2.1.12 Staff Development Programs

Last updated on:
07/28/2015

Formerly Known As Policy Number:
22.11

The Staff Development Program (SDP) supports employee development by providing partial or full reimbursement of the cost of courses, seminars and workshops that enable employees to improve performance in current jobs, prepare for career development, or meet requirements of degree programs related to current performance or planned career development. The SDP consists of two parts: Staff Training Assistance Program (STAP) for job related or career enhancing courses and seminars and Staff Tuition Reimbursement Program (STRP) providing partial to full tuition payment for individuals enrolled in a degree program. See Educational Assistance Programs [1] for additional information.

Authority:
Approved by the Vice President for Human Resources.

1. Eligibility

To be eligible for the Staff Development Program, an employee must meet all the following criteria:

- Be a continuing regular or fixed-term staff employee (including a bargaining unit employee). See Guide Memo 2.2.2 [2] for definition of regular staff or fixed-term employee.
- Receive no financial assistance from other sources that would duplicate SDP assistance (scholarships, grants, and departmental funds may augment but not duplicate SDP assistance).

Staff Training Assistance Program (STAP)

- STAP assistance funds are available to each eligible staff member on the first date of employment.
- Academic Staff-Teaching: senior lecturers, lecturers, artists-in-residence who work at least 50% time are also eligible for the Staff Training Assistance Program.
- Faculty, students, temporary employees, retirees, and other non-staff University affiliates are not eligible for STAP assistance.
Staff Tuition Reimbursement Program (STRP)

- Available after an eligible employee has completed one year in a continuing benefits-eligible position at 50% Full Time Equivalent (FTE) or greater.
- The amount provided is pro-rated if eligible staff works less than full-time, but at least 50% part-time.
- Faculty, students, and other temporary workers are not eligible for STRP assistance.

2. Staff Training Assistance Program (STAP)

STAP assistance may be requested for job-related training, career development, STAP approved health improvement courses through the Stanford Health Improvement Program (HIP), and academic pursuit through the Stanford Continuing Studies Program.

a. Job-Related Training
Training must be directly related to performance requirements of the employee’s current assignment, and either maintain or improve job skills; be required by law; or respond to organizational or operational need as defined by employee’s supervisor including training required to respond to organizational or operational need as defined by the employee’s supervisor or the university. STAP does not cover training to meet minimum educational requirements of the current job, or qualify the employee for a new trade or business.

Training may be a formal course given for academic credit or certificate of completion by an accredited college, university, technical/vocational school or institute, special skills school, or adult education school; a seminar, workshop or special emphasis short-duration program presented by an approved provider; or training obtained at a conference or professional organization. Online training may be allowable if it meets the requirements outlined in Section 2.a. The employee’s supervisor must approve the training in advance. Questions about whether the training or the provider is eligible for STAP should be directed to the Stanford STAP administrator prior to the start of the training course or activity.

(1) Release Time/Time Off with Pay for Required Training
An eligible staff employee’s supervisor must approve in advance the course as job-related training and approve the release time, if any, to attend the training. Such time off must be compatible with the work schedule of the department and consistent with requirements of contracts and grants regarding time worked. The department funds time off with pay for training.

(2) Reimbursement
Requests for reimbursement of allowable expenses through STAP must be made within 20 days of satisfactory completion of the training, with the supervisor’s approval. Submitted requests will be charged against the STAP funds based on the class start date. When employees are reimbursed in advance of course completion, the employee must provide evidence of satisfactory completion to the supervisor. (See Section 5 for procedure).

b. Career Development Training
Training must be related to an identified and planned training objective for career development.
Such training may be a formal course given for academic credit or certificate of completion by an accredited college, university, technical/vocational school or institute, special skills school, or adult education school; or be a seminar, workshop or special emphasis short-duration program presented by an approved provider. Career development must only be for training activity that will assist the employee in qualifying for a new position or advancement within his or her current trade or business at Stanford. The employee's supervisor must approve in advance this training and any release time needed to attend.

