



**Governor's Office of
Employee Relations**



**Workshop and Seminar
Reimbursement (WSR) and
Nurses' Enhanced
Workshop and Seminar
Reimbursement (NEWSR) Programs
for
PEF-Represented Employees**

**Program Guidelines
for
January 1, 2019 through December 31, 2019**

**Workshop and Seminar Reimbursement and
Nurses' Enhanced Workshop and Seminar Reimbursement Programs**

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WORKSHOP AND SEMINAR REIMBURSEMENT PROGRAM

A. Program Description

The Workshop and Seminar Reimbursement (WSR) Program reimburses eligible Public Employees Federation (PEF)-represented employees for attendance at professional development courses, workshops, conferences, seminars, symposiums, and educational events given by approved providers and that do not result in college credit. WSR enables employees to improve job-related skills in their profession and gain the knowledge and skills necessary for promotional opportunities and career mobility within New York State service.

B. Funding and Oversight

Funding for WSR is provided through Article 15 of the 2016-2019 Agreement between the State of New York and 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. Program Highlights

- Provides reimbursement to current PEF-represented employees for qualifying conferences, workshops, seminars, and non-college credit bearing courses by accredited providers and that begin on or after January 1, 2019 through December 31, 2019.
- Maximum reimbursement is \$1,600 for the period January 1, 2019 through December 31, 2019.
- The WSR Program will not cover incomplete or failed non-credit courses or events.
- All applications and supporting documentation for reimbursement must be submitted within 90 days after the end date of the course. The postmark or email date will be used to determine the timeliness of the application.
- WSR can only be used for professional development courses, workshops, conferences, seminars, symposiums, and educational events given by accredited providers and that do not result in college credit as detailed in the guidelines.
- **All reimbursements issued during the calendar year are reported to the Office of the State Comptroller (OSC) during the month of October. Once these reimbursements are reported, no further payments will be issued until after January 1 of the following calendar year.**
- **OSC will withhold estimates taxes at the end of each calendar year from employees whose benefits (reimbursements) from this program and any additional educational benefits (reimbursements) from their agency exceed \$5,250. This may result in substantial withholding from paychecks at the end of the year and applicants should plan accordingly.**

D. Employee Eligibility

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

1. Current PEF-Represented Employees

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

- Actively employed in a PEF-represented position
- 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)

2. 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
- Is on the appropriate Civil Service or Roswell Park Preferred List

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

3. Less than Half-Time Employees

A New York State or Roswell Park Cancer Institute employee, represented by PEF, who works less than 50 percent, shall receive 50 percent of the benefit with proper documentation. Eligibility will be based on work status on the start date of the course or event.

E. Course Eligibility

WSR is available for professional development courses, workshops, conferences, seminars, symposiums, and educational events that do not result in college credit (not including any additional fees) at approved institutions, schools, or organizations. Fees associated with obtaining Continuing Education Units (CEUs, CLEs, etc.) associated with the event are also covered.

1. Job-Related or Career-Related

The content of professional development courses, workshops, conferences, seminars, symposiums, and educational events given by approved providers and that do not result in college credit (hereafter called “educational events”) must be job-related or career-related.

- *Job-related* educational events must directly relate to the employee's current profession or job assignments, duties, and responsibilities.
- *Career-related* educational events must provide the employee with the knowledge, skills, or abilities to increase opportunity for advancement or career mobility 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.

Questions frequently arise regarding the eligibility of educational events leading to certificates in fields such as real estate, accounting, personal tax preparation, and self-help. In keeping with the requirement that the course or certificate be job- or career-related, courses or certificates in these areas will not be eligible for reimbursement unless the applicant can demonstrate that the subject matter is directly relevant to his or her job or career in New York State government.

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

2. *Eligible Course Categories*

The content of eligible educational events must relate to the employee's current job or career path for which there currently exists a need in New York State government. Eligible educational events taken in person or online must also 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, provided the content is also related to the employee's job or career path
- 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 path
- Computer application courses (Word, Excel, WordPerfect, and Access) that do not result in college credit and are provided by educational institutions and businesses certified by corporations 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
- Educational events provided by a nationally recognized professional association or their state or local chapter, or recognized by GOER

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 www.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).

3. *Provider Eligibility*

Eligible educational events must be provided by an approved 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)
- Other providers may be approved at the sole discretion of the PDC

F. Application Time Period and Deadline

WSR covers eligible expenses incurred for educational events that begin during the period of January 1, 2019 through December 31, 2019. All applications must be submitted within 90 days after the end date of the course. The postmark or email date will be used to determine the timeliness of the application.

G. Release time

WSR does not entitle an employee to receive release time.

H. Expenses Covered

Eligible employees will be reimbursed only for registration (attendance) fees for eligible educational events. Continuing Education Units (CEUs, CLEs, PDHs, etc.) associated with the event are also covered.

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

J. Maximum Reimbursement

An applicant can receive reimbursements of up to \$1,600 per program year.

K. Alternative Sources of Financial Assistance

The WSR Program Reimbursement will be secondary to any other assistance received. If the applicant receives financial assistance from any source, such as the agency or a professional organization, the source and amount must be reported on the WSR application and on the paid invoice. This amount must be subtracted from the total reimbursement amount requested. An employee who fails to report the amount of assistance must repay the overpayment. These participants may be excluded from participating in future programs.

