



FRANKLIN LAKES FIRE DEPARTMENT

TUITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

ADMINISTRATIVE GUIDE

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I. Introduction and Definitions

In the Borough of Franklin Lakes (“the Borough”), it is citizen volunteers who respond to many emergency situations. Due to a variety of factors, local volunteer fire departments are currently experiencing a critical need to recruit and retain members.

As an incentive for students to serve and volunteer for the fire departments, the Borough has developed the Franklin Lakes Fire Department Tuition Assistance Program. This program will provide tuition reimbursement to Student-Volunteers for their volunteer service in the Borough, for up to one hundred twenty (120) lifetime credit hours. The Franklin Lakes program credit hours must be obtained from a New Jersey State Department of Education accredited college or university. Any/all previous lifetime credits earned at or through any college/university, will count towards the one hundred twenty (120) lifetime credit hour limit. The Borough does not reimburse retroactively for previously earned credits.

In exchange for the fulfillment of established service requirements with the Franklin Lakes Fire Department (“the Fire Department”), Student-Volunteers (as defined hereinafter) enrolled as full-time or part-time students are eligible for tuition reimbursement based upon a sliding scale of grade point average (“GPA”) specified in Section VII of this guide.

There is no restriction as to the type of academic coursework the Student-Volunteer chooses to pursue.

Definitions

Volunteer Service Commitment Form: the application required for tuition reimbursement

Chief: Any person who serves in the highest operations capacity of the fire department.

Committee: Franklin Lakes Volunteer Recruitment and Retention Committee.

Financial Aid: Funds awarded to a Student-Volunteer for which no repayment is required (e.g. TAP, Pell, APTS, and etc.). Financial aid excludes work-study, Stafford Loans, and subsidized/unsubsidized student loans.

Lifetime Credit Hours: All college/university credit hours obtained during the Student-Volunteer’s lifetime.

Student-Volunteer: An individual member of the Fire Department, approved to receive tuition reimbursement for up to one hundred twenty (120) lifetime credit hours. While enrolled in the program, credit hours must be obtained from an accredited college or university, or trade school.

Trade School: A trade school, sometimes referred to as a vocational school, technical school, or vocational college, is a post-secondary institution that’s designed to give students the technical skills to prepare them for a specific occupation.

II. Disclaimers, Communications and Disclosures

- A. Acceptance as a member the Fire Department and acceptance for enrollment at a college or university does not guarantee that the Student-Volunteer will be awarded tuition reimbursement.
- B. Student-Volunteers may be subject to discontinued financial assistance at any time due to limitations of funding.
- C. The Borough reserves the right to discontinue funding for cause and the Student-Volunteer will be notified, in writing, at least thirty (30) days prior to the start of the next semester.
- D. Service obligations are required regardless of degree attainment.
- E. No provision for termination appeal, grace periods, or reinstatement exists under this guide.
- F. This guide and forms are subject to revision.
- G. The most current version of this guide and forms are available on the Fire Department website, www.franklinlakesfire.com.
- H. In the event of deficiencies not addressed by this guide, the Borough Administrator shall make and interpret policy, and issue a decision(s) in accordance with the intent of the program. Such decisions shall be final and binding.
- I. Any and all communications and disclosures regarding a Student-Volunteer's participation shall be limited to the Student-Volunteer unless the Student-Volunteer has designated an authorized representative to act on his or her behalf.

III. Contact Information

Please send all questions and submissions to the following:

Borough of Franklin Lakes Fire Department
480 DeKorte Drive
Franklin Lakes, NJ 07470
Phone: 201-891-4000

