



APPLICATION FORM

All applications must include the following information. Separate applications must be submitted for each eligible program. **Deadline: June 2, 2017.** Please include this application form with electronic entry.

PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: County of Henrico

Program Title: Creating A Culture of Leadership: Public Works Leadership Discussion Group

Program Category: Organizational Development

CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: Holly Zinn

Title: Management Specialist

Department: County Manager's Office

Complete Mailing Address: 4301 E. Parham Road, Third, Floor, Henrico, VA 23228

Telephone: 804-501-4370 **Website:** henrico.us

Email: zin01@henrico.us

SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

Name: John A. Vithoukias

Title: County Manager

Signature: 

1. Program Overview

The world of work is changing. Gone are the days of top-down leadership, with strict hierarchical structures and one-way information flow. Gone too is the image of ponderous, “red-taped” interactions between citizens and local government. Instead, top counties need to proactively anticipate customer needs and communicate fluidly with one another to quickly respond to constituents.

To create this level of agility, it is imperative that leaders talk to one another regularly and develop relationships of trust and rapport. The Department of Public Works (DPW), in collaboration with the Department of Human Resources (HR), created the DPW Leadership Discussion Group to facilitate ongoing knowledge sharing and development for DPW supervisors. This group, which includes the director and assistant director of DPW, has met consistently since 2014 and focused on a wide range of leadership topics. Just as important as the topics has been the opportunity for informal, safe, and open discussion, regardless of participants’ title or rank. Members actively ask questions and draw upon one another’s insights, creating professional networks from which to draw support back on the job.

The results have been clear and powerful. Leaders ranging from Road Maintenance foremen to division directors prioritize these meetings, carving time from their busy schedules to discuss leadership concepts and application. Public Works Leadership Development Program (LDP) participation has increased from 2 to 22 participants, an increase of 1,000%, and 15 have achieved levels in the five-level LDP since 2014.

2. Problem/Challenge/Situation Faced by Locality

When a new director joined the Department of Public Works (DPW) in early 2011, he inherited a department filled with hard working, dedicated employees who were experts in their fields. Other than himself, however, only one of them participated in the county's LDP – an intensive, five-level leadership development program coordinated by HR's Organizational Learning and Talent Development (OLTD) division. This was a concern since participation supports the county competencies of Leading and Influencing, Serving Customers, Communication, and Personal Accountability, among others – all crucial in today's fast-paced, demanding workplace. There was a clear need to increase LDP participation among DPW supervisors.

Another concern was information sharing and breaking down silos. Although DPW employees were experts in their own areas of expertise, they rarely shared information and ideas across division boundaries. In addition, the new director himself had come from a different department and had much to learn from the DPW division leaders. He needed all DPW supervisors to collectively assume responsibility for the department instead of leaving the big picture decisions to him, and he recognized that the director could not, and should not, be the only one to connect dots between DPW divisions. It was imperative that supervisors step up to take charge not only of their own sections, but of DPW's overall concerns.

3. How Program Fulfilled Awards Criteria

Collaboration and communication are key to success in any public service agency. Without an open forum for the free exchange of ideas, employees are hesitant to take risks and stretch boundaries. If we expect our employees to lead effectively, it is imperative that we create pathways for interaction, knowledge sharing, and active learning. It is also important that employees be given the opportunity to hear from, and suggest ideas to, their top leaders so that the best ideas are given a chance to become reality. DPW's Leadership Discussion Group creates a forum for all of this to occur, encouraging supervisors from foremen to division directors to share ideas, ask questions, and converse informally with DPW's director and assistant director. By encouraging those in leadership positions to be comfortable with taking risks and speaking up, collaboration is encouraged.

Through DPW's focus on leadership development, supervisors feel connected to the vision and values of the department, as well as to one another. These combined factors help them succeed in all their daily operations, and play an active part in planning for DPW's future. The continuous commitment to this program by those involved is unique in the county. It provides mentorship and growth opportunities that are not present otherwise. This initiative cost nothing, yet it has resulted in huge returns. Any organization can replicate this no-cost, program where collaboration and communication are important.

4. How Program Was Carried Out

On January 27, 2014, the director of Public Works invited all DPW supervisors to a 2½-hour kickoff session on leadership development. It did not matter if the employee was a labor foreman with a high school education or a high-level Professional Engineer – the director's goal was the same: to share his own personal story and encourage others to embark on a journey of leadership development.

At this session, the director shared tales of his struggles and triumphs as he rose through the ranks in his prior department, and spoke of the power of participating in the county's LDP. DPW's assistant director then spoke, followed by HR's assistant director sharing the personal benefits of LDP from the perspective of a county leader who rose through the ranks from an entry level position. OTLD's training manager explained the nuts and bolts of LDP, and the 28 DPW supervisors in attendance asked challenging questions to determine if LDP was right for them. Leadership development was a new concept for attendees: in 2011, only one other DPW employee besides the new director was an active LDP participant.

The DPW director ended the session with his vision of a department filled with people actively participating in their own leadership development for the betterment of the whole. So great was his dedication to this concept, that he pledged to set time aside bimonthly for DPW LDP participants, regardless of title, to come together to discuss leadership topics and network with one another.

Since 2014, DPW's Leadership Discussion Group has been meeting regularly. The objectives of the Discussion Group are:

- To directly increase DPW participation in the county's LDP, and to serve as a complement to the various elements and levels of LDP.
- Increased opportunity for top DPW leaders to directly mentor others in the program and aid them in their career development, as well as encouraging individuals to more actively manage their own careers.
- To provide an open, non-threatening environment for discussion, allowing supervisors from all levels of DPW to participate in the leadership and direction of the department.
- To foster personal accountability and ownership in the future of DPW.

