



## EDUCATION ASSISTANCE Questions & Answers

### **Do I qualify for Education Assistance?**

To qualify for Education Assistance you need to be a **full-time** employee of the City of Round Rock for at least **6 months**.

### **How do I apply for Education Assistance?**

There is an application on the portal. The application needs to be completed and signed by you, your supervisor and your department director. Page 1 and 2 are completed regardless what school you are attending. The 3<sup>rd</sup> page is only submitted if you are going to attend Austin Community College (ACC) or Texas State University (TSU)

### **When do I apply for Education Assistance?**

**PRIOR TO** registering at any college for any semester or class. The application needs to be submitted no later than 2 weeks before the class starts. This allows time for the Human Resource Department to process the application and notify the necessary individual or institution.

### **Can I submit the Education Assistance application after I have finished the course?**

Yes, but by doing so the City cannot guarantee the funds will be available for reimbursement. **The City of Round Rock Policy & Procedure Manual states that the application needs to be submitted within 5 days of starting the class and no more than 30 days before the class begins.** The program is on a first come first serve basis. The employees who sign up prior to registering will be considered for reimbursement first.

### **How much money do I get reimbursed?**

Up to \$2,000 per fiscal year, depending upon which school you attend and what grade you make determines the reimbursed amount. The following applies:

	<u>Undergraduate</u>	<u>Graduate</u>
ACC	A-C = 100%	No graduate classes at ACC
TSU	A-C = 100%	A or B = 100%
Any other college	A=100%, B=90%, C=80% D=0%, F=0%	A = 100%, B=90%, C=0% D & F =0%

**So every fiscal year I get \$2,000.00 toward Education Assistance?**

Yes, every October 1 you will have another \$2,000 to use through September 30 of the following year. For example: FY October 1, 2007 – September 30, 2008, there would be \$2,000 available. FY October 1, 2008 – September 30, 2009 there would be another \$2,000 available.

**What happens if I go over \$2,000?**

You will only receive up to \$2,000 in reimbursement money. If your courses run more than the allotted amount you will be responsible for any balance over \$2,000.

**What happens if I don't use all of the \$2,000?**

If you have not used all of the \$2,000 for that Fiscal Year it **does not roll over** to the next fiscal year. The amount does not accumulate and roll from fiscal year to fiscal year. You are allotted only \$2,000 per year to use towards education.

**What exactly does the \$2,000 pay for?**

It pays for **all required fees** that apply towards a class. It does not pay for books, parking permits or extra items needed for the class.

**Can I get 3<sup>rd</sup> party billing with other colleges besides ACC and TSU?**

At this time, according to the City of Round Rock Education Assistance policy, no. Third party billing is applied to ACC & TSU to encourage employees to attend local (Round Rock) colleges.

**How do I choose a college?**

Whether you have decided on what to study or not we encourage you to research colleges and universities either online or by visiting the campus. It is important to ask all relevant questions about the college prior to registering with them. The City Portal has links to local colleges and a few online colleges that some city employees have or are attending.

**Can I go to a trade school or other type of schools?**

Yes. If the learning facility you pick meets the policy requirements. The policy states that the institution you attend must be accredited by national and/or regional recognized accreditation institutions. You also must receive credit for course taken and a letter grade in order to receive reimbursement. It is important to note that many trade school degrees are not always recognized by higher education learning facilities and the classes taken may not transfer.

**Can I take classes that are offered only online?**

Yes, again, the learning facility must be accredited, credit received for classes taken and a letter grade received for reimbursement. A word of caution: there are many online places that consider themselves a college or university. If you are unsure if an online institution qualifies for the Education Assistance program, please contact Human Resources and they will assist you in verifying the legitimacy of the institution. The City Portal has links to several online colleges that have been accepted as a viable online college.

**Is there a difference between National and Regional Accreditation?**

Yes. Most brick and mortar schools (U.T., Texas State, ACC) have Regional Accreditation. Most online schools have National Accreditation. Some Regional Accredited schools do not transfer National Accredited schools courses. **For more information on this please contact Melissa Hermosillo in HR PRIOR TO enrolling at any college or university.**

**Does the City require that I take classes from only National or Regional accredited colleges or universities?**

No, the City does not require one type of accreditation over another. The only requirement is that the institution must be accredited. The City wants you to understand the difference and choose wisely prior to enrolling at any education institution.

**Does the Education Assistance program ever run out of money?**

At one time in the past the budget for Education Assistance program was exhausted for that fiscal year. We have addressed that issue and now have enough money for the current ratio of employees. That is why it is important to submit your application prior to registering for any course. Applicants are reimbursed on a first come-first serve basis.

**What happens if I have a grant or scholarship or any other financial aid?**

Grant, scholarship or other non-loan financial aid money should be applied first to your education. Grant, scholarship, and non-loan financial money is yours and does not have to be paid back to anyone. The Education Assistance program should be used only after your grant, scholarship or non-loan scholarship money is exhausted.

