

VOLUNTEER TUITION CREDIT PROGRAM

GENERAL PROGRAM INFORMATION:

Known as the Volunteer Tuition Credit Program, it covers members of a volunteer organization who are active and in good standing, their spouse, and their dependent children. The law defines a volunteer organization as a volunteer fire company, or a first aid, or rescue squad association. They are allowed to enroll in postsecondary courses on a tuition credit basis in specific learning institutions: county colleges, county vocational schools or county technical institutes. A dependant child shall be any student who does not meet any of the eligibility criteria listed in N.J.S.A. 9A: 9-2.6 (a) or (b) for independent student status.

Each volunteer is eligible to receive tuition credit in the amount of \$600 per year, not to exceed a maximum of \$2400 over a four year service period, provided that classroom space is available and that tuition paying students constitute the minimum number required for the course.

PROCEDURES FOR CREATING/IMPLEMENTING A VOLUNTEER TUITION CREDIT PROGRAM

- To participate in the program, the municipality must pass a resolution allowing the governing body to enact the Program along with delegating the responsibility of record maintenance and authorization of volunteer participation to a municipal employee.
- The volunteer must agree to serve as a member of a volunteer organization for a minimum of four years.
- Following each year of active volunteer services, the volunteer organization must provide the municipality with a letter verifying that the volunteer has been a member in good standing for the past twelve month period.
- Upon verification the municipal official (i.e., the municipal clerk) shall issue a Certificate of Authorization to be presented to the learning institution by the volunteer or eligible family member(s) during the enrollment period.
- If registration is authorized, the learning institution will debit the tuition amount of the course on the lower portion of the certificate and maintain a running balance for other courses taken during the year.

Frequently Asked Questions about the Volunteer Tuition Credit Program

1. Q: How does the tuition credit work? Does the volunteer member pay the fee to the learning institution and is then reimbursed by the municipality?

No. No money is exchanged. Once the volunteer is deemed eligible by the municipality to participate in VTC, he/she is given a Certificate of Authorization to be presented to the learning institution. If registration is authorized, the learning institution will debit the tuition amount of the course on the lower portion of the certificate and maintain a running balance for other courses taken during the year.

2. Q: Can the State provide standards or criteria to define a “member in good standing?”

A “member in good standing” is one that complies with the by-laws or the rules/regulations of the volunteer organization of which they are a member.

3. Q: Callers have indicated that some colleges require students who qualify for the tuition credit program to withdraw from all their classes. The students then try to reregister for the same courses after the required number of tuition-paying students register for the class. Because the students are required to drop courses and then reregister, they may be excluded from core classes required for their majors. Potential candidates for the tuition credit question how the State regulates the procedures employed by the county colleges for awarding the credit. Potential candidates also question what sanctions the State will impose on colleges who fail to enforce the Tuition Credit Program?

Students should exercise caution when using the VTC program for selection of core and/or major requirements because the program limits credits to open enrollment registrations. It would be advisable for a student to use VTC for their elective courses because there is more flexibility in their options in the event a course is dropped or is filled. The VTC law does not allow the State to enact rules and regulations for the implementation of the program. DLGS established the forms, guidelines and procedures in cooperation with the Municipal Clerks Association, NJ County College Association, NJ Vo-Tech Association, and the Division of Fire Safety. The law does not provide for sanctions against any institution that does not enforce the program.

4. Q: How is the State addressing problems with implementation of the Tuition Credit Program?

To date, most complications have been amicably worked out over the phone. The majority of situations that arose were mostly lack of understanding of the program.

5. What is the distinction between a volunteer and a non-volunteer squad? Does the volunteer squad apply to the individual or to the squad?

Volunteers are unpaid squad members while non-volunteers are employed by the municipality. The volunteer status applies to the member not the squad. For example, in a municipality where there are paid firemen, volunteer firefighters are used as backup or evening shift coverage. Only the volunteers are eligible for LOSAP even though he department is mixed.

6. Q: Does the four years in the law refer to four calendar years or four years total? (Suppose a student does not attend school for four consecutive years. Would the student still remain eligible for tuition credit?)

The program can be implemented at any time of the year. The four-year period is for the total number of years not calendar years. The student is eligible as long as the volunteer meets the eligibility requirements as stated in the statute. The program can be renewed numerous times.

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7. Q: How will colleges determine who should receive tuition credit in those cases where several students are eligible for the credit and the required number of tuition-paying students have not applied?