(1) Release Time/Time Off Without Pay
An eligible staff employee may be granted a maximum of 24 hours per month of release time without pay for approved training for career development purposes if no comparable course is offered during non-work hours. Time off for eligible part-time staff should be pro-rated based on the percent time worked. Approval of time off is at the department's discretion and must be compatible with the work schedule of the department and consistent with requirements of contracts and grants regarding time worked.

(2) Reimbursement
Requests for reimbursement of allowable expenses through STAP must be made within 20 days of the satisfactory completion of the training with the supervisor's approval. Submitted requests will be charged against the STAP funds based on the class start date. When employees are reimbursed in advance of course completion, the employee must provide evidence of satisfactory completion to the supervisor (see Section 5 for procedure). For IT Services, HIP and Continuing Studies courses, the STAP allowance will be deducted from the fee when employees register for classes.

3. Staff Tuition Reimbursement Program (STRP)
Eligible employees may request STRP support for courses that fulfill undergraduate or graduate degree requirements at a fully accredited college, university, technical/vocational school or institute, special skills school, or adult education school when the employee is admitted to the degree program (certificate programs excluded). Courses must be taken at, or online through, a regionally-accredited institution recognized by the U.S. Department of Education in order to be eligible for reimbursement. The employee's supervisor must approve the request if release time/time off (with or without pay) is requested.

Covered degree programs:
- Associate
- Bachelor
- Master
- Doctoral

Programs that are not covered:
- Individual courses
Certifications
Graduate Certificate
Degree program entrance exams, such as SAT, ACT, GRE, LSAT, GMAT, MCAT
Challenge exams or credit by exam, such as CLEP, UEXCEL and DSST

a. Release Time/Time Off without Pay
An eligible staff employee may be granted a maximum of 24 hours per month of release time, without pay, for an approved undergraduate or graduate course, if no comparable course is offered during non-work hours. Time off for part-time regular staff should be pro-rated based on the percent time worked. Approval of time off is at the department's discretion and must be compatible with the work schedule of the department and consistent with requirements of contracts and grants regarding time worked.

b. Tuition Payment
Payment of tuition and covered fees through STRP will be made directly to the institution before attendance each quarter or semester.

4. Allowable Expenses
An employee may not receive reimbursement under STAP and reimbursement under STRP for the same course or program. For example, you cannot use STRP for tuition and STAP for books, supplies and equipment for the same course or program.

a. STAP Expenses
- The current maximum STAP reimbursement is:
  - $800 for eligible employees not covered by the SEIU Collective Bargaining Agreement
  - $700 for eligible employees covered by the SEIU Collective Bargaining Agreement
    - $100 of STAP funds for SEIU-represented staff are reallocated for a leadership, training and educational program, known as the Apprenticeship Program. (For additional information, refer to the 2014 Collective Bargaining Agreement between SEIU Higher Education Workers Local 2007 and The Board of Trustees of the Leland Stanford Junior University, Side Letter 7: Leadership, Training and Educational Fund).
- Costs of tuition, registration fees and required textbooks, CDs, e-books or tapes are allowable for reimbursement up to a maximum determined each fiscal year.
- Travel expenses, parking, lodging, meals, professional memberships, testing and exam fees, reference books and professional subscriptions are not allowable.

b. STRP Expenses
- The current maximum annual STRP benefit amount is $5,250 granted to the eligible employee at the beginning of each fiscal year. Payments and reimbursements are pro-rated for part-time eligible staff working at least 50% time.
- Covered fees are limited to the cost of tuition, registration fee, lab fees, course fees and eLearning fees.
- Covered expenses are limited to required books, CDs, DVDs, and other published materials,
supplies and equipment, including software. Supplies, equipment and software that the employee may keep after the course is completed are not a covered expense.

