



# COUNTY OF INYO

## EMPLOYEE TRAINING, CONTINUING EDUCATION AND TUITION ASSISTANCE POLICY

\*This policy currently applies to ICEA, ICPPOA, Non-Represented and Management Employees

### STATEMENT OF POLICY

It is the policy of the County of Inyo to encourage training, self-improvement and personal development programs for employees which includes three (3) general categories: on-the-job training; continuing education, and tuition assistance programs. In its discretion, the County may provide limited financial assistance in the form of tuition assistance loans for a given employee's participation in an education program.

### ON-THE-JOB TRAINING

Responsibility for developing and assigning on-the-job training programs for employees shall be assumed jointly by the Department Head, Personnel staff, and the employee's supervisor. Such training may include demonstration, assignments of reading matter, lecture courses; seminars, conferences, and/or training courses inside and outside the workplace, or such other devices as may be available for the purpose of improving the effectiveness in broadening the knowledge of employees in the performance of their respective duties. All on-the-job training shall be assigned or otherwise approved in advance by the County and the cost of on-the-job training will be paid by the County.

### CONTINUING EDUCATION

Employees who, as a job requirement of their current employment, must utilize certifications or licenses which require renewal or continuing education will have the cost of doing so paid by the County. The time associated with participating in the continuing education program will count as time worked. The continuing education program, course,



or class required to renew certificate or license, and associated use of time and travel expense, must be approved in advance by the County, and are expected to be planned in advance of the deadline for acquiring them, and achieved using the most cost-effective means available. The County will not provide reimbursement for continuing education activities and associated costs not approved in advance by the County. Nothing in this policy shall be construed as limiting an employee's ability to select and attend a continuing education program, certificate, license renewal course, or class of his or her choice, at their expense and on their time

## TUITION ASSISTANCE

Personal and professional development of employees can be beneficial to both employees and the County. In this regard, the County understands that some employees on their own initiative and on their own time (outside of work), may wish to voluntarily pursue advanced education programs leading to college degrees, certificates, or professional licenses. Although pursuit of such education programs is not mandated by the County for employees, the County recognizes that an employee's attainment of a degree, certificate, or professional license that is not a job requirement for their current employment may be a benefit to the County. As such, in accordance with eligibility criteria described below and subject to available funding, the County may provide limited financial assistance to employees in the form of tuition assistance loans that may be satisfied over time through continued County employment.

## ELIGIBILITY FOR TUITION ASSISTANCE

To be considered for the Tuition Assistance Program, an individual must be a full-time employee and have received a performance evaluation of "Meet Standards", "Exceeds Standards", or "Exemplary" during the most recent rating period. Probationary employees are generally not eligible to be considered for tuition assistance except in the case of probation due to promotional reclassification. The County Administrator/Personnel Director may make exceptions; in his/her sole discretion based upon the potential benefit to the County, for newly hired employees who are already participating in an advanced education program.



In addition, the advanced education program or course(s) must be employment related, a benefit to the County, and be provided through an accredited educational institution. Conferences, conventions, seminars, workshops, short courses, etc. are not eligible for Tuition Assistance Program. Attendance at these types of events will typically be handled at the department level. Programs in specific courses of study that do not result in a degree or certificate may be pursued on a case-by-case basis through on- the-job training.

The advanced education program or course(s) must be pursued on the employee's personal time and shall not interfere with the employee's normal workday, and is not considered compensable time. Any scheduling impacts with the employee's job related duties and responsibilities must have prior approval from the employee's supervisor or Department Head, and utilize compensatory time off (or accrued leave other than sick leave) or a flexed work schedule.

## APPLICATION PROCESS AND ASSISTANCE PLAN

### 1. PRE-APPROVAL REQUIREMENT

To participate in the Tuition Assistance Program, an employee must be accepted into the course of study for which he/she is seeking tuition assistance, complete an application provided by the Personnel Office, and submit the completed and signed application to the Department Head. The Department Head reviews the application, and provides a recommendation for approval or denial based on whether the employee meets the eligibility requirements, and if the Department Head believes the proposed course of study is relevant to the employee's current job or professional development, or will otherwise benefit or meet the needs of the County. The Department Head may consult with the County Administrator/Personnel Director regarding County needs, if necessary.

