

Leadership

Since the initial publication of the Partnership for Public Service Solution Center case studies, the programs highlighted have encountered progress, changes and continuing challenges. The following questions attempt to capture a snapshot of what has transpired in that time, with the goal of informing other agencies who might undertake similar initiatives.

UPDATE

HHS: Emerging Leaders Program

Case Study Published November, 2003

Against a backdrop of global turmoil, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) is front and center in the war on disease and bio-terror. In these tough economic times, HHS employees are also our nation's advocates for the disabled, aged and homeless populations. In light of these formidable challenges, HHS is facing a long-term battle to ensure the well-being and safety of Americans. To be successful will require nothing less than inspired leadership, yet retirement projections show that HHS is in danger of losing much of its leadership corps over the next several years.

To respond to this potential crisis, HHS launched the Emerging Leaders Program (ELP), and early indications are promising. More than 8,000 applicants with advanced degrees competed for just 62 slots in the first year of the ELP. Based on the Career Intern framework, the program recruits talented employees and begins preparing them for leadership roles at the very start of their careers, through skills training and unique learning opportunities.

1. Is the program still in place?

Since its launch three years ago, the Emerging Leaders Program has expanded in response to requests from individual HHS Centers. This is due to the Emerging Leaders performing at exceptionally high levels and being viewed as an outstanding asset to the organization. As a result, there has been a shift within HHS Centers from hiring at the GS-13 or 14 levels to utilizing Emerging Leaders at the GS-9 level. This has created a pipeline of new talent who can be future leaders in HHS and are committed to staying with HHS as their Federal career grows.

2. What adjustments have you made to the program?

Based on feedback received from participants, managers and staff involved in the Emerging Leader Program, the following changes have been instituted:

- **Recruitment Procedures** – Targeting recruitment efforts at college career fairs and other events across the nation rather than relying on a job vacancy announcement. This enables HHS to reach out directly to over 30 colleges and universities to promote the program, outline the opportunities for development and advancement, and respond directly to applicant questions.



- **Recruitment/Hiring Time Frames** – Modifying the recruitment timeline from November 1 to March 1 as opposed to the original time frame of February 1 to May 1. This change, made in response to requests from colleges and universities, enables high potential applicants who are extremely interested in working for HHS to make career decisions sooner in the year. Interviews are conducted in mid-March and selections are made by April 1. The Program kick-off remains mid-July. The individuals selected to participate in the Program appreciate the extra time from receipt of the employment offer to start date as it allows them added flexibility in addressing relocation and other logistical-related issues.
- **Human Resources (HR) Track** – Adding the HR track has been added to the Administrative Career Path. It focuses on developing HR Professionals who will become expert consultants to managers and take on leadership roles within the HHS HR Centers. These individuals will rotate through the four HR Centers, as opposed to an HHS programmatic Center, and will focus on HR functional issues and receive training so they may be certified by the Society of Human Resource Management as a Professional in Human Resources (PHR). They will also attend all Emerging Leader training and participate in group activities.
- **Training** – Modifying the second year approach to provide a more in-depth, comprehensive focus on leadership competencies (the Executive Core Qualifications, or ECQs). Simply put, in the first year Emerging Leaders learned about the ECQ's and in the second they learn how to apply them in their work assignments.

An ongoing training plan is now being developed for the 3rd year and beyond for Program graduates. It is envisioned that this will be a combination of continued development and technical training appropriate for their specific positions. The goal is to keep the graduating class together for the developmental training to continue the bonds established while in the two-year program, enhance networking opportunities, and serve as champions for the Program within their Centers as they progress in their careers.

3. How has the program prompted other changes or adapted to organizational changes?

Recognizing the incredible talent being hired into HHS every year, managers are beginning to integrate this Program into their hiring plans. They also recognize that Emerging Leaders are available to assist them on mission critical projects via rotational assignments, which is a key component of the Program. HHS, as is true for most Federal agencies, has an aging workforce and this Program has become an integral part of an effort to bring in new Federal employees who want to have a career with HHS. Largely because of its success, managers are assessing how they can use this Program to meet their workload demands rather than hiring exclusively at mid-levels which enhances the pipeline with new hires from outside the federal government and reduces the overall average age of the HHS workforce.

The success of the Emerging Leaders Program has prompted managers to recognize the need for other developmental Programs to be initiated within HHS. In addition, recruitment efforts at colleges and universities are now seen as a valuable opportunity to recruit highly talented individuals to HHS thereby creating a greater commitment to building relationships with colleges and universities. In turn, colleges and universities are promoting the Emerging Leaders Program and other HHS employment opportunities to their students.

4. What remains the greatest success of this effort? The greatest challenge?

The greatest successes of the Program are that high-potential individuals are being hired and they are helping to address HHS' succession planning goals. Most hires are individuals who recently completed graduate school seeking a long-term career with HHS. They are very highly motivated and mission oriented, represent the future leaders of HHS, and help address the agency's aging workforce concerns. In addition, the Program has greatly facilitated building ongoing relationships with colleges and universities. The Program is now known on a national level and many higher learning institutions are beginning to steer their graduate students toward HHS for employment opportunities. Building and promoting this relationship is essential for HHS in continuing to hire the brightest and best students that these colleges and universities have to offer.

The greatest challenge is the oversight and management of the Program (recruitment, selection, training, rotational assignments, and day-to-day coordination) as it continues to grow. As the Program's success grows, the demand for positions has increased and is expected to continue to do so. In addition, the number of applicants and the competition for available positions has also become more intense each year. This has challenged managers and Program staff to make the necessary time commitment to interview and make selections in a timely fashion, identify meaningful rotational assignments, and provide cutting-edge training.

5. How have you measured progress in this area?

A significant measure for the Program is the high retention rate of HHS Emerging Leaders. The first year's class graduated 54 out of the original 60 who were hired. In order to graduate, Emerging Leaders must meet outlined objectives for each rotational assignment. The assessments received to date praise the overall high level of performance by the Emerging Leaders. Another key measure is the continued interest and support for the Program by managers as demonstrated by a steady increase in hires over the past three years - 60 in the first year, 62 in the second and 87 in the third year.

6. What advice do you have for others seeking to undertake similar changes?

There are a number of key elements to ensure ongoing Program success:

- Obtain support, commitment and involvement at the highest levels of the Agency as well as from front-line managers.
- Develop a well-laid plan outlining operating procedures for the Program.
- Establish a budget to cover the expenses associated with all aspects of the Program, including dedicated staff to manage it, recruitment, travel, training, orientation, and marketing materials.
- Develop and implement an effective recruitment and selection process, and a comprehensive training plan that continues to foster the development of Emerging Leaders and challenges them to succeed.
- Assess and review the program periodically, modifying as necessary to meet the needs of the agency, managers and the Emerging Leaders