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PRESIDENT'S PAGE



*FMA National President
Patricia Niehaus*

Doing What We Can in the Face of Sequestration

I sit here looking back on a summer where many of us faced furlough days and the subsequent loss of income and find myself angry that, once again, our elected officials have decided to try to resolve the budget woes of our country on the backs of federal employees. As a Department of Defense manager and employee, I was happy to see our furlough obligations reduced from 22 days to 11 days to six days but still strongly believe there should have been NO furlough days for any federal employee. FMA

will continue to lobby against this unfair targeting of federal employees and to represent your interests in the challenging months ahead of us. As I write this, Congress is already predicting that there will be no budget at the end of the Fiscal Year. This could result in another type of furlough – government shutdown – if Congress doesn't do its job.

I urge you to take an active role in your future. Visit your congressional representatives (or their staffers) in their District Offices and let them know what you think about sequestration and the impact it is having on you, your families, your fellow feds and your communities. Challenge their claims that it's the other side's fault. FMA is here to help you do that. Take advantage of FMA-PAC and attend fundraisers for your representatives. Be visible; be vocal. Send the action letters that Katie Maddocks writes for your personalization – but don't do it on duty time or on a government computer. The Hatch Act applies in "off" election years, too.

On a positive note, I was able to visit two chapters this summer: Chapter 125 at Corpus Christi Army Depot and Chapter 385, Social Security Administration Hearings Appeals Judges, in Denver. This is one of my favorite things about being your National President – getting to know our members and visiting chapters. Thank you to both chapters for the invitation and your hospitality!

FMA's official charity, the Federal Employee Education and Assistance Fund (FEEA) has been there for federal employees throughout many natural disasters as well as the most recent disaster known as Sequestration. Unfortunately, their resources are stretched very thin due to the thousands of federal employees who have applied for aid to get them through the impact of furloughs. For the first time in FEEA's history, they had to suspend issuing furlough-related hardship loans due to the unprecedented number of applications. I'd like to repeat my request for you to consider being there for FEEA and your fellow feds now. ANY contribution will help and you can become a "Friend of FEEA" for only \$150 a year or \$12.50 per month. Also, please keep our official charity in mind when you're completing your CFC contribution pledges this year. FEEA's CFC code is 11185.

I look forward to seeing many of you at the FMA Region Conferences. Region 2 will lead off in Williamsburg, VA, on September 7, followed by Region 1 in Somers Point, NJ, on September 28, and finished off by Region 4 in Henderson, NV, on October 12.

Please be assured that FMA is here for you and we will not give up the fight. There is strength in numbers and I ask each of you to invite a fellow Federal Manager to join us! ■

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All materials submitted to *The Federal Manager* should pertain to public service managers. Copy should be double-spaced, no longer than 10 pages.

High resolution color images, charts, or illustrations should be included if possible. Text should be submitted by email or on compact disc. Include a biography of the author.

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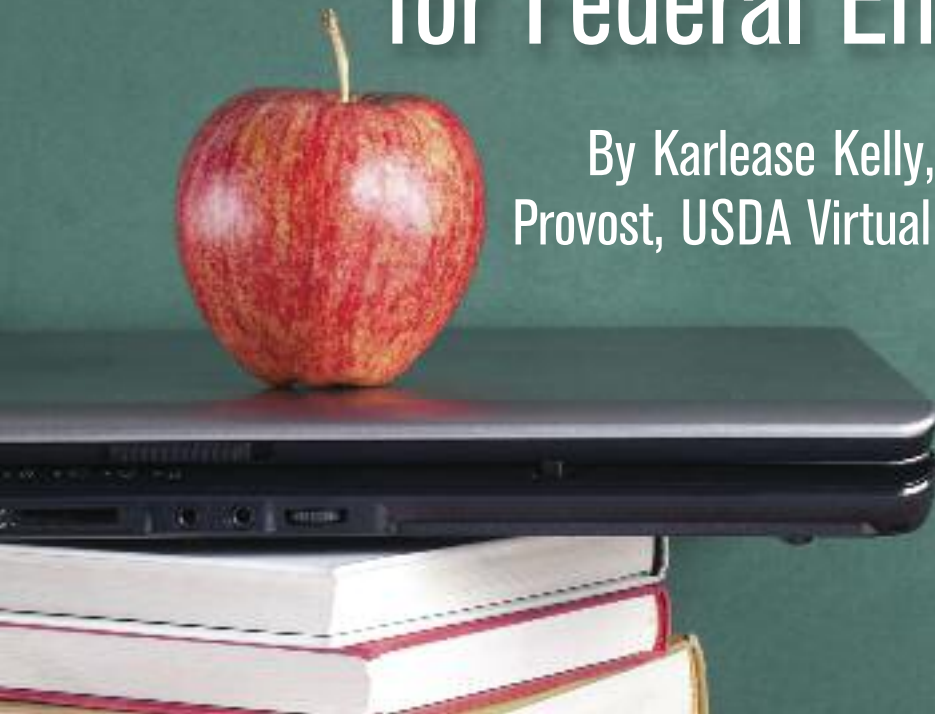
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USDA's Virtual University: Providing Training Resources for Federal Employees

