



## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Mayor and Council

**FROM:** Joya Hayes, Director Human Resources Department *JAH*

**DATE:** October 24, 2019

**SUBJECT:** Update on Council Resolution 20190620-182 regarding updates to the Tuition Reimbursement program

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The purpose of this memorandum is to provide a status update on Resolution No. 20190620-182 regarding updates to the City's Tuition Reimbursement Program.

On June 20, 2019, the Austin City Council passed a resolution directing the City Manager to analyze the City's current tuition reimbursement program and to implement any changes to the program based on several factors. The City Manager was directed to report back to council with actions taken by the end of fiscal year 2019.

### **Tuition Reimbursement Program**

The Human Resources Department began a review of the Tuition Reimbursement program in 2018, to change the program to allow additional opportunities for City Employees to receive reimbursement. The following highlights changes to the program:

#### **Eligible Degrees/Programs**

Employees must apply to the program and receive the appropriate approvals, and then may be reimbursed for the approved fees and expenses for college coursework completed in pursuit of:

- one (1) certificate program from an accredited college,
- one (1) associate's degree program,
- one (1) bachelor's level program,
- one (1) advanced degree or professional program Masters/ JD program during the entirety of their employment at the City of Austin, and
- one (1) Ph.D. program during the entirety of their employment at the City of Austin

Employees may also receive reimbursement for courses not completed in pursuit of a certificate program or degree with approval from their director.

#### **Application Process**

Application Process has been streamlined to reflect the following (each form is now one page):

- Employees initially apply for the program
- Employees submit course information each time they take a class

- Employees apply for reimbursement of their tuition and fees at the end of the course

**Criteria for eligible employees remains the same:**

- The employee is employed in a regular-budgeted position
- The employee has completed the initial probationary period before the start of classes for which reimbursement will be sought
- The employee submits all documents required for consideration for program participation
- The employee receives appropriate approvals for participation

**Timelines for Completion**

- Program application is due 10 days prior to the start of first class
- Coursework application is due 10 days prior to the start of each class
- Tuition and Fee reimbursement requests are due six weeks following course completion

**Program Tracking**

- By the end of calendar year 2019, software for employees to submit their requests online will be implemented to allow the following:
  - The software provides advanced analytics to the City, allowing the opportunity to track employee progress towards graduation
  - This software will allow for a comprehensive understanding of reimbursement resource utilization levels; including encumbered funds, actual use by the department, and other information

**Community Partnerships**

The Human Resources Department explored formalizing partnerships with local nonprofit service providers like Workforce Solutions to allow employees to explore career paths, seek out appropriate educational institutions, identify skill development opportunities, pinpoint available grants, scholarships, and other resources, and have the ongoing support necessary when taking on a new challenge.

Currently, Workforce Solutions provides special financial assistance to employees who qualify for services and additional programming provided through their partners based on employee household income and other mitigating factors. One of the programs can provide some conditional support in advance to employees seeking additional education.

Workforce Solutions, as part of the Austin Metro Regional Workforce Master Plan, has developed a list of partner institutions and high demand career paths that City of Austin employees can access and participate in the programming available to realize a career in those fields.

There are companies that provide educational counseling, scholarship assistance, financial aid sourcing, and in-person support. The City can explore contracting with companies that provide these types of services.

## **Next Steps**

Modifications to the Tuition Reimbursement program will occur by the end of calendar year 2019. With the implementation of new software, we will be able to track utilization, actual use of funds, and progress of employees toward their educational goals. Future steps also include partnering with other entities, like Workforce Solutions, to establish a model for other area employers to follow when working to develop their workforces.

We will continue to look for opportunities to leverage partnerships with community agencies, colleges, and universities in the region to provide continuing education and development to our employees. Also, we will continue to provide a wide array of services and programming internally to our employees. Many of our supervisors and managers are graduates of our internal leadership academy programs.

Cc: Spencer Cronk, City Manager  
Nuria Rivera-Vandermyde, Deputy City Manager