Regardless of his or her recommendation, the Department Head must forward the employee's completed application for the Tuition Assistance Program to the County Administrator/Personnel Director who, in his or her sole discretion, will determine the employee's eligibility to participate in the Program in accordance with the criteria outlined in this Policy and his/her understanding of the needs of the County; and, if eligible, approves the employee's participation in the Tuition Reimbursement Program



and the associated level of reimbursement based on available funding in the selected course of study.

If an employee is pursuing a degree program, the entire course of study must be submitted as part of the application. Only those courses within the degree program that are employment related, as determined by the County Administrator /Personnel Director, are eligible to be considered for assistance. Required versus elective courses will be taken into account in this evaluation. Advanced degrees beyond the Masters level are not eligible for this program.

## 2. **CRITERIA**

### a. Employment Related

Eligibility for tuition assistance will be primarily based on the relevance for the employee's duties and responsibilities at the County, in the context of how the course of study will improve the employee's knowledge or skills as it relates to his/her current position, or to prepare him/her for a higher position within the organization. Course electives which are part of the degree program curriculum, and are chosen by the employee, and are relevant to the employee's current duties and responsibilities and/or professional development as a County employee, may be considered for assistance. The final decision on eligibility for assistance and acceptance into the program will be made by the County Administrator/Personnel Director in his/her sole discretion.

### b. Assistance (Loan Agreement)

Once accepted in the Tuition Assistance Program, an employee will be eligible to enter into a tuition loan agreement (promissory note) with the County on terms and conditions specified in the agreement, which will be approved as to form by County Counsel. Among other things, the agreement will provide for the County to loan the employee money toward agreed-upon tuition expenses up to a maximum dollar amount specified in the agreement and within the maximum rates/schedule specified by this Policy. Among other things, the agreement will specify the interest rate applicable to the loan, the term for repayment, and the minimum monthly payments which shall be forgiven under the terms of the agreement for each month that the employee remains



employed with County, beginning with the first month thereafter the employee draws upon the loan as described below. The employee will be permitted to draw down funding from the authorized loan amount over time toward approved tuition expenses after submission of satisfactory evidence that the course work associated with the tuition has been successfully completed with at least a grade of C, and provided that the employee has a minimum 2.0 GPA, at an accredited educational institution. Grades are determined by the educational institution. Subject to the maximum rate/schedule set forth in this Policy (see below) and the maximum dollar amounts of individual loan agreements, loan funds can potentially cover up to one hundred percent (100%) of tuition, however, no loan funds will be made available for any course which the employee has not received a minimum C grade (i.e. not C minus or lower). Additionally, the classes taken on an audit basis are not eligible for tuition assistance.

c. Assistance Rate/Schedule

- i. *Link to State University Fee*- The maximum amount of loan agreement funds that will be made available for tuition will be set at the highest cost per unit at inland California State University campuses within the Southern California area. Currently, these campuses include: Bakersfield, Dominguez Hills, Fresno, Fullerton, Los Angeles, Northridge, Pomona and San Bernardino. The Personnel Office will monitor the State University fee annually to ensure that the assistance rate is current in determining the per unit cost of tuition, the tuition cost for up to six units will be divided into the total cost (for example, the FY 2016-2017 Tuition is \$3,174 for up to six units, the per unit cost is \$529 per unit.)
- ii. *Subject to Available Funding- Tuition Assistance Program* funding will be limited to the Program budget approved by the Inyo County Board of Supervisors as part of the annual County Budget process. Generally, dollars budgeted for each fiscal year will be available on a first-come, first-served basis, with existing tuition loan agreements being prioritized for funding over new applications. In accordance with the terms and conditions specified in the tuition loan agreement, the



County will determine the amount of budgeted funds available in a given fiscal year for the employee to draw against for approved tuition expenses, and will earmark (reserve) a portion of the budgeted funds for that purpose.

