# Workshop and Seminar Reimbursement (WSR) Program

## For PEF-Represented Employees

# Program Guidelines

**For the Period**

**April 1, 2012 through March 31, 2013**

Including the Retroactive period of
January 1, 2012 through March 31, 2012

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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 to 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 of the Agreement also establishes the Professional Development Committee (PDC) consisting of two designees from the Governor's Office of Employee Relations (GOER) and two designees from PEF. The PDC has adopted these WSR Guidelines and monitors the administration of this program.

## C. Workshop & Seminar Reimbursement (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, 2012 through March 31, 2013.**
- Maximum reimbursement is $1,000 per fiscal year, which runs from April 1st through the following March 31st.
- Reimbursement requires successful completion of non-credit course, workshop, or event. WSR will not cover incomplete or failed courses or events.
- All applications for courses or events that ended before September 10, 2012 must be submitted by November 15, 2012.
- All applications for courses or events that end on or after September 10, 2012 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 WSR Guidelines.

## D. Workshop & Seminar Reimbursement (WSR) Retroactive Period

- The WSR retroactive period covers qualifying WSR courses or events that occurred between January 1, 2012 and March 31, 2012.
- The maximum reimbursement is $1,000 for fiscal year 2011-2012.
- Any reimbursements already received for expenses incurred during the period April 1, 2011 through December 31, 2011 will count against the $1,000 maximum reimbursement for fiscal year 2011-2012.
- Applications should be entered online.
- Applications for qualifying WSR courses or events taken during this period **must be submitted by November 15, 2012.**

## E. Employee Eligibility

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

**Current PEF-Represented Employees**

At both the start date and completion date 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% or more), and
- have completed the 13 bi-weekly pay period qualifying period to earn and use annual leave (vacation).

**Laid Off Employees**

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

- has been laid off; **and**
- 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

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

**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 reason for the leave, as well as the start and end dates. It must also show the employee's bargaining unit, agency code, and appointment date (date of initial appointment to state service). The documentation must be signed by a personnel officer and sent as an attachment with the other supporting documentation required by the program. Eligibility will be based on your 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 and use 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. The documentation must be signed by a personnel officer and sent as an attachment with the other supporting documentation required by the program.

## F. Qualifying Course/Event

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

1. 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 is one that directly relates to the employee's current profession or job assignments, duties, and responsibilities.

A ***career-related*** workshop, seminar, conference or non-credit course is one that 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, such as nursing and accounting.

The PDC maintains sole discretion to make final determinations.

2. Eligible workshops, seminars, conferences or ***non-credit-bearing*** courses 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 continued State employment, or provide professional development within the employee's current State profession/career
   - CPA review courses and BOCES courses, when a letter is attached to the application from the employee's supervisor stating the reasons why the course is directly job-related
   - Non-credit-bearing computer application courses (e.g., Word, Excel, WordPerfect, 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 design, database design, and maintenance
   - 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), Thomas Edison College Exam Program (TECEP - www.tesc.edu), College-Level Examination Program (CLEP - www.collegeboard.com/student/testing/clep/about.html), or DANTES Subject Standardized Tests (DSSTs - www.getcollegecredit.com)

3. 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 specific course of instruction
   - A business engaged in the delivery of high technology or computer software and hardware training programs, which is certified to deliver these courses by manufacturers such as Microsoft, Novell, etc.
   - 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 organizations that are organized but not affiliated nationally.

   If your provider does not appear, you may request the institution be added. See "Adding an Institution" on the resources tab of your dashboard.

4. Eligible workshops, seminars, conferences and ***non-credit-bearing*** courses as identified above, completed through **distance learning**, (e.g., correspondence courses, online learning, video tapes, audio tapes, or DVDs), whether or not they provide certificates or continuing education units, are eligible for reimbursement for the cost of the course if:

   - The participant's course work is monitored and/or evaluated by the accredited institution
   - The participant is required to take examinations, tests, or submit assignments related to the subject matter of the course.

   Normally, the costs of study materials (i.e., books, CDs, DVDs) and supplies are not expenses covered by WSR. However, for distance learning courses where the course is presented through one of these media, the cost of study materials required (not optional) is normally covered by WSR.

   **Courses that are exclusively self-study are not eligible for reimbursement. This includes any course where there is no contact with the accredited provider (i.e., interaction with an instructor or completion of graded examinations) after initial enrollment/registration.**

**G. Application Deadline**

All applications for courses or events that ended before September 10, 2012 must be submitted by November 15, 2012. All applications that end on or after September 10, 2012 must be submitted within 60 days after the end date of the course.

**H. Release time**

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

**I. 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 CEU's or CLE's **only**.

**J. Maximum Reimbursement and Time Period**

WSR covers eligible expenses incurred from January 1, 2012 through March 31, 2013. An applicant can receive reimbursements of up to $1,000 per fiscal year (April 1st through March 31st) during this period. For fiscal year 2011-2012, any reimbursements already received for expenses incurred during the period April 1, 2011 through December 31, 2011 will count against this cap. The minimum reimbursement for WSR is $35. Applications for courses or events costing less than $35 will not be accepted. Employees working less than half-time will be reimbursed at a rate of 50 percent.

**K. Credit by Examination Providers**

The following programs offer college credit through examinations. Please check the website for each of these four programs 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 most students take as requirements in the first two years of college. A college usually grants the same amount of credit to students earning satisfactory scores on the CLEP examination as it grants to students successfully completing that course. Unless stated otherwise, one examination is intended to cover material in a one-semester course.