Because the law limits the program to open enrollments if there is an insufficient number of tuition paying students to conduct the course, the institution reserves the right to drop the course. The institutions have the right to enroll VTC students at late registration so as not to turn away tuition paying students.

8. Q: What is the policy for courses offered with a waiver? (Not enough tuition-paying student's register, but a course is offered to fulfill the curriculum requirements.)

This situation is at the discretion of the institution. A small amount of planning and flexibility is required when a student is planning their curriculum because of the open enrollment policy.

9. Q: The Local Finance Notice states "volunteers serving more than one emergency service organization are eligible to enroll and receive the benefits of more than one tuition credit program." If a volunteer is active both as a volunteer firefighter and volunteer rescue squad member at the same organization, is the volunteer eligible to receive benefits of more than one tuition credit program; or must the volunteer organizations be separate entities in order for the member to receive multiple VTC benefits?

The law refers to membership in a "volunteer fire company or volunteer first aid or rescue squad." The Division interprets this as meaning a single organization, regardless of how many services it provides. Thus, the member of a company that provides both fire and rescue is considered as a single organization and only entitled to one credit. Only if the organizations are separate entities with separate memberships would a volunteer that is a member of both be eligible for two credits.

10. Does the State provide suggestions or guidelines on how to implement a Volunteer Tuition Credit program?

Yes. See the New Jersey Tuition Credit Program Summary of Recommended Procedures.

VOLUNTEER TUITION CREDIT PROGRAM P.L. 1998, CHAPTER 145

C.18A: 71-78.1 Tuition-free enrollment in postsecondary program for certain volunteers, family members.

1. A person who is an active member of a volunteer fire company or volunteer first aid or rescue squad or association in good standing and the dependant children and spouse of a volunteer shall be allowed to enroll in a postsecondary program on a tuition-free basis in county college, county vocational school or county technical institute and be eligible to receive tuition credit in an amount not to exceed a maximum of \$2,400 for the member, children and spouse; provided that available classroom space permits and that tuition paying students constitute the minimum number required for the course. Nothing herein shall preclude a county college, county vocational school or county technical institute from requiring registration and lab fees for individuals attending courses pursuant to this act.

C.18A:71-78.2 Eligibility for tuition credit.

2. In order to be eligible to receive tuition credit at a county college, county vocational school or county technical institute, a person shall agree to serve as a member of a volunteer fire company or volunteer first aid or rescue squad or association for a minimum of four years and sign an agreement with the municipality in which the squad or association is located pledging four years of service in exchange for the tuition credit. Following each year of volunteer service performed, the volunteer or the spouse or dependant children shall be entitled to receive tuition credit of up to \$600, not to exceed a maximum of \$2,400 for the member, children and spouse over a four-year service period.

C.18A:71-78.3 Verification of service, transcript records.

3. Upon being accepted and enrolled in a county college, county vocational school or county technical institute, the volunteer, dependant child or spouse shall provide verification to the institution that the volunteer has performed the service required for the tuition credit. Upon completion of each semester, the volunteer shall submit a transcript to the municipality to be maintained in a permanent record. The volunteer or the dependant child or spouse shall maintain a "C" grade average in order to continue eligibility for the tuition credit program.

C.18A:71-78.4 Issuance of letter of eligibility.

4. A municipality which chooses to participate in the tuition credit program shall issue a letter of eligibility to the volunteer, to be presented to the appropriate institution, stating that the individual is a member in good standing of a volunteer fire company, volunteer first aid or rescue squad or association.
5. This act shall take place immediately.

NEW JERSEY VOLUNTEER TUITION CREDIT PROGRAM SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDED PROCEDURES

The following summarizes the key steps involved in implementing and running the Volunteer Tuition Credit Program in a municipality.

