A Practical Guide to Offering PE Licensure as **an Employee Benefit**

School of PE™

Why We Wrote This Guide

At School of PE, we believe licensure benefits everyone–engineers, employers, and the industry as a whole–and we want to make it easy for organizations to reliably produce more licensed professionals.

This guide is designed for leaders who believe that licensure matters and want to move beyond simple reimbursement toward a more structured benefit program. We'll show you how to do that without taking on the risk of paying for unused courses or investing in training that doesn't translate into exams taken and licenses earned.

We've helped more than 200 firms and DOTs, including over half of the ENR Top 100, implement successful licensure benefit programs. In this guide, we'll share what we've learned about what works so you can launch your program with confidence and drive real results.

How to Read This Guide

- This guide has been designed as a step-by-step roadmap.
- Each step builds on the one before it, but each can also stand alone. Dive into the areas most relevant to your situation.

The Roadmap

STEP ONE

Establish Your Program Goals

Licensure can solve different problems inside an organization. For some firms, the constraint is growth: not enough licensed professionals to support new work. For others, it's succession: senior engineers are carrying a heavy load without a deep bench behind them. For others still, it's retention: high-potential engineers leave shortly after becoming licensed because advancement pathways are unclear.

After supporting hundreds of implementations, one pattern is clear: firms that define the outcome first, and have clear accountability for that outcome, are far more likely to build programs that deliver it. When programs stall, lack of clarity on the goal or accountability is often the cause.

Before setting a budget or drafting policy language, leadership should align on three things:

1. **What problem are we solving?**
2. **What single metric will tell us we've succeeded?**
3. **Who is accountable for that metric?**

Common primary objectives include:

- **Increasing total licensed professionals or staffing ratios**
- **Improving retention of high-potential employees**
- **Improving first-time pass rates**

What Works in Practice: Defining Accountability

In our experience, one of three roles is the accountable driver of this initiative.

HR or L&D	Head of Engineering	Direct Managers
Usually the main point of contact for licensure benefits providers, such as School of PE. *Accountable for:* Budget, utilization rate, post-licensure outcomes (e.g. retention, career progression) *Responsibilities:* Annual planning, issuing access to courses and training programs, coaching employees with low engagement, building licensure into career paths.	*Accountable for:* Pass rates (at the department level) *Responsibilities:* Reviewing progress at the department level and flagging issues with direct managers	*Accountable for:* Activation rates, pass rates (at the team level) *Responsibilities:* Checking in during 1:1s and troubleshooting issues, escalating engagement issues to HR / L&D for coaching

Trend to Watch: Licensure as an Experience

If retention and engagement are priorities, licensure can't sit off to the side as a reimbursable benefit. Engineers increasingly expect clarity on how earning their license fits into their long-term career path, visible support from their manager, and a structured plan they can follow alongside project work.

The most advanced firms are responding by embedding licensure into the employee lifecycle: introducing it early in career conversations, formalizing it within career paths and promotion criteria, supporting it intentionally during preparation, and defining what happens after an employee passes.

If you want to move in this direction, Step 3 outlines how to define and design the licensure journey, before and after the exam.

STEP TWO

Build Your Budget Based on Eligibility

Shifting from an unpredictable reimbursement model to a structured licensure benefit gives you better visibility and control of employee outcomes, but it also introduces a new concern. Instead of reimbursing employees after the fact, you are committing upfront to a defined number of prep course seats. What if some of those seats go unused, or are activated but employees never complete the course or sit the exam?

The most effective way to mitigate this risk is to budget based on true eligibility and readiness instead of general interest. In our experience, not everyone who expresses enthusiasm is realistically positioned to sit for the exam in the next 6–12 months.

Here's how to build your budget:

Start With Your Eligible Universe

Begin by defining the total population that could realistically sit for the exam in the next 12 months. For the FE, this means employees with ABET-accredited degrees. For the PE, this means employees who have passed the FE and meet the required years of qualifying experience. Because criteria vary by state, refer to the *eligibility guidelines from NCEES*.

Add Internal Eligibility Filters

Most successful firms narrow this universe further by including internal guardrails such as:

- **Minimum tenure requirement (e.g. 6 months)**
- **Good standing on performance evaluations**
- **Manager approval**

Consider Current and Upcoming Workload

Beyond technical eligibility, leading firms also assess whether this is the right moment for an employee to commit to licensure. Even if most study time happens outside of work hours, the reality is that employees balancing demanding project work and exam prep may experience capacity strain, particularly during peak project cycles. Before approving participation, managers should consider:

- **What major projects is this employee assigned to over the next 6–12 months?**
- **Are there anticipated spikes in project workload or travel commitments?**
- **Will adding exam prep meaningfully impact their focus or performance?**

Gauge Intent

From this refined group, survey employees to understand:

- **Which exam they intend to take**
- **When they expect to take their exam (and whether they have been approved to take it or have an exam scheduled)**
- **Whether they can realistically commit to devoting the time to study for the exam**

Budget Conservatively

Based on partner data, a practical budgeting formula includes:

100% of employees who already have an exam date scheduled

100% of employees in the formal approval process

~60% of employees who say they plan to sit within 12 months

From that total, include only those who confirm they have the required study time available and meet your internal eligibility criteria.