IV. Application Requirements

A. Requirements to apply for the program are as follows:

- 1) The Student-Volunteer shall be an active member in good standing, prior to making application.
- 2) The Student-Volunteer must be enrolled in an accredited college or university or trade school.
- 3) The Student-Volunteer's eligibility for the Program includes consideration of all previously earned credits through any college/university. These credits will count towards the one hundred twenty (120) lifetime credit limit. The Borough does not reimburse retroactively for previously earned credit. Post graduate studies are not eligible for tuition reimbursement.
- 4) Funds can only be utilized for on-campus (classroom) and distance (Internet) learning tuition costs but cannot be applied to books or other school fees. The Student-Volunteer agrees to use the funds only to supplement any tuition not covered by other sources of free financial aid or only after other such resources are exhausted.
- 5) The Student-Volunteer shall commit to providing the applicable service to the Fire Department throughout their participation in the program, for which any reimbursement is received, in accordance with the schedule specified in Section VIII of this Guide.
- 6) The Student-Volunteer shall report their service commitment utilizing the Fire Department Tracking Form, which requires certification by the Chief, until the completion of their service obligation.

V. Application Process

Step 1 Volunteer Service Commitment Form

- A. Complete a Tuition Assistance Program Application (the "Application") that must be notarized. This form is available on-line at the Fire Department website, www.franklinlakesfire.com.
- B. You must apply separately for each semester that you wish to be considered for funding, regardless if you were previously accepted.
- C. The Application must be submitted no later than October 1st for the fall semester and February 1st for the spring semester.
- D. The Application must be mailed to the Fire Department to the address specified in Section III of this guide. Applications will not be accepted via email or fax.
- E. Applications will be reviewed on a first come, first served basis.

Step 2 Supporting Documentation

The following supporting documentation must be provided to complete the Application:

- A. A copy of the Student-Volunteer's official college/university bill, indicating the Student-Volunteer's tuition charge and any/all financial aid.
- B. Full and Part-time students MUST complete the following:
 - 1) Full-time and Part-time students must file a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and provide proof of filing.
 - 2) Part-time students must submit an application for Aid for Part Time Study (APTS) made through your college financial aid office.
- C. The above supporting documentation must be submitted no later than November 1st for the fall semester and March 1st for the spring semester.
- D. Upon the receipt of all required supporting documentation, the Committee shall review the entire application package, verifying tuition costs and sources of financial aid.

VI. Tuition Reimbursement Requirements

Step 1

At the completion of each qualifying semester, the Student-Volunteer shall provide the Committee with the following documents within ten (10) business days of the conclusion of each semester:

- A. Student-volunteer's transcript, including GPA of their most recently completed semester (an electronic copy is acceptable). The transcript must include the following:
 - 1) The Student-Volunteer's name.
 - 2) At least one (1) other personal identifier (i.e., Student ID #, Date of birth or Soc. Sec. #).
 - 3) The total number of credits attempted and/or achieved.
 - 4) The completed semester's GPA along with a cumulative GPA.
- B. An original Fire Department Tracking Form, signed by the Chief, must be mailed back to the address specified in Section III of this guide. This form will be mailed to you prior to the end of the semester.
- C. An original signed W-9 must be mailed back to the addressed specified in Section III of this Guide.

- D. Upon receiving all documentation listed in this step, the Borough will calculate the amount of reimbursement earned and will mail to you the Grant Default Agreement and a Payment Voucher. Tuition reimbursement rates are based upon the Student-Volunteer's GPA for each semester completed as follows:
- 1) 3.75 – 4.00 or an "A" = 100% tuition reimbursement
 - 2) 3.00– 3.74 or a "B" = 75% tuition reimbursement
 - 3) 2.00– 2.99 or a "C" = 50% tuition reimbursement
 - 4) Less than 2.0 = No tuition reimbursement
- E. Reimbursement shall not exceed the current value of full-time Bergen County resident tuition at Bergen County Community College for the semester applied for reimbursement.

Step 2

The Student-Volunteer's completed Grant Default Agreement (signed and notarized) and the signed Payment Voucher must be mailed back to the address specified in paragraph III of this guide within ten (10) business days of the date of the Grant Default Agreement letter for reimbursement.

