

# Atlanta Fire Rescue Foundation, Inc.

## **Tuition Assistance Program Policies and Procedures 2018 Calendar Year**



Developed by the Atlanta Fire Rescue Department &  
Atlanta Fire Rescue Foundation  
Tuition Assistance Program Committee

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## PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

### **Tuition Assistance Program**

The mission of the Tuition Assistance Program is to utilize collaboration between the fire department and the community to provide all sworn and non-sworn employees of the Atlanta Fire Rescue Department with the opportunity to earn a college education. The Tuition Assistance Program Committee is established to guide the direction of and make decisions regarding Tuition Reimbursement Program activities. The Committee includes a diverse range of AFRD sworn and civilian staff, as well as representatives from the Atlanta Fire Rescue Foundation and other stakeholder groups. All programmatic decisions will be reviewed and approved by the Tuition Assistance Program Committee.

### **TUITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM COMMITTEE**

#### **1. COMPOSITION**

- a. The Tuition Assistance Program Committee will be comprised of a diverse range of AFRD sworn and civilian staff, as well as the representatives from the Atlanta Fire Rescue Foundation and other stakeholder groups. *The Committee will have a minimum of 4 members plus the chair, and may have a maximum of 15 members. The quorum is 50 % of the members. The Committee will be comprised of members from all Divisions of the Atlanta Fire Rescue Department. Committee Members will serve one-year terms, and no more than half the Committee may be replaced in a calendar year. The Committee will have permanent positions based on the following necessary assignments: AFRF TAP committee member and any other AFRF member, Recruitment Captain, and Professional Development Committee Chair.* All programmatic decisions will be reviewed and approved by the Tuition Assistance Program Committee. The AFRF board of directors must approve programmatic decisions made by the tuition assistance program committee.

#### **2. NEW MEMBERS/REPLACEMENT MEMBERS**

- a. If a vacant position occurs on the committee, committee members will identify potential new member(s) and explain benefits of adding the individual(s) to the committee. The Atlanta Fire Rescue Department Executive Staff will appoint at least one member from their division of labor to be on the Committee. Once all potential new members have been identified, the committee will vote to add/deny the potential new member to the committee at each trimester meeting.
- b. If any member of the committee misses over 1/3 of the scheduled meetings for the year, the committee may vote to remove that committee member. If situations arise in which the integrity of the committee is in jeopardy a 2/3 majority vote can remove any member from the committee.

#### **3. MEETINGS OF THE TUITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM COMMITTEE WILL OCCUR THREE TIMES PER CALENDAR YEAR**

- a. **By February 15<sup>th</sup> (in order to review all potential candidates for the fall semester)**
- b. **By July 15<sup>th</sup> (to review all potential candidates for the spring semester)**
- c. **By October 15<sup>th</sup> (in order to review all potential candidates for the summer semester)**

## TUITION REIMBURSEMENT POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

### PURPOSE

The City of Atlanta Fire Rescue Department and the Atlanta Fire Rescue Foundation are committed to employee growth and development. To support this commitment, the Tuition Assistance Program has been established to partially reimburse education expenses to those AFRD employees interested in obtaining higher education from a regionally accredited university. This program is designed to meet organizational goals by assisting personnel who elect to improve job performance or increase skills through education. Participation should be mutually beneficial to both the employee and the City of Atlanta. This policy is established to assist in providing higher educational opportunities for all members of AFRD who meet the necessary criteria.

### PROCEDURE

The Tuition Assistance Program Committee developed this document to guide employees and department management through the stages of the Program by providing information on applying for the tuition reimbursement benefits, determining employee eligibility, determining course eligibility, and reimbursing the employee.