2. **DANTES Subject Standardized Tests (DSSTs*)* –** 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 or classroom, or through independent study.

3. **Thomas Edison College Examination Program (TECEP)** - www.tesc.edu
   The Thomas Edison College Examination Program (TECEP) offers a wide range of examinations for earning college credit. The examinations 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
   Excelsior College Exams provide flexible opportunities to demonstrate college-level learning in the arts and sciences, business, education, and nursing. The tests are available in a computer-delivered format through Sylvan-Prometric nationwide.

## L. Expenses Not Covered

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

1. Lab fees
2. Academic and application fees
3. Certification or Licensure renewal fees (see Certification and Licensure Exam Fee Reimbursement Program)
4. Study materials (e.g., books, CDs, DVDs, etc.) and supplies where there is no contact with the accredited provider (i.e., interaction with an instructor or completion of graded examinations) after initial enrollment/registration and payment.
5. Late registration or penalty fees
6. Student service fees (e.g., activity, athletic, drop/add)
7. Health Service fees
8. Transportation, parking, or vehicle registration fees
9. Travel, lodging, or meal expenses
10. Optional fees
11. Membership fees
12. Any fees or costs associated with auditing a course
13. Any additional fees charged for attending a non-credit-bearing course that are not part of the cost of the course (i.e. lab fees, student fees, etc. noted above)
14. Fees for maintenance of matriculation

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

## M. Alternative Sources of Education and Training Assistance

If the applicant receives 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 any reimbursement overpayment received and may be excluded from future program participation.

## N. 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. No tax withholding is required on educational assistance benefits provided to state employees for undergraduate or graduate level courses, up to a $5,250 limit during the calendar year; and
2. Educational benefits that exceed $5,250 are generally taxable, unless they can be excluded as a "working condition fringe benefit."
3. Employees should consult a tax expert with questions regarding taxation of these benefits. GOER cannot provide any tax clarification or advice.

**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.** 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.

## O. Application Process

Applications for the WSR program are now submitted online directly through GOER's PSTP Online Application (PSTP OA) System. This system results in faster application processing. Complete a separate application for each course or event. Applications with course or event dates that differ from the date shown on the documentation will not be accepted. **For employees who do not have access to the Internet, 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.** Once an account has been established, sign-in each time you wish to access your account.

**Step 2: Complete an online application**

- Sign on to your dashboard 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 have been provided if assistance is needed when completing individual fields of the application. Applications must be submitted within 60 days after the end date of the course or event.
- Attach supporting documentation to your application. The documentation can be attached by clicking the 'Add Supporting Documentation' link and selecting a Word or PDF version of a scanned or downloaded document. The documentation must include all of the following:

a. An unaltered invoice, receipt, or online itemized account summary from the provider or school, showing the registration (attendance) cost of the event, (separate from any additional fees), for a non-credit bearing course and the alternative sources of funding.
b. List of any alternative sources of funding not shown on the invoice that has been or will be received.
c. Documentation showing the start date and end date of the event or course (month, day and year).
d. Documentation from the event or school showing you attended (certificate of completion), or successfully passed a ***non-credit-bearing*** course. *WSR will not cover incomplete or failed non-credit courses or events.*
e. If your course was self study, please provide proof of interaction with an instructor, or proof of completion of a graded examination.

All supporting documentation must be submitted within 30 days from the submission of your application.

- If you are unable to attach your documentation to your online application, you may send the documentation separately via certified U.S. mail within 30 days from submission of your application to:

  NYS Governor's Office of Employee Relations
  PSTP Reimbursement Unit
  2 Empire State Plaza, 7th Floor
  Albany, NY 12223

  Please be sure to retain a copy of all documentation for your records.
- Submit the completed application. A successfully completed application will yield a confirmation number in a pop up box. The confirmation 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 you check your email and the 'Notifications & Alerts' area of your Online Application (OA) dashboard.

- Notification of Receipt – Notification will automatically be sent to the applicant that their application has been received and is being reviewed.
- Notification of Hold – Applicants will receive notification when additional information is needed, when supporting documentation has not been received.
- Notification of Rejected or Denied – Applicants will receive notification when an application has been denied and the reason.
- Notification of Approval – Applicants will receive notification that the application is being processed for payment.

Applicants can review current status of their applications at any time on their dashboard. Details regarding each status can be found on the resources tab on your Online Application (OA) dashboard.

**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 receive

notification that payment is being processed. This check will look very similar to a paycheck or travel expense check and is **not** automatically deposited.

## P. 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*. For information, contact the Career Mobility Office at (800) 553-1322 or (518) 485-6199.

**Taxation and Employer Educational Benefits**

Relevant IRS publications on this subject include Notice 97-60, Publication 970, Publication 535, and Publication 508. For further information, call the IRS at (800) 829-1040, or consult the IRS home page on the Internet at www.irs.gov, or a tax preparer. **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. The taxation of employer-paid educational benefits is subject to continuous change.

*The Governor's Office of Employee Relations (GOER) and the State of New York provide equal access to its programs for all persons and is an equal opportunity employer. It is our policy 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, sex, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation, genetic characteristics or information, political beliefs, status as a victim of domestic violence, and veteran, marital or family status or any other discrimination prohibited by law. Harassment of any individual will not be tolerated.*

*Reasonable accommodations are available, upon request, in all aspects of state training, consistent with the Americans with Disabilities Act and the New York State Human Rights Law, to ensure that every individual is able to gain maximum benefit from the training experience.*