1. The municipality must pass a resolution (VTC-1), which allows the governing body to enact the Program and assign a municipal official responsibility for maintaining the Program files and authorizing volunteer participation.
2. An eligible fire or emergency medical volunteer signs the Service Pledge Agreement (VTC-2) form in the municipality in which the volunteer organization is located, pledging 4 years of service. The head of the volunteer organization signs the form. The volunteer then files it with the municipal official assigned the responsibility for the program.
3. Following each year of service, the volunteer organization sends a letter of verification (VTC-3 or VTC-4) to the municipality at the request of the volunteer or on behalf of all eligible volunteers.
4. The first requests for the letter of verification may come at any time after a volunteer has earned one year of service.
5. The assigned municipal officer then issues a signed and sealed Certificate of Authorization (VTC-5) to the volunteer. The form can then be presented by the volunteer, spouse and dependant children to the learning institution during the enrollment period. Only the original form can be accepted.
6. Enrollment is limited to those classes where space is available and tuition-paying students constitute the minimum number required for the course. The institution may wait until the last day of registration to determine space availability.
7. The learning institution will show the tuition amount on the lower portion of the certificate, and show a running balance for other courses taken during this period.
8. Upon completion of each semester or course cycle, the student must submit a transcript to the municipality, which becomes part of the permanent file kept by the municipal official.
9. A student must maintain a grade of “C”, “2.0” or “pass” in the courses taken under the Program to continue eligibility.
10. The municipality assumes no responsibility for the requisitioning of any supportive documents.
11. The Certificate of Authorization is an “original only” document. In the event of its loss, it is not replaceable.

A Resolution for the _____ of _____

To support and participate in the Volunteer Tuition Credit Program (P.L. 1998, c. 145)

WHEREAS, the _____ of the _____ in the
Name of Governing Body Name of Municipality

County of _____, deems it appropriate to enhance the recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters and emergency medical volunteers in the _____;
Name of Municipality
and

WHEREAS, the State of New Jersey has enacted P.L. 1998, c. 145 which permits municipal governments to allow their firefighting and emergency medical volunteers to take advantage of the Volunteer Tuition Credit Program at no cost to the municipal government.

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, by the _____
Name of Governing Body

of the _____ in the County of _____
Name of Municipality

that the Volunteer Tuition Credit Program as set forth in P.L. 1998, c.145 is herewith adopted for the volunteer firefighters and emergency medical volunteers in the municipality; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the _____
Name/Title of Municipal Official

is herewith delegated the responsibility to administer the program and is authorized to enter into all agreements and to maintain files of all documents as may be required under the P.L. 1998, c. 145, a copy of which is herewith made part of this resolution.

State of New Jersey
Volunteer Tuition Credit Program
P.L. 1998, c.145
Service Pledge Agreement

I, _____, agree to serve as an active volunteer
Print Name

member of the _____
Volunteer Organization

for a minimum term of four (4) years.

I further agree to comply with the regulations, rules and by-laws that are applicable to this volunteer service organization and that I will, to the best of my ability, perform the duties required of me as a member.

Following each year of volunteer service, my spouse, dependant children and I are eligible to participate in the Volunteer Tuition Credit Program as set forth in the N.J.S.A. 18A:71-78.1 et seq. I further understand that a "C", "2.0" or "pass" is required for the student to maintain program eligibility and that registration is on a space available basis.

Signature of President, Captain or Chief

Signature of Volunteer

Date

Date

State of New Jersey
Volunteer Tuition Credit Program
P.L. 1998, c.145
Verification of Service Performed

As of _____, _____
Date *Name of Volunteer*

has successfully completed one year of active volunteer service with the

Name of Organization

This letter is intended to serve as verification to the _____
Name of Municipality

that the volunteer has fulfilled the obligation as stated in the Service Pledge Agreement. A copy of this letter is to remain in the volunteer's file along with the required documents for the Volunteer Tuition Credit Program.

Signature of President, Captain or Chief

Signature of Secretary

Date

Date

State of New Jersey
Volunteer Tuition Credit Program
P.L. 1998, c. 145
Certificate of Authorization/Voucher

The fire or emergency medical volunteer listed below, has completed one year of service with the:

Name of Organization

Pursuant to P.L. 1998, c. 145 (N.J.S.A. 18A:71-78.1), this voucher may be used by the volunteer and the volunteer's immediate family as payment for tuition at any county college, county vocational, or county technical school in the State of New Jersey on a space available basis. Pursuant to this law, this voucher is redeemable for up to \$600.00 of tuition credit. The institution may wait until the last day of registration to determine if space is available.

Name of Volunteer:

Name(s) of eligible family member(s):

This certificate must have an original signature and be sealed by the Municipal Clerk, and may not be reproduced. It is good for a period of one (1) year from the date below. Any balance remaining is void and non-transferable.

Signature of Volunteer

Signature of Municipal Official

Date

Date

Space below for educational institution only:
