

# **Developing Leaders from Within**

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**CITY AND COUNTY OF SAN FRANCISCO**

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

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In our current economic landscape and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, many organizations struggle to fill positions and retain staff. Many employees are re-evaluating their work-life balance and how their employer contributes to it. Due to this re-evaluation, we must reevaluate our approach to retention and development of our workforce. There is a need and urgency to build our leadership from within. We must ensure that our employees' talents are cultivated, and that they have the tools and desire to remain with our agency. In doing so, we prepare for the many changes that occur, such as career changes, resignations,

and retirements. Sonoma Counties Emerging Leaders Track (ELT) was created to strengthen leaders engaged in the Human Services Division (HSD). Developing a similar program at the San Francisco Human Services Agency (SFHSA) will complement and build on our current work. An Emerging Leaders Program will address our Racial Equity Action Plan to improve retention and satisfaction. An ELT program would also be an effective strategy to address staff vacancy, morale, recruitment, and retaining institutional knowledge within SFHSA.

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*“The single biggest way to impact an organization is to focus on leadership development. There is almost no limit to the potential of an organization that recruits good people, raises them up as leaders, and continually develops them.”*

- John Maxwell

## Introduction

Many organizations have difficulty filling leadership positions. Agencies often have staff who want to grow their careers but may not have the tools or be aware of the resources available. At the City and County of San Francisco’s Human Services Agency (SFHSA), these opportunities and resources are available through our Diversity Equity Inclusion and Belonging (DEIB) office and Office of Learning & Organization Development (L&OD). Through L&OD, SFHSA offers technical training such as Supervisor 24 Plus, Supervisor Orientation, Introduction to Emotional Intelligence, Excel, and Success Roadmap & Smart Goal training. SFHSA’s DEIB office created a mentorship program in 2022.

*“We launched the SFHSA Mentorship Program to create equitable pathways for upward employment mobility across our Agency. Rooted in the principle that commitment to developing diverse and equitable leadership requires SFHSA to strategically develop its existing employees, the program seeks to create meaningful development experiences for future Agency leaders. Over the six-month program, participants work on a personalized development plan, connect with their mentors one-on-one, and participate in monthly professional learning labs.” (SFHSA Racial Equity Action Plan Update 3.2023).*

The DEIB office offers “Growing Your Career” workshops. County-wide, the City and County of San Francisco also has Peer Mentorship and Emerging Leaders programs.

SFHSA established an Acting Assignment Policy in 2021. *The Stats from Racial Equity Progress Report 3.2023 Phase 1 Racial Equity Action Plan (2021-2023)* notes:

*“As a result, in 2022, we found that 30% of those who started and completed an acting assignment in 2022 advanced to a higher position, demonstrating that acting assignments provide invaluable hands-on experience for employees to continue to grow their skills and experience.”*

While many of our staff are skilled in their current positions, they may not have the confidence or developed skills to lead. We have the programs, but they stand alone. Supervisors are able to participate in Supervisor 24Plus, a great training program for the policy and technical side of supervision. For middle managers, there is the BASSC Executive Development Program (EDP); however, not all middle managers are provided the opportunity to attend or know of the benefits. The addition of a program such as the Emerging Leader Track would supplement our current programs and develop leaders from all levels of the agency.

Mobility and Professional Development Goal: Empower SFHSA employees of all racial and ethnic backgrounds to envision and carry out their professional goals, including continuous learning and career advancement. We believe that investing in staff development is essential to providing quality services to our clients, promoting retention, and creating an internal pipeline for future leadership. We have dedicated the past year to building the infrastructure needed to empower staff in their careers.

Stats from Racial Equity Progress Report March.2023 Phase 1 Racial Equity Action Plan (2021-2023)

*Before you are a leader, Success is all about growing yourself. When you become a leader, Success is all about growing others."*

- John Welch

## **Sonoma County's Emerging Leader Track**

The Emerging Leader Track (ELT) began in 2013 as a four-year program designed to support and provide greater educational depth and skills development for staff within the Sonoma County Human Services Department (HSD). The ELT was built on the success of Contra Costa County's leadership program and studied as part of the BASSC exchange project. The ELT program has held an important role in preparing the staff at HSD to take on roles and positions with increasingly more responsibilities.

The original ELT program had five objectives.

1. Continuous improvement
2. Employee commitment and engagement
3. Improve current performance
4. Build relationships
5. Build leadership at all levels.

In 2022, ELT 2.0 was implemented. The new ELT 2.0 changed the timeline from four

years to one year. Another difference from the original format is that it consists of cohorts of the same work level. The new framework continues to utilize the five program objectives from the original ELT, with four additional objectives focusing on leadership development and participant engagement.

1. Identify and promote leadership skills and knowledge that will benefit ELT participants and HSD, now and in the future.
2. Develop leaders who are forward-thinking, capable, and self-aware
3. Facilitate a shared vision and common language for leaders by promoting the practice, behavior, and values of an HSD leader
4. Create an environment where participants become deeply engaged in working at HSA (Sonoma County Staff Development - Emerging Leader Track 2.0 Program Description).

ELT 2.0 consists of two cohorts or track levels. Track 1 is comprised of core staff and

is open to all staff in non-supervisory roles. Track 2 includes managers and supervisors or persons in a position holding higher responsibility. Track 1 consists of up to 25 participants and Track 2 consists of up to 15 participants. Participant slots are allocated using a percentage of staff from each of HSD's divisions. This allows for fair and equitable opportunities for all employees to participate.

