

**Workshop and Seminar Reimbursement (WSR)  
Program  
for PEF-Represented Employees**

**Program Guidelines  
for the Period  
April 1, 2014 through March 31, 2015**



Governor's Office of Employee Relations



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**Workshop and Seminar Reimbursement Program (WSR)**  
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## WORKSHOP & SEMINAR REIMBURSEMENT (WSR) PROGRAM

### A. Program Description

The Workshop & Seminar Reimbursement (WSR) Program reimburses eligible PEF-represented employees for attendance at non-credit bearing professional development courses, workshops, conferences, and seminars given by accredited providers. WSR enables employees to improve job-related skills in their profession, and gain the knowledge and skills necessary for career mobility and promotional opportunities within New York State service.

### B. Funding and Oversight of WSR

Funding for WSR is provided through Article 15 of the 2011-2015 Agreement between the State of New York and the Public Employees Federation (PEF). Article 15 also establishes the Professional Development Committee (PDC) consisting of two designees from the Governor's Office of Employee Relations (GOER) and two from PEF. The PDC has adopted these WSR guidelines and monitors the administration of this program.

### C. WSR Program Highlights

- Provides reimbursement to current PEF-represented employees for qualifying conferences, workshops, seminars, and non-credit bearing courses by accredited providers **that begin on or after April 1, 2014 and run through March 31, 2015.**
- Maximum reimbursement is \$1,000 per fiscal year, which runs from April 1st through March 31st of the following year.
- Reimbursement requires successful completion of a non-credit course, workshop, or event. WSR will not cover incomplete or failed courses or events.
- All applications must be submitted within 60 days after the end date of the course.
- **The Office of the State Comptroller will withhold estimated taxes at the end of each calendar year from employees whose benefits from this program and any additional educational benefits from their agency exceed \$5,250.**
- WSR can only be used for **non-credit bearing** courses, workshops, and seminars as detailed in the guidelines.

## D. Employee Eligibility

Applicants are eligible to participate in the WSR Program under the following conditions:

### Current PEF-Represented Employees

At both the start and completion dates of the course, the applicant must:

- be actively employed in a PEF-represented position; and
- be a New York State or Roswell Park Cancer Institute employee with attendance rules coverage who is either full- or part-time (working 50 percent or more).

### Laid Off Employees

A New York State or Roswell Park Cancer Institute employee is eligible for reimbursement if the applicant:

- has been laid off;
- has not been rehired by New York State or Roswell Park in a PEF-represented position; and
- is on the appropriate Civil Service or Roswell Park Preferred List.

To be eligible for reimbursement, the course or event date must be within 12 months of the layoff date. The applicant must provide documentation showing that date and preferred list standing. The documentation must be signed by a personnel officer and sent as an attachment with other supporting documentation.

### Half-Time Employees and Employees on Full-Time Non-Disciplinary Leave

A New York State or Roswell Park Cancer Institute employee, represented by PEF, working less than 50 percent, and those on full-time non-disciplinary leave, shall receive 50 percent of the benefit **with proper documentation**. Documentation must specify the start and end dates and reason for the leave. It also must show the employee's bargaining unit, agency code, and the initial appointment date to state service. The documentation must be signed by a personnel officer and sent as an attachment with other supporting documentation. Eligibility will be based on work status on the start date of the course or event.

### Seasonal Employees, Student Interns, and Student Assistants

Seasonal employees, student interns, and student assistants are **not** eligible for this benefit unless they are entitled to earn vacation accruals prior to the start date of the course or event. Such employees must provide documentation of their eligibility to earn and use vacation accruals. It must be signed by a personnel officer and sent as an attachment with other supporting documentation.

## E. Course Eligibility

WSR reimburses employees for registration (attendance) fees for workshops, seminars or conferences, or for costs (not including any additional fees) for **non-credit bearing** courses at **accredited** institutions, schools, or organizations.

### 1. Job-Related or Career-Related

Workshops, seminars, conferences, and non-credit bearing courses must be **job-related** or **career-related**.

A **job-related** workshop, seminar, conference, or non-credit course directly relates to the employee's current profession or job assignments, duties, and responsibilities.

A **career-related** workshop, seminar, conference, or non-credit course provides the employee with the knowledge, skills, or abilities to increase opportunity for career mobility and/or advancement within their current profession or in a career path for which there currently exists a need in New York State government, such as nursing and accounting.

**The PDC maintains sole discretion for making the final determination on whether a training is eligible for reimbursement. Documentation may be requested from the applicant's supervisor to assist in determining eligibility.**

## 2. Eligible Course Categories

Eligible workshops, seminars, conferences, or **non-credit bearing** courses—taken in person or online—must fit into **one** of the following categories:

- Licensing exam preparatory and refresher courses if the license is required for continued employment with New York State or advancement within the employee's current state profession/career.
- Continuing education courses if they are required for continued licensure, certification, or state employment; or provide professional development within the employee's current state profession or career. Online continuing legal education (CLE) courses are offered at no charge to PEF-represented employees through the Public Service Workshops Program (PSWP). For further details, visit <http://pswp.info/CourseOfferings.cfm>. Under the WSR program, employees also may request reimbursement for individual CLE courses offered by approved providers (e.g. the American Bar Association and Albany Law School). For a list of approved providers, see the dropdown list on the WSR application.
- Non-credit bearing computer application courses (Word, Excel, WordPerfect, and Access) that are provided by educational institutions and businesses certified by manufacturers to engage in providing such training (e.g. CompUSA, IKON, New Horizons).
- Courses on web development, website and database design, and maintenance when job-related or career-related.
- Courses, workshops, or seminars provided by a nationally recognized professional association or their state or local chapter, or recognized by GOER.
- Examinations that lead to college credits through an accredited institution that include: Excelsior College Examinations ([www.excelsior.edu](http://www.excelsior.edu)), Thomas Edison College Exam Program (TECEP, [www.tesc.edu](http://www.tesc.edu)), College-Level Examination Program (CLEP, [www.collegeboard.com/student/testing/clep/about.html](http://www.collegeboard.com/student/testing/clep/about.html)) or DANTES Subject Standardized Tests (DSSTs, [www.getcollegecredit.com](http://www.getcollegecredit.com)).

## 3. Provider Eligibility

Eligible workshops, seminars, conferences, and **non-credit bearing** courses must be provided by an **accredited** institution, school, or organization that meets one of the following criteria:

- chartered, approved, or authorized to confer a degree by the New York State Board of Regents or an equivalent recognized educational accrediting body
- licensed or registered by the New York State Education Department or an equivalent recognized educational accrediting body
- licensed, registered, or approved by a department or agency of the State of New York to provide a specific course of instruction

- a business engaged in the delivery of high technology or computer software and hardware training programs and is certified to deliver these courses by manufacturers, such as Microsoft and Novell
- a nonprofit private or public college or university affiliated consultant group
- a nationally recognized professional association or its state or local chapter
- for those PEF-represented occupations where opportunities for training are limited, consideration will be given to entities that are organized but not affiliated nationally
- approved to award continuing learning credits, such as Professional Development Hours (PDH) and Continuing Education Credits (CEU)

If the provider does not appear in the drop down list on the application form in the Public Service Training Program Online Application (PSTP OA) System, a request may be submitted to add it. See **Adding an Institution** in the Quick Tips document located on the program website.

#### F. Application Time Period and Deadline

WSR covers eligible expenses incurred for the period of April 1, 2014 through March 31, 2015. All applications must be submitted within 60 days after the end date of the course.

#### G. Release time

WSR provides reimbursement for the cost of workshops, seminars, conferences, and **non-credit bearing** courses. It does not entitle an employee **to receive release time**.

#### H. Expenses Covered

Eligible employees will be reimbursed registration (attendance) fees for non-credit bearing professional development courses, workshops, conferences, and seminars, and additional fees for CEUs or CLEs **only**.

#### I. Expenses Not Covered

Expenses not covered by the WSR Program, or any expense that exceeds the maximum reimbursement, are the responsibility of the applicant. Costs or fees **not** covered include, but are not limited to:

- fees that are not part of the registration fee (late, application, membership, maintenance fees)
- study materials (books, CDs, DVDs)
- transportation, travel, and lodging expenses (parking, meals, permits)
- fees or costs associated with auditing a course
- shipping costs
- certificate or license issuance or renewal fees

**WSR will not cover incomplete or failed non-credit courses or events.**

#### J. Minimum and Maximum Reimbursement

The minimum reimbursement for WSR is \$35. Applications for courses or events costing less than \$35 will be denied. An applicant can receive reimbursements of up to \$1,000 per fiscal year.

## K. Credit by Examination Providers

The following programs offer college credit through examinations. Please check the website for the most up-to-date list of exams.

- 1. College Level Examination Program (CLEP) —**  
<http://www.collegeboard.com/student/testing/clep/about.html>  
CLEP examinations cover material taught in courses that are mostly requirements in the first two years of college. The institution usually grants the same amount of credit to students earning satisfactory scores on the CLEP examination as it does for students successfully completing that course. Unless otherwise stated, one examination covers material in a one-semester course.
- 2. DANTES Subject Standardized Tests (DSSTs) — [www.getcollegecredit.com](http://www.getcollegecredit.com)**  
Defense Activity for Nontraditional Education Support (DANTES) provides an extensive series of examinations in college subjects that are comparable to the final or end-of-course examinations in undergraduate courses. DSSTs offer students the opportunity to earn college credit for knowledge gained in the workplace, classroom, or through independent study.
- 3. Thomas Edison College Examination Program (TECEP) — [www.tesc.edu](http://www.tesc.edu)**  
The Thomas Edison College Examination Program (TECEP) offers a wide range of examinations for earning college credit. They are designed to allow students to demonstrate the college-level knowledge they have gained through work, independent reading, or other activities. Originally designed to help enrolled Thomas Edison State College students meet degree requirements, the examinations are now administered nationally and may be used at many other institutions.
- 4. Excelsior College Exams — [www.excelsior.edu](http://www.excelsior.edu)**  
Excelsior College Exams provide flexible opportunities to demonstrate college-level learning in the arts and sciences, business, education, and nursing. They are available nationwide in a computer-delivered format through Sylvan-Prometric.

## L. Alternative Sources of Financial Assistance

If the applicant receives financial assistance from any source, **the source and amount must be reported on the WSR application and on the paid invoice or a separate list.** This amount **must be subtracted from the total.** An employee who fails to report the amount of assistance must repay the overpayment. These participants may be excluded from participating in future programs.

## M. Taxation of Employee Benefits

The employee is responsible for any taxes and other withholdings as defined by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) Code. Taxation of educational benefits is subject to continuous change.

In general, job-related educational benefits are not taxable with the following clarifications and exceptions:

1. Educational benefits that exceed \$5,250 are generally taxable unless they can be excluded as a "working condition fringe benefit."
2. Employees should consult a tax expert with questions regarding taxation of these benefits. GOER cannot provide any tax clarification or advice.

**At the end of each calendar year, the Office of the State Comptroller will withhold estimated taxes from employees whose benefits from this program and any additional educational benefits from their agency exceed \$5,250.** Students are encouraged to seek competent tax advice to determine if the "working condition fringe benefit" is applicable when filing their taxes. This taxation of employer paid educational benefits is subject to continuous change.

## **N. Application and Reimbursement Process**

Applications for the WSR program are submitted online through GOER's PSTP OA System. Complete a separate application for each course or event. All information must be true, accurate, and verifiable by supporting documentation. Failure to complete a course successfully or to comply with the guidelines may result in denial of benefits or a penalty imposed for future benefits. **Employees who do not have access to the Internet can contact GOER at 518-474-6612 for a paper application.**

### **Step 1: Log on to Public Service Training Program Online Application (PSTP OA)**

- Register for a GOER account at [http://www.goer.ny.gov/Training\\_Development/pstp\\_online.cfm](http://www.goer.ny.gov/Training_Development/pstp_online.cfm).
- Once an account has been established, applicants can sign-in whenever they want to access their account.