VII. Service Obligation

At the core of this Program is an individual's commitment to meet the needs of his/her community. Student-Volunteers must maintain acceptable volunteer activity and training levels as set forth by the Fire Department during their entire course of study. The meeting of these objectives will be verified by the Fire Department utilizing the Fire Department Tracking Form. This service obligation begins, upon being accepted into the Program, and continues until the service obligation is satisfied as specified below:

NOTE: Service obligations are required regardless of degree attainment.

Service Obligation After the Attendance at a College /University	
81 to 120 credits	Five (5) years following the receipt of total funds.
61 to 80 credits	Four (4) years following the receipt of total
41 to 60 credits	Three (3) years following the receipt of total funds.
21 to 40 credits	Two (2) years following the receipt of total funds.
1 to 20 credits	One (1) years following the receipt of total funds.

VIII. Termination from the Fire Department; Financial Obligation; Deferment and Forebearance

- A. A Student-Volunteer may be immediately terminated from the tuition assistance program without possible future reinstatement for the following reasons:
- 1) Failure to meet acceptable volunteer activity levels as determined by the Fire Department;
 - 2) Abandoning or otherwise forfeiting membership in the Fire Department;
 - 3) Termination or expulsion from membership from the Fire Department.
- B. If a Student-Volunteer is terminated from the Fire Department due to any of the conditions listed above, they must reimburse the Borough all tuition reimbursement funds received, on a prorated basis, within 90 days of receiving notice, for failure to complete the remainder of their service obligation as follows:

TERMINATION DATE	REIMBURSEMENT TO SERVES
Within one year following the receipt of total funds.	Full reimbursement of all tuition reimbursement funds received for all semesters attended to date.
One year following the receipt of total funds but less than two years after receipt of total funds.	Reimbursement of 4/5 of all tuition reimbursement funds received for all semesters attended to date.
Two years following the receipt of total funds but less than three years after receipt of total funds.	Reimbursement of 3/5 of all tuition reimbursement funds received for all semesters attended to date.
Three years following the receipt of total funds but less than four years after receipt of total funds.	Reimbursement of 2/5 of all tuition reimbursement funds received for all semesters attended to date.
Four years following the receipt of total funds but less than five years after the receipt of total funds.	Reimbursement of 1/5 of all tuition reimbursement funds received for all semesters attended to date.

- C. A Student-Volunteer that requires a payment plan for the repayment of funds, shall be permitted to make payments in accordance with the following:

REIMBURSED CREDITS	REPAYMENT PERIOD
61 to 120 credits	Equal monthly payments over three years of all tuition reimbursement funds received under the program.
21 to 60 credits	Equal monthly payments over two years of all tuition reimbursement funds received .
1 to 20 credits	Equal monthly payments over one year of all tuition reimbursements under program.

D. A Student-Volunteer may apply for a deferment based on the following:

- 1) Deferment for Exceptional Circumstances. Under exceptional circumstances and with good cause provided in writing by the Student-Volunteer, the Committee may grant approval for a one-time deferment for a maximum period of one semester. During this period, the Student-Volunteer must continue to meet all Fire Department responsibilities and submit documentation through the Fire Department Tracking Form for that semester.
- 2) Deferment for Post Graduate Studies.
 - a. A Student-Volunteer may, for one time only, be permitted to defer their service requirements for post graduate studies if they attend an accredited college or university outside of the County. Student-Volunteer must maintain their status as an active member in good standing of the Fire Department throughout the period of their deferment and submit annual documentation through the Fire Department Tracking Form.
 - b. Such a request must be submitted in writing to the Fire Department prior to beginning their post graduate studies. If approved, the Student-Volunteer must provide a copy of their schedule and transcript for each semester.
 - c. This deferment of service would be on a one time only basis, be continuous and conclude within three years of the date of approval. This approved deferment shall not add or reduce the Student-Volunteer's service obligation.
 - d. Failure to adhere to these conditions will result in the immediate restoration of the Student-Volunteer's service obligation requirements and/or the repayment of any outstanding balance due.
 - e. A Post Graduate Student-Volunteer can choose to remain an active member and begin the service obligation period immediately in accordance with the provisions contained in this Guide.
- 3) Deferment for Armed Forces Enlistment:
 - a. A Student-Volunteer that enlists in the Armed Forces of the United States after enrollment at an approved college/university will be permitted to defer service during any period of ACTIVE DUTY.
 - b. Such a request must be submitted in writing to the Borough within 15 days of the signing of an enlistment contract with a copy of their Department of Defense Form 4 (the "DD-4" form).
 - c. Upon approval of the service obligation deferment, the Student-Volunteer must provide a copy of their Leave and Earnings Statement ("LES") annually (every June) to verify continuous active duty status.
 - d. Such a deferment would be continuous and would conclude upon change of status to inactive duty or separation from the Armed Forces.
 - e. This will not increase nor reduce the Student-Volunteer's service obligation. However, if the Student-Volunteer's continuous active duty time in the Armed Forces equals TWICE their required service commitment time to the Fire

