

Finance Professionals Career Fellowship Program Guidelines and Implementation Strategy

Revised April 7, 2016

I. Program Goals

The purpose of the Finance Professionals Career Fellowship Program is to enable Ramsey County departments to attract, develop and retain the best finance-related talent in a competitive labor market where the recruitment of qualified public sector financial professionals and accounting graduates is becoming increasingly difficult. The program is designed to find qualified applicants, introduce them to our organization, and provide robust on-the-job training to develop them as the potential next generation of our Ramsey County workforce.

With adoption of the Ramsey County 2016-2017 budget, the County Board approved funding for the development of this post-graduate career development initiative, which is intended to build on the success of the Progressive Internship Program and serve as a prototype for similar efforts that could be considered for other occupational groups at Ramsey County.

Through this program, Ramsey County will partner with Metropolitan State University and other local colleges to place graduates with an accounting degree into a four-year financial career track program with participating departments at Ramsey County. Graduates accepted into this program will be appointed into an Accountant job classification, will serve in rotational assignments in multiple departments, and will receive in-depth financial experience to prepare them for higher-level financial positions at Ramsey County.

County departments will benefit by having a direct pipeline to qualified accounting candidates. This will provide a “grow-our-own” career development opportunity for selected candidates.

The Finance Fellowship Program will advance the County’s goal of modeling fiscal accountability, transparency and strategic investments through professional operations and financial management. It will also advance the County’s goal to enhance access to opportunity and mobility for all residents and businesses through connections to education, employment and economic development throughout our region. Through focused, active recruitment at local colleges with student bodies that reflect the racially and culturally diverse talent that exists within Ramsey County, the program will ensure that Ramsey County is building its next generation of financial professionals to be reflective of and responsive to the needs of the organization and the residents it serves.

Funding for this program is included in the adopted 2016-2017 budget in the Unallocated General account and from department operating budgets.

II. Challenges Addressed By This Program

- It is difficult to recruit qualified public sector financial professionals in general, and accounting graduates specifically. Governmental accounting is not routinely or pervasively taught at today's public and private colleges. Accounting students are often guided into private sector accounting positions and don't realize there are legitimate career path options in the public sector. Graduates with an accounting degree are currently in very high demand.
- Given recruiting competition in today's labor market, we cannot rely merely on job announcements and job postings to garner sufficient interest in our job openings. Better outreach efforts are needed to maximize our success.
- Additional retirements of long-term County financial professionals is anticipated and will create the need for skilled replacements.
- There is a need to diversify the Minnesota public sector finance profession generally and Ramsey County finance occupations specifically if we expect to be more reflective of the entire population we serve.
- Training, development and improved skill sets of our current accountants was listed as a priority need in our recent Countywide Risk Assessment Report.
- Not all accounting experiences within County departments are equivalent. No two departments are the same. As such, work-related experiences vary. Even with significant years of experience at Ramsey County, department silos can limit the professional development of individual employees. Participants that are hired at the same time will progress through the program as a cohort, with structured opportunities to network with each other and meet with other leaders from across the organization as they learn more about Ramsey County.

III. Program Elements

Ramsey County will partner with Metropolitan State University and other local colleges to place graduates with an accounting degree into a financial career track program with participating departments. For example, the Metropolitan State University accounting department is interested in participating, with approximately 1,000 students presently enrolled in that academic program with a very diverse, locally-grown pool of students that includes both entry-level students as well as students working in mid-level careers.

A Program Sponsor Group has been formed to lead this initiative with participating departments that include Finance, Community Human Services Administration, Corrections, and Property Records and Revenue, with assistance from the Human Resources Department and the County Manager's Policy and Planning Division.