Participation is voluntary, and any DPW employee who becomes active in LDP may participate.

Meetings last approximately two hours and are held every other month. The program is loosely organized around discussing a specific leadership topic at each meeting, and allows for mentoring, informal discussion, and an open forum for knowledge sharing.

Not only does the DPW Discussion Group encourage collaboration between participants; it also models collaboration with other leaders outside of DPW. Some meetings have included guest speakers from other departments who have shared their expertise and perspective before facilitating open discussion. For example, Henrico's retired County

Manager joined the group to discuss the topic of “Why is Leadership Development Important?” This is significant because he considers leadership development a core element of his legacy to the county: he was the driving force behind LDP being developed in the first place. Another meeting included an open discussion with the current County Manager.

Other topics have been chosen because of their importance to county leadership culture and the success of leading DPW, such as:

- High Performing Organizations
- Leading at all levels of the organization, and taking ownership and initiative
- Collaboration
- Various topics specific to current challenges and opportunities facing DPW

The county's Department of Human Resources has been a core partner with DPW in this program. Not only were members of HR at the official 2014 kickoff to share stories and answer questions, but the director and the assistant director of HR have served as guest facilitators, as have members of HR's OLTD. In addition, four OLTD leadership coaches have taken an active role in meeting one on one with the DPW LDP participants, supporting them in reaching their own leadership and career goals. Discussion Group members have reached out to OLTD for assistance with topic development for their meetings, and DPW's director and HR's training manager touch base at regular intervals to discuss the success of the program.

5. Finance and Staffing

Almost no cost was incurred in the development of this program. Facilitators are salaried members of DPW, HR, or other departments, and facility costs are nonexistent due to meeting internally. Material costs perhaps included a single sheet handout for some of the discussions. Maintaining the program uses existing employee salaries. Technology use has been minimal since the format is in-person discussion. Handouts, where used, have been created in Microsoft Word and printed, and members coordinate meetings using Microsoft Outlook. Tracking of LDP participants takes place in Microsoft Excel. Staffing is minimal as it involves members of the Discussion Group or occasionally another county employee joining the group for two hours as a guest.

6. Program Results

The results of DPW's Leadership Discussion Group are many and far-reaching:

- Since this program began in 2014, participation in LDP increased from 2 to 22 participants – an increase of 1,000%!
- Fifteen Awards in Leadership Development have been awarded to DPW participants since 2014, which indicates active participation in the county's leadership development efforts.
- DPW is one of the larger departments in the county, with seven divisions and 260 employees spread out over three locations. Having regular meetings where participants discuss leadership in an informal setting is important to fostering a cohesive understanding of, and appreciation for, DPW as a whole.

- After being in this group, several supervisors have reached out to one another for support on projects, and have collaborated where once they might have duplicated efforts within their own silos. As an example, Engineering and Environmental Services has loaned three of their engineers to another division to manage construction projects. The Capital Project Division has many smaller projects and only a few employees who are fully engaged in existing projects. Having engineers from another division assist them helps with project execution. It also allows the engineers to gain valuable experience in project management as well as expanding their understanding of DPW operations from a different perspective.
- Better service has been provided to our citizens. Because they have a greater understanding of DPW's big picture goals, they feel comfortable taking the initiative to not only collaborate with one another, but also to reach across departmental lines. An example is a recent significant snow storm. DPW leaders needed to coordinate services with each other and with the Police Division, Public Utilities, Schools, and General Services. Because of how fluidly they worked together, the main roads were in good condition less than 36 hours after the event, and the government offices opened as usual on Monday. The number of traffic accidents were equivalent to those that occur during regular weather. Only a few residents called to request additional service, and several shared compliments with DPW about how well the county responded to the snow storm. This kind of inter/intra-departmental communication now happens routinely. Teams form on an ad-hoc basis, information and resources are shared, and the job is completed, often without senior management even needing

to know because concerns are taken care of independently and collaboratively by staff.

- Since the director or assistant director have been present at all meetings, attending gives supervisors from all levels of DPW unprecedented access to these top leaders.
- When the program first began, discussions were facilitated by either the director or assistant director of DPW, or external facilitators. Recently, members themselves have begun to generate topics and facilitate. One even reached out to HR's OLTD division to collaborate on a topic scheduled for 2017. In addition, two supervisors have led, and invited OLTD to facilitate, leadership discussions within their own individual divisions.

7. Brief Summary

When a new director joined the Department of Public Works (DPW) in early 2011, only one DPW employee participated in the county's LDP – a leadership development program that supports the county competencies of Leading and Influencing, Serving Customers, Communication, and Personal Accountability, among others – and there was a clear need to increase LDP participation among DPW supervisors.

Another concern was information sharing and breaking down silos. DPW leaders rarely shared information and ideas across division boundaries. The new director needed all DPW supervisors to collectively assume responsibility for the department instead of leaving the big picture decisions to him. It was imperative that supervisors step up to take charge not only of their own sections, but of DPW's overall concerns.

The Department of Public Works (DPW), in collaboration with the Department of Human Resources (HR), created the DPW Leadership Discussion Group to facilitate ongoing knowledge sharing and leadership development for DPW supervisors. This group has met consistently since 2014 and focused on a wide range of leadership topics. Just as important as the topics has been the opportunity for informal, safe, and open discussion, regardless of participants' title or rank. Members actively ask questions and draw upon one another's insights, creating professional networks from which to draw support back on the job.

The results have been powerful. Leaders at all levels of DPW's hierarchy prioritize the Discussion Group, and DPW Leadership Development Program (LDP) participation has increased from 2 to 22 participants, an increase of 1,000%. In addition, 15 Discussion Group participants have achieved levels in the five-level LDP since 2014.