

Policy and Procedure 8-5

Human Resources – Professional Development, Education and Training (DHRM Policies 5.05 – 5.10)

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References:	DHRM Policy Number: 4.15 - Educational Leave DHRM Policy Number: 5.05 - Employee Training and Development DHRM Employee Handbook The Employee Recognition Program Handbook
Forms:	8.19 Training Request/Nomination 8.50 Educational Tuition Assistance/Educational Paid Leave Request

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PURPOSE

To provide guidance for employees about the appropriate Department of Human Resource Management (DHRM) policies in regards to the topics covered. DHRM policies are applicable to all executive agency staff. This policy and procedure provides VDOF-specific application of the DHRM policies. To establish a policy and procedures to fully utilize VDOF workforce in achieving strategic and operational outcomes while managing human resources effectively. Professional development and continuous learning are necessary to maintain a quality workforce, continued readiness and ability to contribute effectively to the mission and goals of the agency.

POLICY

All VDOF employees are responsible for following DHRM policies and further VDOF policy and procedure specified below. VDOF provides assistance and supports employees to increase their effectiveness as well as to encourage employees to obtain knowledge, skills and abilities, which may improve their performance or opportunities for career advancement within VDOF.

DEFINITIONS

“**Agency**” and “**VDOF**” means the Virginia Department of Forestry.

“**Agency staff**” means all Virginia Department of Forestry classified, restricted, part-time and wage personnel, consultants, contract personnel and other non-employees, such as volunteers or interns.

“**Commonwealth**” means the Commonwealth of Virginia.

“**DHRM**” means Department of Human Resource Management.

“**EPL**” means Educational Paid Leave

“**ETAP**” means Educational Tuition Assistance Program

“**Individual Development Plan (IDP)**” means an organized outline of the activities and programs that would help the employee further his/her declared career goals.

“**PELE**” means planned emersion learning experiences.

“**Release time**” means time away from work.

“**VCU**” means Virginia Commonwealth University.

“**VNRLI**” means the Virginia Natural Resources Leadership Institute.

“**Workforce Development**” means a process that provides a systematic assessment of agency talent needs and actions necessary to address needs via many aspects including soft skills; technical skills and certifications; access to information, and mentoring by considering the agency’s business goals that includes analysis of demographic information; trends and emerging issues, staffing and knowledge gaps.

“**Workplace**” means any state-owned or leased property including, but not limited to, buildings and other structures, parking lots, open spaces or any site regardless of ownership where agency staff performs official duties.

“**Written Notice**” means a written warning, in accordance with [DHRM Policy 1.60 - Standards of Conduct Policy](#). This action is employed when counseling has failed to correct misconduct or performance problems, or when an employee commits a more serious offense, management should address the matter by issuing a Written Notice. A Written Notice may be accompanied by additional actions including suspension; a demotion or transfer with reduced responsibilities with a disciplinary salary action; a transfer to an equivalent position in a different work area; or termination, as described in Sub-Sections a, b, and c. Management should issue Written Notices as soon as reasonably possible after becoming aware of misconduct or unacceptable performance. (Refer to Section E. “Due Process” for procedural guidance.)

PROCEDURES

Employee Training and Development

VDOF will follow [DHRM Policy 5.05 – Employee Training and Development](#) to provide employee training in support of the Commonwealth's goals. Training shall be available without regard to race, sex, color, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, veteran status, political affiliation, genetics or disability according to the Governor's Executive Order on Equal Opportunity and state and federal laws. Policy amended January 13, 2018 per Executive Order Number 1 (2018) Equal Opportunity.

Responsibilities

Employee Responsibilities

VDOF will provide professional development resources to help employees, based on funding availability, to improve in their current position or to help them gain the skills needed to advance. Employees are ultimately responsible for directing their own learning and career development. Employees seeking changes or advancement in their careers should work with their manager to develop an individual development plan (IDP). Once developed, the IDP should align with the employee's EWP. An employee with an approved IDP receives higher priority for training fund allocations.