Graduates accepted into this program will be appointed for a term of up to four years in limited-duration, unclassified Accountant I and II classifications, and will serve 12-month rotational assignments in each participating department. Program FTEs will be budgeted in the Finance Department with participants directly assigned to and managed by participating departments. Through the course of the rotational assignments, participants will have exposure to all elements of a full fiscal year in each department that includes budget preparation, daily transactional duties and year-end financial reporting. The intent is to provide a practical, hands-on experience, with departments benefitting by having actual work performed by the participants. Future employment with the Ramsey County is not guaranteed. However, through completion of the program, participants should have sufficient experience and training to compete favorably for other available financial positions in the organization through an open, competitive employment process.

Departments will be asked to reallocate existing resources to participate in this program, with matching funds provided from the 2016-2017 Unallocated General account, with no impact to the property tax levy.

Implementation of this program is expected to begin in time to recruit participants from the spring 2016 graduation class.

IV. Program Roles and Responsibilities

The Program Sponsor Group will:

- Serve as the governance body for the Financial Professionals Career Fellowship Program
- Be comprised of participating departments, Human Resources, and the Policy and Planning Division of the County Manager's Office.
- Meet regularly, provide program guidance and resolve disputes
- Participate in the selection of candidates and determine appropriate step and accountant classification levels of selected participants
- Develop a rotational schedule and assign participants to departments accordingly
- Determine whether participants will be appointed into full-time or part-time assignments, depending on individual circumstances and department needs
- Monitor and guide the performance of individual participants
- Evaluate the on-going performance of the program as a whole

The Chief Financial Officer and Finance Department will:

- Chair and hold regular meetings of the Program Sponsor Group
- Manage the program generally
- Meet periodically with participants, both individually and as a group
- Host the central program budget and FTEs in the Finance Department budget
- Serve as the lead relationship manager in developing and maintaining appropriate points of connection for the program with participating college accounting programs

Participating Departments will:

- Agree to participate in the 4-year program
- Serve on the Program Sponsor Group
- Agree to the rotational assignments as determined by the Program Sponsor Group
- Offer meaningful, well-rounded work experiences to participants in their departments
- Manage the day-to-day duties, work responsibilities, and supervision of the participants in their departments
- Approve timesheets, leave requests and perform other daily supervisory requirements
- Provide work stations, computers, equipment and supplies to participants assigned to their departments
- Encourage participants to attend countywide training events and allow participants to attend program-related events and meetings, when requested
- Provide matching funds, when required, that will be reallocated to the central program budget to cover FTE expenses

The Policy and Planning Division of the County Manager's Office will:

- Serve on the Program Sponsor Group
- Invite participants to attend relevant training, meetings and shared experiences with members of the Progressive Internship Program

The Human Resources Department will:

- Serve on the Program Sponsor Group
- Provide assistance to the Program Sponsor Group to implement the recruitment, selection and retention of participants in this program in accordance with applicable state statutes, HR rules, and these program guidelines

Participants (Fellows) will:

- Agree to participate in the program for up to 4 years
- Possess a bachelor's degree in accounting or a closely related field or obtain such degree by the end of their current semester or quarter
- Agree to rotation assignments as determined by the Program Sponsor Group
- Receive compensation and health benefits as made available to other employees in the same accountant classifications
- Be placed into unclassified, limited duration appointments that will not exceed 4 years for any one person, will not accrue seniority benefits, and have no guarantee of future employment at Ramsey County
- Be appointed into full-time or part-time assignments by the Program Sponsor Group, depending on individual circumstances and department needs
- Advance through the program as a cohort with structured opportunities to network with each other and meet with other leaders from across the organization as they learn more about Ramsey County
- Obtain a full, well-rounded work experience through completion of their appointment that is intended to prepare them to compete favorably for available financial positions at Ramsey County through an open, competitive selection process
- Receive credit for their years of experience in the program that will be fully counted towards applicable work experience and minimum requirements in other open financial positions at Ramsey County, including the Accountant II, III and IV classifications.

V. Implementation Authorities

The County Manager is authorized to change program elements and requirements as needed, based on recommendations of the Chief Financial Officer and the Program Sponsor Group.