

**MERIT SYSTEM OPERATIONS COMMITTEE AGENDA**  
**THURSDAY, December 17, 2020**  
**11:30 A.M.**

Committee Purpose: Minn. Stat. § 256.012, subd. 3 provides that "The Commissioner shall ensure that participating counties are consulted regularly and offered the opportunity to provide input on the management of the Merit System to ensure effective use of resources and to monitor system performance."

Present: Rae Ann Keeler-Aus (Yellow Medicine), Dave Saylor (Wilkin County), Kathy LaFrance (Koochiching County), Bruce Messelt (Sherburne County), John Dahlstrom (Wabasha County), Jackie Och (Todd County), Naomi Ochsendorf (Watonwan County), Kay Steffen (Des Moines Valley Health and Human Services), Jamie Halverson (Clearwater County), Chuck Hurd (Kanabec County), Tess Arrick-Kruger (Houston County), Julie Sjostrand (Pennington County), Pam Hughes (DHS), Liza Garcia (DHS) and Jessica Page (DHS).

Rae Ann called the meeting to order at 11:31.

1. **Approval of October meeting minutes.** The minutes from the October 22, 2020 meeting were approved as recorded.
2. **EEO/AA annual reports.** Liza mentioned the EEO/AA annual reports are due by the end of January. The template is still up on the Merit System County Resources website. It's meant to be a guide, you don't have to use it. The reports should include the number of complaints received the previous year, recruiting activities, 2021 hiring goals, and any staff training related to EEO/AA topics. If counties need help with their utilization analysis, the MN Department of Human Rights website can serve as a resource.

Liza mentioned that the reference to the annual reports due each January can be found on pages 9 and 13 of the guidelines that most counties have adopted. The committee asked if a reminder can be sent to all merit system counties. Liza and Jess agreed to get a reminder sent. There will also be another reminder in the January newsletter. Committee members asked if there are free trainings for counties to attend. Liza replied that she forwards information to Jess on free events and trainings when they come up and will continue to do so. These will continue to be included in the monthly newsletters.

3. **Merit System staffing update.** Jess gave an update on Merit System staffing. Stacey, who was a HR Consultant, is now working with the Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED). There are two redeployments: Brent is working with the Department of Health and Mary has been redeployed since late October. Jess mentioned the merit team is expecting Mary back in early January. The team is doing their best to keep up but staffing levels are down temporarily about 40%. Dave asked if the Merit System plans to replace Stacey. Jess responded that there are no plans to immediately backfill the position and that work has been redistributed to the team.
4. **Updated costs for January - June 2021.** Jess shared the updated county costs for January through June 2021. The Merit System is expecting some cost savings with the smaller staffing model, which is reflected in the spreadsheet sent. Jess will send the updated numbers to the remaining county directors/HR staff. Jess mentioned that the updated numbers puts the merit budget in a much better position for the next year or two.
5. **Update on 2021 county certifications & 2022 requests so far.** Jess announced that the commissioner has given final approval to the six county agencies that applied to operate their own merit system, effective January 1, 2021. This includes Becker, McLeod, Meeker, Morrison, SWHHS, and St. Louis County (representing 921 employees).

Jess stated that starting in January, there will be 51 agencies/53 counties remaining in the Merit System. She went on to say the Merit System has received four formal requests so far for 2022, which includes 311 employees. Counties have until December 31st to submit their request so additional requests could come in before then.

Dave asked if some counties ever end up moving into the next year? Jess replied that it has happened when a county didn't transition until the following year. It happened last year where a county needed a little more time to prepare their own merit system program.

6. **2021 initiatives**
  - a. **Meet & Greets and Merit System survey**

With previous discussions on recruitment efforts and the need to market the Merit System better, Jess spoke of a few initiatives that the Merit team is working on or will be working on in 2021.

