

2016 NASPE Eugene H. Rooney, Jr. Award | Innovative State Human Resource Management Program

Commonwealth Mentoring Program

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Summary

The Office of Administration created the Commonwealth Mentoring Program (CMP) to increase employee skills and retention without adding to our operating costs. Over the past several years, Pennsylvania has implemented programs like the CMP to address knowledge transfer and workforce and succession planning issues related to the aging workforce. Currently, 16% of Pennsylvania's state employee workforce is eligible to retire and is projected to rise to 32% by 2020. The CMP takes a strategic approach to formal mentoring by providing intentional learning directly linked to specific workforce and succession planning concerns. The program also takes a fresh and exciting approach to formal mentoring by combining mentoring and coaching, practical application and exercises to strengthen curriculum content, experiential activities, one-on-one meetings with mentees/mentors, web-based and classroom training opportunities, individual development planning and core business process identification and documentation into one comprehensive package. Because the CMP uses internal staff and outside speakers who volunteer their time, the Office of Administration is able to offer the program at no cost to participating agencies, many of which lack the budget and staffing resources to create their own leadership development programs. With many other states currently facing similar workforce challenges, the Office of Administration believes that the CMP is an innovative and cost effective program that can be replicated by other states to create similar benefits.

1. Brief description of program: The CMP is an 8-month program in which mid-level management employees with a minimum of one year of state service are mentored by upper-level management employees from their agency. 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. 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 each 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, learning how to effectively start and close a conversation and increasing self-confidence, culminating in a mock networking event;
 - Knowledge Management - Learning its importance and exploring topics related to identifying resources, overcoming barriers to knowledge-sharing and systematically capturing, documenting and managing knowledge;
 - Business Ethics - Increasing awareness of situations that require 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 understanding common interpersonal roadblocks to relationship-building within the workplace.

Each educational session is preceded by a 10 minute web-based training course that introduces the topic and serves as a pre-requisite and foundation for discussion. The 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): The CMP was initially implemented in 2009 and offered through June 2011. During this timeframe, two classes with a total of 301 participants (154 mentees and 147 mentors) successfully completed the program. The revamped program began in October 2014. Thirty-two pairs (64 participants) graduated from the 2014-2015 cycle and 31 pairs (62 participants) are currently enrolled in the 2015-2016 cycle.

3. Reason program was created; problem or issue to be addressed: Like many other states, PA has a growing population of retirement-eligible employees. Currently, 16% of the state employee workforce is eligible to retire and is projected to rise to 32% by 2020. Further, many agencies lack the budget and staff resources to create new leadership development programs. PA created the CMP to help address its workforce and succession planning challenges through a cost-conscious approach that fosters mentoring connections, improves skills and competencies, and increases 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 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. 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 brings all of the mentoring pairs together for four educational sessions where they learn about and

discuss specific issues and challenges currently faced by the commonwealth. This creative approach 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 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: There is no cost to participate and no limit on the number of mentor/mentee pairs an agency can nominate to the program each year. The salary of the HR Analyst who manages the program is supported 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 similar program 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 focus group discussion with mentors and mentees six months after they finish the program
- Evaluate completeness of documented core business processes

The 2014-2015 CMP evaluations demonstrated that the program was successful in developing mentoring relationships; 85% of mentees and mentors agreed that they were well-matched by their agencies and that their partners were enthusiastic and committed; 77% reported that they intended to continue a mentoring relationship after the program ended; and 97% would encourage others to participate as either mentees or mentors.

Additionally, both mentees and mentors made learning gains from each of the experiential, skills-based sessions; 92% of participants reported increased comfort with professional networking; 91% said that they gained networking skills; 97% reported increased awareness of the importance of knowledge management and that they gained useful skills for managing knowledge; 94% expressed increased understanding of the value of diversity and seeking out commonalities with their co-workers; and 94% reported increasing their knowledge of business ethics.

Agencies benefited from knowledge transfer and employee development through 97% of mentees documenting a core business process and 98% completing two self-identified professional goals in the 2014-2015 cycle, while 98% of all participants increased their understanding of the value of differences in the workplace and 97% gained skills for finding commonality with coworkers .

11. Ways in which program has grown/changed since inception: Based upon participant feedback and program staff observations, the following changes were made to enhance the learning experience:

- Based on evaluation responses from the 2014-2015 CMP cycle, content that was previously presented through “break-out sessions” was incorporated into the four main educational sessions, making it available to all participants.
- Based on pre- and post-testing of participants, staff strengthened the 2015-2016 curriculum with more challenging information and exercises on the topics of networking, knowledge management, and business ethics.

- In the 2014-2015 cycle, the CMP 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.
- Also in the 2014-2015 cycle, mentees were required to identify and document a core business process for continuity purposes. In the 2015-2016 cycle, both mentees and mentors were given this assignment.
- Based on evaluation results, the length of the orientation session was increased to more extensively review mentor and mentee roles, responsibilities, and expectations in separate breakout sessions, as well as to provide helpful tips to manage mentor/mentee experiences.