

Merit System Operations Committee - Quarterly Meeting

Date: 07/28/2022

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.”

Members

Minnesota Association of County Social Service Administrators (MACSSA) Representatives	Region	County	In Attendance
Julie Sjostrand	Region 1	Pennington	X
Jamie Halverson (Chair)	Region 2	Clearwater	X
Kathy LaFrance	Region 3	Koochiching	
Dave Saylor	Region 4	Wilkin	X
Jennifer Westrum	Region 5	Wadena	X
Rae Ann Keeler-Aus (Vice-Chair)	Region 6	Yellow Medicine	
Vacant	Region 7		
Vacant	Region 8		
Naomi Ochsendorf	Region 9	Watsonwan	X
Nina Arneson	Region 10	Goodhue	X

Minnesota Association of County Administrators (MACA) Representative	County	In Attendance
Kelsey Baker	Swift County	

Minnesota County Human Resources Management Association (MCHRMA) Representative	County	In Attendance
Tess Arrick-Krueger, Human Resources Director	Houston County	X

Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) Representatives	Program Area	In Attendance
Jessica Page	Merit System	X
Brent Boyd	Merit System	X
Pam Hughes	Merit System	X
Liza Garcia	Equal Opportunity & Access	X

Agenda

1. Welcome

The meeting was called to order. No new members were present for introductions.

2. Approval of March meeting minutes

The minutes from the March 24, 2022 meeting were approved as recorded.

3. Capturing disability status for annual EEO/AA reports & resources/events available

Liza started the discussion of this topic by asking for issues, concerns or feedback regarding the disability reporting templates sent out with the April/May newsletter. The Committee members didn't have any comments regarding the documents, but a suggestion was made to send them out in a separate email for those that didn't catch them in the newsletter -- Liza agreed with this suggestion.

Liza also wanted to touch base with the Committee regarding the new guidelines issued in November and the related training requirements within them. Liza provided the Committee with a list of government agency news and information sources that are free, virtual and reliable. Liza thought that counties may be interested in subscribing to them for helpful resources on EEO-AA matters. This list includes: the Minnesota Department of Human Rights newsroom, where you can subscribe and receive information regarding many of their activities; EEOC news updates which has resources on training and a workshop on accessibility, along with other information; MNIT's website and newsletter on accessibility, including a quick tips sheet for creating Power Point presentations.* Nina suggested that this was helpful information and it might be useful if it was sent out with an acknowledgement of receipt of the annual report.

*This list, with links, was sent in an email subsequent to the meeting.

4. Update on Merit System Director vacancy

Jess started the discussion on this topic by notifying the Committee that the job posting for the position will close on August 3. She mentioned that she has been working closely with the recruiting team at DHS and noted several locations where the position was being posted. She indicated she will be conducting two information sessions for interested applicants which will provide an overview of DHS and details regarding the job, along with a question and answer segment. Jess mentioned that they are really pushing to get word out. Interviews are scheduled from August 9 through August 15 with Nina and Jamie serving on the interview panel. She indicated that they are trying to move quickly now after some delay in getting the position set-up. DHS – Human Resources felt a job audit was necessary to ensure it was classified at the right level. Jamie indicated that she really liked the idea of information sessions, and was thinking of listening in to get some ideas for implementing this process in Clearwater County.

5. 2022 Costs & planning for the future

Jess shared with the Committee that costs will remain the same for the remainder of the year. She noted that there will be some salary savings with the Director position being vacant for the past 4 to 5 months and there should be some salary savings with the new position because the reporting structure has changed. She added that the position is kind of a mix between a supervisor and a director.

Jess noted that she plans to work with the new director regarding administering a survey related to county intentions for certification and departure in the next three to five years. She noted that we had hoped to see a decline in the work as counties departed, but are not seeing that because of the tight job market and efforts to recover from the pandemic -- We are actually seeing increases with the number of new positions being established (40% increase), the number of postings (36 % increase) and the number of transactions (21% increase). Jamie asked if Jess had any indication as to why new positions were being created, and if it

was due to the difficulty in filling positions. Jamie also inquired as to whether or not the new Director position would have a virtual component. Jess indicated the position would have a virtual component, allowing for a greater degree of flexibility and hopefully opening it up to more candidates. In terms of the increases in positions, Pam and Brent both indicated it was hard to tell why, but that they've had discussions with counties regarding these types of adjustments.