- iii. *Grants/Scholarships* - If an employee receives assistance for approved educational classes/programs under the Veterans Administration, other federal/state student aid programs or public grants/scholarships, only the difference, if any, between such assistance and the cost the employee actually incurs, subject to the criteria established for maximum reimbursement, will be eligible for County assistance under this Policy.
- iv. *Use of Funds* - The purpose of the Tuition Assistance Program is to fund a portion of the cost of tuition for an approved course of study at an accredited institution. However, to the extent that the County Tuition Assistance Program funds are drawn down upon the completion of an approved course of study or discrete class, with a qualifying grade, and in accordance with the approved program application, the maximum rate/schedule specified by this Policy, and the tuition loan agreement, the employee may, in his/her sole discretion, apply funds to the cost of books, materials, supplies, fees for entrance to a university program, or similar expenses.

## STEPS FOR PARTICIPATING IN TUITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

1. Employee completes a County provided Tuition Assistance Program application and submits it to the Department Head for review. The employee must submit the application to participate in the Tuition Assistance Program for review at least sixty (60) days prior to the beginning of the course of study, but no sooner than the first day of April preceding the fiscal year for which application is being made to the Tuition Assistance Program. As provided for in the Tuition Assistance Program application, the employee must provide a



- detailed explanation of the course(s) and how the degree and/or course(s) related to the employee's professional development benefit the County of Inyo.
2. The Department Head reviews a signed application for completeness, and provides a recommendation for approval or denial based on whether the employee meets the eligibility requirements, and if the Department Head believes the proposed course of study is relevant to the employee's current job or professional development, or will otherwise benefit or meet the needs of the County. The Department Head will consult with the County Administrator/Personnel Director regarding County needs, if necessary. Regardless of his or her recommendation, the Department Head forwards the signed and completed application to the County Administrator/Personnel Office for review and consideration.
  3. Upon receiving complete applications , including the Department Head's recommendation, the County Administrator/Personnel Office will consider applications on a first-come first-served basis and, in his or her sole discretion will determine the employee's eligibility to participate in the Program in accordance with the criteria outlined in this Policy and his/her understanding of the needs of the County; and, if eligible, approves the employee's participation in the Tuition Reimbursement Program and the associated level of reimbursement based on available funding and selected course of study.
  4. Approval or modified approvals of applications for participation in the Tuition Assistance Program will be conditioned on budget availability, and final approval may not be made until adoption of the Final County Budget for the fiscal year in which application to the Tuition Assistance Program is made. Funding will be allocated in the order in which approved or modified applications were received. However, in the event that the number of applications received exceeds the available funding if all were fully funded, funding may be based on those applications that are deemed to provide the greatest potential benefit to the County and may be funded on a limited term basis (e.g. a semester as opposed to a degree program.) Employees already enrolled in an approved degree program in the prior year's Tuition Assistance Program, which maintain a 2.0 or higher GPA will be given top priority for continued funding (based on seniority in the Tuition Assistance Program) if their application is received by April 1 preceding the fiscal year for which application for continued participation in the Tuition Assistance Program is made.



5. Once accepted in the Tuition Assistance Program, the employee will be eligible to enter into the tuition loan agreement (promissory note) with the County on terms and conditions specified in the agreement, which will be approved as to form by County Counsel. See the discussion above under "application process."
6. Upon successful completion of a course that has been approved for tuition assistance under the Program and pursuant to their tuition loan agreement, the employee forwards a copy of their official grade reports, and original tuition receipts to the Personnel Office with a request to draw down their loan. The employee must submit, with each grade report, a separate tuition assistance (loan) approval/acceptance form per semester, trimester or quarter.
7. Request to draw against the loan amount specified in an employee's tuition loan agreement for an approved course must be submitted by the employee within three (3) months after completion of the course(s), but not later than the 31<sup>st</sup> day of July following the fiscal year in which the course was successfully completed. Request to draw against the loan amount specified in the employee's tuition loan agreement which are submitted after the three (3) month specified deadline, or after July 31st, whichever is less, will not be considered or approved by the Personnel Office.