

Employee Learning and Development Policy

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§ 1. Policy

The Employee Learning and Development policy is designed to assist agencies¹ in workforce planning and development. It provides tools to support both non-academic and academic activities that directly relate to the agency's identified knowledge, skills, and abilities, and which support the agency's mission, vision, and values.

Access to learning and development, the learning and development financial assistance program, and educational leave are not an employee benefit, right or entitlement;

¹ For ease of reading, this policy uses the term "agency" to refer to any state agency, university institution, board, commission, bureau, or other state government employer that is subject to the State Human Resources Act. This policy applies only to employees who are subject to the State Human Resources Act, but state employers may choose to mirror the provisions of this policy for employees who are exempt from the Act.

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they are management tools for workforce development. Denial of participation in these programs is not grievable, except on grounds of discrimination.

§ 1.1. Goals of Employee Learning and Development

The State's policy is to provide learning and development for its employees to:

- Improve productivity, effectiveness and efficiency of government service by developing and better utilizing employee talents, abilities and potential.
- Help employees develop knowledge, skills and abilities that make them better qualified to perform the duties of their present jobs and advance their career.
- Develop current and future supervisors capable of designing and implementing effective systems that accomplish each state agency's goals and objectives.²

Employees, supervisors, and departmental management all play a role in employee learning and development, in cooperation with the North Carolina Office of State Human Resources (OSHR), as follows.³

- Employees. State employees should aim to advance their careers by pursuing appropriate opportunities for development and education.
- Managers and Supervisors. Managers and supervisors should ensure access to job-related learning and development for their employees. Managers and supervisors should identify each employee's learning needs and work to prepare and implement plans for their development.
- State Agencies. Agencies should strive to develop their employees by assuring that learning programs geared to specific agency needs are planned, budgeted, established, utilized, and evaluated appropriately.
- Office of State Human Resources. OSHR is responsible for statewide planning, coordination, and review of learning and development programs, as well as for direct delivery of some interagency training.
- State Universities, the Community College System, and Public Instruction. OSHR and State agencies are responsible for utilizing the State's universities, community college system, and Department of Public Instruction to the fullest degree possible in securing professional, management, and vocational education to meet their personnel development needs.

² These bullets reflect 25 NCAC 01K .0104.

³ This part of the policy is taken from 25 NCAC 01K .0105.

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§ 1.2. Consistency with Non-Discrimination

Agencies should offer access to learning and development, financial assistance, and educational leave in a non-discriminatory fashion. Agencies should establish a formal process with defined selection criteria for approving these opportunities.

§ 2. State Sources of Learning

§ 2.1. On-the-Job Learning

Managers and supervisors, when developing their employees' plans for job-related learning and development, should make use of on-the-job learning, including:

- Individual and group instruction by supervisors,
- Formal or informal learning and educational activities,
- Rotational assignments to provide greater depth and a wide base of experience, and
- Mentorships.

§ 2.2. OSHR-provided Courses

OSHR provides in-person, virtual, and hybrid courses on a variety of topics. Most courses are offered as scheduled in-person or virtual classroom courses.

Employees can sign up for these courses through the NC Learning Center, a website accessible to state agency employees and many university and judicial branch employees. Most OSHR provided courses require supervisor approval. The NC Learning Center allows supervisors to assign training to their employees or for employees to request to attend.

§ 2.3. Courses from Other Agencies

Many agencies offer training on topics relevant to the agency's employees. Some of these courses can be found in and registered for through the NC Learning Center, while others are provided upon notification from the agency.

Some agencies offer courses that may be taken by employees of other agencies. Agencies shall report these course offerings to OSHR annually on July 1. OSHR will maintain a list of agency-offered courses in a place accessible to at least agency HR Directors.

§ 2.4. On-Demand Courses Through the NC Learning Center

Employees can access on-demand eLearning courses from an extensive course catalog in the NC Learning Center. These courses are available at no cost. Supervisors can

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assign eLearning courses to their employees, or employees can sign up and take these courses themselves without supervisor approval.

§ 2.5. Courses from North Carolina State Community Colleges or Universities

The institutions in the North Carolina Community College System and North Carolina University System provide an extensive set of courses, many of which focus on career skills. Employees may take either credit or non-credit courses from accredited academic institutions under this Policy. To determine whether the agency may pay the cost of the course or provide paid educational leave, see the section of this policy below entitled “Employee Learning and Development Financial Assistance” and the Educational Leave Policy.

§ 3. Non-State Sources of Learning

Because state-sponsored courses are often customized to fit state employee jobs and are available at a lower cost, agencies are encouraged to look for training from state sources before using non-state sources of learning. Consequently, the North Carolina Administrative Code places several restrictions on whether state agencies can cover the cost of training from non-state sources, described below. Note that the restrictions stated in this Section 3 of this Policy apply only to employees who are subject to the State Human Resources Act.

