

## **Cowlitz Tuition Assistance Award Program Policies and Procedures**

The Cowlitz Tribe views vocational certificates and college or university degrees as an investment in both the Tribal member and the future of our Tribal community.

The Cowlitz Education Committee and staff administer the Tuition Assistance Award Program using these Policies and Procedures as guidelines. These Policies and Procedures are effective on the date they are approved by Tribal Council.

By accepting Tribal funds from the Cowlitz Tuition Assistance Award Program, the student agrees to comply with these Policies and Procedures.

### **Cowlitz Tuition Assistance Award Defined**

The Cowlitz Tribe will support Tribal members who meet the eligibility requirements and are progressing toward a certificate or degree. While Tribal funding is considerable; it is not all encompassing. The amount of funding available is dependent on the Tribe's ability to fund and the Tribal Council's annual budget approval. The Cowlitz Tribe does not guarantee the amount of funding beyond the current budgeted year.

Tribal funding will support the following certificates/degrees:

- Vocational Certificate
- Associate Degree
- Bachelor's Degree
- Master's Degree
- Doctorate Degree

Students must be enrolled in a course of study leading to a certificate or degree from an accredited vocational school or an accredited college or university.

All students may proceed at their own pace toward their certificate or degree. Payment of the award is based on an invoice/statement from the school and is made directly to the school. Beginning in the 2024-25 academic year (May 1, 2024 to April 30, 2025), assistance from this award is limited to:

- **Vocational Certificate** – Funding up to \$12,000 per academic year, with a maximum lifetime limit not to exceed \$30,000.
- **Associate Degree** – Funding up to \$6,500 per academic year, with a maximum lifetime limit not to exceed \$16,000
- **Bachelor Degree** – Funding up to \$13,000 per academic year, with a maximum lifetime limit not to exceed \$60,000
- **Graduate Degree** – There are three pathways to a graduate degree. In no case will a student's total maximum lifetime limit exceed \$85,000
  - **Master Degree** – Funding up to \$19,500 per academic year, with a maximum lifetime limit not to exceed \$41,000.
  - **Doctorate Degree following a Master Degree** – Funding up to \$19,500 per academic year, with a maximum lifetime limit not to exceed \$41,000.
  - **Doctorate Degree Bypassing a Master Degree** – If a student bypasses a Master Degree and moves from a Bachelor Degree to a Doctorate Degree program, funding will be up to \$19,500 per academic year with a maximum lifetime limit not to exceed \$85,000.

If a balance remains in the lifetime limit of an award after the student has completed a certificate or degree program, the student may use the balance to enroll in a second certificate or degree program or courses that will enhance their first certificate or degree. At no time will the student receive more than the lifetime limit of the award for the certificate or degree. Applications for a second degree will be reviewed by staff for completeness and forwarded to the Education Committee for approval.

### **\$500 GWE Educational Costs Benefit (High School/College Dual Enrollment and Dual Credit)**

The Cowlitz Tribe recognizes that Cowlitz high school students who choose to get a jump start on an Associate's or Bachelor's degree or a Career and Technical Education Certificate (CTE) while earning a high school diploma are reducing their post-secondary education costs that would be paid by the Cowlitz Tuition Assistance Award Program.

Beginning in the 2023-24 academic year, the Cowlitz Tribe will support these high school/college dual enrolled and dual credit students by providing a \$500 GWE Educational Costs Benefit. This benefit may be used for, but is not limited to, tuition, class-based fees, lab fees, books, computers, calculators, and transportation to and from school.

These programs and the costs of these programs vary from state to state and school district to school district. To be eligible for the Cowlitz \$500 GWE Educational Costs Benefit, a student must be taking college classes while enrolled in high school. The classes must count for both high school and college credit.

The high school student must contact their local school district to enroll in a dual enrollment/dual credit program. After completing the enrollment process in the local school district, the student must contact the Cowlitz Tuition Assistance Award office and request an application for this Cowlitz GWE Educational Costs Benefit. The application will require both the student's and parent's signature. Payment of this benefit will be made to the parent of all students under the age of 18.

### **\$2,500 GWE Educational Costs Benefit (Vocational and College or University Student Benefit)**

Beginning in the 2023-24 academic year, a GWE Educational Costs Benefit was increased from \$1,000 to \$2,500. This will be available to all Tuition Assistance Award recipients. The student will be eligible for this annual benefit following payment of tuition and tuition related fees in the student's first education term of an academic year.

This annual payment for educational costs may be used for, but is not limited to, books, computers, calculators, musical instruments, sports equipment, supplies for studies, tutors, clothing, room and board, and transportation to and from school.

A Cowlitz student not needing tuition assistance and enrolled in a certificate or degree program at an accredited vocational school, college, or university; may receive this GWE Educational Costs Benefit. This student should contact the Tuition Assistance Office to request this benefit.

If a student withdraws from school after receiving this GWE Educational Costs Benefit payment but before completing the term, future GWE Educational Costs Benefit payments will be made at the end of the term.

### **\$400 GWE Educational Testing Costs Benefit (General Educational Development "GED" also known as a High School Equivalency Test.)**

Beginning in the 2024-25 academic year, (May 1, 2024 to April 30, 2025) a one-time GWE Educational Cost Benefit for GED Testing Costs will be available to all enrolled Cowlitz Tribal Members who do not currently possess a High School Diploma.

