

Emerging Leadership Track: Developing Qualified Candidates for Leadership Opportunities at all Levels in the San Francisco Human Services Agency

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

After many years of turnover rates below 10%, San Francisco Family and Children's Services Department has experienced a relatively high level of agency turnover in the past couple years, increasing to 11% in 2017 and 16% in 2018 (COHA, 2018). As there are several factors that are contributing to the changing turnover rate, the lack of commitment to the agency may be connected to the belief that there are no opportunities for growth and development as well as a lack of fairness in the hiring process. For the past few years, Family and Children Services have been committed to developing and supporting a stable, high-performing workforce that can

provide critical services to vulnerable children and families. As the agency is continuing to develop a climate and culture that promotes performance development and encourages leaders to emerge, a formal Emerging Leadership Track Program falls in line with the agency's 'Theory of Change'. The theory is, "If we change the culture of the agency to be more data-informed, performance-oriented, and team-based, then our services will become more responsive to families and children's needs, our staff at all levels will improve their services, and outcomes will improve."

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Why Leadership Development Matters in Culture Change

Leadership development is a continuous cyclical process of empowerment, enablement, and development. Leadership development is about managing and maximizing the uniqueness of people and ensuring that talent is retained and there is drive behind a performance culture. There is a relationship between good management and employee commitment, as leadership development creates a magnet for high-performers and fosters a high-performing organization. Research has shown that agencies with strategic approaches to leadership development are 84% more effective at increasing the quality of their leadership pipeline, 73% more effective at improving overall employee retention, and 67% more effective at increasing the engagement, retention, and teamwork of leaders (Bersin, 2014).

San Francisco Family and Children's Services Agency participated in a Comprehensive Organizational Health Assessment (COHA) as part of a Workforce Excellence Initiative. The evaluators conducted a Comprehensive Organizational Health Assessment (COHA) of FCS in July, 2014, to identify critical workforce strengths and challenges. The goal was for FCS to more effectively meet its practice objectives and achieve better outcomes for families. In November, 2017, the evaluators conducted a follow-up COHA to assess changes in organizational health as a result of the agency efforts. As part of the

feedback, staff shared that they perceive unfairness in the hiring process and would like to see greater transparency and communication about the hiring process, while managers would like the flexibility to hire the most qualified staff for the job in a timely way (COHA, 2018).

Existing Staff Development Resources at HSA

The San Francisco Human Services Agency (HSA) offers elements of leadership development within the Staff Development Department. HSA Staff Development creates an overview of some leadership elements that should be developed, with a focus on developing staff after promotion or developing entry-level skills. For example, HSA Staff Development offers a series of courses referred to as "24 PLUS" that was developed in 2006 for supervisors or managers during the first six months after a promotion. Over the course of the six months there are four sessions: managing yourself, setting expectations and developing others, coaching performance and giving feedback, and managing your authority. HSA Staff Development also offers courses focused on career development trainings for Public Service Trainee (PST) positions. This training offers an entry-level overview of career planning, goal setting, interviewing skills, job search tips and techniques, workplace rules and guidelines for bringing your best to work, and resume writing.

Key Elements of the Emerging Leadership Track in Sonoma County

History of ELT Program

The program began in 2014, with the goals of improving the quality of service, increasing retention, preparing employees for leadership roles at all levels in order to improve performance in current positions and build a teaming relationship between co-workers across various divisions. One very important stated goal of the program is that the ELT specifically states that it is “committed to developing employees for positions higher than what they currently occupy, creating a culture to learn skills for development of where one wants to be, not where they currently are” (Sonoma County HSD ELT).

Initially, the program took four years to complete, but in 2018 Sonoma consolidated the program into two years, consisting of four levels. The cohort has 25 participants, ensuring that each division is equally represented. The levels include the following:

Level 1: Highly Capable Individual (HSA overview & job basics)

Level 2: Contributing Team Leader (role in achieving agency goals)

Level 3: Competent Manager (developing management and leadership skills)

Level 4: Effective Leader (executive level training)

The ELT also includes a Mentor Project (the Executive Management Team mentors employee before level four) and the Inspiration Lab (in levels three and four, small groups identify agency deficits and develop a project to address the problem).

