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Pilot Program:
Tuition Assistance Program
Policy Guidance

A Mandatory Reference for ADS Chapter 476

Revision Date: 12/15/2005
Responsible Office: M/HR/PPIM
File Name: 476maa_121505_cd42

Pilot Program
TUITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM
POLICY GUIDANCE
Revised 12-5-05

OVERVIEW

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) is establishing a Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) to encourage employees to continue the development of skills, knowledge, and abilities in order to further their career development and to meet current and future skill needs of the Agency. Numerous studies indicate that investment in training is one of the most important factors in determining organizational efficiency. In addition, recruitment and retention rates are increasingly spurred by incentives that go beyond “traditional” benefits. Tuition assistance programs are one such incentive, used to attract and maintain highly motivated and well-rounded employees.

This first year will serve as a pilot program to determine interest, appropriate funding levels, and benefit to employees and the agency. Policies may be modified and if so, the revisions will be issued as policy notice updates.

PROGRAM SCOPE

The program provides tuition assistance for coursework that offers college credits from a fully accredited college or university. Coursework may be delivered in a classroom setting and/or as e-learning on-line, but must be provided by an accredited college or university. All coursework must be completed on the employee’s own time.

Employees may select the accredited college or university. Course subject matter must be of current or future benefit to the employee and broadly support the accomplishment of USAID’s mission. There will be three funding request periods to coincide with the fall, spring, and summer school periods (semesters). Funding for approved coursework will be permitted, up to \$1500 per semester. M/HR/TE will pay the tuition assistance directly to the college/university and may be used for tuition, course registration, and lab fees, as required for course participation. Other costs, such as late fees, books, supplies, transportation, and non-course related fees, are not covered and are the responsibility of the employee. Courses must be approved prior to registering. Applications cannot be accepted for courses previously completed or for courses currently in progress at the time of application.

The TAP covers coursework requested and approved on a course-by-course basis, therefore each request and approval will be for an individual course and not for a series of courses or for an entire degree program. If, in the accomplishment of such training, an employee receives an academic degree, the degree is an incidental by-product of the training.

ELIGIBILITY

The TAP is open to permanent U.S. direct-hire employees. In order to be eligible to participate, Foreign Service (FS) applicants must have a current rating of “A” or “B” from the FS Boards, and civil service applicants must be performing at a “fully successful” level or above. Applicants must have completed a minimum of 1 year of federal service prior to the start date of the requested course.

PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITIES

a. The Office of Human Resources, Training and Education Division (HR/TE) will determine the policy and guidance for the program with implementing instructions. M/HR/TE will:

- Determine eligibility requirements
- Distribute program announcements
- Receive and review applications for basic eligibility
- Facilitate committee review of applications
- Notify employees of approval/disapproval
- Process training authorization forms (SF-182) and provide approved form to applicant for submission to the school
- Monitor program budget
- Analyze data and report program status at least annually to the Director HR and the Administrator

b. Management and supervisory officials will:

- Encourage eligible employees to participate
- Abide by merit principles in making training related decisions
- Review/endorse/sign applications as appropriate
- Support employees in the development of an Individual Development Plan (IDP) that includes self-development; e.g., after-hours training
- Permit flexibility and consider reasonable requests for schedule adjustments and leave requests to allow employees to attend courses. Administrative leave is not appropriate for these purposes
- Provide feedback and respond to follow-on evaluations on the application of learning in response to M/HR/TE inquiries.

c. Employees who participate in the program must follow appropriate guidance and instructions. Employees must:

- Review and comply with agency policy guidance
- Ensure that a complete application package is submitted in a timely manner for consideration

- Submit the approved training authorization form to the college/university for direct billing.
- Pay expenses that are not approved/covered by the program; e.g., books, transportation, late fees, supplies, non-course related fees, etc.
- Maintain a C grade or higher (B grade or higher for graduate level coursework) and provide a copy of the course grade report within 45 days after course completion
- Provide feedback and respond to post-event (end of course) and follow-on (6 months after course completion) on-line evaluations

APPLICATION AND APPROVAL PROCEDURES

Submission Deadlines: Applications for funding under the program will be accepted three times during the pilot year:

Academic Term	Submission Deadline
Fall Semester 2005	completed
Spring Semester 2006	December 19, 2005
Summer Semester 2006	TBD

Course Coverage: Courses considered for approval under this program must be:

- Related to employee's current responsibilities or be of future benefit to the employee and USAID
- Offered for academic college credit; not continuing education units (CEUs)
- Provided by an accredited institution of higher learning as published by the U.S. Department of Education
- Approved prior to registering (substitution of alternate courses must also be approved in advance)

Selection Factors: M/HR/TE will review applications received by the deadline for basic eligibility. M/HR/TE will facilitate a review of applications by a Review/Approval Committee, consisting of representatives from M/HR/TE, EOP, and a representative from the Bureaus. This committee will review the applications and approve/disapprove in consideration of the following factors:

- Relevancy of the course content to applicant's ability to serve USAID
- Availability of funds
- Prior program participation
- Applicable training regulations

Payment of Expenses: Payment for approved courses will be made directly to the college or university. As program funds permit, the following expenses will be covered in accordance with 5 USC 4109:

- Course Tuition (at non-degree rate)
- Course registration fee (late-fees, drop/add fees, etc. are not covered)
- Course-related lab fees

Course completion: Participants must attain acceptable levels of course completion:

- A grade of C (2.0 in a 4.0 grading system) or above. A grade of B (3.0 in a 4.0 grading system) or above is required for graduate level coursework.
- Submit a copy of the grade report within 45 days of course completion
- Course completions below the grade levels will require reimbursement of training expenses. Additionally, the employee will be responsible for, or will reimburse USAID for, any costs incurred for courses that the participant does not successfully complete, e.g., a course is dropped after registration and a fee is charged.

Employee's Agreement to Continue in Service: Participants must sign and fulfill the service agreement found in the SF-182 (page 2). This form meets the service requirements of 5 USC 4108.

HOW TO APPLY:

Step 1: Determine the course and school. Counseling services are available from most colleges and universities to help students with selection of courses.

Step 2: Complete and sign the TAP Application Form. A separate application is required for each course requested. Separate applications must also be submitted for any alternate courses to be considered.

Step 3: Read and sign the TAP Reimbursement Agreement and attach for each course/alternate course requested.

Step 4: Prepare of the SF-182 (page 1), Training Request and Authorization for each course/alternate course requested. Complete items #1-19. Leave Item #21, Direct Costs blank. Obtain supervisor's signature in item #26. Obtain other Bureau/office approvals signatures in accordance with office procedures. Sign page 2 of the SF-182 package, Section G – Employees Agreement to Continue in Service.

Step 5: Submit completed application package for consideration by the TAP Selection Committee. Deliver package to M/HR/TE, Attn: Ruth Derr, RRB Room, 2.08-080 no later than **4:30 p.m. on the submission deadline date for each semester**. Late or incomplete applications will not be accepted or considered. It is the employee's responsibility to ensure timely submission of the application.

Step 6: Upon approval, M/HR/TE will return the approved SF-182, Training Request form for the applicant to submit to the school for direct billing to USAID.

QUESTIONS:

Questions about the Tuition Assistance Program may be directed to Ruth Derr at 202-712-5564 or via email at rderr@usaid.gov