#### 1. Eligibility

##### a. Employees Eligibility – AFRD employees are eligible for reimbursement if:

- i. Employee is employed in a regular-budgeted full-time position.
  1. At least 95% of Tuition Reimbursement Funds are allocated to sworn employees.
  2. 5% of Tuition Reimbursement Funds may be dispersed to civilian staff.
- ii. Employee has completed a minimum of two (2) years of continuous employment.
- iii. Employee is not under any type of disciplinary probation or suspension at the time of submission of application or at the time of dispersion of funds. Application are subject to review on a case by case basis.
- iv. Employee agrees to continue employment with AFRD for no less than three (3) additional years following the reimbursed semester by signing the Service Agreement included in the tuition reimbursement application. AFRD Human Resources Manager will notify the AFRF of any student(s) who leaves AFRD or are terminated prior to the completion of three (3) years of service after the last date of the remittance to the student of tuition assistance. If the employee does not complete three (3) years of service after such date, the employee must repay the Atlanta Fire Rescue Foundation the full amount of the reimbursement within in 90 days of their separation date. Any unpaid balance after 90 days will be turned over to a collection agency.
- v. Employee is working toward a degree from a university regionally accredited through the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA).

*NOTE: There are many schools that claim to be accredited, but are not regionally accredited. Please read the following article for more information about accreditation:*

<http://adulted.about.com/cs/fasttrackoptions/a/accreditation.htm>. To search for the accreditation information for the school you are considering go to the link: <http://www.chea.org/Directories/regional.asp> and type in your school name.

- vi. Employee maintains a 3.0 overall GPA and a 2.0 GPA for the semester in which he/she is requesting reimbursement, as long as an overall 3.0 is maintained (at that particular/respective institution).
- b. **Course eligibility** – all courses offered by a regionally accredited university program as determined by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) are eligible for tuition reimbursement if all of the following criteria are met:
- i. The school attended is a regionally accredited program. To search for the accreditation information for the school you are considering, go to the link: <http://www.chea.org/Directories/regional.asp> and type in your school name.
  - ii. Course will increase employee's job applicable skills and ability.
  - iii. Course is included in a degree seeking program that will enhance the skills and knowledge of the employee.
- c. **Application eligibility** – all applications must be submitted by set deadlines and should be filled out completely. Eligible applications will be:
- i. Received by, stamped and dated by the Atlanta Fire Rescue Training Academy on or before set deadline.
  - ii. Completely and accurately filled out to include all necessary supervisory signatures.
  - iii. Accompanied by all requested receipts, grade reports and other documentation. Attachments should be legible and easy to understand.

## 2. General Guidelines

- a. Discretionary Nature of Benefit:
  - i. Funds for tuition assistance are provided by the Atlanta Fire Rescue Foundation. They are distributed based on availability, and on the application process described below. Recommendations of approval are made at the discretion of Tuition Assistance Program Committee, which is comprised of members of the Atlanta Fire Rescue Department, and final decisions regarding reimbursement are made by the Board of the Atlanta Fire Rescue Foundation. Reimbursements will be made available until all funds are expended. However, **submission of a tuition reimbursement application does not guarantee reimbursement.**

