

Mendocino County Comprehensive New Employee Orientation  
Executive Summary for 2017 Challenge Award

Overview:

The Mendocino County Employee Orientation is a two-day comprehensive onboarding program for new County employees to ensure they have a basic understanding of the County mission, structure, and the importance of their new role as public servants. New employees attending orientation are able to meet and hear from key County officials, learn about the services provided by the County, complete mandatory employee trainings, and understand the benefits available to them so that they feel welcome and valued as they begin their career as public servants in Mendocino County.

Challenge:

Being a large, rural county with lower-than-market wages, Mendocino County struggles to attract and retain long-term, talented employees. When the County does hire, departments are anxious to have their new staff begin work right away. Past practice has been to provide a four-hour orientation to new hires on their first day of work. The orientation included a brief meeting with union representatives, completion of I-9 and W-4 paperwork, a brief overview of benefits, and a presentation about workers' compensation and employee safety. At the conclusion of orientation, employees were sent to their respective departments with deadlines to turn in benefit and retirement enrollment forms, and a list of mandatory online training modules to be completed within the first six months of employment. Employees often had additional questions and reported feeling rushed and overwhelmed. Additionally, new employees frequently failed to turn in necessary paperwork or complete their mandatory trainings within the six-month timeframe because they were devoting their attention to becoming familiar with their new jobs. Due to the limited amount of time for orientation, new employees were also missing out on valuable information about public service, local government operations, County structure, and the numerous benefits and services available to them as County employees.

Solution:

In July 2016, the Human Resources (HR) Department formed a new employee orientation committee comprised of nineteen representatives from ten County departments with diverse interest in the project. The committee met several times in the subsequent months to discuss orientation topics and delivery methods for new

employees. HR staff then designed an expanded new employee orientation program to ensure employees start their County career feeling welcome, informed, and empowered. On January 3, 2017, the County of Mendocino rolled out a two-day intensive orientation program for new employees. The enhanced format incorporates a variety of methods for delivering important information in an engaging way. Methods range from in-person presentations, videos, orientation trivia activities, hands-on trainings, and dedicated time for questions and forms completion. Each new hire is given a detailed Employee Handbook outlining the information reviewed during orientation. The first 30 minutes of day one are set aside for union presentations, followed by an official welcome from a member of the Board of Supervisors, and a brief presentation on local government structure, and our County's leadership philosophy by Chief Executive Officer Carmel J. Angelo. HR Director Heidi Dunham continues with an overview of public service employment, HR services, and employee training programs. Day one continues with a review of HR policies, employee leaves, and a presentation from the Auditor's Office with information on payroll deductions and direct deposit. This is followed by hands-on computer instruction by Information Services. New employees are provided access to a laptop during the session and are guided through the process of logging into the County system, accessing their email account, and are instructed on how to access and use the County's online training program. Rounding out day one, new employees are given time to begin completing the six online training modules they are expected to finish by the end of orientation. Day two opens with a presentation by Risk Management on workers' compensation and employee safety, followed by a presentation from the County's Office of Emergency Services on disaster worker services, employee emergency services training, and emergency preparedness. The Mendocino County Employees' Retirement Association provides information on retirement eligibility and benefits. HR then returns to provide information on health benefits, the employee assistance program, and the employee wellness program. The remainder of the second day is spent completing mandatory online training modules. At the end of orientation, the County's newest employees have gained a basic understanding of county government and the services we provide, and are better prepared to assume their role as public servants to the citizens of Mendocino County.

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*Submission Material: New Employee Handbook, New Employee Orientation PowerPoint Presentation flashdrive*