

STATE GOVERNMENT CASE STUDIES

Workforce: 85,468

Synopsis

Since 1981, the Pennsylvania Management Associate (PMA) Program has recruited master's-level professionals to work in state government. It has produced more than 400 graduates, approximately half of whom now serve 26 state agencies in senior leadership and other roles. The one-year program includes many components that research has found are effective for building the leadership pipeline: rotational job assignments across agencies; a cross-functional team project; and formal training. Recent changes to the program have accelerated the recruitment process and broadened the prerequisites to attract candidates with more diverse areas of expertise.

Challenges

- **Declining applications.** Although the PMA has an excellent track record, applications had fallen off. Relying primarily on campus recruitment, the program attracted just 60 applicants for the class of 2001.
- **Projected retirement and attrition.** Through workforce planning — conducted statewide and at the agency level — the state has identified where it is likely to lose employees in coming years and which positions would be most difficult to fill or train for. These projections point to the need to attract new talent with credentials in a variety of disciplines.

Approach

Since 1981, Pennsylvania's Management Associate Program (PMAP) has recruited state residents with a master's degree to participate in a developmental program that grooms them to become candidates for mid- and upper-level management jobs in state government. Each Associate is sponsored by a state agency, who pays his or her first-year salary.

Faced with declining applications and a growing need to attract new talent, the state made several important changes to the PMA Program in 2002. These changes, their impact, and the design of the Program are discussed below.

Recruitment

Historically, the state has worked closely with Pennsylvania universities to recruit recent MPA- or MBA-graduates to the program. To combat a decline in applicants, two changes were made that have since dramatically reversed that trend. The first was the decision to broaden the degree requirement. The state no longer requires that the master's degree must have been earned within the past two years, nor does it limit the field of study. Any master's-level degree is accepted. As the state's workforce planning efforts made clear, "We weren't going to be losing just people with an MPA, but people with master's degrees in many fields," says Kathy Kieffer, Chief of the Office of Administration's Human Resource Development Division. "We needed to expand our recruitment base to reflect the types of degrees that would be successful in state government."

The second change was the move to an online application, which accelerated the process. As a result of these changes, the number of applications jumped from 60 to over 400. Applications are now limited to the first 300 received, to make selection more manageable.

Selection

Civil service conducts an initial review of applicants to screen out any who don't meet the basic requirements, including state residency. Those who do are invited to Harrisburg for a written and oral Civil Service exam. Typically, 50-70 percent of eligible applicants take this next step. Civil Service identifies the top candidates based on the exam scores and Civil Service rules. In recent years, the pool has ranged from 25-80.

Following the oral and written examination, applicants have the chance to meet with current and graduate PMAs to learn about the PMAP experience. During this period, applicants are asked how they heard about the program and what attracted them to apply. They can also provide information on their career interests. That information, combined with the test scores and the initial applications, enables the Human Resource Development Division within the Bureau of Workforce Planning and Development (which oversees the program) to select finalists and match them with a sponsoring agency. Typically, the PMAP class ranges from 15-20 participants. Most are in their thirties; however, there has been at least one person age 60 or older in both the 2003 and 2004 classes.

¹ Pennsylvania's approach to workforce planning was described in detail in the previous study, *The Aging and Retiring Government Workforce*, available at www.cps.ca.gov/AboutUs/agebubble.asp

Program Design

The twelve-month program begins in July and has several components:

- **Orientation.** During the first weeks of the program, the new PMA class gets a basic grounding in state government, the Civil Service system and the PMA Program history and its network of graduates.
- **State agency briefings.** These sessions inform Associates about major state agencies, including those with which they may be involved either through a rotational assignment or team-project.
- **Rotational job assignments.** The first of six rotational assignments is spent at the funding agency working in one of the four, core rotations that all Associates are required to complete: policy; budget; enterprise management (at one of three offices reporting to the Office of Administration); and HR. The remaining two rotations can be chosen by the Associate and related to his or her career interests.
- **Management Development Training.** These sessions are scheduled throughout the year and focus on topics such as presentation skills, facilitation, conflict management, team-building, group problem-solving, and leadership.
- **Management-Issue Team Project.** Working in teams of four or five, Associates take on a real (as opposed to simulated) inter-agency project that must be completed within eight months. The teams deliver progress reports to an advisory group of senior managers, as well as a final report with recommended actions.

Team Project Examples

Prison Overcrowding and Incarceration Alternatives

Review of Commonwealth Revenue Collection and Utilization Progress

What is the Interest Level on the Part of State Political Subdivisions in Joining a Commonwealth Radio Network?

Impact of the Existing Transportation System on Economic Development

The Fraudulent Uses of Commonwealth Driver's Licenses

Design and Implementation of an Employee Exchange Program for the Office of Income Maintenance, Department of Public Welfare

Universal Access—An Alternative to Pennsylvania's Health Care Delivery System

Job Placement

Each February, all state agencies (even those that haven't sponsored a PMA) are invited to submit position vacancies appropriate for the PMAs. In some cases, an agency may be interested in a specific Associate, based on her or his performance on a rotational assignment or team project. In other cases, an Associate may approach an agency about a specific job opportunity. Agencies and candidates interview each other and, by June, Associates have a new job. After a six-month probation, they become permanent, full-time employees.

Although the initial position posting is targeted solely to PMAs, an agency that fails to fill a position through this process may then pursue other recruitment avenues.

Outcomes

One of the program's benefits, says Kieffer, is that the Associates and the agencies gain broad exposure. The agency briefings, rotational assignments and team project give program participants a much wider network than if they had entered state government on their own. They also gain a deeper understanding of the organizational and programmatic intersection points within state government. Anecdotally, this experience pays off once they've completed the program. Agency leaders report that PMA graduates are much better equipped than those who haven't had the program to work across agencies boundaries. They're also able to accomplish such tasks more quickly.

While some of Pennsylvania's state agencies have formal leadership development programs, "they tend to be more targeted," says Kieffer. Because the PMA Program provides a broader kind of preparation, its graduates "can serve a number of different functions in different agencies."

Evaluation

- **Performance evaluations.** The PMAs are evaluated by their rotational supervisors, team project advisors, and advisory team members. The program director completes a final performance evaluation based on this input plus their own observations and experiences.
- **Evaluation of the application and examination process.** The selection panelists, representatives of the State Civil Service Commission, and the HRD Division evaluate the application and examination process. The applicants also have the opportunity to provide input during the post-examination period.
- **Feedback on the program design and components.** This is collected from Program participants, final placement supervisors, Agency PMAP Coordinators, facilitators, and others.

Some recent changes as a result of this feedback:

- A written test was added to the examination process based on feedback from the PMAs' final placement supervisors.
- Mid-rotation evaluations were added based on feedback from both the rotational supervisor and the PMAs.
- Reference checks are now made for just the top candidates and are conducted by the HRD Division, rather than the selection panel.
- As a result of feedback from Agency PMAP Coordinators, the program's intranet site has been changed to give the Coordinators and others better access to information.

PMA mobility, promotion, and retention rates are regularly tracked. While the state hopes to compare these outcomes for PMAs who participated in the Program before and after various changes were made, it is still too early to draw definitive conclusions about the impacts of these changes, says Kieffer.

Cost

A state agency funds each Associate's salary (\$36,499 plus benefits) during the Program year. The only additional costs are incidental, such as for travel during a rotational assignment.