The employee shall:

- ◆ Obtain supervisor approval prior to registering and obligating agency funds for professional development.
- ◆ Submit requests to the Human Resources Office a minimum of 30 days prior to the development opportunity.
 - Complete Form 8.19 Training Request/Nomination and submit to the Human Resources Office.
- ◆ Obtain supervisor approval prior to making an adjusted work schedule or scheduling leave.
- ◆ Obtain appropriate approvals for travel.
- ◆ Assume full responsibility for registration and arrangements related to travel.
- ◆ Successfully complete the learning event.
- ◆ Complete and submit a travel expense reimbursement (DOA Form Travel Expense Reimbursement Voucher and Distribution Continuation Sheet) within the required timeframe, if appropriate. *{See Policy and Procedure 3-2 - Travel Regulations and Guidance}*
- ◆ Share feedback of their learning experience with supervisor and Human Resources Office.

Supervisor Responsibilities

Supervisors have many roles to play but facilitating his or her employees' development is one of the most critical. It starts with orienting the new employee on the first day and ends when the employee moves on. Development is an important component of an employee's professional development.

Supervisors shall:

- ◆ Provide advice and transfer information that helps shape employee behaviors and attitudes.
- ◆ Build a culture of learning. Encourage and support employees to participate in development activities and to apply and share new knowledge and skills on the job.
- ◆ Share and encourage the sharing of knowledge among coworkers.
- ◆ Encourage employees to seek out learning opportunities.
- ◆ Help each employee's development by identifying career goals, developing an IDP and supporting the employee's efforts in completing the plan.
- ◆ Remove obstacles that impede employee development by providing flexible work hours or release time for employees to attend development opportunities.

- ◆ Act as a coach, mentor and facilitator versus “boss” or “judge”.
- ◆ Assess his or her employee’s knowledge, skills and abilities and assist them in finding opportunities for growth.

Human Resources Office Responsibilities

The Human Resources Office is responsible for facilitating workplace learning and development. One of its critical roles is to provide learning opportunities enabling employees at all levels to develop competencies needed for success. The Human Resources Office provides learning opportunities helping employees prepare for future workplace challenges and career advancement opportunities.

The Human Resources Office shall:

- ◆ Assess learning needs.
- ◆ Design and/or deliver development programs tailored to employee/agency needs.
- ◆ Identify and coordinate internal/external development resources as needed.
- ◆ Develop and maintain partnerships with outside development resources.
- ◆ Consult with managers on employee development issues and assist in finding appropriate resources.
- ◆ Consult with and assist managers with organizational development.
- ◆ Develop and administer a workforce development budget.
- ◆ Monitor and manage workforce development expenditures.
- ◆ Maintain centralized records of workforce development through the State’s Learning Management System.

Finance Office Responsibilities

The Finance Office shall:

- ◆ Monitor employee tenure agreements.
- ◆ Partner with the Human Resources Office in the budget development process.

Professional Development

VDOF supports all types of professional development venues that directly support the business needs of the agency to include but not limited to;

In-Service Training Events

In-Service training events typically include a wide variety of cost-effective learning opportunities, such as courses, workshops, seminars, webinars, etc., provided in the workplace, on-line or off-site as workforce development programs. Many provide continuing education credits by a certifying organization (i.e., Society of American Foresters).

Professional Conferences

Conferences typically provide an important opportunity for employees to learn current information and future trends pertinent to their profession; they also aid in establishing important networks with other professionals in their line of work. VDOF may pay an employee’s expenses for attending a conference as a training expense when:

- ◆ The purpose is primarily educational and the employee can show that they will derive developmental benefits.
- ◆ The content is relevant to improving the employee’s performance.
- ◆ The conference consists of planned educational sessions by presenters.

Development Tracks

The VDOF development program will focus on supporting employee development within the context of two broad career tracks, career competency and organizational development. The latter will consist of management and special interest development.

Career Competency Track

The career competency track will provide continuing education opportunities. These will consist of learning events (courses, seminars, workshops, conferences, etc.), developed or secured, that focus on the development of knowledge and skills needed in an employee's current line of work as well as new advancements and future challenges in the field.

Organizational Development Tracks

Management Development

Management Development will consist of educational opportunities (i.e., courses, seminars, workshops, etc.), developed or secured, that are designed to cultivate recognized leadership competencies for people who are in, or who aspire to, management/administrative positions.

Employees seeking future management roles within the agency can better position themselves by participating in management development programs as well as demonstrating their leadership capabilities through involvement in real-time experiences (i.e., special projects at work, committee assignments, community projects, etc.).