- ii. Applicants are required to follow all application instructions and submit to the Atlanta Fire Rescue Training Academy by published deadlines.
  - iii. The Tuition Reimbursement Program is awarded \$22,500.00 annually to provide tuition assistance to AFRD employees. The funding will be distributed between Fall, Spring, and Summer Semesters according to the schedule below.
    - **Fall Semester (classes in session August – December)**
      - **\$8,750 available. Deadline for application is January 31.**
      - **Reimbursement will be made by March 1.**
    - **Spring Semester (classes in session January – May)**
      - **\$8,750 available. Deadline for application is June 30.**
      - **Reimbursement will be made by August 1.**
    - **Summer Semester (classes in session May – July)**
      - **\$8,750 available. Deadline for application is September 30.**
      - **Reimbursement will be made by October 15.**
  - iv. Tuition Assistance requests will generally be approved based on the following priorities:
    - Priority I: Sworn AFRD Employees
    - Priority II: AFRD Civilian Employees
  - iv. The Tuition Assistance Program Committee will make all final recommendations regarding reimbursements, and reserves the right to make adjustments to this and other programmatic policy (such as maximum reimbursement allowances) based on circumstances and availability of funds.
- b. Benefits Allowance:
- i. *Reimbursements are permitted for out of pocket tuition expenses only.* Expenses that are covered by outside grants, scholarships or other financial aid that the student is not required pay back will not be eligible (to include without limitation any tuition reimbursement offered by the City of Atlanta, and/or the U.S. Department of Aviation Educational Tuition Reimbursement). However, student loans are eligible for reimbursement. Fees, books and other educational expenses incurred are also not eligible for reimbursement.
  - ii. Regular employees in budgeted full-time positions are eligible for up to the annual maximum reimbursement **not to exceed \$3,000.00 contingent upon the availability of funds each calendar year (January to December)**. If the total amount requested exceeds the total amount available there will be a percentage reduction to all request to accommodate each participant. For example, if 25 valid requests are received for tuition assistance and there is only \$8,750 available, all 25 participants will receive

approximately \$350. If the tuition assistance that is requested is less than what has been approved (Tuition is \$500.00 and the participant, based upon the amount for each semester and the number of participants is 6, the participant will only receive the tuition amount).

- iii. All employees receiving tuition reimbursement must have served two (2) continuous years with the Atlanta Fire Rescue Department, and are required to sign a commitment of three (3) years of continuous service upon application for reimbursement. AFRD Human Resources Manager will notify the AFRF of any student(s) who leaves AFRD or are terminated prior to the completion of three (3) years of service after the last date of the remittance to the student of tuition assistance. If the employee does not complete three (3) years of service after such date, the employee must repay the Atlanta Fire Rescue Foundation the full amount of the reimbursement within in 90 days of their separation date. Any unpaid balance after 90 days will be turned over to a collection agency.

b. Loss of Tuition Reimbursement Benefits:

- i. Employees will not be reimbursed for tuition expenses if, upon course completion, they are no longer employed by the City of Atlanta Fire Rescue Department.
- ii. Employees will reimburse the Atlanta Fire Rescue Foundation for all tuition reimbursements received, upon leaving employment with or being terminated by the City of Atlanta Fire Rescue Department within the three (3) years of receiving degree (and/or) classes. Employee must repay the Atlanta Fire Rescue Foundation the full amount of the reimbursement within in 90 days of their separation date. Any unpaid balance after 90 days will be turned over to a collection agency.
- iii. Employees will not be reimbursed for tuition expenses if their overall GPA drops below a 3.0 (at that particular/respective institution).

c. Accommodating Employee Work and Class Schedule:

- i. Courses should be scheduled during non-working hours.
- ii. If a course is available only during regular working hours, the final approval for flexible scheduling will be at the discretion of the Fire Chief or his designee.

### **3. Roles and Responsibilities**

a. Employee:

- i. Completes application and forwards to immediate supervisor for review and signature.
- ii. Keeps a copy of completed and signed application.
- iii. Forwards approved application and all required documents, including final grade report and itemized receipts for paid fees to the Atlanta Fire Rescue Training

Academy, who then in turn forwards to the Tuition Assistance Program Committee by the specified deadlines.

