



POLICY

Approved by: Rebecca R. Hunter, Commissioner	Policy Number: 12-031(Rev. 1/16)
Signature: <i>Rebecca R Hunter</i>	Supersedes: 11-040; 90-031; 90-035;
Application: Executive Branch Agencies, Employees, Human Resource Officers	Effective Date: October 1, 2014
Authority: T.C.A. § 4-3-1703, T.C.A. § 8-30-104, T.C.A. § 8-30-207	Rule: Chapter 1120-04, Chapter 1120-08

Subject:

Nationally Recognized Professional Certifications

The Department of Human Resources may approve professional certification programs which meet the guidelines set forth in this policy. Employees who meet the qualification requirements of this policy are eligible for the additional compensation and cost reimbursements as set forth herein.

In approving professional certification programs, the Department seeks to recognize an employee who enhances his or her competencies and services to the state by acquiring knowledge and skills relevant to the major duties and responsibilities of the job and who attains certification from a nationally recognized professional organization. The intent is to encourage employees to attain professional competencies and to provide an incentive for these employees to remain in state service. This policy does not apply to employees in positions which require certification as a minimum or necessary special qualification for employment. The policy also does not apply to employees who obtained professional certification prior to their employment with the state, unless the employee was appointed at the range minimum.

Acceptable Nationally Recognized Professional Certification Program

The Department must approve all requests for additional compensation for employees who obtain nationally recognized professional certifications. The certification program must meet the following criteria in order to be eligible for approval:

1. For a certification program to be eligible, the certification must be obtained as a result of passing an examination administered by a nationally recognized professional organization.
 - A. The organization must be national in geographic scope, or a regional organization affiliated with a national organization which provides professional certification, corresponding to the level and kind of certification provided by other regional organizations with national affiliation. Regional organizations recognized throughout the nation may also be considered. However, certification from organizations unique to a particular region may not reflect a national consensus among members of a profession and, thus, are not considered under this policy.

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- B. A certification is considered professional if it is based on a systematic, coherent body of knowledge and competencies, not normally acquired through on-the-job experience or job training. While there are many definitions of the term professional, this policy applies to job functions which require specialized knowledge and extensive preparation. For example, computer programming skills, bookkeeping skills, and interviewing skills are competencies which are not professional in depth or scope, though each might be one among many competencies required for certification in a profession. The nominal designation, created by the placement of the word professional in the name of the organization or in the certification offered by the organization, does not necessarily meet the criteria for being deemed professional, as defined by this policy.
- C. The certification must be based, in part, on an examination which assesses the extent to which an individual possesses the competencies needed to independently carry out the functions of the profession. The assessment method may consist of proctored paper and pencil tests; structured oral interviews, conducted and scored by experts in the occupation; ratings of work products, independently prepared by the examinee; or, other means of objectively determining the individual's level of competence. The examination must accurately assess the appropriate competencies. Certifications based solely on credentials, such as completion of courses offered or endorsed by an organization, documentation of life experiences, and similar criteria which do not directly assess professional competencies, are not considered an examination.
- D. In unclear cases, the Department will consider the following factors in its approval process:
- Do the professional competencies defined by the organization describe competencies which are professional, as distinguished from commonplace performance of a professional job?
 - Do the standards of the organization, including the nature of the examination and the requirements for successfully achieving certification, reflect a distinction between those who are highly competent and those who may not be? In general, standards which can be met by all or most who apply for certification are inherently suspect.
 - Is the organization one of several offering certification in a particular professional domain? If so, how do its standards, examinations, and the basis for granting certification compare with those of other organizations?
2. The certification obtained must be directly related to the employee's major job duties and responsibilities.

In applying this guideline, the competencies upon which professional certification are based must be directly related to the performance of an employee's major duties and responsibilities in his or her current job classification. The policy does not apply to an employee who achieves professional certification relevant to a different job, even though the employees may seek future employment in such a job. The policy also does not apply to an employee for whom the acquisition of the certified competencies is not relevant to his or her assigned duties and responsibilities.

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3. The attainment of certification must result in expanded capabilities within the employee's job classification, meaning the employee will perform additional duties and responsibilities independently and achieve greater proficiency in performance.
4. The employee's job performance must be at least valued, as determined by the appointing authority, before the salary increase may be granted.
5. The salary increase cannot be more than one (1) step and cannot exceed the maximum of the salary range.

In applying this guideline, an employee may receive only one (1) increase for professional certification within an occupation. However, if an employee later changes occupations and subsequently receives professional certification in the new occupation, the employee is eligible for a salary increase in the new occupation. A change in job classification is not necessarily a change in occupation.