Consider Piloting with a Smaller Cohort

Many firms choose not to launch organization-wide in year one. Starting with a defined pilot group reduces financial risk and builds internal proof points. Common pilot cohorts include:

- High-potential employees on an advancement track
- Employees who have previously attempted but not passed exams
- A single identified team or discipline

How School of PE Reduces Overbuying Risk

While the vast majority of our clients use all of their course licenses within 12 months, we understand that committing to a defined number of courses upfront can feel risky. School of PE offers safeguards to help protect your investment:

Unused Course Protection
Unused course licenses may be rolled into the following contract year, provided the firm renews at a minimum of 50% of the prior year's purchase volume.

Early Transfer Option
If an employee leaves the company or becomes unable to continue within 30 days of activating their course, the license can be transferred to another eligible employee.

STEP THREE

Define the Employee Experience and Develop Your Policy

One of the most sensitive parts of launching a licensure benefit is clarifying what the experience looks like for employees, from the moment they express interest through the moment they pass–and beyond.

If expectations aren't defined and communicated upfront, you risk inconsistent manager decisions, confusion about eligibility, and frustration about what passing does (or does not) unlock.

Before Enrollment: Set Expectations Early

The employee experience begins before anyone signs up for a course. Employees should clearly understand:

- Who is eligible
- When in the employee lifecycle
- What's required of them
- How the company will support them
- What passing will (and will not) unlock for them in current and future roles at the company

Many Firms Require Employees to:

- Confirm eligibility to sit for the exam
- Obtain manager approval
- Certify that they can commit to a set amount of study time over a six month time period (up to 12.5 hours per week)
- Submit a basic study plan and/or target exam date
- Commit to a minimum post-licensure employment period (e.g. 12–18 months)

Managers and Administrators Should Clearly Understand:

- Their role in making their direct reports succeed
- What signals mean someone is at risk, and when to escalate for additional support
- How and when to check in: set a recurring cadence (often every 2–3 months) to review progress, unblock issues, and reinforce accountability
- What study time is expected outside of work vs. where they can use their best judgment, and what "support" does not mean (e.g. lowering performance expectations)
- How to reinforce motivation along the way
- What happens after passing: what is mandated vs. manager discretion (e.g. comp changes, title changes, role scope, project assignment expectations), so employees don't get mixed messages

During Preparation: Define the Support Structure

Many organizations go beyond simply paying for a prep course. Consider whether your program will include:

- **Paid study time (e.g. one hour per week during work hours)**
- **Exam-day PTO (if the exam falls on a workday)**
- **Reimbursement of exam registration fees**
- **Structured manager check-ins during preparation**

The level of support you provide signals how seriously your organization takes licensure. At the same time, support should be paired with accountability. Clear expectations around study progress, scheduling timelines, and manager involvement protect your investment and are fair for your employees.

It's also important to recognize that preparing for licensure is a long, demanding process. The most effective programs build in moments of recognition along the way, celebrating milestones such as reaching the halfway point in the course, achieving a target score on a practice exam, or officially scheduling the exam. These small signals of encouragement help employees feel supported throughout the journey, not just at the finish line.

After Licensure: Clarify Advancement and Compensation

What happens after someone passes is often the most emotionally-charged part of the process. If you haven't defined and communicated this upfront, you risk inconsistent manager decisions and unnecessary frustration.

If you have advancement guidelines in place, this is a good opportunity to review them and ensure they align with the rest of your licensure experience. For example, will earning a license:

- **Automatically result in a title change?**
- **Make the employee eligible for promotion (subject to readiness and business need)?**
- **Be required for advancement into certain roles?**
- **Result in an automatic salary increase and/or spot bonus?**
- **Result in a salary increase during the next compensation cycle?**
- **Not impact compensation until scope and/or billable revenue expand?**

Some firms provide automatic salary increases to remain competitive in tight talent markets, while others tie compensation strictly to expanded scope and responsibility. The goals you clarified in Step 1 should guide which approach makes the most sense for your organization.

Once you've aligned on goals, budget guardrails, accountability, and what licensure unlocks for employees, the next step is translating those decisions into a clear, enforceable policy. The most successful licensure benefit policies are fair for employees while protecting your company from wasted spend.