The benefit would help cover the expenses associated with taking the GED tests, including any re-takes.

A copy of your GED Certificate will be required after completion.

## **Study Abroad**

To receive funding from the Cowlitz Tuition Assistance Award Program, the study abroad program must meet the student's major or minor requirements and result in course credits earned toward the student's degree. A letter from an academic advisor or other school official must accompany the funding request confirming the study abroad experience and credits will be applied to the student's major or minor.

Study abroad and study at stateside schools will be funded at the same level and under the same rules. All deposits and fees are the student's responsibility. Only deposits of tuition and tuition related fees are eligible for reimbursement. Reimbursement for eligible deposits will be made at the time payment for tuition and tuition related fees is made.

## **Application Process**

Applications will be accepted beginning on or around January 10 of each year until funds are exhausted. When funding is exhausted, students will be placed on a waiting list. If additional funding becomes available, assistance will be offered to students on the waiting list in the order the applications were received.

A student cannot benefit by adjusting the start date of an academic year. The student is limited to one award in each academic year. Academic year is defined as a 12-month period beginning on or after May 1/Summer Term, current year through April 30/Spring Term, following year.

A school may define the academic year as quarters, semesters, or number of months beginning any month throughout the year. In some programs, the student is required to attend year-round, without interruption, until the program is complete. Award payments for these non-traditional academic years are limited to the Tuition Assistance Award Program academic year definition, award amount, and lifetime limit rules.

Funds must be spent for tuition and tuition related fees in the academic year they are awarded and may be drawn down for classes beginning on or after May 1. Funds will be available after approval of the application. Unused award funds from the current academic year will not rollover to future academic years. Refunds of Cowlitz payments of tuition and tuition related fees must be returned to the Tribe by the student or school. Upon receipt, the refund will be credited to the student's annual award balance and lifetime limit.

Following committee approval of an application, a letter of award including a Request for Payment form and instructions on how to draw down the award will be e-mailed to the successful applicant. Reminders will be e-mailed periodically throughout the academic year. Three weeks are required for processing of award payments. It is the student's responsibility to submit the Request for Payment form and supporting documents in a timely manner. All late payment fees are the student's responsibility.

## **Enrollment Status**

The student confirms their active enrollment status at the start of each academic quarter, semester, or term by submitting a:

- Request for Payment form.
- Statement/invoice with the school's name, student name, and student identification number showing tuition and tuition related fees owed.
- Class list for the upcoming term.
- School transcript, when available, showing grades from the previous Cowlitz funded term.

## **Change in Enrollment Status**

Students changing enrollment status must notify the Cowlitz Tuition Assistance Office by e-mail within two weeks of the change in enrollment. Examples of change in enrollment status are:

- A change of school.
- A delay in the start date of an academic year.
- Withdrawal from one or more classes if withdrawal results in a refund of Cowlitz funded tuition.

## **Student Accountability**

The Tribe believes each tribal member should have the opportunity to achieve his/her vocational or higher education goals. The Tribe helps, but the student must make it happen.

- It is the student's responsibility to determine their education plans and goals and bring the commitment and drive to achieve their goals.
- It is the Tribe's responsibility to provide the financial support for the student's education goals. While Tribal funding is considerable, it is not all encompassing.

The student and the Tribe succeed when the student earns their certificate or degree.

## **Failure to Complete**

Failure to complete is failure of or withdrawal from more than half of all enrolled courses.

If this occurs, the student will immediately be placed on probation. Cowlitz will continue to pay tuition and tuition related fees while the student is on probation.

If the student fails or withdraws from courses in a second consecutive term, the student's Tuition Assistance Award will be suspended. If award funding is suspended, the student will be responsible for self-funding their education.

Following completion of a successful self-funded term, the student may request reinstatement of the award. A successfully completed term is defined as a term without failures or withdrawals.

Future payment of the award will be based on the student's status, full-time or part-time, during the self-funded term.

## **Procedures for Reinstatement of a Suspended Award**

The student must request reinstatement of their Tuition Assistance Award by e-mail to the Education Committee at [tuitionassistance@cowlitz.org](mailto:tuitionassistance@cowlitz.org). The student must include a copy of their transcript providing proof of a successfully completed self-funded term with the request.

## **Appeal Process**

A student may appeal Education Committee actions within 30 days of notification of that action. All appeals requesting reconsideration must be submitted by e-mail to the Cowlitz Tuition Assistance Office at [tuitionassistance@cowlitz.org](mailto:tuitionassistance@cowlitz.org).

On receipt of the appeal, the Education Committee will review the reasons for reconsideration and determine if the appeal should be rejected or upheld. The appellant will be notified within 30 days of the result of their appeal.

Issues not covered in these Policies and Procedures will be addressed by the Education Committee on a case-by-case basis.

The Education Committee may amend these Policies and Procedures from time to time.

These Policies and Procedures will be included in the Tuition Assistance Award application packet.

Approved by Education Committee: September 27, 2023

Approved by Cowlitz Tribal Council: October 7, 2023