By Karlease Kelly, Ph.D.,
Provost, USDA Virtual University



Federal managers often ask themselves, "What can I do to further develop my skills and grow as an organizational leader? And, how can I help my employees develop their skills?" USDA provides a resource to help federal managers get answers to these questions through their Virtual University (VU). The VU reports to USDA's Chief Human Capital Officer. The services offered by the VU contribute to USDA's succession planning needs and the closure of critical skills gaps. The VU also ensures that training and employee development is widely available to our diverse and inclusive workforce. The VU solicits best practices from within USDA, other federal agencies, academia, and private industry, to offer training and development resources that provide successful results.

To meet the variety of training and employee development needs at USDA,

the VU offers programs using state of the art technologies, as well as classroom training, and employee development resources. For example, the VU provides courses electronically to geographically dispersed groups of managers and employees through a web-based application. This technology allows managers and supervisors to participate in training via their computer, resulting in a significant travel cost savings. Participants can listen to the trainer, as well as interact with the class. The VU also builds interactive electronic courses with a tool that converts PowerPoint presentations into e-learning content that is posted and shared throughout USDA.

The Virtual University grew out of feedback that was shared by USDA employees and supervisors in listening sessions that were held across the country in the summer of 2010. The sessions

focused on gathering input on a variety of issues related to improving employee satisfaction and customer service. At every listening session, employees and managers asked for greater access to training and development opportunities. The Virtual University has been guided by the input from the listening sessions, and it plays a key role in achieving the vision of building a high performance culture, and providing a modern workplace for a modern workforce at USDA.

The following are some samples of the training and employee development resources that have been provided by the VU:

A Departmental Regulation requiring the development of Individual Development Plans (IDPs) was published. (See a copy of this regulation at:

continued on next page

USDA's Virtual University

continued from page 3

<http://www.ocio.usda.gov/directives/doc/DR4040-410.pdf>.) The IDP represents a commitment that the organization makes to growing and developing employees. It demonstrates that employees are valued. As employees learn new skills and gain in personal growth, they become more motivated and skilled to meet new challenges. When the organization shows interest in employee development, the employee has a greater interest in the organization's development.

IDPs are also an important part of succession planning in that they help employees develop skills that are needed both now and in the future. As part of long-term career planning, employees, supervisors, managers, student interns, executives, and training officers use IDPs to plan and track training. More importantly, managers are able to use IDPs to create activities that will lead to a more engaged, effective, and skilled workforce. In addition, the VU provides training on how to develop an IDP. A goal was established for 95% of all eligible employees to have an IDP within the fiscal year and USDA is currently at 94%. This goal is monitored, tracked, and reported on a monthly basis to drive continuous improvement.

The VU is organized into three "schools," or components: the College of Leadership and Professional Development, the School of Talent Management, and the Academy for Interns and Scholars. Each school focuses on a specific group of USDA employees, taking into consideration the appropriate types of opportunities, guidance, and support needed by members of that group. (See Figure 1.)

