

6.1.6 Professional Development Program

TWC is committed to being an entrepreneurial, flexible organization dedicated to helping its employees achieve high quality performance through education and training.

TWC professional development programs are designed to provide employees with training and development opportunities to pursue educational training from an accredited institution of higher education, and to obtain and maintain professional credentials. Approval will be considered if such training enhances the employee's ability to perform current job duties, enables the employee to perform prospective job duties, and is relevant to the employee's future career goals with the agency.

A. Tuition Assistance Program

The Texas Workforce Commission provides support in the form of tuition assistance for eligible employees seeking self-improvement through college-level courses and standardized knowledge exams. Under the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP), TWC may only pay the tuition expenses for a program course successfully completed by the employee at an accredited institution of higher education with approval of the Executive Director. This includes traditional courses and nontraditional training (including online courses or courses not credited towards a degree).

1. Eligibility

To be eligible for Tuition Assistance Program (TAP), employees must:

- a) Be continuously employed at TWC for one year at the time of application
- b) Be a full-time regular status employee
- c) Maintain satisfactory job performance as documented in the current PPR;
and
- d) Have no disciplinary action during the six months prior to applying for TAP.

While participating in TAP, employees may apply for and accept other positions within the agency. Transferring to another position or to a different division does not invalidate the participant's eligibility for tuition reimbursement.

Eligibility Exclusions: Employees in part-time, temporary, probationary, or emergency status are not eligible for participation in TAP. Employees on Administrative Probation, Absent Without Leave (AWOL), or on Leave of Absence (LOA) are not eligible for TAP.

2. Requirements

An employee participating in TWC's Tuition Assistance Program shall:

- a) maintain a satisfactory grade of "C" or better for undergraduate courses or courses not credited towards a degree, "B" or better for graduate courses, or "passing," if a pass/fail activity;
- b) observe and comply with all TWC policies and work rules.

3. Conditions of Participation

- a) TWC may deny an employee further participation in a professional development program if the employee fails to meet performance, program, or academic requirements and expectations, or if TWC determines that participation is no longer in the agency's best interest.
- b) Participation in the TWC TAP is not a contract for any duration of continued employment, and the employee is guaranteed no special rights or privileges in addition to those granted to other TWC employees. Continued employment is subject to the same policies and employment practices that govern all TWC employees.
- c) An employee participating in the TAP must agree in writing, prior to the coursework or beginning of an exam, to a service commitment to the agency. An employee who receives reimbursement is obligated to fulfill a 6-month service commitment with the agency.
- d) Employees who do not comply with the length of service requirement must reimburse TWC for both the cost of the training activities, (prorated to credit any full calendar month of employment following completion of the course), and any reasonable expenses incurred by TWC in obtaining restitution, including reasonable attorney's fees.
- e) Employees approved for TAP may flex their work schedule with the approval of their supervisor if there is no negative impact on customers or work products. Employees may not use work hours for attending classes, studying, taking exams or other activities associated with their coursework or exam. When such activities fall within an employee's normal work schedule, the employee must use leave hours to compensate for time away from the job.

4. Reimbursement for TAP

If department funds are available and the employee meets the eligibility criteria and successfully completes a TAP activity, TWC may reimburse the employee for the following:

- a) tuition
- b) expense of training materials
- c) professional review, preparation or testing costs at institutions of higher education.

5. Reimbursement Conditions for TAP

- a) An eligible employee may be reimbursed after course completion up to an amount equivalent to the average semester hour cost for Texas public colleges and universities as reported annually by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. The participant will be responsible for paying the difference in the cost.
- b) The maximum reimbursement to any employee, regardless of the professional development approved source, is \$5,000 per state fiscal year (September 1 through August 31).
- c) Employees who participate in a review course in preparation for a professional certification examination may not be reimbursed for the review or preparation course unless the employee passes all parts of the related examination.
- d) The TAP funds may not duplicate any other educational grant or benefits for the requested activity. In addition, the following activities are not eligible for reimbursement:
 - i. parking fees
 - ii. refundable property deposits
 - iii. late fees
 - iv. mileage and travel expense for local programs.

6. Service Requirements for TAP

- a) Because the goal of TWC's professional development program is to attract and retain a well-qualified, trained workforce, an employee who receives reimbursement under the TAP is expected to continue in employment with the agency for a minimum of six months. The commitment will begin on the first day of the month following a reimbursement. Multiple, overlapping service commitments will be served concurrently.
- b) If the employee voluntarily separates from TWC prior to the completion of the obligatory service period(s), the employee must reimburse TWC for the cost of the professional development grant, prorated to credit any full calendar month of employment following completion of the approved activity.
- c) If an employee fails to meet the service requirements cited previously, the department head is responsible for notifying the General Counsel's office and initiating restitution proceedings.
- d) TWC's Executive Director may waive an employee's reimbursement requirements because of an employee's extreme personal hardship or if it is determined to be in the best interest of TWC.