- iv. Confirms that Atlanta Fire Rescue Training Academy has received application and required documents by posted date by securing receipt stating date and signature of receipt of completed application within five (5) business days of submission. (For example, if applicant submits application through interoffice mail, application should not be assumed to be received by Atlanta Fire Rescue Training Academy until receipt is secured.)
- b. Section/Battalion:
- i. Supervisors determine and approve, when possible, whether applicant's job performance warrants flexible scheduling.
- c. Division and/or Shift Commander:
- i. Determines and approves, when possible, flexible scheduling.
- d. Tuition Assistance Program Application Coordinators (Atlanta Fire Rescue Training Academy):
- i. Member of the Tuition Assistance Program Committee and/or Atlanta Fire Rescue Training Academy Staff.
  - ii. Appointed by Tuition Assistance Program Committee Chair.
  - iii. Accepts and acknowledges receipt of application to applicant within five (5) days of receipt.
  - iv. Reviews all scholarship reimbursement applications for accuracy and completion, and notifies employee if application is incomplete and/or needs attention.
  - v. Confirms eligibility of employees and courses for tuition reimbursement.
  - vi. Submits applications to Tuition Assistance Program Committee.
- e. The Tuition Program Committee:
- i. Composed of diverse range of members representing various departments and divisions of AFRD and the Atlanta Fire Rescue Foundation.
  - ii. Chaired by the Atlanta Chief of Training.
  - iii. Designs overall Tuition Reimbursement Program Policy.
  - iv. Makes all programmatic and policy recommendations including, eligibility for reimbursement.



- v. Makes recommendation to the Atlanta Fire Rescue Foundation and Board of Directors via the AFRF Tuition Assistance Program committee for approval or denial of all tuition reimbursement benefits.
- f. Tuition Assistance Program Committee Chair:
  - i. Identifies Tuition Assistance Program Application Coordinators (i.e. Chief of Training).
  - ii. Provides initial, supervisory approval or denial of employee's request for tuition assistance based upon employee eligibility and course eligibility to meet the needs of the department.
  - iii. Makes final recommended rulings on appealed or contended tuition assistance applications.
- g. Atlanta Fire Rescue Foundation
  - i. Atlanta Fire Rescue Foundation and Board of Directors via the AFRF Tuition Assistance Program Committee make final decisions regarding program policy as well as approval and payment of scholarship reimbursement.
  - ii. Make payment to tuition assistance program applicant.

#### **4. Applying for Tuition Assistance**

- a. Employee may obtain an Application for Tuition Assistance Program in the following ways:
  - i. By visiting Training Academy, 407 Ashwood Ave SW, Atlanta, Georgia 30315
  - ii. By downloading the Policies and Procedures and application from the Atlanta Fire Foundation website at [www.atlfrf.org](http://www.atlfrf.org).
- b. Employee completes application, including all necessary supporting documentation, and forwards to immediate supervisor for review of completeness and approval or denial based on the employee performance.
  - i. Required Documentation includes:
    - verification of grades (by class and overall GPA, via official manuscript from the school)
    - detailed receipt of payment of tuition (tuition must be paid prior to receiving reimbursement)
    - all necessary signatures.
- c. Employee forwards approved application to Tuition Assistance Program Application Coordinator (i.e. Chief of Training) by specified deadlines. When delivered to the Atlanta Fire Rescue Training Academy, application will be stamped and dated. *The application*

*must be stamped and dated by the academy by specified deadlines and applicant should keep a copy.* Coordinator may request additional documents if he/she deems them necessary for a committee decision.

- d. Employee must confirm receipt by Tuition Assistance Program Application Coordinator (i.e. Chief of Training) of application, approval, final grade report and paid fee receipts.

## **5. Approval of Tuition Reimbursement**

- a. Completed applications must be submitted to the Tuition Assistance Program Application Coordinators by published deadlines for the semester.
- b. Once all completed applications and required documents are received for a semester, Tuition Assistance Program Application Coordinators will bring applications before the Tuition Assistance Program Committee for review and approval.
- c. If approved, and the Tuition Assistance Program Application Coordinators (i.e. Chief of Training) signs off and submits through Chain of Command for signatures. The AFRD Fire Chief has final say in recommended approval for reimbursement.
- d. If denied, Tuition Assistance Program Application Coordinator (i.e. Chief of Training) will notify employee. See appeals process below.
- e. Processing and reimbursement of tuition assistance applications will take approximately 45 days from date of review by Tuition Assistance Program Committee.
- f. Atlanta Fire Rescue Foundation and Board of Directors via the AFRF Tuition Assistance Program committee will make final decisions regarding program policy as well as approval and payment of scholarship reimbursement.