The College of Leadership and Professional Development

focuses on fostering and developing a cadre of high-performing USDA employees who aspire toward future supervisory, management, and leadership positions within USDA. These programs address needs identified in USDA's succession and workforce plans, as well as

The USDA Virtual University administered by USDA's Office of Human Resources Management		
Academy for Interns and Scholars	School of Talent Management	College of Leadership and Professional Development
OBJECTIVE		
To attract, inspire, and develop college students and entry level professionals for future USDA leadership positions.	To provide every current USDA employee with developmental opportunities for career enhancement and personal satisfaction.	To develop and deliver programs that target USDA workforce/succession planning needs.
TARGET AUDIENCE		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student Interns • New employees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • USDA employees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • USDA managers, supervisors, and executives
COMPONENTS		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On-boarding • Individual Development Plan • Targeted Skill Enhancement • Mentoring • Panel discussions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual Development Plan • Mentoring • Details • Seminars (current issues, career development, etc.) • Competency assessment and skills gap closure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SES Candidate Development Program • Leadership Development Programs • Mentoring/Coaching • New Supervisor Training • Training for experienced supervisors and managers • Executive Seminar Series • 360 degree assessment • Presidential Management Fellows • President's Management Council Rotational Program

Figure 1: USDA Virtual University: Preparing USDA managers and supervisors for the challenges of today and the opportunities of tomorrow.

target key competencies identified by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM). Through this College, the VU is piloting training and resources for newly hired supervisors, as well as developing programs for experienced supervisors and managers.

This College also provides USDA's Senior Executive Service Candidate Development Program (SES CDP). The VU provides workshops on writing Executive Core Qualifications to help employees learn how to prepare their SES CDP application prior to announcing the opportunity. Individuals selected for the SES CDP engage in eighteen to twenty four months of leadership development activities leading toward an opportunity to become formally certified as a senior executive by OPM. The activities include coaching, training, mentoring, assessment, and an executive-level detail to develop each of the Executive Core Qualifications required by OPM for SES members.

The School of Talent Management

provides every USDA manager and employee access to training and career development resources. The Virtual University works collaboratively with the USDA team that administers the learning management system called AgLearn, to guide employees to on-line courses and curriculum designed to meet their developmental needs. AgLearn offers a library of on-line books, a Leadership Channel, and other professional development resources, to which all USDA employees have access regardless of their geographical locations. Some of the courses in AgLearn are available to individuals outside of USDA. For more information about AgLearn, click on this link: <http://www.aglearn.usda.gov/>.

The Virtual University also provides the on-line Detail Registry and the Mentoring Portal. The Detail Registry allows offices to post available details and/or shadowing opportunities in a searchable database that employees can access to locate a developmental experience. The Mentoring Portal helps Mentoring Coordinators match mentors with protégés to promote a mentoring culture

at USDA. The mentoring program follows the OPM best practices guide on mentoring. (See the guide at: <http://www.opm.gov/hrd/lead/BestPractices-Mentoring.pdf>.) The Virtual University also hosts Flash Mentoring events to help match mentors with protégés, and published a Departmental Regulation to promote mentoring.

The Academy for Interns and Scholars

provides interns and new employees at USDA with an on-boarding process and training to promote a successful start for their career. For students who have been hired under the Pathways Regulation, the VU established guidance on training to develop entry level business skills to help interns adapt and succeed in the federal work environment. The Academy sponsors training for intern supervisors and managers focused on how to make the on-boarding process for interns welcoming and informative, how to make the work experience for the intern engaging, and how to fully comply with the requirements of the Pathways Regulation. The VU also provides training for the supervisors of new employees so that they know how they can help newly hired team members be successful quickly. The on-boarding resources for interns and new employees are posted at an on-boarding web portal that has received positive recognition by OPM.

With access to all of these resources through the Virtual University, managers at USDA are well-prepared to develop their skills as well as the skills of their employees for current challenges and future opportunities. ■

For more information about the Virtual University, contact Karlease Kelly (karlease.kelly@dm.usda.gov) or Zina Sutch (zina.sutch@dm.usda.gov), or see the USDA Virtual University web site at: www.dm.usda.gov/employ/vu/index.php.

“
The services offered by the [Virtual University] contribute to USDA's succession planning needs and the closure of critical skills gaps.”