The agency utilizes management development courses offered through VCU's Performance Management, VNRLI and other sources to provide formal development.

Special Interest Development

Special Interest Development will consist of planned emersion learning experiences (PELE) designed to develop an employee's expertise in an area where VDOF has defined business programs and needs (current and/or future). The intent is to facilitate the development of employees who find themselves interested in directing their career toward a focused field-of-study in which VDOF has career niches and/or career ladders (i.e., urban and community forestry, land conservation, water quality, forest health, forest management, finance, etc.)

The goal is to provide opportunities for employees to develop specialized skills, knowledge and networking in their area of interest; hence, improving their opportunity for advancement into a program area of interest (e.g., forest technician into water quality engineer, area forester to land conservation specialist, program support technician to fiscal technician). PELE will vary depending on the focus area and level of the position pursued but can include courses, conferences, workshops, special assignments, shadowing, etc.

Allocation and Prioritization of Funding for Workplace Learning and Development

VDOF recognizes and funds professional development of its full-time salaried employees by paying registration and travel costs for approved learning events during the workday for attendance. In addition, part-time salaried and hourly (wage) employees may be provided development opportunities, as determined appropriate by their manager and approved by the Human Resources Office, based on their job responsibilities, business needs of the agency and available funds.

An annual workforce development budget is submitted for consideration to the agency's budget development team each May. This workforce development budget is, in part, derived from employee requests for development. These requests should be submitted to the Human Resources Office in March and April using Form 8.19 Training Request/Nomination.

A final allocation of funds to the workforce development budget usually does not support all requests. The state forester and director of human resources will make a final determination of what development events will be funded.

Funding will only be used to support development activities that address business needs of the agency. The following criteria are taken into consideration when making decisions about development allocations:

- ◆ Priority 1: Development that addresses knowledge or skills and prevents employees from performing their jobs satisfactorily.
- ◆ Priority 2: Development that maintains or enhances needed job knowledge/skills/professional networks.
- ◆ Priority 3: Development that addresses future needs of the agency.

Other criteria used to determine how to allocate workforce development funds include:

- ◆ Is the funding request for professional development versus a meeting?
- ◆ Amount of funds available in relation to the cost of the requested learning events.
- ◆ Quality of the learning experience requested.
- ◆ Funds already allocated for the employee requesting funding.
- ◆ Is the professional development event tied to an Individual Development Plan?
- ◆ Does the individual requesting the workforce development funds have access to other funding sources?
- ◆ Are there equally effective alternative development methods at a lower cost?

Other programs of study not covered in this policy will be considered provided they meet the purpose of the policy and guidelines.

Request Procedures

In order to receive priority in funding, requests for participation in development opportunities should be submitted to the Human Resources Office **by April 30th** for the following fiscal year. The Form 8.19 Training Request/Nomination must be submitted for these requests and shall include a short explanation of how the development opportunity supports the agencies mission, vision and strategic objectives; date(s) of the event; location; names of the employees planning to attend, and total cost. Employees may also request funding for ad-hoc development opportunities throughout the fiscal year.

- ◆ When requesting funds for a training event through the workforce development budget:
 - The employee will submit Form 8.19 Training Request/Nomination to their supervisor for consideration. It must provide a total estimated cost including registration, lodging, per diem, transportation, etc.
 - If approved for consideration by the supervisor, the request form shall be forwarded to the Human Resources Office **no less than 30 calendar days prior to the event.**
 - Requests will be reviewed and decisions to pay made on a case-by-case basis by the Human Resources Office. Every effort will be made to accommodate reasonable requests. However, approval is based on budget allocations and the demand for workforce development dollars.

Only pre-approved professional development events will be paid by the workforce development budget. Any employee registering and/or attending a professional development event without prior approval from the Human Resources Office is personally responsible for the associated costs.

Educational Assistance

VDOF will follow [DHRM Policy 5.10 – Educational Assistance](#), which supports employee pursuit of educational opportunities that will benefit the agency, enhances employee’s current job performance and improves their opportunity for advancement.

