbursement determined at the sole discretion of the County.
4. The employee shall submit a copy of the syllabus from the completed course(s), verification of satisfactory completion of the course(s) (i.e., unofficial transcript), and a copy of their receipt from the university's bursar office documenting an itemized list of all expenses incurred to the El Paso County Employee Benefits Division with this application.
5. A minimum of a "C" grade is required for course reimbursement. Failure to satisfy the minimum grade requirement in a course will disqualify the employee from receiving reimbursement for the costs of said course, including required course books or equivalent. Each course will be evaluated individually for satisfactory completion. For example, if an employee takes two courses in one semester and receives an "A" in one course and a "D" in another, only the course in which the employee receives an "A" will be considered for reimbursement. In the case of a course(s) being determined on "pass" or "fail" criteria, a "fail" score will disqualify the employee from receiving tuition reimbursement for that course.
6. Coursework completed must be on the employee's own time and not during work hours.
7. Doctoral degrees must have the approval of the employee's Department Director, designee, and the County Administrator.
8. Bases for review and processing are on the date received to the El Paso County Employee Benefits Division, and funds are distributed based on availability.
9. Tuition reimbursement is only for the cost of tuition (cost per credit hour) and required course books (or equivalent).
10. School supplies (e.g., computer, tablet, notebooks, pencils, pens, or comparable items), transportation (e.g., parking pass or equivalent), and room and board are the responsibility of the employee and do not qualify for tuition reimbursement and are non-reimbursable expenses.
11. Tuition and other expenses for which the employee receives a scholarship, grant, or any other reimbursement that covers the entire cost of tuition and books are not eligible for reimbursement.
12. Distribution of funds is not guaranteed and expressly subject to availability
13. Under no circumstances will reimbursement exceed the maximum tuition reimbursement amount in a calendar year as set by the Internal Revenue Service. The EPC Tuition Reimbursement Program shall not cover pre-existing student loans. Employees may only apply for tuition reimbursement for the calendar in which he or she attended a course.
14. As an express condition of receiving tuition reimbursement, employees must acknowledge in writing that if separated from the County at any time or for any reason within twelve (12) months of receiving a reimbursement, the employee will repay the entirety of the reimbursement received within three (3) days of separation, and will repay 50% if he or she separates between twelve (12) months and twenty-four (24) months of receiving a reimbursement. The employee must also agree that if repayment is required due to separation and payment is not made by the employee within three days after separation, the employee authorizes El Paso County to deduct the amount owed from the employee's final paycheck.
15. The employee is solely responsible for payment of taxes that result from any tuition reimbursement for education that is taxable.
16. El Paso County and the employee shall abide by the regulations set forth in the Publication 15B.

17. Employees participating in the El Paso County Tuition Reimbursement Program remain bound by the terms of any agreement signed regarding participation in the program, including any provisions conditioning payment upon remaining in the County's employ, notwithstanding any contrary terms stated prior.
18. By signing this application, the employee affirms understanding of their obligations under this agreement. The employee understands that utilizing this program opportunity should not result in the deterioration of job performance.

By signing below, I, \_\_\_\_\_, acknowledge that I shall comply with the Terms and Conditions as outlined within this document and all affiliated El Paso County policies and procedures. I further acknowledge that I have read, understand, and accept the terms and conditions in their entirety and certify that the information provided within this document is complete and accurate. I further acknowledge that I understand that failure to provide complete, accurate, and truthful information will be grounds for denial.

Employee Signature	Date	Supervisor Signature	Date
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## Tuition Reimbursement Commitment Form

By signing this form, I, \_\_\_\_\_, acknowledge that if I separate from full-time employment from El Paso County at any time and for any reason within twelve (12) months of receiving tuition reimbursement, I must repay 100% of the most current reimbursement received within three (3) days of separation. I acknowledge that if I separate from full-time employment between twelve (12) months and twenty-four (24) months of receiving a reimbursement, I will repay 50% of the most current reimbursement received within three (3) days of separation. I also agree that if repayment is not made within three days after separation, I authorize El Paso County to deduct the amount owed from my final paycheck.

Employee Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



## **Tuition Reimbursement Checklist**

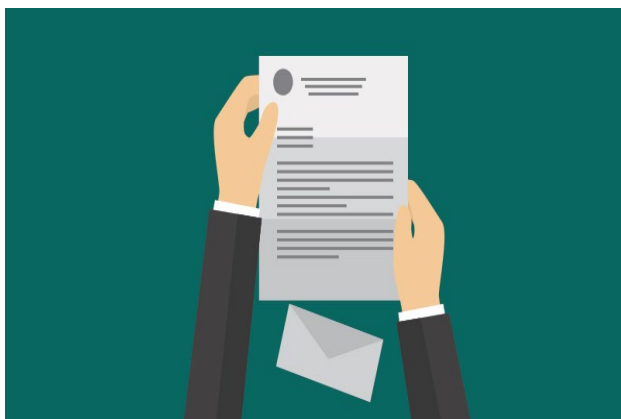
### **Are you eligible?**

- ☐ Full-time employment status with El Paso County
- ☐ Not on a corrective action plan or received discipline in the past 12 months.



### **Are your courses and/or program eligible?**

- ☐ Educational Institution or Program is accredited.  
To verify: <http://ope.ed.gov/accreditation/>
- ☐ Are courses or degree related to a field that El Paso County normally recruits?



**Documents must be submitted to El Paso County Employee Benefits Division within 60 days of completion of the course.**

*Fax:* (719) 520-7497

*Email:* [EmployeeBenefits@elpasoco.com](mailto:EmployeeBenefits@elpasoco.com)

*Interoffice:* Tuition Reimbursement – EBS

*Mail:* El Paso County Benefits Division

2880 International Cir N040

Colorado Springs, CO 80910

### **Required Documents:**

- ☐ El Paso County Tuition Reimbursement Request Form (signed)
- ☐ Terms and Conditions (signed)
- ☐ Commitment Form (signed)
- ☐ Verification of satisfactory completion of the course(s) such as an unofficial transcript
- ☐ A copy of the syllabus from the completed course(s)
- ☐ A copy of the receipt from the University's bursar office documenting an itemized list of **all** expenses incurred and paid by the employee and any scholarship, grants, etc. received.



Contact El Paso County Benefits Division via phone (719)520-7486 or email [EmployeeBenefits@elpasoco.com](mailto:EmployeeBenefits@elpasoco.com) with questions related to Tuition Reimbursement.