

Abstract

In 1996, the Henrico County Department of Human Resources designed and implemented a competency-based **Leadership Development Program** to promote continuous employee learning and development. This program offers managerial and supervisory employees of this 3,900-employee organization a broad range of choices for assessing personal learning needs and creating custom learning plans with a format for recognition of achievement.

At the request of the County Manager, Virgil Hazelett, the Department of Human Resources studied private sector practices in management and leadership development. As a result of this study, Henrico County decided to direct its leadership development efforts towards strengthening specific leadership competencies. County managers identified the top competencies that contribute to the success of progressive organizations and that are most relevant to Henrico County. (In 2008, these competencies were revised and are now used County-wide.) All managers and supervisors were invited to attend an Inaugural Conference. Presentations by the County Manager, Department of Human Resources' staff, and outside speakers introduced the program and highlighted the crucial importance of leadership and individual professional growth. Each participant received a reference binder outlining this important and multi-faceted learning program.

The objectives of the **Leadership Development Program** are to 1) develop a pool of highly versatile leaders for attaining the County's goals in financial management, economic development, and quality of life; 2) to equip Henrico's leaders with the broad competencies needed for anticipating and responding to change; and 3) to encourage the professional growth of current and future leaders by offering a framework and resources for the achievement of employee-designed, competency-based learning goals. A variety of assessment instruments, experiential learning options, and competency-based courses provide managers and supervisors with tools to take charge of their professional development.

The **Leadership Development Program** is designed to help managers, from the highest management levels to first line supervisors, grow professionally by deciding:

1. What they want to learn,
2. How they want to learn, and
3. When they want to achieve their goals.

Recognizing that adults develop most effectively when they "learn by doing" and develop their own goals, this program includes numerous choices for both traditional classroom and experiential/"hands-on" learning. It supports employees' learning with a format to design individual learning programs, encouragement to actively apply learning in service of our citizens, and recognition for these achievements.

The main features of this program include:

- ✓ Voluntary participation
- ✓ Self-initiation and direction within a framework of adult learning
- ✓ Target groups which include upper and middle managers and first line supervisors
- ✓ Competency-based focus
- ✓ Assessments for identifying leadership and learning styles
- ✓ Professional Development Plans customized with assistance from Human Resources Department advisors
- ✓ Courses, forums, and conferences based on Henrico County competencies
- ✓ Experiential learning opportunities including cross functional work teams, cross training, mentoring, and other leadership experiences that encourage "learning by doing" and practical application
- ✓ Equivalency provisions for prior experience and/or training
- ✓ Certificates awarded by a County Manager-appointed committee based on completion of a portfolio demonstrating that relevant competencies were applied in leadership situations

Additional LDP information and forms: www.co.henrico.va.us/hr/edt/ldp.html

The Employee Development and Training Division (ED&T) of the Department of Human Resources sponsors this program. **Leadership Development Program** advisors meet periodically with participants to assist with goal clarification, interpret the results of assessments, provide guidance with experiential learning ideas, and monitor progress toward goals. ED&T designs and presents competency-based seminars targeted for leaders. To provide specific expertise for additional training, ED&T contracts with outside consultants who bring relevant experience from private, public, military, and university settings.

The County's **Leadership Development Program** has been a very successful initiative and has added to the reputation of Henrico County. Over 1000 awards have been achieved, and over 400 supervisors are active participants in this voluntary program. This award-winning program has richly contributed to the culture of the organization and has become a beacon of learning. It also has become an important foundation of the County of Henrico's Succession Management initiative – an initiative that has enhanced the leadership abilities of employees and maintained leadership continuity as a way of preparing for the future.

For more information about the **Leadership Development Program**, contact Employee Development and Training at 804-501-7207 or hol17@co.henrico.va.us.