Some of the ELT courses that are particularly unique include Project Management, Operational Planning vs. Strategic Planning, Managing Change, Political Acumen, and Fiscal Essentials. Each of these course offerings is most interesting, as often these elements are left to “on the job” training. The ELT program demonstrates thoughtfulness to trust that employees can take a deeper dive with various concepts, which is encouraging.

Challenges Faced Over Time

As mentioned above, the initial program was four years, which created hardship in the department due to coverage of work as the executive managers were committed to allowing participants uninterrupted time to participate. Specifically, employees within Sonoma County’s Family, Youth, and Children Department had to either put off their enrollment in ELT or develop other means to participate due to the nature of their work. The program was shortened to two years, which allowed for the flow of the levels to continue without eliminating key components to leadership development, while making the completion of the cohort for those who participate less of a time commitment.

The ELT Program is managed within Sonoma County’s staff development, and consist of an organizational development manager, administrative aid, department analyst, and program planning and evaluation analyst. The manager, Francine Conner, shared that 60%, of her time is spent on the ELM program.

Perception of Impact or Outcome of ELT

During the second year of the program, 33% of ELT participants were promoted internally, compared to 24% of non-participants. For the third year, 45% of ELT participants were promoted, compared to 19% of non-participants. The Organizational Development Manager, Francine Conner, stated that staff continue to be interested in the program and see it as a road to promotion, as the cohorts continue to be in high demand and the participants believe it is an important resource for leadership development and a pipeline to promotional opportunities.

Recommendation for Implementing the Emerging Leadership Track in San Francisco County

Step 1: Inform FCS Management and Identify Available Resources for Initial Pilot to Live in FCS Work Force Development Team.

This program would first be introduced to the FCS management team and discussed for possible implementation as a pilot. The proposal would highlight

utilizing the Family and Children's Services Division of HSA's Work Force Development (WFD) Team to pilot the ELT. The WFD Team will utilize their program manager, three coaches, and a training officer for implementation. The WFD team would ensure the fidelity of the ELT Program, and the pilot would be open to 10 people, as volunteers. The WFD team would also ensure equal representation from all classifications at FCS.

Step 2: Develop Curriculum and Pilot in FCS Work Force Development

Over the course of six months, the WFD would review the existing Sonoma County ELT program and decide if it could mirror the exact program in San Francisco or at least use it as a foundation to design an ELT Program in Sonoma County. The WFD would also have a short-term workgroup that could gather information from subject matter experts, as well as other employees, to discuss what they would like to see in an ELT program. This group would also develop an evaluation tool for participants to complete at the beginning, mid-point, and end of the ELT pilot.

After the ELT program is structured and reviewed by management, the WFD team will provide an overview of the program during the annual FCS retreat and also provide a video description of the program for those who missed the retreat. The outline will include why the program is being implemented, the goals for participants, the structure of the pilot, the timeline and the expectations.

Step 3: Recruit Participants for ELT Program

As stated above, the goal is for this to be a voluntary program for the pilot. In order to show interest for the ELT program, individuals would be required to submit an application. The WFD team and the management team can then decide who is appropriate to participate in the program and will be clear about the qualifications and restrictions, such as not being on probation or not currently being assessed for disciplinary actions. Once the participants are

identified an email will be sent to the individual and eventually to all staff.

Step 4: Identify Performance Measures and Develop Evaluation Tools

As part of the pilot, it will be pivotal to monitor the effects of the ELT program in relation to the culture and climate of the department. This can be measured by how many project suggestions from the ELT pilot group are implemented, how many ELT pilot participants receive promotions, how many ELT pilot participants have been assessed to have been professionally developed (as outlined by the performance anchors identified in their annual appraisal), and finally, an analysis of the feedback from the pilot participants. The evaluation tool would be developed during step two.

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