Resources for You

- Sample employee journey map
- Customizable licensure benefit policy template

Download the Toolkit

STEP FOUR

Launch and Communicate

Even the clearest and most compelling policy will underperform without strong internal communication. Across our partner firms, adoption is highest when licensure is positioned as a strategic talent initiative, managers are aligned before the formal announcement, and organizations consistently celebrate newly licensed professionals.

What Works In Practice

Pre-Launch	Launch	Post-Launch
• Brief managers first and equip them with talking points and eligibility criteria	• Send a leadership-endorsed announcement to your target group (this may be org-wide or a more focused group) • Develop a simple application form and process including eligibility checks and manager approval • Create a dedicated intranet page outlining benefits and guardrails	• Monitor enrollment and activation rates in the first 30–60 days • Celebrate newly licensed engineers publicly • Reinforce licensure in performance conversations.

Internal Communications Toolkit

To make your rollout easier, we've compiled a set of ready-to-use internal communication templates modeled on successful launches from School of PE partners, including:

- Leadership announcement templates
- Manager briefing and talking points
- Interest survey template
- Intranet landing page copy
- Launch presentation deck

Download the Toolkit

STEP FIVE

Measure, Review, and Improve

Launching your program is just the beginning of your journey. We've found that partner firms that consistently produce more licensed engineers treat their program as an evolving system. This is as simple as setting up two rhythms:

1. Quarterly program health checks
2. Annual program evaluations

Quarterly: Program Health Checks

In addition to individual accountability (covered earlier), leadership should review program-level metrics quarterly:

Adoption	Engagement	Outcomes
• % of eligible employees enrolling • Activation rate (i.e. licenses issued vs. started)	• Completion rate • Exam scheduling rate • Midpoint progress compliance	• First-time pass rate • Staffing ratios • Turnover rate within 6–12 months of licensure

Quarterly reviews allow you to understand how you're tracking and if there are issues, intervene before engagement drops or budget is wasted.

Annual: Program Evaluation and Budget Planning

At renewal time, step back and assess the program holistically:

Policy	Budget	Impact
• Are eligibility criteria too broad or too restrictive? • Are chargeback provisions working as intended? • Are study time or other benefits being used appropriately? • Are your actual post-licensure outcomes (e.g. promotions, pay increases, title updates, bonuses) consistent with what is outlined in your policy?	• How many licenses did we budget for, and how many were used? • What was our all-in cost per license earned? • Based on this year's participation and outcomes, how many employees are realistically eligible to participate next year?	• Are pass rates meeting expectations? • Is the program impacting our ability to maintain optimal staffing ratios and retain licensed employees?

What Successful Programs Have in Common

After helping more than 200 engineering firms and DOTs formalize licensure as a benefit, a few patterns consistently emerge about successful programs:

- **Be intentional from the start.** The most successful programs are intentionally designed around the employee experience. They begin by budgeting based on realistic eligibility and capacity, and focusing their energies on employees who are truly positioned to act in the next 6–12 months. Often that means starting with a defined cohort: those already approved to sit for the exam, those who have attempted and not yet passed, or high-potential employees on a clear advancement track and a stable workload window.

- **Make accountability explicit.** When ownership is unclear, programs can stall. The most effective firms clearly define who is responsible for budget oversight, progress monitoring, and outcomes.

- **Create regular check-ins that reinforce ownership.** When ownership is unclear, programs can stall. The most effective firms clearly define who is responsible for budget oversight, progress monitoring, and outcomes.

- **Balance support with responsibility.** Employees are given meaningful backing, but they also have skin in the game. Clear consequences for inactivity or missed commitments reinforce that licensure is a shared investment.

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- **Celebrate progress along the way.** Six months of preparation can be a demanding experience for engineers balancing a full project workload. Successful firms build in recognition at key milestones, not just at the end of the journey. These moments of acknowledgment keep engineers motivated, send a signal to the rest of the organization that professional growth is supported and valued.

About

School of PE

School of PE partners with engineering firms, DOTs, and universities to help turn licensure into a structured employee benefit and create more licensed professionals, more predictably.

Structured study plans that fit alongside full-time work

Built-in accountability and dashboards to see progress in real-time

Dedicated partnership support for administrators and managers

A “Pass Guarantee” and “Rollover Policy” that reduce financial risk

Whether you are launching a formal licensure benefit for the first time or refining an existing reimbursement model, we help you design a program that drives real outcomes without unnecessary administrative burden.

Ready to Build a Licensure Benefit Your Employees Will Love?

Contact us to learn how School of PE can support your organization.

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Additional Resources for You

Download the toolkit for all of the resources you’ll need to get started: policy templates, communications templates, annual review checklists, and more.

Download the Toolkit