## **6. Reimbursing the Employee**

- a. Final approval and check request signed by all appropriate designees is forwarded to the Atlanta Fire Rescue Foundation.
- b. The AFRF will cut check and forward to Tuition Assistance Program Application Coordinator (i.e. Chief of Training) within fifteen (15) business days from date of receipt.
- c. Tuition Assistance Program Application Coordinator (i.e. Chief of Training) will ensure the employee is notified of availability of check and will ensure check is delivered to employee in a timely fashion.

## 7. Appeal Process

- a. If requested assistance is denied by the Tuition Assistance Program Committee and/or the Fire Chief, applicants are entitled to appeal the decision ONLY if extenuating circumstances existed in the submission of the application.
- b. Applicants may appeal the decision by respectfully submitting a letter addressing concerns to the Tuition Assistance Program Committee Chair. However, it should be noted that submission of scholarship reimbursement request does not guarantee approval of reimbursement.
- c. Letter should contain the following:
  - Justification or reasoning for appeal.
  - Explanation of extenuating circumstances that may have precluded approval of original training request.
- d. All appeals will be heard by the Tuition Assistance Program Committee. Once a decision is reached, the applicant will be contacted.
- e. All results of this process are final.

## DEFINITIONS

**Annual Maximum Reimbursement:** The amount of benefit available to an employee on a fiscal year basis, as determined by the availability of funds in the Atlanta Fire Rescue Foundation Budget.

**Eligible Costs:** Costs eligible for reimbursement under the Program. Tuition only.

**Final Grade Report:** A grade report issued by an educational institution that shows the number of hours and the titles of the courses in which the employee was enrolled.

**Ineligible Costs:** A number of items fall into the category of costs that are ineligible for reimbursement under the Program. Those include:

- Tuition costs covered by grants, scholarships or any other non-repayment funding.
- Costs for books, supplies, fees, travel or parking.
- Tuition costs for grades of “D” or 69 percent and “fail” grades if the class is pass/fail.
- Grades below a cumulative 3.0 GPA (at that particular/respective institution).
- Tuition Reimbursement will be denied if the employee fails to comply with the guidelines of the Tuition Reimbursement Program

**Paid Fee Receipt:** An itemized receipt issued by an educational institution that shows the total amount of tuition and fees the employee paid.

**Regular Employee:** Any employee in a regular position who has completed his or her probationary period with the City.

**Tuition Assistance Program Application Coordinator:** the Chief of Training or his/her designee(s) that will be assigned to administer the Tuition Assistance Program.

**Attachment A**  
**ATLANTA FIRE RESCUE DEPARTMENT**  
**Request for Tuition Assistance Program Funds**

Request by: Name \_\_\_\_\_ AFRD ID # \_\_\_\_\_  
 Division \_\_\_\_\_ Battalion/Section \_\_\_\_\_ Station/Assignment \_\_\_\_\_

I would like to request funding from the Atlanta Fire Rescue Foundation for \_\_\_\_\_  
 The purpose of this request is as follows:

Make Check Payable to: \_\_\_\_\_

*Note: Attach any documentation that provides verification such as tuition receipts and official transcript.*

**For AFRF Use Only**

Amount requested:  Amount approved:

Requestor Signature \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_  
 Title \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Supervisor Signature \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_  
 Title \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Deputy Chief: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Approved  Not Approved  Date \_\_\_\_\_  
 Print Name \_\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_

First Deputy Chief: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Approved  Not Approved  Date \_\_\_\_\_  
 Print Name \_\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Fire Chief: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Approved  Not Approved  Date \_\_\_\_\_  
 Print Name \_\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Program Committee Chair: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Approved  Not Approved  Date \_\_\_\_\_  
 Print Name \_\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_

AFRF Executive Director: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Approved  Not Approved  Date \_\_\_\_\_  
 Print Name \_\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_

