

NASPE Eugene H. Rooney, Jr. Award | Innovative State Human Resource Management Program

Pennsylvania Commonwealth Mentoring Program

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Summary

The Office of Administration created the Commonwealth Mentoring Program (CMP) in 2009 to increase employee skills and retention without adding to our operating costs. Over the past several years, Pennsylvania has implemented programs like CMP to address knowledge transfer and workforce and succession planning issues related to the aging workforce. Currently, 16% of Pennsylvania's workforce is eligible to retire and is projected to rise to 32% by 2019. The goal of the program is to nurture leadership skills in a diverse and inclusive group of employees. Due to staffing constraints, the program was suspended in 2011 and re-introduced in 2014. While the idea of utilizing mentoring relationships as a vehicle for less-experienced staff to develop relationships with more-experienced colleagues occurs, the CMP takes a fresh and exciting approach to formal mentoring. CMP is unique in that it combines mentoring and coaching, practical application and exercises to strengthen curriculum content, experiential activities, one-on-one meetings with mentees/mentor, web-based and classroom training opportunities, individual development planning and core business process identification and documentation into one comprehensive package.

Executive sponsorship, the caliber of mentors and instructors, presenters (commonwealth professionals and/or private sector speakers skilled in their subject matter), and quality of program content and structure make this another great developmental program the commonwealth is currently offering that could be replicated by other states facing similar workforce challenges.

1. Brief description of program: CMP is an 8-month program available to management employees with a minimum of one year of state service at pay scale groups 5 – 8 for mentees and 9 and above for mentors. Participants are nominated and paired at the agency level in order to best match the agency's mission, function and organizational needs. Mentoring pairs are taken through an extensive orientation process to establish a foundation for the relationship and clarify roles, responsibilities and expectations. In addition to full-group instruction, both mentees and mentors attend separate breakout sessions designed to expose the group to additional topics and experiences related to the overarching educational topic. The CMP curriculum includes the following components:

- Active involvement through mentoring and ongoing coaching and development between the mentor/mentee pairs
 - individual development plans are jointly created by mentor/mentee pairing
 - individual, bi-weekly meetings take place between each mentor/mentee pairing
- Experiential, skills-based curriculum focused on the following topics:
 - Networking – Exploring how to network, discovering the benefits of developing an elevator speech and the importance of effectively closing a conversation. Breakout session topics include: Building Your Personal Brand, Conversation Starters, Carrying Yourself with Confidence, and a Mock Networking Event;
 - Knowledge Management - Learning its importance and exploring topics related to identifying resources, overcoming barriers to knowledge-sharing, and systematically capturing and managing knowledge;
 - Business Ethics - Increasing awareness of situations that impact ethics, integrity, and moral reasoning, reviewing and discussing workplace dilemmas and preventing unethical situations by demonstrating integrity and ethical conduct within and outside of the workplace;
 - Appreciating Differences - Exploring the value of differences and common interpersonal roadblocks that significantly impact relationship-building within the workplace. Breakout

session topics include: Conflict Management, Building an Inclusive Workplace and Influencing Others.

- Each educational session is preceded by a ten minute web-based training course that introduces the topic and serves as a pre-requisite and foundation for discussion.

- Executive sponsorship from senior leadership at the cabinet and deputy secretary levels

CMP is experientially driven, partnership-oriented, and feedback-focused. All of this takes place in a safe and mutually supportive learning environment.

2. Length of time program has been operational (month and year): CMP was implemented in 2009 and was offered through June 2011. During this timeframe, two classes participated and a total of 301 participants (154 mentees and 147 mentors) successfully completed the program. The revamped program was piloted in October 2014 and currently has a total of 32 pairs (64 participants).

3. Reason program was created; problem or issue to be addressed: PA has a growing population of retirement-eligible employees. Currently, 16% of Pennsylvania's workforce is eligible to retire and is projected to rise to 32% by 2019. Further, there is a lack of leadership development programs and insufficient budget and staff resources available at the agency level to create them. The purpose of the program is to foster mentoring connections, improve skills and competencies, and increase knowledge management and transfer throughout the enterprise while also encouraging agencies to ensure that developmental opportunities are afforded to all employees.