### **Step 2: Complete an online application**

- **Turn off the pop up blocker to certify the application submission and receive a confirmation number.**
- Applications must be submitted within 60 days after the end date of the course or event.
- Sign on to the PSTP OA System and select the **Applications** tab.
- Click on the **WSR** tab to bring up that specific application.
- Follow the instructions. All required fields must be completed to successfully submit an application. Information circle links are beside each field to clarify what is needed.
- Attach supporting documentation by clicking the **Add Supporting Documentation** link. Select a **Word** or **PDF** version of a scanned or downloaded document. Documentation must include:
  - a. an unaltered invoice, receipt, or itemized summary from the provider, showing the registration (attendance) cost separate from any additional fees;
  - b. list of any financial assistance received toward the cost of the course or event indicating the name of the entity providing the assistance;
  - c. documentation showing the start and end dates of the course or event (month, day, and year); and
  - d. documentation from the provider confirming attendance or successful completion. *WSR will not cover incomplete or failed non-credit courses or events.*
- All supporting documentation must be submitted within 30 days from the submitting the application.
- Applicants having difficulty attaching documentation may mail them via certified U.S. mail within 30 days of submitting their online application to:

NYS Governor's Office of Employee Relations  
PSTP Reimbursement Unit  
2 Empire State Plaza, 7th Floor  
Albany, NY 12223
- Applicants should retain a copy of all documentation for their records.
- Submit the completed application. **A successfully completed application will yield a confirmation number in a pop up box.** That number must accompany all documentation and/or correspondence relating to this application.

**Applications can be submitted but cannot be approved for reimbursement without the supporting documentation.**

### **Step 3: Check application status**

It is important that applicants check their email and the **Notifications & Alerts** area of their PSTP OA System.

- Notification of Receipt — Notification will automatically be sent that the application has been received and is being reviewed.
- Notification of Hold — Applicants will be notified when additional information is needed or when supporting documentation has not been received.
- Notification of Rejected or Denied — Applicants will be notified when their application has been denied and why.
- Notification of Approval — Applicants will be notified that their application is being processed for payment.

Applicants can review the current status of their applications at any time by selecting the **Current Fiscal Year Apps** section of the PSTP OA System.

### **Step 4: Receive Reimbursement**

Once an application has been approved, reimbursement checks will be mailed from the Office of the State Comptroller to the employee's home approximately four to six weeks **after** applicants are notified that their payment is being processed. This check will resemble a paycheck or travel expense check and is **not** automatically deposited.

## **O. Additional Resources**

### **Agency Support**

A limited number of state agencies have set aside funding for their employees' education and training assistance. Some of this funding is from federal sources. Employees should check with their agency/facility training or personnel office regarding the availability of such funds, and restrictions on their use.

### **Support Services for Students with Disabilities**

Many programs offer assistance to students who have physical or learning disabilities. Employees with disabilities who are interested in applying for WSR benefits should call the school as soon as possible so that services can be arranged.

### **Career Mobility in New York State**

The Career Mobility Office (CMO) at the NYS Department of Civil Service can assist state employees in exploring their career options and transfer opportunities. The CMO also offers workshops, such as *Understanding the Merit System*, *Resume Preparation*, and *Interviewing Techniques*. Contact the Career Mobility Office at (800) 553-1322 or (518) 485-6199 for more information.

### **Taxation and Employer Educational Benefits**

Relevant IRS publications on this subject include Notice 97-60, Publication 970, Publication 535, and Publication 508. Call the IRS at (800) 829-1040, consult the IRS home page on the Internet at [www.irs.gov](http://www.irs.gov) or a tax preparer for more information. **The Office of the State Comptroller will withhold estimated taxes at the end of the**

**calendar year.** Students are encouraged to seek competent tax advice when filing their taxes. Taxing employer-paid educational benefits is subject to continuous change.

The Governor’s Office of Employee Relations (GOER) provides equal access to its programs for all persons and is an equal opportunity provider and employer. It is the policy of GOER to maintain an academic and work environment free of discrimination and harassment against any person on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, and where applicable, sex, marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, genetic information, and veteran, marital or family status, political beliefs, or reprisal. Harassment of GOER program participants, trainers, or staff will not be tolerated.

Reasonable accommodations are available in all aspects of state training consistent with the Americans with Disabilities Act to ensure that every individual is able to gain maximum benefit from their training experience. To request a reasonable accommodation, requests should be submitted to an individual’s agency training representative or HR office when signing up for training.