7. Application and Review Guidelines for TAP

a) *Application Procedure*

An employee requesting reimbursement from the Tuition Reimbursement Program must seek written **pre-approval** at least two weeks prior to registration or enrollment by completing and submitting a Tuition Reimbursement Program Application, Form P-99, through supervisory channels for review and approval by the employee's department head, department budget analyst, and TWC's Executive Director.

b) *Review Procedure*

- i. Upon receipt of a completed TAP application, the department head ensures an up-to-date Employee Development Plan, Form P-56, has been completed for the employee, and attaches a copy of the Form P-56 to the employee's Tuition Assistance Program application (Form P-99). The department head reviews each TAP application using the following process, to ensure equitable and effective use of training and development funds:
 - a. Are training and development funds available within the department's budget to support the request? If yes, proceed with an evaluation of the application.

- b. TAP Application Evaluation: Does the training enhance the employee's ability to perform current job duties or enable the employee to perform prospective job duties with the department or the agency following the training?
- ii. If both of the above questions are answered in the affirmative, proceed with the TAP approval process.
- iii. If the request is disapproved, the department head documents the basis for the disapproval and forwards Forms P-99 and P-56 (Employee Development Plan) to the Training and Development Department
- iv. If the request is approved, the department head documents the basis for the approval and forwards Forms P-99 and P-56 (Employee Development Plan) to the department's budget analyst for approval. The budget analyst completes the Form P-99 and forwards it to the Executive Director for approval. The Executive Director, if approving the request, signs the Form P-99 and forwards it to the Training and Development Department. If the Executive Director disapproves of the request, the Executive Director notifies the appropriate department head and forwards the P-99 to Training and Development with a copy going to the requesting department.
- v. Training and Development's review includes the following:
 - a. analyzing and identifying specific training and development needs, including whether training needs can be enhanced with in-house training or through training and development support.
 - b. aiding in the selection of an institution of higher education, if appropriate.
 - c. maximizing group discounts, if available.
- vi. If the PDP application is disapproved by the department head, Training and Development may recommend alternative activities and resources to support the requested staff development.
- vii. Within five working days of receipt, the Training and Development Department completes its review and returns copies of the completed Form P-99 to the employee and department head for appropriate action.

c) *Reimbursement Procedure*

- i. Upon satisfactory completion of TAP-approved activities at an accredited institution of higher education, an employee requests reimbursement by submitting the following documents through supervisory channels to the department head:
 - a. approved Form P-99, Tuition Assistance Program Application
 - b. official grade report (or copy) or other documentation that indicates satisfactory completion of the activity. Satisfactory completion means completing the approved activity with a grade of "C" or better for undergraduate courses and courses not credited towards a degree, "B" or better for graduate courses, or "passing," if a pass/fail activity or testing/certification activity. A testing or certification review course must result in an employee passing all parts of the related examination. Other documentation may include a signed statement or certificate of completion from the school or instructor and a detailed receipt for the actual cost of the approved activity.
- ii. The department head forwards the approved Form P-99 to the Finance Department, Accounts Payable Unit, with the following attachments:
 - a. employee's official grade report or other documentation
 - b. detailed receipt of the employee's allowable, reimbursable expenses related to the approved activities.

6.1.7 Obtaining Professional Credentials and Maintaining Continuing Professional Education Requirements

- A. Some state board-licensed professions, such as attorneys, certified public accountants, human resources professionals and project management professionals, require a number of continuing professional education (CLE, CPE, etc.) hours per year to maintain licenses.
- B. To promote professionalism within TWC, the agency provides support of continuing education assistance to help professional, regular classified employees maintain their licenses. The agency allows employees holding a license to attend a course(s) to obtain the minimum number of professional

education hours required to maintain a license for public practice of a professional occupation.

- C. If employees meet eligibility criteria outlined in the Tuition Assistance Program, TWC may also approve reimbursement of preparatory coursework and examination to obtain professional credentials with chapter groups, independent consultants, or certified testing centers.
- D. If the employee takes courses directly related to his or her job duties at TWC, or to support licenses required to obtain the employee's position at TWC, management may approve the request and pay for the courses through that administrative area's training budget. With administrative approval, TWC pays costs incurred with such course(s), including travel and per diem.
- E. If the employee takes courses not directly related to his or her job duties at TWC, but which enable the employee to maintain the professional license, the employee pays all costs. The Executive Director (or designee) may, upon request, grant administrative leave necessary for course attendance. Management recommending administrative leave for this purpose forwards the request to the appropriate Division Director. The Division Director forwards approved requests to HRM for Executive Director (or designee) review and final approval.