

MERIT SYSTEM OPERATIONS COMMITTEE AGENDA
THURSDAY, January 28, 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), 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), and Jessica Page (DHS).

1. **Approval of December meeting minutes.** The minutes from the December 17, 2020 meeting were approved as recorded.

2. **Upcoming recruiting events.** Pam gave an overview of the recruitment efforts she's been working on. She added a note about contacting counties directly if candidates are interested in an internship. This note can be found on the [Merit System Career Page](#) and flyer used for career fairs. The Merit System will be attending the upcoming MSSA conference on March 17 to share information on the Merit System and how to apply for positions. On March 25, Merit will be attending the virtual career fair which is open to sophomores, juniors, and seniors. Merit will be presenting and hosting a Q&A session. Individual sessions will also be available for those interested in hearing more about Merit positions. Pam also mentioned that she has been posting harder-to-fill positions on regional college boards and has seen some increased interest. Jamie asked about recruiting efforts for positions that don't require a degree. Pam mentioned Merit includes those at career fairs/boards, especially knowing applicants may not yet have their degree or can share openings with their networks. Merit usually has a lot of interest in non-degree required positions. It historically has been harder-to-fill positions that require a degree. Many applicants apply and do not complete the test, especially with the eligibility worker exam.

3. **Trainee appointments.** Jess gave an overview of trainee appointments as an option for those that don't meet the minimum qualifications of a position or are not one of the top 15 ranked candidates. A trainee can be hired for up to three years but no less than six months. All that's needed is an 852 form, offer letter, position description, and training plan. Trainees must meet the minimum qualifications of the job by the end of their trainee appointment. Dave asked if others have been successful hiring trainees. Jess answered that some have been successful while others have not. Kay asked if the trainee appointment has ever been used for nurses. Jess and Pam answered they have never seen one for a nurse position. Tess asked if it's for classes that already exist. Trainee appointments are for already established classifications. Jess will email an overview of the trainee appointment when the meeting minutes are sent. Questions can be directed to dhs.merit.system@state.mn.us.
4. **2022 Certification requests.** Jess shared that 13 requests were received for 2022 which represents 889 employees and 13 counties. There are currently 51 agencies (53 counties total) operating under the MN Merit System which is about 61% of all Minnesota counties. If all 13 counties are certified and approved to operate their own merit system, there would be 38 (40 counties) remaining agencies. That would leave 2,009 health and human services employees left under the MN Merit System. Jess and Pam will be reviewing all the certification materials throughout 2021 to ensure they meet the federal and state requirements.

Concerns were expressed about the rising costs as larger counties move to operate their own merit system. MSOC members suggested several ideas for stabilizing the program such as reviewing/adjusting the fee structure/formula, surveying agencies, adjusting to a minimum maintenance concept, reestablishing priorities, AMC/MACA-provided support to smaller counties, subscription-based support, state support, transitioning from NEOGOV/Biddle to the state's Recruiting Solutions, and transitioning from county to state employees (similar to what the courts did from 2000-2005). The final idea generated by the MSOC was to propose funding for a 2-year study on finding stabilization. Jess informed the committee that estimated costs for July 1, 2021+ would be shared at the April MSOC meeting and that the Merit System continues to evaluate the budget as agencies operate their own merit systems. Being fairly new to the program, Jess commented that she'd have to look into the process for rule changes/proposals. The committee decided to get together in the next month or communicate via email any updates on this topic as it is a top priority.

5. **Meet & Greets.** Jess shared that she's extended invitations to all 51 agencies. So far, she's met with 9 agencies and has 17 more scheduled. She's received great feedback so far and appreciates the time spent talking about what's going well and the challenges agencies face. Jess thanked those that have met with her so far and those that will be meeting with her in the future. Rae Ann commented that agencies appreciate the opportunity to meet and discuss issues.

6. **Merit System survey.** Jess gave an update on the Merit System survey. Survey questions were shared with the committee. Committee members should send their feedback directly to Jess by Friday, February 12. The goal is to send the survey the week of President's Day and close it on Friday, March 12. Reminders will go out in the March newsletter and closer to the deadline date. Jess will monitor responses. If the response rate is low, the survey will be extended. Chuck commented that the questions were spot on and Tess recommended adding some drop down options for question 8 (key services provided or cluster of positions). Kay asked about including FTEs on question 3 because some agencies are sharing HR staff. We could dig further to find out how their HR support is set up. Dave requested not having too many questions (aim for 10) so those receiving the survey are more likely to complete it. Questions 6 and 8 are similar and can be combined. The survey will be administered via SurveyMonkey.

7. **Next meeting date/time.** The next meeting of the MSOC will be held Thursday, April 22, 2021. Calendar invitations have been sent. The committee will meet sooner if there's an immediate need to discuss proposed changes to the Merit System.

Jess reminded the committee that the EEO/AA annual reports are due by January 31. Please send them directly to Liza Garcia.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:35 p.m.