6. The salary increase request must be accompanied by a written recommendation from the employee's director, and must be approved by the appointing authority.

Recommending and Approving Professional Certification Programs

An appointing authority may recommend nationally professional certification programs to the Department for consideration under this policy. The recommendation must be a written proposal, linking a specific professional certification program to work performed by employees in a job classification(s) used by the agency. The recommendation must demonstrate how the professional certification program relates to the agency and employees in the job classifications performing the agency work.

The Classification/Compensation Division will consider recommendations on a case-by-case basis. Proposals must include, at a minimum, the following information:

1. The job classification performing the job-related professional competencies.
2. The professional organization with relevant documents describing the nature, membership, and related information, allowing the Department to determine whether or not the professional certification program qualifies under this policy. Anecdotal information from an employee or other sources may be helpful, but cannot be accepted in lieu of information obtained from the professional organization itself.
3. Information detailing the professional competencies relevant to the certification; the certification process; and the certification examination, including technical descriptions of the content of the examination, how it was developed; how it is scored, and how "passing" levels are determined.
4. The relationship between the professional competencies, the duties and responsibilities of employees in the job classification, and how certification would benefit the agency.

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Approval is contingent on state budgetary limitations and priorities. If insufficient funds exist, authorization will not be granted for a particular certification program and affected job classifications unless, and until, sufficient funding exists to process increases for all eligible employees.

Processing of Employee Increases

When a nationally professional certification program has been approved, the agency is responsible for ensuring that affected employees are aware of this authorization, and that employees who may be eligible for a pay increase are provided the opportunity to fully participate. For each employee who successfully passes a job-related, approved nationally recognized professional examination and is awarded the appropriate certification, the following procedures must be followed:

1. The agency must send the request for the salary increase to the Department for approval.
2. The request must contain a copy of the certification attained and documentation verifying the date the employee attained certification.
3. The request must contain a written recommendation from the employee's division director that has been approved by the appointing authority.
4. The request must state that the employee's job performance is at least valued. If the employee's performance is less than valued at the time certification is achieved, but later improves to a valued level or above, the employee is eligible for an increase at such time as performance has improved.
5. The request cannot exceed one (1) step and cannot exceed the maximum of the employee's salary range.

Effective Date of Salary Increases

The effective date of the approval will be the first day of the defined work week after the request is submitted to the Agency Resource Center (ARC).

Circumstances in which a Certified Employee May be Denied a Pay Increase

When the authorization regarding professional certification within a specific occupation is granted, the agency must grant increases to all eligible employees.

Increases for attaining this certification may be denied for any of the following conditions:

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1. An employee is at the maximum of the salary range.
2. The employee's job performance is ranked less than valued.
3. Performance of responsibilities for which relevant professional certification is not sufficient to justify the increase, e.g., possession of the certification does not result in expanded capabilities within the employee's job classification or the ability to perform a job with a higher level of independence.
4. The responsibilities of an employee in a particular position are irrelevant to the competencies associated with the specific professional certification.
5. The employee has previously received a pay increase for a professional certification in the occupation.
6. The certificate is not from an approved nationally recognized organization.

Reimbursement for Review Courses

Employees may receive reimbursement for the successful completion of review courses taken to prepare for nationally recognized professional examination and designation.

1. Reimbursement for review courses taken in preparation for nationally recognized professional examinations will be granted for employees whom the Department has approved as eligible in accordance with this policy.
2. Request for reimbursement for review courses must include a copy of the certification issued to the employee by an approved nationally recognized professional organization that administered the examination. The agency's training coordinator will assist with the reimbursement process.
3. Reimbursement may not exceed 75% of the tuition fee. In no event may the tuition reimbursement exceed \$450.00. The examination fee is not reimbursable.
4. Continuing education requirements necessary to maintain all professional certifications will be subject to the following conditions:
 - a. Continuing Education Units (CEUs) awarded through the Department are accepted by nationally recognized professional organizations and/or state regulatory agencies. The Strategic Learning Solutions (SLS) Division will work closely with agency training coordinators to ensure appropriate training activities occurring within each agency meet guidelines for awarding CEUs, and employees are given appropriate credit for attendance. SLS can assist agency training coordinators in obtaining official CEU transcripts, which are available in Edison.

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- b. The Department will assist agencies in obtaining CEUs for qualified training activities sponsored by an executive branch agency. The agency is responsible for any fees or costs involved.
- c. In situations where no continuing education opportunities are available through the above accepted means, the Department will make decisions on a case-by-case basis.

Questions regarding reimbursement or Continuing Education Units may be directed to the Strategic Learning Solutions Division. Questions regarding this policy may be directed to the Agency Resource Center.