

5-Step Employer Tuition Reimbursement Guide

How to Take Advantage of Your Company's Tuition Assistance Program to Pay for Graduate School

Step 1: Perform Initial Research

Many companies offer tuition reimbursement or have a tuition assistance program. Does your company have such a policy? Review your company handbook or email your HR representative to find out. If your company has an existing policy, make sure you understand the details such as:

- **How much will they cover?** Most companies offer a certain dollar amount of tuition reimbursement per calendar year, while some may pay for a percentage or the entirety of a program.
- **How is payment handled?** Some policies may require you to pay for tuition with the understanding that the company will reimburse you directly if you achieve an acceptable GPA, while other policies may call for the company to pay the college or university directly.
- **What program/courses can I take?** While most policies require your education to directly relate to your current or future work at the company, some may allow you to pursue an area of study of your choosing.

If your company does not have an existing tuition assistance or reimbursement policy, you can still pursue a discussion with HR or your manager to determine if tuition reimbursement is possible.

Tax-Free Assistance

If your employer participates in a qualifying educational assistance program, you can exclude up to \$5,250 of your employer-provided tuition assistance benefits annually. These benefits can cover tuition, fees, books, supplies and equipment for either undergraduate- or graduate-level courses.¹

Step 2: Gain Intel From Your Coworkers

Talking to a coworker who has received tuition reimbursement is an incredibly useful way to gain insight about your company's policy. Ask around with your coworkers to see if they personally received tuition reimbursement or if they know anyone who has taken advantage of the company policy.

Reaching out to knowledgeable colleagues can help you:

- Better understand how to speak with your manager or HR about receiving tuition assistance
- Avoid any surprises or complications regarding your company's policy
- Learn how others balanced work and graduate school
- Build workplace connections you may not have discovered otherwise

1. Retrieved on September 4, 2019, from [irs.gov/newsroom/tax-benefits-for-education-information-center](https://www.irs.gov/newsroom/tax-benefits-for-education-information-center)

Step 3: Develop a Proposal That Underscores the Bottom Line

Now that you've performed exhaustive research and leveraged your workplace network, it's time to start developing your talking points.

Your proposal should answer the following questions:

- Which program(s) are you considering and at which school(s)?
- How much will the program cost?
- How long will your education take to complete?
- Will you be able to continue working full time in your position?
- What courses, in particular, relate to your current or future position?
- How will the knowledge you gain improve your performance at work?

In addition to covering the basics (program type, length, cost), you must prove that you are worth the company's investment. Above all else, you must be able to articulate the return on investment for the company.

Facts to Help You Make Your Case

Over a three-year period, Cigna's Educational Reimbursement Program (ERP) produced an **ROI of 129 percent** as a result of avoided talent management costs.²

When compared to non-ERP participants, ERP employees were:

- 7.5 percent more likely to receive a transfer, resulting in lower costs to fill positions
- 8 percent more likely to stay with the company

Step 4: Present With Confidence

You're thoroughly prepared, and the time has come to present to your boss. Ask yourself why the boss should want to invest in your education and provide details to support your case.

Tips for Acing Your Face-to-Face Meeting

- **Be specific.** You know what you want and you did the research, so back up your request with conviction and hard facts.
- **Anticipate tough questions.** Hope for the best, but be prepared to answer any curveballs your manager might throw your way.
- **Be firm in your request, but open to discussion.** Clearly state your intentions, but enter the conversation with an open mind and be ready to compromise if that's an option.

Most importantly, go into the meeting knowing that you are worth your company's investment!

Step 5: Prepare for Next Steps

While you wait to hear if your request for tuition reimbursement has been approved, you can speak with an Admissions Advisor and [begin your application](#).

If everything goes according to plan and your boss approves your request for tuition reimbursement, congratulations! If your manager cannot honor your request, thank them for their time and politely ask them to follow-up if their stance changes in the future.

No matter the outcome, feel free to [reach out to our admissions team](#) at California State University, Chico with any questions you may have.

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