ELT 2.0 recruitment consists of an email to all staff. The greatest resource and recruitment strategy has been previous ELT graduates. The selection process consists of an information session that is followed up by interested participants submitting an application submission. Each division is given a specific number of slots. Submissions are reviewed by the Division Director, Manager and Supervisor. Division leadership determines who will participate in ELT. The process is highly supported by all of HSD's management.

Participants attend one full day of training per month. Track 1 cohort meets on Tuesday and Track 2 on Thursday. The program includes leadership trainings, which are presented by members of HSD leadership and contracted trainers. Trainings offered are chosen for content that will help develop leadership competencies. Recent trainings included Leading Change, Building a Culture of Belonging & Inclusion, Communication Skills for Leaders, and Delivering Effective Presentations.

ELT 2.0 includes an information exchange. The exchange allows cohorts to explore other HSD programs of interest. Most staff only have knowledge of their own program. Through interviews and shadowing, participants are able to learn the challenges and gain insight into another program. It also allows for exploration of different career opportunities. Participants write a

two-page paper and deliver a presentation on what they learned to their cohort.

Another addition to the ELT 2.0 is a project presentation modeled after the BASSC EDP exchange project. In the ELT 2.0, project members from both cohorts are grouped together to work on a topic that will contribute to change within HSD. Teams work on a project that was started from a past ELT group or focus on a new problem. The topics are solicited by the ELT coordinator from the executive management team regarding areas the department is facing and that the group could work on. Participants learn project management skills. HSD can solicit valuable staff feedback and engagement and look at collective impact. The project includes a charter, action plan, and presentation. A few of the presentations from the recent cohort include:

- HSD Professional Toolkit
- Stay Interviews: Strengthening Relationship and Retention in HSD
- HSD Peer Buddy Program for New Employees

Every project has a project sponsor and Subject Matter Expert (SME). The team and project assignment are chosen randomly. Participants are provided a brief description of the project, similar to BASSC's EDP project. Presentations are made to management at the end of the program and both cohort tracks prior to graduation.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

SFHSA could replicate the Sonoma County HSD ELT program in order to continue investing in its staff and their professional growth. The program could sit within the DEIB office, which oversees our Mentorship and Racial Equity Workgroup (REWG). Although L&OD concerns staff development, the office focuses on technical training. The DEIB office focuses on staff

engagement and building relationships. The DEIB office has the staffing and resources to oversee and align leadership with our Agency's mission and racial action plan goals. Including racial equity and our DEIB framework would be a key component of implementation. The 21-day racial equity challenge should be incorporated into the curriculum. The REWG has now included action committees, which are similar to the ELT project and would complement each other. A dedicated staff to facilitate and serve as the contact for participants would be key.

Similar to HSD's process, utilizing our management and current contracted training partners to present training will help us use our current resources. The Agency would need to look at our current marketing and recruitment strategies to ensure access to all levels of staff. Furthermore, the SFHSA Communications team should be utilized to assist with messaging and posting to internal sites. A commitment from leadership to supporting the program will be key. HSD has experienced participants advancing in their careers while in the program, which is great and is a program goal. Utilizing testimonials from alumni could be a future recruitment strategy and could also be our most effective tool.

There are challenges that would need to be addressed to implement an ELT program, such as ensuring participants have enough time to participate and providing coverage and support for staff while participating in the program. Additionally, there is a need to explore the best way to market and increase participation feasibility for all job classifications and positions, such as Social Workers, who, due to their fieldwork job requirements, may have difficulty participating. Additionally, the program will need a dedicated staff person to oversee and facilitate it for consistency.

Adopting a program like ELT in San Francisco will only enhance what we already have. It will guide participants in their personal and professional growth. Developing a program like Sonoma County's ELT will address morale, retention, and job satisfaction. The training and activities utilized through a leadership development program will help employees explore their abilities, gain confidence, and grow within the agency. The program could be a 12-month program like HSD's. Pre and post-evaluations, advancement, and retention data could be utilized to gauge program success. SFHSA offers many training resources to its staff, and having a dedicated leadership training program will show continued investment in our staff growth from within our agency.

*"ELT felt more robust and about relationship. Environment that supports risk." - Anonymous, Sonoma HSD ELT 2.0 Participant 2022-2023*

*"I would not have applied for promotion had it not been for ELT. I would have waited. ELT gave me confidence to apply." - Anonymous, Sonoma HSD ELT 2.0 Participant 2022-2023*

*“Participating in the Emerging City Leaders and Mentorship Programs empowered me with a sense of direction and confidence to reach my goal of promoting within the City and County of San Francisco. This was achieved through creating a clear understanding of what tools and skills are required to push my professional growth to the next level. Prior to participating in these programs, the goal was always known but how exactly to achieve it was the real challenge. The other invaluable part that these programs offered was to allow participants to create the personal space needed for networking by making personal and professional connections with others. This was achieved by providing opportunities where people can meet, who were in similar situations, but needed that guidance from peers and mentors alike so questions could be asked, concerns expressed, and strategies developed. Because of these programs I was able to build the needed skillset to move forward with applying and interviewing for an acting manager position with In-Home Supportive Services, and being offered the position in July 2020. Through my tenure I have applied what I learned from the programs which has aided me in my continual growth and success and broadening my vision of what is achievable.” - Toshio Westland*

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