

Part 1: Introduction

1.1 Purpose

The Continuing Education Plan (CEP) of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC) is a national program intended to encourage and support life-long learning among rostered and non-rostered/lay employees. CEP assists employers in achieving their goals for mission by providing resources for employee education and training. CEP also supports synods and the National Church in encouraging life-long learning across the ELCIC.

The ELCIC expects professional leaders to possess a thorough grounding in the Christian faith and Holy Scriptures coupled with an understanding of the world and society in which ministry must take place. Professional leaders need to grow continually in understanding and competence in order to be faithful in discipleship. CEP offers the means by which members may:

- further develop present knowledge and skills;
- acquire new knowledge and skills; and
- experience growth for more effective ministry.

1.2 Definitions

Members: Employees enrolled in the plan are referred to as *members*. Both rostered and non-rostered/lay employees of ELCIC employers are eligible to be members of CEP. Rostered employees are required to become members of CEP as per their call document and/or standard employment agreements. Employers are encouraged to have non-rostered/lay employees participate in CEP as a way of encouraging life-long learning.

Employers: ELCIC employers can be either congregations or other organizations. Employers play a vital role in identifying knowledge and skills that will promote effective ministry in their context. The employer's authorization of CEP expense reimbursement confirms that the educational experience relates to employment responsibilities and ministry duties, and it affirms that education experience will be a benefit to both the employer and the employee.

1.3 Policy Accountability

CEP guidelines are a policy of the ELCIC National Church Council (NCC). Policy reviews and amendments are prepared by the Program Committee for Leadership for Ministry (PCLM) and recommended to NCC for approval. Financial administration is provided nationally by ELCIC Group Services Inc. (GSI). (www.elcicgsi.ca)

Part 2: Member Account

A separate account is maintained for each individual member, where member-contributions, employer-contributions, education disbursements and educational hours are recorded.

Both employers and members contribute to the *Member Account*. As per Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) guidelines for employment related continuing education, employer contributions are not subject to income tax or statutory withholdings. The member’s contributions are after-tax dollars. As financial administration is provided nationally by GSI, the account continues if the member transfers to another ELCIC employer.

No interest is allocated to the member’s account. Interest, net of administrative costs, on accumulated funds is designated to the *Advanced-Study Funds*.

2.1 Contributions

The following table of contributions is recommended as a minimum guideline:

	Member	Employer
Rostered	\$25 per month (\$300 annually)	\$50 per month (\$600 annually)
Non-rostered/lay	\$12.50 per month (\$150 annually)	\$25 per month (\$300 annually)

2.2 Qualifying Education Disbursements

Continuing education should be planned to further the member’s goals for ministry and to serve the employer’s goals for mission. All disbursements must qualify as eligible education expenses within the interpretation of the Income Tax Act (Canada).

The education event must consist of classes, seminars or conferences for either:

- subjects taken for maintenance or upgrading of skills related directly to the responsibilities of the member’s employment with the employer; or
- general matters relating to employment (for example: time management, how to supervise employees or volunteers, crisis management).

The education event may also have the format of a lesson, including coaching, for a small group or individual, when it meets the qualifying criteria listed above. The ELCIC regards upgrading skills for building community and for forming restorative relationships as valuable leadership training for the practice of ministry.

2.2a Independent Learning

If the event is not in any format described above (i.e. travel tour, individual exploration, independent learning) the following factors should be considered to determine eligibility for this tax free program:

- the employer provides a 1 to 2 sentence written summary of what the employee is expected to learn in order to document why the employer supports and/or recommends the event to be undertaken;
- the member should provide documentation of the expectations regarding the knowledge to be gained by the member from each daily experience that in turn can be shared with the employer and/or participants in the ministry context;
- this is a new experience for the member.

For additional clarity, CRA does not allow expenses to be paid from this fund that it considers to be for personal interest or wellness.