- An employee may not use STAP and STRP funds for the same course or program.

5. Reimbursement

a. Timing of STAP Reimbursement
Requests for reimbursement of allowable expenses through STAP must be made within 20 days of satisfactory completion of the training, with the approval of the supervisor. Submitted requests will be charged against the STAP funds based on the class start date. Refer to the STAP Frequently Asked Questions [3] for details on the reimbursement process.

b. Timing of STRP Payment
Payment of tuition and covered fees will be made directly to the institution by the program administrator before attendance each quarter or semester. If the employee makes payment directly to the institution, the employee must submit the invoice to the program administrator through a Direct Bill request. The program administrator will make payment directly to the institution, and the institution will issue a credit or reimbursement to the employee.

c. Departmental Reimbursement
When covered costs exceed the current STAP/STRP limit, the excess cost may be partially or fully reimbursed by the employee's department. Departmental reimbursement is at the department's discretion and is determined based on available departmental funds for training. Reimbursement for work-related or career development training may be taxable if the total exceeds $5,250 in one tax year (see Section 7a), regardless of the source of university funds. Departmental reimbursements have the same tax consequences as STAP/STRP reimbursements.

d. Employee Obligation
When the University reimburses an employee for training costs through STAP prior to completion of the activity, the employee assumes an obligation to complete the supported training in a satisfactory manner. An employee who does not complete University-reimbursed training must repay the University the total amount of the reimbursement.

e. Evidence of Satisfactory Completion
Employees utilizing funds for training expenses through STAP must provide the supervisor with evidence of satisfactory completion as soon as possible—but no later than 60 days after the training activity is completed. For STRP, evidence of satisfactory completion must be provided to both the supervisor (if supervisor approval was required) and to EdAssist, the STRP administration vendor, within 60 days of the course end date. Such evidence may be an official grade card or transcript from the institution or provider of the course. Failure to submit evidence of course completion within 60 days will require the employee to repay the tuition/fee/expense amount to Stanford and could result in denial of all future requests for tuition assistance. Refer to the STRP Guidelines for details on the Evidence of Satisfactory Completion submission process.

- For undergraduate academic courses using STRP funds, a grade C or better, or pass grade in
a pass/fail course is required. A grade of C- or less will not be accepted as a satisfactory grade.

- For graduate academic courses, using STRP funds, a grade B or better, or pass in a pass/fail course is required. A grade of B- will not be accepted as a satisfactory grade.
- If a course may be taken for either a letter grade or a pass/fail grade, the employee must take the course for a letter grade to be eligible for STRP funds for this course.

f. Repayments
Staff members who have utilized STRP are required to repay tuition and fees that were paid to STRP to an institution for coursework if:

- Employee withdraws from a course after the tuition was paid
- Employee fails to submit proof of satisfactory completion
- For undergraduate course work, the employee receives a grade of C- or lower or Fail (if a Pass/Fail course)
- For graduate course work, the employee receives a grade B- or lower or Fail (if a Pass/Fail course)

6. Application Process

a. STAP
An employee planning a training or development activity should discuss development and performance objectives with his/her supervisor before registering for the course or program. Decisions regarding applicability of training and issues regarding release time should be made at this time. The employee and the supervisor should review career development plans before registration. No application form is needed.

Departmental Review
The supervisor should review the staff training assistance request and evidence of satisfactory completion, confirming the following:

- Employee eligibility (see Section 1)
- Program applicability (see Section 2 and 3)
- Covered fees and expenses (see Section 4)
- Course completion (see Section 5)

Courses taken through the Stanford Health Improvement Program (HIP) or Stanford Continuing Studies Program (CSP) are not subject to supervisor approval unless release time is required.

b. STRP
Prior to April 30, 2015, employee must submit a completed/signed STRP application to the Tuition & Training Programs Office before the beginning of the designated institution's academic year. The application and instructions can be found on the STRP website [4] (My Learning Center). A supervisor’s signature is required if release time/time off with pay is requested.

