

## **Omaha District develops future civilian leaders**

For 18 years the Omaha District has been developing the future civilian leaders of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers through the Leadership Development Program (LDP). The program has graduated 218 alumni to date, many of whom have promoted into supervisory positions within the Corps.

The 12-month program is open to high-performing, permanent employees assigned to the Omaha District and Projects/Field offices. Throughout the program, participants become more aware of their leadership skills and personal strengths and learn how to develop them.

Additionally, they learn more about the Omaha District and regional business practices; network with other District and Division employees; are mentored by District Leadership and attend graduate-level university courses on leadership and management topics.

The LDP program begins with a two-day retreat where participants get to know each other through ice breakers and team building exercises. Following the retreat, class members are required to attend two days of classes each month and two additional field trips.

One of the field trips is to a District or project office where the class meets with leadership office to learn about challenges faced by that office and to observe an area of the District that the students may not otherwise have the opportunity to experience.

The second class field trip is to USACE Headquarters in Washington, D.C. While there, the class gains insight and exposure to USACE workings, leadership activities and interests within the Capital region,

and meets with the USACE Chief, currently Lt. Gen. Todd Semonite. The class also has the opportunity to meet with members of Congress and other leaders to learn how the Omaha District interacts with their represented areas.

One of the many benefits of the program is that participants have the opportunity to gain a level of facetime with the District's senior leadership that is not normally available to those in the district. LDP participants are encouraged to select a mentor who then counsels and mentors them throughout the program by providing feedback and guidance. Additionally, participants give presentations to members of the corporate board or to the District Commander, Col. John Henderson.

Another of the LDP's requirements gives participants the opportunity to shadow those same leaders throughout high-level meetings, trips, and other activities which allow them to observe how those leaders engage with other senior Corps or civic leaders.

While the program has many benefits, it comes with some stringent requirements. Those selected for the program participate on a part-time basis while assigned to their regular positions within the District; as the program requires an estimated commitment of 250-300 hours of duty time and additional commitment of personal time.

LDP is considered a living program which evolves from class to class.

"We have given it more direction over the last year and strive to gain more involvement from the corporate board," said Capt. Jason Ackermann, LDP training coordinator. "The program is constantly evolving to meet the corporate board needs and to include lessons learned based on feedback of the previous LDP alumni."

A major change resulting in feedback from previous classes is the addition of a “mock interview.” It is one of the last exercises the class participates in prior to graduation, and for many, it is their first time to participate in a panel interview. Participants are expected to utilize many of the lessons they have learned during the past year and apply them to their interview process. While these interviews are not interviews for open positions, they are intended to prepare those in the LDP program for future supervisory interviews.

One of the suggestions from this past year’s class was to conduct the interview as if LDP class members were interviewing for their immediate supervisor’s position. The rationale is that each LDP participant is fairly intimate with their supervisor’s position and one day may actually be interviewing for it.

An additional change for the 2017-2018 class is “Government 101.” According to Ackermann, there was a lack of knowledge about the overall U.S. Army Corps of Engineers organization and where it fits into the U.S. government. The new “Government 101” class is intended to establish a foundation for LDP participants and showcase how and where USACE fits into the government and to define USACE’s overarching authorities.

“Participation in the Leadership Development Program involves a significant investment of funds and time,” says Henderson. “However, I am confident that it is a good investment that will benefit the District and those participating in the program as they apply the skills and knowledge gained from training.”

Any USACE Omaha District members interested in participating in the 2018 Leadership Development Program, can apply beginning in December. All questions regarding the LDP program can be directed to Capt. Jason Ackermann, [Jason.D.Ackermann@usace.army.mil](mailto:Jason.D.Ackermann@usace.army.mil).