- Department, their service commitment will be considered fulfilled.
- f. Failure to comply with the aforementioned will result in the immediate restoration of all service obligation requirements or the repayment of any outstanding balance due to the Borough.
 - g. An enlisted Student-Volunteer can choose to remain an active member and begin the service obligation period at any point while on extended leave or inactive status from the Armed Forces in accordance with the provisions contained in this Guide.
- 4) Forbearance:
- a. Permanent disability.
 - i. Should a Student-Volunteer apply for permanent disability status either during the enrollment or post-enrollment period of program participation, the Student-Volunteer must provide the Committee via certified or overnight mail a copy of the completed New Jersey State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance application and supporting documentation.
 - ii. Upon receipt of this documentation, the Committee may choose to grant a six-month deferment pending a final decision by the NJS OTDA.
 - iii. If a permanent disability is determined, all current service requirements outstanding balances shall be waived.
 - iv. It shall be the responsibility of the Student-Volunteer, within 20 days of the receipt of the final decision to serve upon the Borough via certified mail a copy of the NJS OTDA final decision.
 - v. Failure to provide a copy of the final NJS OTDA decision within 20 days of the receipt of the decision may, absent good cause, result in a denial of forbearance.
 - b. Exceptional Circumstances. Under exceptional circumstances, and with good cause shown, the Student-Volunteer may request the approval of the Borough of a waiver of partial or full reimbursement of all tuition funds received to date due to an unforeseen and unusual circumstance. An application for a waiver of reimbursement must include the following:
 - i. An extraordinary circumstance that is demonstrated in a letter to the Borough to be submitted by the Student-Volunteer and/or their parent/guardian.
 - ii. This extraordinary circumstance must be supported in a letter to the Borough to be submitted by the Fire Chief.

IX. Monitoring and Fulfillment of Obligation

- A. Monitoring. The Committee shall monitor the Student-Volunteer's volunteer service progress on a semester-by-semester (non-cumulative) basis until the conclusion of the Student-Volunteer's service obligation. The Student-Volunteer's membership shall be verified annually, through the Fire Department Tracking Form. The Committee will act as the clearinghouse for all inquiries and documentation regarding its participants and will monitor the Student-Volunteer's educational and volunteer service progress on a semester- by-semester (non-cumulative) basis throughout their entire participation.
- B. Fulfillment of Obligation. At the end of a Student-Volunteer's participation in the program, the Borough will issue a letter of confirmation to the student and the Fire Department upon receipt of all appropriate documentation indicating that all academic and volunteer service obligations have been met.
- C. All applicable local, state or federal laws and regulations shall supersede the procedures and conditions outlined in this guide. The procedures and conditions contained in this guide are subject to change without notice.

X. Notifications

- A. Within ten business days following the conclusion of a Student-Volunteer's attendance at a college/university, the Student-Volunteer must complete an updated Fire Department Tracking Form notifying the Fire Department.
- B. The Fire Chief must forward an updated Fire Department Tracking Form to the Borough if a Student-Volunteer is terminated from the Fire Department, indicating the change in status.