

Date: Jan 5th, 2023

To: Town Manager John Elsesser

From: Alexander Taylor, Coventry Intern to the Town Manager

Subject: Coventry Tuition Reimbursement Language

Overview

I propose a change to the language of the Town of Coventry's existing policy on Employee-Initiated Professional Development Expenses (Tuition Reimbursement) for the purposes of clarity and reducing any potential loopholes. The current text of the policy is vague in terms of amounts of reimbursement and the eligibility of employees for receiving these funds. Refining this language will give management an easier time in determining when and how to distribute funds and give a clear process for employees to follow.

Existing Language

Current language on Tuition Reimbursement is vague and not helpful to either party in outlining the process. The amount to be reimbursed in existing language is given as "The Town may provide reimbursement for a percentage of the cost of tuition [...] as the Town's budgetary limitations permit." As it stands the Town has no metric to judge what the budget permits. This not only provides a challenge when choosing where to set the rate of reimbursement, but is also unclear to employees who may be on a tight budget themselves. In addition, the lack of a clear standard may lead to cases where employees are reimbursed at different rates. This may cause conflict amongst employees and between employees and management with accusations of unfair or unequal treatment. Existing language is silent on the issue of a process or procedure to follow. This may lead to confusion and frustration for both employees submitting requests and management processing them. Finally, the current process provides several potential areas where it may be exploited. For example, the following text from section 4 reads, "reimbursement of tuition and/or fees for employee-initiated training may be conditional upon the employee's continued service with the Town." While this suggests a requirement for continued work, it is not specific, and employees may make decisions about future employment with the expectation they will be reimbursed.

Recommended Changes

Language should be revised and made as specific as possible as to ensure even application of the policy and minimize the chance of any confusion. A specific rate should be chosen in order to set a standard for reimbursement. Although comparable policies in other towns use varying thresholds, tying the value to a set percentage of the rates from an existing reputable institution will ensure an accurate representation of what average tuition costs, and minimize the need to update the policy in the future as rates change. By setting a timeline for when requests must be submitted by and providing concrete limits on total funding and credits it greatly increases clarity about what the town is willing to offer.

Conclusion

The Town of Coventry must, especially in a difficult hiring market, take care to ensure it remains competitive when compared to other organizations. By providing a clear and accessible policy on tuition reimbursement contingent on continued employment at the Town, it may encourage both prospective and current employees to continue employment with Coventry. In addition, by subsidizing the education of town employees it will support a skilled workforce of town employees well equipped to solve the challenges of municipal governance. In pursuit of these goals, I have attached the original language, as well as my proposed revisions.