

City of Fairfield

The City of Fairfield's Mentoring/Coaching Program

Jurisdiction

Population: 105,000

Total Full-Time Employees: 1,000

Budget: \$310 million

Program Description

The City has a Management Committee comprised of managers from all city departments and a few department heads. The department heads represent the executive management team of the city. The committee coordinates leadership development and succession planning programs. Since 2002 the City of Fairfield has developed programs to prepare the "next generation" of city employees to take the place of those retiring and otherwise leaving the workforce. The City's program today relies heavily on the statewide efforts of the Cal-ICMA Preparing the Next Generation (PNG) Committee.

Getting buy-in by managers and supervisors

The city's successes over the years began with the commitment of the city manager and the executive management team. Buy-in by managers and supervisors city wide began with the Management Committee that introduced a mentoring/coaching program to the organization in 2005. In October 2005, the Management Committee coordinated a kick-off meeting to managers/supervisors called "Help Develop the City's Mentoring/Coaching Program." The meeting was held off site and was facilitated by Don Maruska, the director of the statewide Cal-ICMA Coaching Program. At this meeting the following goals for the citywide mentoring/coaching effort were agreed on:

- Prepare the next generation of leaders inside the Fairfield organization
- Build linkages with colleagues across the organization
- Target key talent needs for the City
- Learn and teach best practices
- Sample effective mentoring and coaching approaches
- Enjoy the camaraderie of being part of a great team/family!

Survey

Under the direction of the city manager, the city's Human Resources Department also conducted an organization-wide survey seeking the following information:

What were departments doing currently to prepare the next generation?

What mentoring or coaching opportunities were being offered to department employees?

What cross training and team city wide team/task force efforts were going on?

How an effective mentoring/coaching program could be developed throughout the organization. (The Management Committee took leadership on many of these areas and in particular the development and delivery of an effective mentoring /coaching program.)

The mentoring program

One of the best parts of the development and execution of the City's PNG efforts was to see the managers and supervisors in all departments step up and take leadership. This was done through the Management Committee. With support and encouragement from the city manager and the executive team, the "Mentoring Program" has flourished over time. The Management Committee has developed and provided with support from HR:

An ongoing training program for managers volunteering to become mentors.

Mentoring guidelines

An agreement form

A sample program plan

Brochures and on-line access to mentor bios/vitas as well as contact info.

Norms set by executive management

The city manager and the executive management team have over time helped to build an expectation or culture for development and growth of city employees. This has been done in a variety of ways:

- It is expected that all managers and supervisors will make themselves available and provide time for their employees to participate in the mentoring/coaching activities of the city.
- Mentoring/coaching is the responsibility of all managers and supervisors.
- All managers must learn how to develop others.

Annual informational meeting held by the city manager

The city manager invites new and recently promoted city employees as well as those interested in preparing for higher-level positions to an informational meeting on the city's Mentoring Program and PNG activities. Employees from across the organization are encouraged to attend.

Program Successes

Indications of program success include the following:

- Currently there are more than two dozen managers and executives serving as mentors after they have gone through the mentor training.
- Managers from all departments participate on the Management Committee.
- Managers and supervisors are taking an active role in citywide presentations and meetings regarding the mentoring/coaching activities.
- Managers and supervisors across the organization participate in the Cal-ICMA Coaching telephone sessions.
- Employees who participate in these calls also engage in group discussions following the calls to consider what was discussed and how it applies to them individually and to the City.

Lessons Learned

1. Support from the top is essential! The city manager's endorsement of the activities promotes the culture for coaching citywide.

2. Ongoing kudos and other support from the city manager underlines throughout the year the importance of the program.
3. Currently one of the biggest successes has been the interest in not just the coaching calls but also the follow-up discussions that follow the call.
4. Although the City of Fairfield started out with a very formal and structured mentoring program, the city has found that there are many successful "informal" coaching/mentoring relationships developing throughout the organization.
5. The program must be promoted in a variety of ways. The city's Human Resources Department staff has written regular articles over time in the employee newsletter and has posted upcoming events and other related information on the city's E-bulleting board.
6. City management must encourage employees to seek mentors/coaches from a variety of sources: the employee's department, other departments, external organizations, as well as coaches from the Cal-ICMA "Coaching Corner" web page.

Future Efforts and Challenges

While the city has experienced some sense of success there continues to be a variety of challenges. For example, how does the city...

- Keep the program as a priority for the city as a new city manager takes over?
- Maintain this program as a priority given growing financial problems?
- Expand the program and make it part of all new employee orientations?
- Encourage employees to share their stories of how mentoring or coaching have helped them?

Attachments

- A. City of Fairfield Mentoring Guidelines
- B. City of Fairfield Mentoring Agreement
- C. Mentoring New Employees and Managers
- D. Development Plan