§ 3.1. Need for Non-State Sources of Learning

Before providing learning through non-State sources, an agency should determine that:

- No agency employee possess the knowledge and skills to provide training that meets the educational or learning need, and
- Relevant learning is not available from state sources.

§ 3.2. Selecting Between Non-State Government Sources

When there is a choice between outside training sources, agencies should consider the provider’s competency to conduct the training, employee access to the training, and the provider’s competency in, employee access to, and cost of the training, and the cost to provide the training.⁴

⁴ For additional details, see 25 NCAC 01K .0403.

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§ 4. Educational Leave

Employee learning and development may be eligible for Educational Leave. See the Educational Leave Policy.

§ 5. Employee Learning and Development Financial Assistance

For many learning and development opportunities, agencies may directly pay related expenses. However, when that is not the case, the Employee Learning and Development Financial Assistance program provides reimbursement of eligible learning and development expenses. To qualify for assistance, the employee and requested course must be eligible, the agency must approve the request for assistance, and the agency must have funds available to cover the expense.⁵

§ 5.1. Employee Eligibility

Full-time and part-time permanent, probationary, and time-limited employees are eligible for financial assistance. Temporary employees are not eligible.

Management should consider any active disciplinary action prior to approving an application for academic assistance.

§ 5.2. Approval Process

Learning and development financial assistance may be initiated by either the employee or management. When determining whether to provide assistance, management should consider whether completion of the course will:

- Directly benefit the agency,
- Advance agency workforce planning needs, and/ or
- Develop an employee who demonstrates the ability to perform at a higher level of responsibility.

Assistance shall not be approved if management has determined that neither the course nor the degree will benefit the agency.

⁵ Applicants for Learning and Development Financial Assistance should consult a tax professional to understand the tax implications, if any, of reimbursement of these expenses.

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Regardless of how the assistance is initiated, employees must complete the financial assistance application (PD-136 or agency equivalent), and employees must obtain approval prior to the start of the program, unless:

- Funding for the assistance program was delayed and enrolling in the class was contingent upon the program's approval,
- Management asked the employee to enroll in the class after it began,
- The educational institution or the agency made an administration error, or
- There was an unforeseen, unavoidable major crisis.

The applicant must provide written notice to the agency as to the reason an application is being submitted after a class begins.

Employees applying for financial assistance must receive a written response from management regarding approval/disapproval of the request, which notes any changes in the application or conditions of approval and whether the course is required by management.

§ 5.3. Courses Eligible for Financial Assistance

Courses that benefit the agency are eligible for the Learning and Development Financial Assistance program, including:

- Academic courses/degrees from an accredited community college, college, or university. Accreditation must be via an accrediting agency recognized by the US Department of Education.
- Certificates, certifications, and licenses required for employment, or after employment, or that are required by employing agency policy.
- Continuing education associated with maintaining required certificates, certifications, and licenses.
- Audited academic courses that benefit the agency. These courses require a statement written on school letterhead and signed by the instructor that the employee attended at least 85% of the scheduled class meetings during the academic term.
- Other work-related courses, workshops, and seminars taken through non-accredited organizations may be considered for funding at the agency's discretion.

The agency head or designee may approve exceptions to the approved course policy. For additional guidance, refer to OSBM Budget Manual sections 6.4.8 and 7.5.

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§ 5.4. Expense Reimbursement

§ 5.4(a) Requirements for Reimbursement

Learning and development financial assistance is provided via funds available to the agency. If funds are available, the applicant shall receive reimbursement of approved costs upon submitting evidence of satisfactory completion of a preapproved course.

Requests for reimbursement must be submitted within 30 days of receipt of grade(s).

§ 5.4(b) Eligible Expenses

1. Courses Required by Management

For courses required by management, the agency shall bear the full cost of salary, tuition, examination and academic fees, textbooks and course materials, travel, and subsistence. Any books or materials paid for by the agency become the property of the agency.

To be considered a Course Required by Management for this purpose, the course must be specifically noted as such and approved by the agency. Being specified as part of an employee's performance improvement plan or individual development plan does not automatically make the course required by management.

2. Other Approved Courses

For other courses approved for financial assistance, eligible employees may be reimbursed for academic costs, registration, or enrollment fees charged by the provider where enrolled. These costs are defined as charges assessed by the provider to every person enrolling in the course. These charges are neither negotiable nor discretionary.

Academic costs include:

- Tuition
- Academic-related fees
- Course/lab fees - These fees must always be itemized and may require a written statement from the academic source justifying that the fee is required.

3. Ineligible Expenses

Agencies may not reimburse

- Non-academic related fees, such as dorm, student union construction, athletic fees, student health service, cultural event fees, etc.
- Charges specifically related to processing or receiving continuing education units (CEUs).

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- Application, examination, and graduation fees.
- Transportation costs, except for courses required by management.
- Textbooks and supplies, except for courses required by management.

