

MERIT SYSTEM OPERATIONS COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

Thursday, November 4, 2021

11:35 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 County) (in-person), Jamie Halverson (Clearwater County) (in-person), Chuck Hurd (Kanabec County) (virtual), Tess Arrick-Kruger (Houston County) (virtual), Kelsey Baker (Swift County) (virtual), Nina Arneson (Goodhue County) (virtual), Jennifer Westrum (Wadena County) (virtual) Pam Hughes (DHS) (in-person), Jessica Page (DHS) (in-person), and Brent Boyd (DHS) (in-person).

1. Introductions. Committee members introduced themselves and welcomed Nina Arneson of Goodhue County (Region 10) back to the MSOC. Nina is replacing John Dahlstrom of Wabasha County.

2. Approval of July meeting minutes. The minutes from the July 22, 2021 meeting were approved as recorded.

3. Vote on MSOC Chair and Vice Chair. Jamie Halverson graciously agreed to step in as the Chair while Rae Ann will step back and serve as Vice Chair for the upcoming two-year term.

4. Review MSOC Guidelines. These were established in 2003 and last revised in 2017. Jess didn't identify any areas for revisions. If any members identify changes, please notify Jess. Otherwise, the current guidelines remain in effect.

5. Gather feedback about the EEO/AA training on October 21, 2021 Twenty-one county agencies out of 51 participated. Ninety percent said the content was satisfactory or very satisfactory. Ninety percent said the pace was just right. Only ten percent thought the pace was too fast. One hundred percent liked it and would recommend it to others. One suggestion was to present and walk through an example. Rae Ann repeated what the feedback suggested in that it was a success. Nina thanked those involved in

putting it on and felt it was well-received and really appreciated the effort. Liza shared that it was a suggestion by the MSOC that led to its development.

6. Estimated costs for January through July, 2022. Jess told the committee that they were looking at a decrease in the overall budget to ease the impact to those counties remaining. As of now, counties remaining could see an average increase of 28% next year (with the range being 19% to 40% depending on the number of employees). Jess also shared that a big part of the decrease was due to the fact that Mower, with about 100 employees, would be holding off leaving until the following year. For 2022 it is anticipated that there will be 37 county agencies and 39 counties, which is down from the current numbers of 51 county agencies and 53 counties covering approximately 2,866 employees.

Tess raised the question regarding the issue of approaching DHS with some funding reimbursement and was wondering if it had moved forward. Jess was not aware of this being raised in the department, but said she will keep evaluating the Merit System's budget and costs as we move forward. Jamie mentioned that the formula was such that as more counties leave, the higher the per-county cost will be, and that this could get very expensive for the counties that remain. She also shared that her county was not in a good place to take over this work. Nina clarified that the Merit System budget was self-sustaining. She also mentioned that Goodhue County was very pleased with the services and felt that it wouldn't be possible to deliver the same services with the HR staff they have in Goodhue County. She noted that they would have to add at least two or three staff members. That said, she realizes there is room for improvement by focusing on value added.

Kelsey inquired about any discussions within DHS regarding long-term goals, adding that we need to be proactive. Jess mentioned that a significant part of the costs are coming from the applicant tracking system (NEOGOV) and that the Merit System is looking into alternatives such as the system currently used by MMB (Recruiting Solutions). Jennifer mentioned that they must know more about the long-term plan if costs keep increasing. Jess suggested that it could be an item for discussion for the next meeting.

Jess also shared with the committee that three more counties would be seeking certification for 2023, in addition to Mower County. Finally, Brent mentioned that the Merit System staff also gets involved with tribal reviews. To date, two tribal nations have been reviewed by the Merit System. The Mille Lacs Band of the Ojibwe are currently seeking review and approval of their HR processes.

7. Update on certification requests. Brent reported that they have been making progress on this work. Out of the 13 counties (12 agencies) seeking certification, seven have essentially been completed. Two have yet to resolve some concerns, and two have significant additional information to submit.