**Why should I use my grant, scholarship non-loan money first?**

If you should stop your employment with the City up to two years of the registration date of any course, you will need to reimburse the City as outlined in the City of Round Rock Policies and Procedures Manual. You would not have to pay the City back if you use your grant, scholarship or non-loan financial money.

### **What happens if I have a loan or other repayable financial aid?**

Submit your application according to procedure. You will be reimbursed according to the CORR Policies and Procedures Manual.

### **Do I need to submit any other paperwork?**

Yes. To remain in compliance with Federal Education Assistance Reimbursement rules and the City of Round Rocks Policies and Procedures we must have the following paperwork on file for all applicants for all Education Assistance courses applied for:

Statement of Account

Final Grade Report

### **Do I have to provide the Statement of Account and Final Grade Report if I attend ACC or TSU?**

Yes, HR still needs a copy for your file in order to show proper compliance of the Education Assistance Program.

### **When do I provide the Statement of Account?**

For 3<sup>rd</sup> party billing institutions (ACC and TSU):

Both of these institutions “mail” a hard copy of your statement 12-15 days into the semester you enrolled for. Once you receive the Statement you should make a copy for HR and keep the original for your records. Inner office mail or dropping a copy off at HR is best.

For non-3<sup>rd</sup> party billing institutions:

Once you have received a statement (online or in the mail) that you have paid for the course you enrolled for that semester, please submit a copy to HR. Inner office mail or dropping a copy off at HR is best.

### **When do I provide a Grade Report?**

Once the class or classes you are taken are completed and you receive a copy of your final grade report in the mail, or online. Keep the original for your records and provide HR with a copy. The online copy should have the official college or universities logo or other identifying markers on it.

### **What happens if I drop or withdraw from a class?**

You would withdraw or drop a class according to the policies of the educational facility you are attending. We ask that you email HR that you have dropped a class so we can update our records. You may be responsible for all associated fees applied by the college depending on the timeframe in which you drop or withdraw.

**What happens if I drop or withdraw from a class and the City has already paid ACC or TSU?**

If the employee does not complete the course and the City has already paid ACC or TSU the employee will need to reimburse the City for the total amount charged by the institution. For example: ACC will charge a penalty fee if a student drops a course after the start of the class. Since the employee did not take the class and ACC charged the City then the employee will need to reimburse the City for that amount.

**Do the classes I take have to pertain to my job or position?**

Yes, your degree plan must be City of Round Rock related. For example, the City of Round Rock will pay for an Accounting degree even if you do not currently work for the Accounting section. The City of Round Rock will not pay for a nursing degree since there are no nursing positions within the City. A degree plan must be submitted to Human Resources to have on file. If you change your degree plan, please make sure that you update it with Human Resources. According to the CORR Policy & Procedures Manual, the course cannot be for staff development training, job required certificates or continuing education.

**What do you mean I have to work for two years with the City if I take a course?**

According to the CORR Policies and Procedures Manual an employee who participates in the Education Assistance Program will need to reimburse the City if they end employment up to 2 years of the date of application for a course. The two-year service requirement can expire concurrently. For example:

<u>Course started:</u>	<u>Date you do not have to reimburse city:</u>
1/1/2008	1/2/2010
7/15/2009	7/16/2011

**What have you found to be the best way to earn my degree?**

Our experience in administering the program has shown us the following:

- a) It is easier and cheaper to take general courses at ACC and have the credits transferred.
- b) If you do better in a classroom style setting its better to attend local colleges then to take online courses.
- c) Degrees received at trade school generally don't transfer to regular types of accredited colleges

**I'm nervous about getting started in college. What would you recommend?**

Our experience has shown that by taking short classroom type trainings at local colleges it helps you to adjust to a college atmosphere.

**Do we have a list of colleges on the portal that is recommended besides ACC and TSU?**

Yes. There are several local colleges as well as online only colleges listed on the portal.

**If I enroll at a college don't I have to take a lot of courses that don't pertain to my degree field?**

Yes, in most cases. Every college has education requirements for each level of learning (freshman, sophomore, junior, senior, associate, bachelor, masters, doctorate). Some of these classes are basic classes that you will most likely need to take and cannot avoid taking.

**But why should I take algebra? I won't ever use it.**

You may not use the exact algebra steps in your every day life, but you will use the theory of algebra and it's principals throughout your entire life. Taking the basic courses in math, English, and history teaches a person to think theoretically and expands your capacity to see life situations with a broader view.

**Who do I talk to in Human Resources if I have more questions?**

Everyone in HR can assist you in obtaining answers to your questions. The main contact person is Melissa Hermosillo in HR for the Education Assistance Program. She can be reached at 218-5496 or [mhermosillo@roundrocktexas.gov](mailto:mhermosillo@roundrocktexas.gov) , M-F, 8-5.

**Where and who do I submit my application?**

Please submit all applications to Melissa's attention in HR for prompt and courteous service.

**This information is only intended to support the process of utilizing the City of Round Rock's Education Assistance Program. It is not all encompassing and is only meant to be a representation of common questions received about the program.**

**The information is not intended to create or change any of the City of Round Rock official Policies & Procedures**