



Requesting Employer Sponsorship for Your Executive Certificate

We encourage you to speak to your employer to see if they provide support options for your education. In addition to funding, they may offer increased flexibility in your schedule and opportunities for you to demonstrate newly acquired skills in a real-world setting. This tip sheet offers guidance on how to request employer support for your certificate program.

How Should You Prepare for the Conversation?

Lay the Groundwork

Sequence your conversations wisely. Start by identifying whether your organization has offered support in the past. After that, broach the topic with your closest mentor and work up to more critical decision-makers.

Know the Program (Do Your Research)

Study the program details in depth, and be prepared to discuss specific courses you are interested in and skills you intend to gain. It is important to emphasize that this as an executive certificate, designed for experienced working professionals.

Prepare to Fully Explain the ROI for Your Company

An executive certificate in Artificial Intelligence from Columbia will benefit your career in the short and long term—and it is imperative that your employer understands how. Your enrollment advisor can help you prepare talking points around the return on investment, but here are a few to keep in mind:

- You will complete the program prepared to implement your knowledge. You will emerge not just with cutting-edge AI skills from some of the most accomplished experts in computer science and machine learning, but the ability to drive AI strategy and adoption across your organization.
- You will build top-tier connections. This program allows you to network with accomplished professionals nationwide across a variety of industries.
- You will gain insight into what is important right now. The curriculum examines current trends in AI and you will emerge understanding what your organization needs to do to keep up.



How Should You Engage Your Employer?

Before reaching out to your manager or human resources department, it is important to compile a list of questions to ensure you walk away with all the information you need.

- Does your company offer sponsorship or reimbursement, and what requirements do you need to meet to receive it?
- Will they cover a non-credit based program with pass/fail courses?
- What amount of funding is available?
- When are funds available? Is there a particular quarter when they become available?

When you feel you are ready to start the conversation, establish clear goals for each interaction. Remember to consider their interests and needs, not just yours. You may need to do one or more of the following with each conversation:

- **Educate** the individual on the value of an online AI executive certificate.
- **Advocate** for yourself as a strong candidate for success.
- **Present** a thorough benefits analysis for the division or organization.
- **Learn** about the decision-making process involved in supporting this level of professional development within the organization.
- **Secure** an endorsement or introduction to the next person in the decision chain.
- **Obtain** approval from the primary decision-maker.

How Should You Explain the Financial Commitment?

When it comes down to discussing the numbers, there are several important points to make for financial sponsorship.

- Structure your request for sponsorship based on quarterly financial requirements rather than one lump sum. This may translate better for budget forecasts.
- Be explicit with the amount you will be required to pay to put the overall cost in perspective—particularly if you are seeking partial financial reimbursement.

What Should Your Follow-Up Look Like?

Navigating the negotiation process may require patience. Remember that there are often multiple paths to success. Let your employer know that they can speak with a Columbia AI executive certificate enrollment advisor if they have questions about the program or the application process.

Additionally, if at first you are denied funding, do not be afraid to work with your manager to build a business case. This can include reframing the program or adding additional detail and pitching again. **Many employers are willing to be flexible if you can make a strong argument and provide tangible examples that illustrate how the certificate will be beneficial for you and your organization.**