2.3 How to Access Funds

1. Complete the *Expense Reimbursement Request Form* and submit for signature to your Employer.
Note: if there is any concern regarding eligibility of the education expense, it is recommended that advice be obtained from GSI prior to the event to ensure that the expenses will qualify.
2. Engage in the educational event.
3. Submit the form together with your receipts to GSI (www.elcicgsi.ca)

Notes:

- i. Eligible disbursements include: tuition, course registration fees, relevant reading material, travel, meals and accommodations.
- ii. Administration of disbursements is guided by *Policy for Reimbursement of Expenses for ELCIC Purposes*.

(<http://elcic.ca/Leadership/For-Ministers/documents/2014PolicyonReimbursementofExpenses.pdf>)

Employers are encouraged to be familiar with the meaning of “Qualifying Education Disbursements.” (2.2 and 2.2a above). The signature of the employer on the *Expense Reimbursement Request Form* indicates that the employer supports the educational experience and regards the experience as one that will benefit the employer’s goals for mission. The educational experience shall help the member to serve effectively and therefore enhances the employer’s particular expression of ministry. For independent learning, the employer also provides a 1 to 2 sentence written summary of what the employee is expected to learn. GSI is available for consultation prior to the event when there are questions regarding eligibility.

2.4 Policy on Compliance Concerns

As administrator of the plan, GSI's role is to ensure that all disbursements are in order and are properly supported with receipts. This ensures that disbursements comply with CRA standards for eligible tax free education expenses.

When a member has concerns about a disbursement request, GSI shall work with the member in order to help gather supporting documentation in order demonstrate eligibility and compliance with CRA standards. For additional support, members may contact their synod bishop and/or ELCIC national staff responsible for leadership.

If a member continues to have concerns after working with GSI on documentation, the member may request a review of the decision made by GSI. A written request stating the reason for the review shall be sent to the National Bishop (or the person or body in the national office with responsibility for guidelines for CEP) with a copy to GSI and a copy to their Synodical Bishop. The request for review may only be made with respect to whether or not the expense complies with CRA standards for eligible education expenses.

2.5 Time off for Educational Events

The time required to undertake an educational event should be provided, with pay by the employer, on a reasonable basis. The following serves as guidance:

- two weeks annually (including two Sundays for rostered employees)
- accumulated to a maximum of six weeks over three years (including a maximum of six Sundays for rostered employees). Note: Accumulated study leave cannot be used at the end of employment.

2.6 Reporting

The purpose of reporting is:

- to encourage participation in life-long learning;
- to support members and employers in achieving their goals for experiencing growth for more effective ministry;
- to provide the ELCIC with data on continuing education practices.

Reporting is a mutual process. By self-reporting on their activities, members generate a record of their continuing education and help the ELCIC to understand how CEP is being utilized. CEP provides statements to members and employers that can serve as a tool in discerning next steps in continuing education.

2.6a Member Reporting

- All members of CEP are expected to report continuing education hours to GSI, using the *CEP Expense Reimbursement Form*. Members are encouraged to submit continuing education hours even when no funds were used.
- Both expenses and education hours are reported in select categories.
- Members are expected to engage in at least 90 hours of continuing education over each three-year period.
- In order to assist with annual reporting, all hours for the previous year should be reported by January 15 of the following year. Hours reported after this will appear on the next year's CEP statement.
- In order to simplify the reporting of full day conferences and multi-day events, a maximum of 12 hours per day can be reported as continuing education time.

2.6b CEP Administrative Reporting

- At least once per year, GSI sends a statement to each CEP member with the following details on their individual account for the last three years: a detailed record of education events with corresponding hours reported and funds dispersed.
- The member's employer receives a copy of this statement. Employers are encouraged to review the statement with each member in order to encourage participation in continuing education and to identify desirable skills for mission, ministry and employment.
- On an annual basis, GSI sends a statement to synod bishops that summarizes CEP activity for each rostered leader in their respective synods.
- On an annual basis, GSI sends a statistical report to the ELCIC, through PCLM, that summarizes overall CEP activity.

