**Designing a Tuition Assistance Program: Recommendations and Best Practices from Detroit Drives Degrees**

**Strategy and Planning**

* Employers should think of this as a strategic investment, rather than a benefit, because it will have a demonstrated ROI for the business.
	+ To that effect, the structure should reflect the intended return.
	+ Encourage students to study particular fields that are highly relevant for the business’s strategic workforce needs (and also high-growth occupations throughout the region).
	+ Encourage students to study at particular institutions – whether it’s part of a regional network or cohort – so that you can establish relationships and partnerships with higher education institutions and ensure employees are receiving quality training.

**Access and Eligibility**

* Opportunities should be distributed equitably across all employment levels. Instead of only focusing on providing master’s or professional degrees to employees, give equal weight to associate and bachelor’s degrees, reaching out specifically to employees who do not currently have a postsecondary credential.
* World class programs do not have strings attached – assistance is offered regardless of what grades participants receive and there is no stipulation that they need to repay under certain circumstances.
* Pay tuition up front, directly to the providers – do not expect employees to pay up front and then have their expenses reimbursed.
* Keep in mind employee motivations. Research shows that the two primary factors in employees taking advantage of employer-led education opportunities are:
	+ Onsite training/course offerings
	+ Guaranteed employment outcome (promotion, raise, etc.)

**Holistic Support**

* Consider offering – or even requiring – financial and/or success coaching throughout an employee’s participation in the tuition assistance program.
* Host workshops or lunch & learns to help employees fill out college applications, complete the FAFSA, or take other steps in the process.
* Partner with [Detroit Reconnect](https://www.detroitchamber.com/d3/detroit-reconnect/) to provide ambassador trainings and mobile reconnect cafes for employees on a regular basis.
* Programs must be holistic – not just focused on one element (e.g. the financial component of tuition assistance) but encompassing mentoring, flexible scheduling, and direct correlation to career development and mobility.