

Your Five-Step Guide to Tuition Reimbursement

Follow the plan outlined below to navigate a potentially tricky conversation with your employers and, hopefully, secure funding for your graduate degree.

1. Start With Research

Before you begin to compose your pitch to your boss, you need to do some research. Not all organizations offer graduate school tuition reimbursement to their employees, so the very first step in this process is to make sure your company does. Ask your friends and colleagues, or perhaps an HR representative, whether your workplace has a history of providing tuition reimbursement. If it doesn't, find out whether there's a specific policy against it.

Taking this initial step is important because you don't want to go into a meeting unprepared, which gives the impression that you don't value your employer's time. This research will help you avoid an awkward conversation that could produce skepticism about your decision to return to school at all.

2. Work Your Network and Ask Around

Your professional network is a key source of information as you begin to strategize your approach to this conversation. If you have any coworkers who you know have secured graduate school tuition reimbursement from your employer, ask them in casual conversation how they approached the interaction:

- What did they feel were convincing arguments?
- Did they make any missteps during the conversation?
- How would they recommend you avoid doing the same?
- Do they have any other advice about your boss' temperament during this kind of interaction?

Conversations like these with your colleagues can provide the added bonus of improving your interpersonal dynamics in the workplace. Discovering a shared desire to grow intellectually and professionally can strengthen your relationships with your coworkers, and the knowledge you can gain about what makes your boss tick can help improve your approach to other professional interactions in the future.

3. Be Ready With the Details

When the time comes for your actual face-to-face conversation with your boss, the last thing you want to do is to give the impression that you're not fully prepared to make your request. You should have all of the essential information about the graduate program(s) to which you're applying:

- What school(s) are you applying to?
- Are you applying to full-time or part-time programs?
- Are you applying to online or on campus programs?
- What is the [tuition](#) for your program of choice?
- How long do you expect it will take you to complete the degree?
- How much time per week do you expect to spend on coursework?

This information can not only help assuage any concerns your boss may have, but it will also present you in the best possible light as someone who's serious about the magnitude of your educational undertaking.

Be sure to keep Medill's [Integrated Marketing Communications Professional program](#) in mind as you make your list. The convenience of online education might be just what you need to convince your employer that you'll be able to handle the time commitment that graduate school demands.

4. Speak Confidently About Your Potential for Growth

While your employers may believe in the value of continued education and understand your desire to grow as a professional, they'll still want to hear what they'll get out of their decision to offer you graduate school tuition reimbursement. You should be ready to list areas in which your graduate program of choice will contribute to your professional development, and more importantly, to show how it will boost your performance at work.

Be ready to discuss how you will:

- Improve your communication and leadership skills
- Master the use of new digital tools and techniques
- Enhance your output and ability to strategize
- Expand your marketing expertise

Whatever you want to get out of your graduate education, be able to identify specific projects and initiatives at work that will benefit from your growth.

5. Show the Impact on Your Company's Bottom Line

Ultimately, the bottom line is likely what matters most to your employers. They may not be prepared initially to see the quantifiable benefits of offering graduate school tuition reimbursement, and they may go so far as to question the value of investing in an activity that will necessarily divert some of your attention.

You can turn their focus on the bottom line into a point in your favor by approaching your conversation with data in hand. For example, a two-year study conducted by the Lumina Foundation found that a tuition reimbursement program at Cigna resulted in a 129% return on investment, which means that every dollar the company invested generated an additional \$1.29.¹ Bring information like this to your employer's attention to show that it pays to spend smartly on training a capable, productive workforce.

Still have questions?

If you'd like additional information about the [IMC Professional program](#), please contact an admissions outreach advisor today. Call (844) 946-3714 or email IMCprofessional@northwestern.edu.

Are you an employee of Northwestern University?

Review the [employee tuition benefits information](#) published by the Office of Human Resources. If you have questions after reviewing it, call (847) 491-4700 or email askHR@northwestern.edu.

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1. Retrieved on February 8, 2023, from luminafoundation.org/files/resources/talent-investments-pay-off-cigna-full.pdf