

2016 CSAC Challenge Award – San Mateo County’s Agile Organization Initiative

Overview: The County of San Mateo offers a flexible and financially sustainable staffing structure that attracts and retains a diverse and talented workforce to meet evolving community needs.

Challenge: Over the last few decades, the workforce has seen many changes, and with these changes come new challenges. The high cost of living, the changing preferences of the modern workforce and the attractive benefits of competing private sector organizations in the Bay Area have made it more difficult to attract talented individuals to public service. Furthermore, the demands and expectations of local government have changed with the array of new technologies available today. Citizens expect greater transparency in government and want services to be available faster than ever before. Furthermore, the rising costs of health care and pensions combined with the unpredictability of government revenues have forced local governments to re-evaluate their staffing models.

Solution/Originality: In 2013, a team of County executives (led by our County Manager and Human Resources Director), community members, business leaders, and consultants gathered together to develop a framework that would enable the County to respond to the challenges facing the County. This committee, called the Agile Organization Steering Committee, began building a menu of different work delivery options that included limited-term assignments, fellowships, internships, volunteers, and self-help.

Through the Agile Organization initiative, the County has designed a flexible and financially sustainable staffing structure to attract and retain a diverse and talented workforce so that we can continue to meet the critical and evolving needs of the community. We have:

- Created and utilized a new employment type (Limited Term). The limited term work delivery option has helped the County meet increased and changing workload demands, expand specific departmental operations, and pilot new programs and projects. Limited term employees allow the organization to fill staffing gaps and can provide both support and leadership in their roles. Since 2013, we have hired over 200 term employees working in 16 of the 23 (70%) County departments. The limited term assignments range from 1-3 years and employees receive full health benefits and a portable retirement plan. These employees can be hired through an expedited process, allowing for service needs to be met earlier.
- Created and expanded the Management Fellowship Program, increasing the number of fellowships from 3 to 16 in one year. Fellowships have been an effective way to identify and develop future local government leaders and for the organization to build valuable partnerships with local universities, including San Francisco State University (SFSU), UC Berkeley, Stanford, Santa Clara University and San Jose State University. Management Fellows are currently placed in seven County Departments, working on top priorities, including: Sustainability issues, Affordable Housing, Veterans Services, Care Facilities for the Disabled and Elderly, and much more.

- Increased internships by 39% from 2014 to 2015 and in 2016, the County anticipates hiring over 200 interns, which include students and individuals new to the workforce or interested in a career change; this expansion has also included internships for foster youth and a Students Consultant Program with SFSU, which offers master's degree students the opportunity to conduct program evaluations.
- Expanded volunteer opportunities to get citizens interested and engaged with government. The County is working with departments to utilize one centralized system for advertising volunteer opportunities and tracking hours.
- Expanded self-service options including mobile applications. The County has hosted two annual day-long hackathons (Hack-SMC) where citizens came together to create working applications that benefit our citizens. This September, the 2016 Hack-SMC finalists will present their applications and compete for a \$5,000 grand prize at the County's Apps Challenge.

These work delivery options enable the County to rethink the ways in which we deliver work and change the way in which we recruit talent to the organization. The changing workforce wants more choices as they progress in their careers and as a leading employer, the County also needs to have the ability to attract talented workers to the organization that are interested in public service and can contribute to the organization in many different capacities, at any age and experience level and for any length of time.

Cost Effectiveness: Based on anticipated needs, participating County departments budget for the costs associated with the various work delivery models. The cost of limited term employees is 30% less than if hired as regular employees, which has resulted annual savings of \$2 million (given that these employees have portable retirement plans versus defined benefit plans). Management Fellows range from \$50,000 to \$83,000 annually. Most interns are paid \$12 per hour. Self-help options range in costs. As an example, an Employee Relations Mobile App (for use by County departments to obtain employee relations information) cost \$30,000. All of these work delivery models have provided the County with options in meeting service needs. Many of the work delivery models, in addition to meeting current service needs, serve as talent pipelines, which saves the County in recruitment and training costs.

Results: The Agile Organization initiative has changed how we deliver work, created opportunities throughout all levels of the organization and established talent pipelines. The work delivery options (Limited Term, Management Fellows, Internships, Volunteers and Self-Help) not only enable the County to creatively staff different projects and assignments, but also allows the organization to attract different types of individuals in the job market. The Agile Organization initiative has opened up different pathways for people to enter government. Additionally, it resulted in cost savings, has reduced the length of time positions are vacant and expedited the recruitment process.

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