

Strategic Career Development Plan Administration

Chesterfield County, Virginia

I. Abstract of the Program

In recent years, there has been a national trend toward flatter organizational structures. A byproduct of this trend is that traditional employee movement "up" the career ladder is no longer as accessible as it once was. Localities need to be creative in identifying alternatives to the supervisory track, in order to move employees along in their careers, keeping them challenged and motivated, so they do not pursue career opportunities elsewhere. Employees need to be flexible in planning their careers and demonstrate a willingness to continue to learn and use new skills. Ultimately, the purpose of a career development plan is to assist an employee in achieving his or her goals and the long-term goals of the organization. In doing so, an organization also increases the likelihood of retaining the employee, because management has helped the employee consider how to achieve career goals within the organization, rather than by leaving it.

Chesterfield County has taken a proactive approach in designing and approving new career development plans while maintaining internal plan equity across department lines. To accomplish this, the County assembled a team of experienced professionals to study and implement a strategy for reviewing and administering career development plans. The team established criteria for future career development plans and designed a streamlined approval and implementation process.

II. The Problem/Need of the Program

Many workplace analysts are predicting an unprecedented labor shortage in the years ahead as the population ages and there are fewer new entrants into the workplace. A government-projected shortfall of 10 million workers by 2010 could trigger widespread turmoil at workplaces in need of skilled employees, and cause a drop in the quality of services provided by local governments. Employers who do not plan ahead are going to spend a significant amount of money replacing people who have moved on to other jobs. Since numerous studies have shown it's not money that motivates and retains employees, Chesterfield County recognized a need to examine other retention strategies such as additional career development plans that will increase job satisfaction and performance. People want to be challenged, they want to learn and grow, but opportunities for promotion are not as prevalent since the advent of flatter organizations.

Historically, career development plans in the public sector have been developed in a piecemeal fashion, often starting in Public Safety and spreading slowly to other areas. Chesterfield County recognized a need to take a proactive approach to strategically design and implement new career development plans where they would impact the most employees and align with the county's strategic goals and objectives. To accomplish this, standard criteria and a formal process for plan design and approval would need to be developed.

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III. Description of the Program

Chesterfield County established a team of human resources professionals to develop and implement a strategic plan for designing and administering career development plans. The team, which began work in the Summer of 2004, consisted of the assistant director of human resource management, the County's compensation & benefits manager and a senior compensation analyst. Its first step was to identify the following objectives:

- Develop a proactive approach to meet future staffing needs by increasing retention of existing employees through the use of career development plans;
- Help departments identify the job-related knowledge, skills, abilities, competencies and experience that employees need to be effective in their positions;
- Give guidance to departments that want to design career development plans that help employees set realistic expectations of career growth, by suggesting time frames for certain milestones to happen and identifying areas for future development;
- Provide a job and compensation structure that supports the organization's goals, allows for individual development and growth and rewards employees for achieving their goals.

Next the team reviewed fifteen career development plans that had previously been approved to identify common themes, strengths and weaknesses. From this analysis, the following criteria were established:

- Career Development Plans (Plans) should result in an increase in job duties upon completion and should include substantive development goals at each level. Plans structured around a certification requirement (i.e. Utility Workers receiving a Class II license) are particularly encouraged because they are quantifiable.
- The maximum number of levels is four. Each level should take at least two years to complete.
- Total salary increases over and above existing merit increases shall not exceed 10%. An employee's salary may not exceed maximum of the salary range. Where possible, recognition for level achievement should be in the form of a bonus, for example \$500-\$1,000. This is particularly appropriate for the lower levels of the Plan.
- Plans for a single incumbent are not encouraged, but may be appropriate if by the nature of the position it is of unique value to the County and is recognized in the market as a difficult position to fill and retain.

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- Plans are considered a separate, but parallel, career track to supervision. Therefore, it is not appropriate to design a career development plan for supervisory or management positions. Individual development plans that focus on the incumbent are appropriate in those cases.
- Design of Plans by individual departments for countywide positions (i.e. clerical support) is not permitted because it will lead to inconsistency from one department to the next for employees in the same classification. In the future, a cross-functional team may be created to develop such Plans.
- Probationary employees, employees who do not meet performance expectations and employees with documented disciplinary actions such as sexual harassment are not eligible to participate.
- Failure to maintain required certifications, significant performance issues and disciplinary actions are grounds for removal from the Plan and may result in loss of pay.
- Plans may be discontinued at any time.

These criteria will be used when reviewing all future Plans and are provided to departments as a starting point when they begin to develop a Plan. The use of such guidelines has reduced rework and resulted in higher quality, more effective Plans.

The team also created a standardized approval process for new career development plans. Approval of new Plans and revision of existing Plans must be coordinated with the Compensation Unit in the Department of Human Resource Management. If the Plan meets all established criteria and is aligned with the County's strategic goals, it is submitted to the County Administrator for final approval.

IV. Use of Technology

The team used Word and Excel to develop summary documents and procedures. They also used the intranet to perform research and email to forward and receive drafts for comment.

V. The Cost of the Program

There were no capital costs to develop the strategic plan for designing and administering career development plans.

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Operating costs consisted primarily of employee hours worked:

EMPLOYEE TYPE	EMPLOYEE HOURS
Senior Compensation Analyst	50
Compensation & Benefits Manager	100
Assistant Director of HRM	100

Total costs were approximately \$7,725.

VI. The Results/Success of the Program

The development and implementation of this program produced noticeable benefits. Human Resource Management staff have used the criteria to coach departments designing new career development plans, resulting in reduced rework and higher quality, more effective Plans. Review time on proposed Plans has decreased from an average of two months prior to this project to three weeks. Departments are now able to move from the design stage to approval and implementation in a fraction of the time it took before these changes took place. Instead of blindly creating a Plan they hope meets the needs of employees and the County, departments now have clear direction on the format and contents of a successful career development plan.

Although there are other factors to consider, it is interesting to note that Chesterfield County's 2004 turnover rate decreased to its lowest level in five years, while employee satisfaction increased. Every two years, the County conducts an Organizational Climate Assessment to get input from employees on their work environment. Results are then benchmarked against previous assessments and national norms. In 2004, the County's overall percent favorable rating was 68%, compared to 62% for the national norm. More importantly, several categories that relate to career development also exceeded national norms. For example, ratings for Training & Development exceeded the national norm for that category by 8%.

VII. Worthiness of an Award

Chesterfield County's strategic approach to designing and implementing new career development plans has provided valuable guidance to departments on the development of effective Plans, and to employees on how to upgrade their skills to enrich their careers and receive positive rewards for doing so. A satisfied, well-trained workforce leads to lower turnover, greater efficiency, and quality customer service.