On or after April 30, 2015, employee must submit an application for each term (quarter or semester) no earlier than 90 days prior to the start of classes and no later than 30 days after the
start of classes. If a supervisor’s signature is required for release time/time off with pay, employee must complete the Supervisor Approval Form. The Supervisor Approval Form can be found and printed from the Stanford My Learning Center website and must be sent to the Stanford STRP office with the employee and supervisor signature within five business days of application submission. Failure to submit the Supervisor Approval Form will result in a denial of the application.

Payment of Tuition and Covered Fees
The Direct Bill option should be used to request payment of tuition and fees directly to the employee’s school by following the four-step application process in My Learning Center, located on the STRP website.

Expense Reimbursement
The Expense Reimbursement option should be used if the employee has paid for tuition and/or allowable fees and or expenses. The employee must make the request and submit documentation as proof of payment within 60 days of the course end date. Detailed information about the application, payment and reimbursement process can be found on the STRP website.

c. Tuition & Training Programs Review
The Tuition & Training Programs office monitors and periodically audits applications for conformance with standards of eligibility, applicability and allowability as outlined in this Guide Memo. The Tuition & Training Programs office has final approval over any disputes, of application denial or denial of payment and reimbursements for approved applications. A decision by Tuition & Training Programs office concerning approval or disapproval of applications, payments or reimbursements is not subject to review under any grievance procedure. Appeal of a decision by the Tuition & Training Programs office may be made in writing to the Director of Tuition & Training Programs in University Human Resources.

7. Termination of Employment

a. New Applications
No applications will be accepted after employment with the university or SLAC ends.

b. Expense Reimbursement
If employment with the university or SLAC ends before a request for reimbursement of covered expenses has been submitted, an employee may submit a manual request for reimbursement if the reason for termination is for any of the following reasons:

- Layoff
- Layoff to Retirement
- Retirement
- Military Service
- Transfer from the University to SLAC
- Transfer from SLAC to the University
If employment with the University or SLAC ended for any other reason, an employee will not be eligible to request or receive reimbursement for expenses after the date employment ended. However, if an application was submitted and approved, and tuition and fees were paid directly to the employee’s school prior to the date employment ended for any reason, he or she will not be required to repay that amount.

8. Tax Implications

SDP is intended to provide benefits that are, to the extent possible, excluded from taxation under federal and state laws. Accordingly, this Guide Memo constitutes a separate written plan for the exclusive benefit of employees under sections 127 and 132(d) of the Internal Revenue Code and its regulations, to provide such employees with educational assistance.

a. General Rule
In general, an employee may exclude up to $5,250 received for graduate or undergraduate education under STRP and up to $800 received under STAP from his/her gross income each tax year for allowable tuition and covered fees and expenses.

b. Tax Year
Employees should note that STRP provides reimbursements of up to $5,250 for each Stanford fiscal year. Because Stanford’s fiscal year runs from September 1 through August 31, an employee could be eligible to receive reimbursements in excess of $5,250 for the employee's tax year.

c. Other Situations
Amounts paid to an employee in excess of $5,250 may also be excluded if they are payments for certain job-related training, when such training maintains or improves the skills of an employee. However, if the training is necessary for the employee to meet the minimum educational requirements for employment, or if the training will qualify the employee for a new trade or business, the payments will not qualify for this additional exclusion.

d. Getting Help
Employees should consult their personal tax advisor with any questions.

9. Status and Duration of Staff Development Program

a. Administration
SDP is administered by the University. The University has the discretionary authority to determine all matters with respect to SDP, including, without limitation, eligibility issues, benefit amounts, evidentiary matters and tax treatment. Its decisions shall be final and binding on all persons.

b. Amendment and Termination
The University reserves the right to modify SDP in any respect, or to discontinue SDP, at any time.

Guidelines on requesting a memo change can be found at