The first item is meet & greets with county directors and HR staff. Jess was hoping to start these this year but the fiscal year end is not a great time for most counties. These virtual meet & greets are done via WebEx and are a way for Jess to meet Merit county partners and learn about what's working and what's not. Jess said it's one more way to gather feedback directly from merit partners. The team hasn't had a chance to fully draft a merit survey but plan to do so in 2021. Dave asked when we might launch the survey. Jess thought early 2021 such as February would be manageable.

**b. Marketing**

The second item Jess mentioned is marketing merit services better and getting the word out. Pam created a detailed spreadsheet with colleges/universities throughout Minnesota and neighboring states. Pam gave an overview of the work she's been doing and how she plans to reach out to colleges/universities in the future, especially for hard-to-fill positions.

Pam mentioned she's started linking job postings to county websites. For hard-to-fill positions, she can work with the county on recruitment strategies /plan. The Merit System usually attends a couple career fairs per year but hasn't lately due to the pandemic. There have been some virtual career fairs but costs remain the same. The Merit System can help post on free job boards and get the word out. Dave asked if most counties require their own application process. Pam responded that most do not. Only a handful do and we include that information on the job posting. Pam went on to say that every county is different; some have applicants apply through the Merit System, some also have them apply through an applicant tracking system (ATS) and some just have them send a PDF/application via email (in addition to the Merit System application).

Jess shared a flyer that Pam puts together for career fairs. Rae Ann asked if it can be shared with employees. Pam mentioned it's usually just used at job fairs. Rae Ann said it could be helpful to share with colleges when we're reaching out. Tess said to consider how the flyer can be utilized with colleges. She mentioned internships are a springboard for positions. Dave asked how

many others hire interns and that Wilken County gets a lot of interns from Moorhead/UMN. Dave mentioned that colleges are trying to find internships for students and we should encourage others to accept interns. Jackie recommended a sentence be included on the Merit System flyer saying most counties offer internships. Interested applicants should reach out directly to the county. Jackie and Rae Ann mentioned they've hired many interns into full-time positions. Pam agreed to include this information on the flyer.

The committee was introduced to Bruce Messelt, from Sherburne County, who has temporarily replaced David Minke as the MACA representative until they find a replacement.

Kay asked if the Merit team has considered updating the Merit System website and that navigating it can be cumbersome. Including links to the counties would be helpful. Jess replied that the team has been considering updates but hasn't had time yet to focus on changes.

#### c. **Training**

The third initiative that Jess mentioned is providing more training to county HR staff and managers/supervisors. These trainings will be optional and virtual, maybe offered quarterly or twice a year. Topics might include how to complete a requisition and posting request in NEOGOV or how to complete Merit forms online. Other ideas are an overview of trainee appointments and performance management. Topics offered will depend on feedback received during the meet and greets and survey.

Chuck asked if the trainings can be recorded? Jess said the team will look into options. Dave mentioned that many counties/employers have an EAP program that provides training as well.

Another thing Jess noted was that the Merit team is in the middle of a Continuous Improvement project where they're evaluating the hiring process. The team is looking for efficiencies in how we all use NEOGOV and how we process requests. Some potential focus areas are examining the intake process, hand offs, and referral lists. Jess mentioned that staff are limited by merit system rules to sending only fifteen per list but maybe there's a more efficient way to administer those lists. Jess asked if it would be helpful to receive more than fifteen names at a time? Rae Ann mentioned it would be

helpful to receive the entire list vs. just the top fifteen candidates. Dave asked if the Merit System still does regional and county registers too. Jess answered yes.

Jess asked if there are additional items or initiatives the committee would like to see in 2021.

Naomi provided regional feedback. Feedback has been that counties consider leaving the Merit System because they've built up their own HR system and are able to handle the responsibility themselves. Another reason is costs. There was only one mention of it being due to service and the ability to get lists when needed.

7. **Next meeting date/time.** The meeting was adjourned at 12:18 p.m. The next meeting of the MSOC will be held Thursday, January 28, 2021. The committee requested that the 2021 meeting invitations be sent now for planning purposes.