2.7 Termination / Account Closure

When a member retires or otherwise terminates service in the ELCIC, the member portion in the account will be refunded to the member. The employer portion will be transferred to the Advance-Study Funds.

The full account balance at retirement or termination may be used for the purposes of retraining if this application is completed within two months of termination, unless other arrangements are made with GSI.

In the event of a member's death, the member portion in the account will be paid out to the member's estate. The employer portion will be transferred to the Advanced-Study Funds.

2.8 Guidance for Members without a Call/Employment regarding their CEP Account

CEP is a resource of funds for plan members to enhance their employment skills. This is the overriding criteria, which allows these funds to be used on a tax free basis to the member. When a plan member leaves employment with the ELCIC, one of the following will occur depending on the circumstance:

Member Status	Intention for future employment	CEP Account Status
Rostered member on leave from call	Is seeking a call	Account may remain open and funds used for education to maintain and enhance skills relating to future employment
Rostered member on a statutory leave	Intends to return to work or seek a new call at end of leave	Account may remain open and funds used for education to maintain and enhance skills relating to future employment
Rostered member retiring	Intends to continue working from time to time in interim positions and supply	Account may remain open and funds used for education to maintain and enhance skills relating to employment
Rostered member retiring	No known intent to return to current employer or to be hired by another ELCIC employer	Member portion of account returned to member and employer portion transferred to the Advanced-Study Funds
Non-rostered/lay member	No known intent to return to current employer or to be hired by another ELCIC employer	Member portion of account returned to member and employer portion transferred to the Advanced-Study Funds
Formerly rostered employee now terminated on the roster or transferred to another non-ELCIC roster	No known intent to return to current employer or to be hired by another ELCIC employer	Member portion of account returned to member and employer portion transferred to the Advanced-Study Funds

Part 3: Information for Accessing Advanced -Study Funds

The Advanced-Study Funds provide grants to CEP members who are engaged in advanced study. Grants are awarded through an application process and shall be evaluated by PCLM on how the proposed program of study will promote growth for effective ministry and will support the ELCIC's mandate to be a church *In Mission for Others*.

3.1 Eligibility

To be eligible for *Advanced-Study Funds*, the member shall be engaged in a study program that leads to an advanced degree or to a diploma.

The program may be based on part-time study while continuing regular employment or it may involve an extended study leave, with or without full-time residency at an educational institution. In some cases, a study leave may happen in conjunction with a sabbatical. If a sabbatical is involved, members and employers should consult the Synodical Sabbatical Guidelines from their respective synod.

A member must have been an active contributor to CEP for at least one full year.

A member who is applying to the Advanced-Study Funds is expected to use funds from his or her CEP member account in support of his or her Advanced-Study goals. With each submission for reimbursement of Advanced-Study costs, 90% will be funded from the grant account and 10% will be withdrawn from the individual's member account.

3.2 Application Approval

An application form must be completed and submitted to PCLM by January 15th each year for the upcoming academic year for which funds are required.

The application requires permission from the employer to engage in the proposed study program. It also includes three letters of reference. One letter should be from an employer representative. For rostered members, one letter should be from the synodical bishop or the bishop's designate. For non-rostered/lay members, one letter should be from an ELCIC rostered minister.

3.3 Tax Information

As the funds in this account are accumulated from employer contributions and have not been subject to statutory withholdings, all disbursements must qualify as eligible education expenses within the interpretation of the Income Tax Act (Canada).

Members who are awarded a grant from the Advanced-Study Funds will be asked to submit a report to PCLM that briefly describes the activities, insights and benefits of their studies. The report is due by January 31 in the year following reception of the grant.

3.4 Available Funds

The maximum amount available per member for any one year will be \$7,500. The amount may depend on the overall availability of funds and number of applications. Consideration will be given to need. The total amount allocated per member in any 10-year period shall not exceed \$37,500.