L. Taxation of Employee Benefits (Reimbursements)

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

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

1. Educational benefits (reimbursements) 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 (reimbursements). GOER cannot provide any tax clarification or advice.

All reimbursements issued during the calendar year are reported to the Office of the State Comptroller (OSC) during the month of October. The tax reports are based on the reimbursement check date. Once these reimbursements are reported, no further payments will be issued until after January 1 of the following calendar year.

At the end of each calendar year, OSC will withhold estimated taxes from employees whose benefits (reimbursements) from this program and any additional educational benefits (reimbursements) from their agency exceed \$5,250. This may result in substantial withholding from paychecks at the end of the year and applicants should plan accordingly. 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 (reimbursements) is subject to continuous change.

M. Application and Reimbursement Process

For complete guidelines and printable application forms, go to <https://www.goer.ny.gov/public-employees-federation-afl-cio-pef> or contact GOER at (518) 474-6612.

Step 1: Complete the Application Form

- Applications can only be submitted once the course has been successfully completed. Applications submitted prior to the end date of the course will not be accepted.
- Read the application and guidelines carefully and provide all the information required.
- All applications must be submitted within 90 days after the end date of the course. Failure to submit your application within the 90-day period may result in a denial. The postmark or email date will be used to determine the timeliness of the application.
- Complete a separate WSR application for each educational event that does not result in college credit.

Step 2: Attach the Required Documentation

All supporting documentation must have the applicant's name printed on it by the issuing entity. Documentation must be in PDF format. All other formats (JPGs or other photo formats, Word Documents, links to documentation or websites, etc.) will not be accepted. Applicants should retain a copy of all documentation for their records.

Each of the following documents is required. They must be converted to a PDF and attached to the completed, signed, and dated reimbursement application:

- Unaltered invoice, receipt, or itemized summary from the provider showing the registration (attendance) cost separate from any additional fees
- Proof of payment such as a bank statement, credit card statement, or cancelled check
- Documentation showing any financial assistance that has been received or will be received toward the cost of the course or event indicating the name of the entity providing the assistance
- Documentation showing the start and end dates of the event (month, day, and year)
Documentation from the provider confirming attendance or successful completion

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

Applicants should retain a copy of all documentation for their records. If all required documentation is not received within 90 days after the end date of the course, your reimbursement request will be denied.

Please note: If you are unable to obtain the required documentation within the 90-day period, you must submit your application form and contact the PSTP Reimbursement Unit prior to the deadline.

Step 3: Submit the Application

Submit signed, dated application and supporting documentation in one of the following ways:

- *Email:* Email the application and supporting documentation by application deadline to psttraining@goer.ny.gov. All emailed documentation must be in PDF format. All other formats (JPGs or other photo formats, Word Documents, links to documentation or websites, etc.) will not be accepted.
- *U.S. Mail:* Mail application and supporting documentation, postmarked by application deadline, to:

NYS Governor's Office of Employee Relations
PSTP Reimbursement Unit, 7th Floor
2 Empire State Plaza
Albany, NY 12223-1250

Step 4: Application Status

The following notifications will be sent via email. Accordingly, please be sure applications include a valid email address.

- *Notification of Receipt:* Notification will be sent within 10 business days that the application has been received and is being reviewed.
- *Notification of Hold:* Applicants will be notified when additional information is needed or supporting documentation has not been received. Failure to provide the required documentation may result in denial of a reimbursement request.
- *Notification of Denial:* Applicants will be notified when their application has been denied and why. If the request is denied for reasons such as ineligible or incomplete application, the applicant may resubmit the claim for reimbursement with additional documentation, as long as the applicant is still within 90 days after the completion date of the requested course. Applicants will have 30 days from the date of the denial to appeal the decision for any other reason(s). The denial appeal may contain additional supporting documentation and a letter from the supervisor.
- *Notification of Approval:* Applicants will be notified when the application has been approved for payment.

Step 5: 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. This check will resemble a paycheck or travel expense check, tear away three sides in order to open the check. This is a live check and is not automatically deposited. Please allow up to four weeks for check processing and delivery.

Please make sure the address on the application is current.

N. 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 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*.

Nurses' Enhanced Workshop and Seminar Reimbursement Program

A. Program Description

The Nurses' Enhanced Workshop and Seminar Reimbursement (NEWSR) Program for January 1, 2019 through December 31, 2019 supplements the regular WSR program available to all PS&T Unit employees (see WSR section of these guidelines for details). For eligible PEF-represented nurses, this enhanced program provides an additional \$1,600 reimbursement for qualifying costs for educational events that do not award college credit.

B. Eligibility

To be eligible for the Nurses' Enhanced WSR, the following requirements must be met:

1. *Applicant Eligibility:* The employee must be a PEF-represented nurse currently working in a nursing position and meet all eligibility criteria of the regular WSR Program.
2. *Qualifying Events:* To qualify for reimbursement, the educational event must meet all eligibility criteria of the regular WSR Program and enhance the performance of current job responsibilities or further the applicant's nursing career with the State of New York.

This benefit is not for PEF-represented nurses who want to change their career (for example, a nurse who wants to become an attorney).

It is the policy of the State of New York to provide for and promote equal opportunity in employment and equal access to all programs and services without discrimination on the basis of age, race, color, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, creed, military status, disability, marital status, domestic violence victim status, predisposing genetic characteristics, arrest record, previous conviction record, and any other status or condition protected by law.