Accredited Higher-Education Courses

VDOF may provide tuition reimbursement to full-time, salaried employees for accredited undergraduate or graduate level courses. These courses shall be deemed important or necessary to support the business needs of the agency and its delivery is only available through an academic institution. Refer to Tenure Agreements and Educational Paid Leave below for VDOF’s programs.

The following general guidelines apply to tuition reimbursement:

- ◆ The program is limited by funding availability.
- ◆ The employee must have completed their probationary period and be rated as a Contributor or higher in their most recent evaluation.
- ◆ The employee must not have an issued or active Written Notice within the 12 months prior to the request.

- ◆ Tuition reimbursement cannot be used to pay for late registration fees, add/drop fees, placement fees and college entrance examinations.

Educational Tuition Assistance Program (ETAP)

The Virginia Department of Forestry Educational Tuition Assistance Program (ETAP) aims to provide financial assistance for voluntary off-duty education programs in support of a VDOF employee's professional and personal self-development goals.

- ◆ Only available to full-time classified employees for courses offered via face-to-face, hybrid or online formats from a higher learning institution certified to operate under State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV), regionally accredited and with an approved degree completion plan leading to an Associate's, Bachelor's, or Master's degree.
- ◆ The employee is responsible for all costs associated with enrollment and shall not be dependent on tuition assistance program for course or degree completion.
- ◆ ETAP is contingent to Human Resources Office (HRO) funding projection, availability for a given fiscal year and announced no later than August 10 (Fall) and January 10 (Spring) each year.
- ◆ When funding is available, ETAP will follow a tiered approach for approval. This tiered approach provides maximum utilization by agency employees who seek to complete their first undergraduate degree to supplement career progression and professional growth. The following are the priority (P) levels for funding:
 - Tier 1 – Employees seeking their first degree or certificate
 - Tier 2 – Employees seeking a Bachelor's Degree
 - Tier 3 – Employees seeking a Master's Degree
- ◆ ETAP may not be used for a lower or lateral degree program from the one an employee currently possesses. In addition to degree programs, ETAP is not authorized for programs of study beyond a master's degree.
- ◆ Funding is limited to one course per person/per semester not to exceed six credit hours per fiscal year.
- ◆ The director of human resources established a uniform per semester hour cap of \$250 for tuition assistance. ETAP may pay 100 percent of tuition costs up to the cap of \$250 per semester hour or \$750 per course.
- ◆ This program is limited to 36 semester hours of undergraduate credit or granting of baccalaureate degree, whichever comes first and 18 semester hours of graduate credit or master's degree, whichever comes first.
- ◆ Reimbursement for fees, books and materials is capped at \$100 per class.
- ◆ Employees who use ETAP incur a tenure agreement. Such agreement will require the employee to work 12 consecutive months following the completion of each course. Thus, a tenure agreement is calculated from the date of completion of the last course for which ETAP was used.
- ◆ Refer to Tenure Agreement section for required employee reimbursement costs for a violated tenure agreement.

Request Procedures

- ◆ A Form 8.50 Educational Tuition Assistance/Educational Paid Leave Request must be submitted and approved prior to the course start date; a grace period of five business days may be approved for ETAP requested after the class start date.
 - The employee may not participate in the ETAP and EPL programs concurrently.
- ◆ ETAP is requested on a course-by-course basis and each course must be part of an approved degree program.
- ◆ VDOF HR Training Manager (HRTM) will notify the employee, whether the ETAP is approved or not. If the ETAP request is not approved, the HRTM will advise the reason and offer further guidance.
- ◆ If approved, employee is responsible for all costs associated with course attendance and completion and will request reimbursement up to allowable amounts upon course completion.

- ◆ Employee must receive a grade of C or better to be eligible for payout of pre-approved reimbursement. The employee must submit a student transcript/printout to Human Resources for verification of grades.
- ◆ Employees must acknowledge and sign the Statement of Understanding (SOU) on Form 8.50 Educational Tuition Assistance/Educational Paid Leave Request each semester they wish to use ETAP.