4. Reason why this program is a new and creative method: Many informal developmental relationships are formed each and every day within the workplace between less-experienced managers and senior managers, peers or subordinates. These relationships typically result in a variety of assistance including mentoring, feedback, coaching, sponsoring, skill-building, preparation for advancement, role-modeling, and reinforcement. The CMP's strategic approach to formal mentoring is not only unique, but also unduplicated outside the commonwealth. While the idea of utilizing mentoring relationships as a vehicle for less-experienced staff to develop relationships with their more-experienced colleagues is not

a new one, the CMP takes a fresh and exciting approach to formal mentoring. The CMP has a two-fold strategy that involves establishing and nurturing formal mentoring relationships and then leveraging those flourishing relationships to provide intentional learning directly linked to specific workforce and succession planning concerns. The CMP pairs experienced staff with less-experienced colleagues, facilitating information exchange between individuals within a specific agency. The CMP then convenes the mentoring pairs, from agencies across the commonwealth, at four educational sessions where the pairs learn about and discuss specific issues and challenges currently faced by the commonwealth. This creative approach to mentoring addresses both micro-level and macro-level workforce concerns by providing opportunities for staff members to develop mentoring relationships and to discuss realistic solutions to enterprise workforce and succession planning concerns, such as professional networking and development, knowledge management, business ethics and building workplace diversity and inclusiveness.

5. Program's start-up costs: All educational sessions are facilitated by internal program staff and/or outside speakers who graciously agree to volunteer their time.

6. Program's operational costs: Aside from internal staff facilitation commitments, supply and material costs are minimal.

7. How program is funded: Unlike the other leadership development programs we administer at the enterprise level, there is no cost for mentee/mentor participation and no limit on the number of individuals who can participate. The salary of the HR Analyst who manages the program is funded through state funds appropriated by the General Assembly.

8. Program origination: The program originated in the state of Pennsylvania.

9. Awareness of similar programs in other states; how program differs: We are not aware of any program that is similar to this one that is being offered in another state.

10. Measures of program success: The CMP evaluation includes several techniques for measuring learning outcomes and process fidelity:

- Compare participant expectations before the program with post-program reported experience
- Conduct pre- and post-tests for each educational session to assess learning gains
- Conduct a survey after each educational session to gauge the quality of content delivery (i.e. logistics, clarity of delivery, etc.)
- Review mentee individual development plans at the middle and end of program year
- Facilitate a six-month post-program focus group discussion with mentors and mentees
- Evaluate completeness of documented core business processes

The 2014 CMP evaluations demonstrate that both mentors and mentees achieved the following learning gains at each educational session:

- 85% of mentors and mentees agree that they are well-matched and that their partners are enthusiastic and committed
- 96% agreed that viewing web-based training teasers distributed prior to each educational session prepares them for the mentoring sessions and that they will use information from the educational sessions in their work
- 40% of participants indicated increased comfort with networking after participating in the networking educational session
- 75% of participants did not have a prepared elevator speech prior to the networking educational session but reported developing one as a result of their participation
- 49% improved their ability to identify the types of knowledge after the knowledge management educational session
- 47% of participants improved their ability to identify steps to knowledge management following the knowledge management educational session
- 93% of participants felt adequately prepared to document a core business process following the knowledge management educational session

11. Ways in which program has grown/changed since inception: Based upon participant feedback and program staff observations from the first and second year of the program (2009 and 2010), the following changes were made to enhance the learning experience:

- Increased evaluation component to measure learning gains/outcomes after each educational session
- Developed web-based training teasers to introduce the group to the topic prior to attending an educational session
- Introduced break-out sessions to expose the group to additional topics and experiences related to the over-arching educational topic
- Added the requirement to develop an individual development plan for mentees that identifies two professional development goals to complete during the duration of the program
- Renewed focus on knowledge management and transfer by adding an educational session on this topic and having participants identify and document a core business process for continuity purposes
- Included separate sessions for mentors and mentees during the program orientation to clarify roles, responsibilities, expectations and provide helpful tips to manage their mentor/mentee experience