§ 5.4(c) **Reduced Reimbursement**

With business justification, agencies may reduce the reimbursement amount to less than the eligible expenses and/or limit the number of courses for which any one employee may be reimbursed in an academic term. Agencies must apply this limitation in a fair and equitable manner to all employees requesting academic assistance in that fiscal year.

§ 5.4(d) **Repayment of Financial Assistance:**

For reimbursement exceeding \$5,000 for coursework that is not a requirement for employment, agencies may condition the provision of agency funds upon agreement of the employee to repay the funds subject to certain conditions. See Employment Contract Policy.

§ 5.4(e) **Other Financial Aid**

Financial assistance from any other financial aid program shall not be duplicated under this program. However, the difference, if any, between such aid and the allowable costs under the Learning and Development Financial Assistance program may be reimbursed.

§ 5.4(f) **Changes in Employment**

- Employee Transfers: If an employee transfers to another State agency, and subsequently completes an approved course, the employee should submit a request for reimbursement to the agency employing the employee at the time of completion; the current employing agency shall pay or provide reimbursement upon course completion.
- Employee Separations: Employees who separate from state service while receiving learning and development financial assistance are not eligible for reimbursement unless the separation is due to one of the following:
 - Reduction in force;
 - Death or severe illness requiring hospitalization of the employee or the employee's parent, spouse, sibling, or child; or
 - Separations because the employee was unable to perform all the position's essential duties because of a medical condition or the vagueness of a medical prognosis.

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§ 6. Sources of Authority

This policy is issued under the following laws and is compliant with these statutes and Administrative Code provisions:

- [N.C.G.S. § 126-4\(7\)](#)
 - [N.C.G.S. § 126-4\(10\)](#)
 - [N.C.G.S. § 126-4\(15\)](#)
 - [N.C.G.S. § 126-3\(b\)\(2\)](#)
 - [25 NCAC 01K .0104 to .0105](#)
 - [25 NCAC 01K .0106](#)
 - [25 NCAC 01K .0209 to .0212](#)
 - [25 NCAC 01K .0300](#)
 - [25 NCAC 01K .0401 to .0404](#)
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§ 7. History of This Policy

Date	Version
May 2, 1966	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Personnel administration - training and staff development. Provides a continuing developmental process so that competent and industrious employees are available to fill high level vacancies.• Each agency to determine its present and projected manpower needs, based on expansion of services and changing technology.• Each agency, within the limit of its resources, should encourage every employee to avail themselves of training opportunities.• The State Personnel Department will provide assistance and coordination in securing training resources, setting standards, determining needs, securing and disseminating information on resources for specialized training and will give advice concerning

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	current methods and consult with agencies on training and development programs.
September 1, 1967	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statement of objectives of the Management Development Program.
January 1, 1978	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apprenticeship Training - This policy is to support and promote the establishment of apprenticeship programs where appropriate in State government and to inform agencies how they shall be administered through the State Personnel System.
November 1, 1990	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revised policy on apprenticeship training to allow apprenticeship agreements although technically prohibited by policy forbidding employment contracts. Since required by GS 94, a clarifying exception is added which will permit their use in registered apprenticeship programs. Also, changes to assure that apprentices working against positions SPA are treated consistently in regard to appointment status, and receive the same employment benefits as other SPA employees.
June 4, 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revised to change the title from “Personnel Training and Development” to “Employee Learning and Development” because “training” is now referred to as “learning.” • Changed “more responsible” to “more advanced” since the employee may be moving up into a higher position. • Changed “Alleviate labor market shortages and reduce personnel turnover” to “Increase employee engagement and overall job satisfaction” because Talent Management is charged with increasing employee engagement not tracking personnel turnover and job shortages. • Changed “State Personnel Manual” to “State Human Resources Manual” throughout the document. • Deleted the last paragraph from the Apprenticeship “Learning” section as it is no longer applicable.
December 11, 2025	Merged the Academic Assistance Policy into the Employee Learning and Development Policy, and revised the combined policy to

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	<p>increase flexibility for agencies to invest in their employees by reimbursing learning and development. The most substantive changes include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Renaming “academic assistance” to “learning and development financial assistance,” since in today’s learning environment, the training programs to develop employees’ skills are not always offered through academic programs.• Expanding the allowable uses of this financial assistance to include non-academic providers’ courses, certifications, required licenses, and continuing education.• Allowing time-limited and probationary employees access to learning and development financial assistance.• Eliminating the ceiling rate, i.e. the cap on the reimbursable amount per academic course.• Eliminating the cap on the number of credit hours per year that can be reimbursed.• Removing the requirement that OSHR approve learning and development from non-state sources. <p>Because the full list of changes is very long, it cannot be repeated in full here; for details, see the summary sheet that was provided at this State Human Resources Commission meeting.</p>
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