Tenure Agreements

Any single professional development event or accredited higher education course of \$2,500 (inclusive of registration and travel) or more will require a tenure agreement. Additionally, a combination of professional conferences or events exceeding \$2,500 in the same fiscal year will also incur in a tenure agreement. Such agreement will require the employee to work 12 consecutive months following the completion of each approved event or from the last event that prompted the costs to exceed \$2,500. If an employee serves a lesser period than required in their tenure agreement, they must repay the cost of the event on a pro-rated basis as follows:

- ◆ 100% within 3 months from completion of event
- ◆ 75% within 6 months from completion of event
- ◆ 50% within 9 months from completion of event
- ◆ 25% between 9 and 12 months from completion of event

Tenure agreements are not cumulative. The tenure for a particular event begins at the completion of the event and ends one year later.

Leave

Training, Conferences, Seminars, Workshops, etc.

Leave with pay, including reasonable travel time, can be granted to employees to attend professional development programs. The programs, however, must be in support of job duties or agency business needs.

Managers are encouraged to arrange flexible work schedules to accommodate employee professional development needs. The recipient's manager, however, has the final determination of whether or not to grant time away from the job for educational development based on workloads and other mitigating circumstances.

Educational Paid Leave (EPL)

Employees may be provided educational leave with full pay, partial pay or unpaid under [DHRM Policy 4.15, Educational Leave](#).

The Virginia Department of Forestry Educational Paid Leave (EPL) program aims to provide an authorized paid absence for voluntary off-duty education programs in support of a VDOF employee's professional and personal self-development goals.

- ◆ EPL is available only for classified personnel (to include restricted) in Full-time, Quasi Full-Time and Part-Time statuses. P-14 or traditional wage Part-Time are not entitled to this program.
- ◆ Leave may be used in conjunction with accrued annual leave.
- ◆ The employee must have completed their probationary period and be rated as a Contributor or higher in their most recent evaluation.
- ◆ The employee must not have an issued or active Written Notice within the 12 months prior to the request.
- ◆ EPL is requested on a course-by-course basis, and each course must be part of an approved degree program.
- ◆ The employee may not participate in the ETAP and EPL programs concurrently.
- ◆ The employee is responsible for class attendance or course participation requirements and shall not be dependent on EPL for course or degree completion.
- ◆ Please refer to table for EPL benefits by classified status per fiscal year.

Educational Paid Leave (EPL) Benefits by Classified Status			
Classified Status	Full-Time 40 Hours per week for twelve months per year	Quasi Full-Time (Q) 30-39.9 hours per week for 12 months per year; or 40 hours per week for 9, 10, or 11 consecutive months.	Part-Time 20 – 29 hours per week, 12 months per year; or for 9, 10, or 11 consecutive months per year at least 1040 hours and 29 hours or less per week for a maximum not to exceed 1500 hours per year.
Entitled Per Academic Year (FY)	80 hours	50 hours	30 hours
Max Used Per Semester	40 hours	25 hours	15 hours
Max Used Per Week*	3 hours	2 hours	1 hour
Entitled Per Academic Year (FY)	80 hours	50 hours	30 hours
Max Used Per Semester	40 hours	25 hours	15 hours

**For degree plans/courses that may require summer residencies contact director of human resources for guidance.*

Request Procedures

- ◆ A Form 8.50 Educational Tuition Assistance/Educational Paid Leave Request must be submitted and approved prior to the course start date.
- ◆ VDOF HR Training Manager (HRTM) will notify the employee if approved or not.
- ◆ If EPL is approved, HRTM updates allocation of Educational Paid Leave in IFRIS under established guidelines.
- ◆ Employee is responsible for all costs associated with course attendance and completion.
- ◆ Employee must receive a grade of C or better to be eligible or continued participation in EPL.
- ◆ Employees must acknowledge and sign the Statement of Understanding (SOU) each semester.

Reimbursement

Completed reimbursement forms for the professional development or accredited higher education event (DOA Form Travel Expense Reimbursement Voucher and Distribution Continuation Sheet) along with the necessary documentation (ie, Student transcripts) shall be sent to the Human Resources Office **within 30 calendar days** of completion. This is necessary to ensure adequate funds are available for any future requests.

AUTHORITY

This policy and procedure is issued by the Virginia state forester.

INTERPRETATION

The director of human resources is responsible for the interpretation of this policy and procedure.

APPROVAL

I certify that this policy and procedure is approved and ready for publication.

Hector Rivera

Director of Human Resources Name (Print)

Director of Human Resources Signature

Ed Zimmer

Deputy State Forester Name (Print)

Deputy State Forester Signature