

## **Sabbaticals for Employees**

Every year, one or two employees of the city of **Winchester, Virginia** (23,600), take a six-month sabbatical from their regular jobs to work in other capacities within the city government. These employees submit an application explaining what they would like to do during their sabbatical, and those who are selected are assigned to a different department. The program provides employees with a change of pace, an opportunity to develop new skills, and the chance to learn about how the city works.

### **Leadership/staffing**

The sabbatical program is directed by the city's director of administration. The city manager helps select successful candidates.

### **Timeline**

The program began in October 2004, and the first participants completed their sabbatical experiences between January 1 and June 30, 2005. The application process for the 2006 program began in October 2005.

### **Budget/funding**

While they are on sabbatical, employees receive their usual salaries, regardless of what they do during this period. The program offers participants' home departments the opportunity to hire temporary assistance while the employees are on sabbatical, but no department has asked for this assistance yet.

### **Program description**

In the fall, interested employees submit a one-page letter of interest explaining why they are applying and what they hope to gain from the experience. The city manager and director of administration review the applications and interview all of the candidates. They then select one or two of the applicants to participate in the sabbatical program. The director of administration then contacts an appropriate department head to set up a position for each employee, and the employee is

assigned to that department for six months. The home department may overfill positions or hire temporary staff to cover the absent employee's responsibilities.

Assignments are carefully selected to match employee's interests, experience, skills, and education. One of the first sabbatical participants was a police sergeant who wanted to learn more about recruitment, retention, and related issues. He spent his sabbatical working on special projects for the administration department, which handles human resources. During this period, he had the opportunity to observe and participate in the hiring process, and he developed useful skills in employee recruitment and selection.

### **Results**

Employees benefit by developing new skills and learning about the different functions of city departments. They also come back from their experiences refreshed and ready to devote their attention to their base positions. The departments to which they are assigned use the opportunity to complete special projects. Ultimately, the program opens up communications among departments.

### **Contact**

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