6. Verifying social worker transcripts upon hire

Jess began this discussion by indicating that it has been a long standing practice to request transcripts, but staff are finding it increasingly difficult to obtain them. She noted that we do send new hires an email requesting their transcript and a follow-up if nothing has been received. Our goal is to get them by the time they are certified. Jess was wondering how valuable this service is to them, or is it duplicate work. The members agreed that it was a valuable service and something the Merit System should be providing. Jess noted that the transcript is the means by which graduation is determined and that we do allow for copies. Jess mentioned that we have discussed requiring the transcript upon application, but haven't been inclined to do so because it would create a barrier to hiring. Tess mentioned that one problem could be transcripts from older graduates and difficulties obtaining transcripts from schools that may have closed. She thought some allowances might need to be made in these circumstances. Additionally, she thought we should make it very clear on the application that a transcript is required. Jess stated, in summary, that the members thought a transcript at time of application was a good idea, but allowances need to be made for those that aren't able to provide them. However, members also made it clear that they would not want to miss out on good candidates because of this new requirement, especially given the current job market.

7. Government and Nonprofit Career Fair

Pam shared information on the upcoming career fair that she will be attending at the end of October. This will take place at the University of Minnesota on the Minneapolis campus. She mentioned that this is a fairly large and well attended recruiting event. Pam noted that members should feel free to send recruiting materials that they would like distributed on hard to fill positions, or just general information regarding their region and employment in the public sector. She said she'd be happy to display that information on our table. Pam also noted that, in the past, she has had numerous requests from attendees for internship opportunities, so please send that information as well.

In terms of recruiting in general, Jamie was wondering what information we share with colleges and thought that perhaps we could do more in that area -- Pam offered to contact a couple of the larger colleges and see if we could promote something through them. However, she said quite frequently they refer these requests to their online career hub and usual don't post things on their bulletin boards.

8. Impact of [Rule 25](#) changes

Brent started the discussion by noting that this topic seems to resurface every two years. The committee initially discussed it back in 2018 and then again in 2020. This most recent request for a discussion occurred

as a result of the expiration of Rule 25 and the shift to Direct Access. An employee contacted the Merit System and was wondering about a higher job evaluation rating for these positions. The last time we discussed this, Dave mentioned that the counties were hoping to be allowed to opt out, and Naomi mentioned that she was part of a work group reviewing this new process. Brent mentioned that the purpose of this discussion is to find out about any updates. Further, we're wondering about whether or not a study should be considered at this time. Dave mentioned Direct Access allows individuals seeking treatment to go anywhere, including private providers or nonprofits. With Rule 25, clients needed to go through the county. He mentioned that Wilkin is unique for a small county in that they have an MSW doing the comprehensive assessment and have a clinical supervisor providing supervision. It was his understanding that the larger counties, such as Otter Tail, Clay and Douglas are providing this option. However, Dave felt that many counties were moving away from providing these assessments. In fact, in Wilkin County, they are moving more towards providing adult mental health and adult protection services where there is greater demand. They are being pressed to do more with adults and don't have as much time to do comprehensive assessments. Nina mentioned that Goodhue was also a county that was opting out and choosing not to continue on with this work. She was wondering just how many Merit System counties were continuing to provide this service. Her sense was that many counties, large and small, were no longer offering this service for various reasons. Brent agreed that it would be good to know what the current participation rate is for Merit System counties. He also questioned whether or not this was an external market issue versus an internal equity problem. Naomi thought it was probably not worth a study at this point, but maybe in the future. She noted that private sector entities have raised the compensation for these positions with hiring bonuses, and if counties want to get back in the market for these positions they will probably need to pay more.

9. Next meeting date/time

Thursday, Nov. 10, 2022 at noon. (This meeting will be both in person and remote).

