

Procedure #4007
Title: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT REQUESTS
Category: Personnel
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Reviewers: MSA Department Supervisors

I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this procedure is to clarify the process of requesting professional development at the Minnesota State Academies (MSA). This procedure also applies to staff members wishing to present at conferences and/or other training opportunities. This procedure should be followed even in situations when the professional development opportunity is free and/or paid for by other organizations/grants.

II. EXPECTATIONS FOR STAFF

1. **Conversation and pre-approval from supervisors:** The first step in requesting professional development (webinars, meetings, conferences, communities of practices, statewide educational groups, and/or other training opportunities) is to have a conversation with the employee's supervisor with details about the professional development opportunity and how this would benefit the employee in their job duties.

Details should include a link to the conference and/or training opportunity, justification for sessions that the employee plans to attend, ways in which information will be brought back to campus, and the costs of the conference, including accommodations, meals, and travel.

2. **Professional development request:** After obtaining pre-approval from their supervisor, the employee is responsible for completing the [professional development request](#) available in the staff portal on our website. This request will be routed to the Director of Curriculum and Educational Programs. Upon receipt of the request, the director will confirm approval from the employee's supervisor and ensure that funds are available. The request will be considered utilizing the criteria set forth in Section III below. **For out-of-state conferences/training, pre-approval from the superintendent and the MSA board are required before proceeding with the request.**
3. **Additional forms:** After approval from the Director of Curriculum and Educational Programs, the employee is responsible to complete all required/applicable forms for processing the request (i.e., Special Expenses form, Purchase order request, vehicle request, out-of-state travel request, leave request, interpreter request). All forms must be completed in a timely manner (submitted to the appropriate department at least 1 month in advance).
4. **Deadlines:** The deadline for expressing your interest in a conference or training opportunity (especially for those that occur out of state) is **two**

months in advance of the event. For smaller training opportunities that have minimal set-up needs (i.e., no-cost webinars, local training opportunities), the deadline is **two weeks in advance.**

5. **Presentations and Booths:** For employees who are interested in presenting at conferences, additional information must be gathered and shared with their supervisor before pre-approval.
 - Whether or not the presentation/booth is presented on the behalf of MSA or as an individual
 - Whether or not the presenter will be paid for their time. (contractual language and state ethics apply here)
 - The necessity of release time and/or vacation time
 - Time needed to prepare the presentation/booth (if representing MSA).
 - Preapproval of the content and materials that will be shared at the conference – required for situations when the employee is representing MSA (Utilization of MSA-approved templates is required). Materials must be shared with the employee’s supervisor and the Director of Community Engagement to ensure compliance with accessibility and branding expectations.
6. **Exceptions to the process:** In unusual circumstances when the timelines cannot be followed for some reason, exceptions can be requested by sending an email detailing the reasons for requesting an exception to the Director of Curriculum and Educational Programs. The director will consult with the superintendent and the employee’s supervisor to determine if the exception can be granted.

III. **CRITERIA USED TO EVALUATE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT REQUESTS**

Listed below are some criteria that will be used to evaluate any request for professional development. Those criteria will be used as appropriate to each request/situation.

- **The “value” of the requested professional development:** MSA administrators reserve the right to evaluate the value of the professional development to MSA programs and employees. High value (high return-on-investment) training will be prioritized over opportunities that provide marginal or indirect benefits to MSA.
- **Number of employees requesting the same or similar professional development opportunity:** At times, MSA receives multiple requests for the same or similar professional development opportunity. MSA will consider the need for sending multiple people and decide how many employees to send. As a general rule of thumb, two people attending a single training opportunity, especially for out-of-state conferences/training, would be the maximum but exceptions due to unique circumstances will be made on a case-by-case basis. Factors that will be considered when making decisions regarding who to send include:
 - Staffing and budget limitations
 - Previous training opportunities that have been provided for each employee.
 - Employee’s job duties and how this aligns with the training opportunity (best fit).

- **Number of professional development opportunities that the employee has already had during a school year:** To provide equity and fairness to all employees within the limitations of our professional development budget, MSA may restrict the number of external professional development opportunities for each employee so that funds are available for other employees. At this time, we have established a limit of two (2) external professional development opportunities for each employee, not including free webinars, advisory meetings, committee work, and/or communities of practice. However, the number of free webinars, advisory meetings, committee work, and/or communities of practice may also be limited, pending availability of coverage and/or student & school needs.
- **Availability of similar training within the state or online:** Out-of-state training will be carefully examined and compared to opportunities that exist in-state and/or online in order to be fiscally responsible. Minnesota hosts numerous professional development conferences and training and in most cases, those opportunities are much cheaper than out-of-state conferences/training.

IV. EXPECTATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

- Employee-initiated professional development will be accompanied by release time (allowing employees to attend during their scheduled workday) if approved by their supervisors. Conferences and/or other opportunities that occur during non-scheduled days (i.e., weekends, breaks, summer months) may be supported but will not be considered paid workdays. If MSA determines that it is necessary for an employee to attend a conference or training opportunity for some reason (i.e., representing MSA interests, becoming a trainer, etc.), MSA will ensure that employees are paid at their daily rate and/or offered balance time, depending on the employee's bargaining contract language.
- Use of state cars to travel to/from conferences/training is required. Mileage may only be reimbursed if there are no state vehicles available. Exceptions to this rule (i.e., attending a conference close to the employee's residence) must be approved by the superintendent's office.
- For hotel stays, no meals or incidental expenses can be charged to the school purchasing card used for the hotel reservations. Employees are responsible for those costs and obtaining receipts in order to be reimbursed.
- For out-of-state trips, rental cars are generally discouraged unless there are no other options available for travel between the airport and the conference site. Use of ridesharing apps, taxis, trains, etc. are recommended.
- For out-of-state training/conferences, a board report must be submitted prior to the next regularly scheduled board meeting.
- After attending professional development opportunities that involve travel, it is the employee's responsibility to submit receipts for reimbursement within one month of the training/conference. Receipts that are submitted late may result in the reimbursement becoming taxable income.