8. Gather input on testing for entry-level positions. Jess was wondering if the online assessment process was creating a barrier to hiring. This includes written exams for the classifications Accounting Technician, Case Aide, Child Support Enforcement Aide, Eligibility Worker and Office Support Specialist (OSS). Jamie mentioned that maybe they could look at the pass/fail rate for some of these exams to better assess the concern. Jess agreed that would be helpful and noted that she will bring that information for the next meeting. Jamie suggested that they might be able to incorporate some type of written exam with the interview process at the county level. But she also noted that some directors are very much supportive of the written exams being administered through the Merit System. Rae Ann mentioned that they had one individual that failed the OSS exam, but would probably make a good candidate and would possibly pass the next time. Nina shared that over the years the entry-level exams may not have been able to get at areas the counties were interested in and, perhaps, could implement something at the county level with the Merit System's assistance. Jennifer mentioned that they needed to be cautious and look at a broader set of objective measures, rather than just candidate numbers. This approach could prove to be shortsighted and, in the end, costing more money.

Jamie suggested we take a look at what happened when we converted the Social Worker exam process. Pam explained the administrative process and how it now requires a review of supplemental questions by staff for verification of training and experience. Brent mentioned that it's difficult to compare the assessment of Social Workers with the variety of technical and para-professional positions included here. The Social Worker requires primarily an undergraduate degree, while a similar assessment for these technical and para-professional positions would need to focus on a wide variety of accumulated work experiences. Brent also provided that the assessment process used currently for these positions seeks to measure the cognitive abilities of the candidate as they relate to the classification's knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs).

9. Debrief of Government and Nonprofit Career Fair. Brent and Pam attended the career fair at the U of M (Twin Cities Campus). Pam noted the event was well attended and the students were engaged. In addition, there were quite a few

employers represented. Pam mentioned that they spoke to 37 students, 20 of those had a related degree, and 8 would consider working in Greater MN.

Related to topic number eight above, Pam mentioned that she had a conversation with an HR representative from St. Louis County who said they had recently implemented a written exam for their OSS applicants.

10. Discuss labor market trends and upcoming training on Recruitment

Strategies. Jess started the discussion on this topic by pointing out that the most recent trend in employer recruiting strategies is to go out and seek talent. Rae Ann added that this time period was now referred to as the *Great Resignation* because of all the turnover currently taking place. She also noted that they are seeing not only retirements, but also employees resigning for positions in other counties. Jamie mentioned that they will have a few retirements coming up, and she was concerned that this may lead to turnover in other areas throughout the agency. Jess suggested that she might have some useful information from DHS on knowledge transfer that might help in this regard. Jamie also mentioned that the Board was concerned enough about this topic to consider major changes to their compensation plan by eliminating steps at the bottom of some ranges and adding steps at the top. Rae Ann mentioned the importance of a flexible telecommuting policy and how a restrictive policy led to the loss of an interested candidate in her County. She noted that employers are no longer competing locally, but now statewide.

Jess pointed out that Pam will be providing some timely and informative training on recruitment strategies on December 8 from 10:00 to 11:00 a.m.. Please watch for upcoming details. For those unable to attend, we will be recording her presentation.

Jess mentioned discussions she has had with the Department of Employment and Economic Development and how they emphasized the importance of focusing on what potential employees want and highlighting those options in your postings. She also stated that DEED has some great resources on this topic and recommended checking out their website.

11. Discuss screening applicants based on ability to legally work in the U.S.

Jess shared with the committee that the Merit System recently had an applicant that answered no to this question on the application. She was wondering if we should be filtering on this question. And, more to the point, are counties interested in sponsoring someone from a different country?

Tess mentioned that even if the county was interested in this option, the job might not be eligible. She wasn't sure what the current parameters might be for the job and the individual. Jess stated that she wasn't sure what the State was doing, but thought there might be some positions in the medical area for DHS. Nina remarked that in Goodhue County it requires a separate Board decision and they would need clarity on some of the possible obligations and requirements. Rae Ann shared that they participated in this process with the hiring of a position for their Collaborative Board and found it to be expensive. However, Jamie mentioned that just this morning at an earlier MACSSA meeting they heard about some money being available and suggested this may be a way of addressing some of their equity concerns.

12. Announce the combined requisition and posting template form. Jess shared that the Merit System staff have been working on a combined form for requesting registers and vacancies to be posted. This has been a collaborative effort across the Merit System. She noted how this form had a very nice flow to it and how helpful it will be to have all this information stored in one place. The plan is to go live with this new form on Monday, November 22. Of course, we will still be accepting this information if it is submitted on the forms we are currently using.

13. Next meeting date/time. The next meeting will be held on Thursday, January 27, 2022 at the same location with call-in options.

The meeting adjourned at 12:30 p.m.

Additional Notes: subsequent to the meeting future meeting dates were forwarded to all committee members.