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LOUDOUN COUNTY ASSESSOR'S OFFICE MENTOR PROGRAM

Definition

As a point of reference, a mentor, from the Greek, is defined as a trusted counselor or guide.¹

Purpose

The purpose of this program is to ensure that new hire appraisal staff is thoroughly trained in a consistent standardized manner as it specifically relates to mass appraisal valuation. The program will guide new hires in learning standard operating procedures, regularly used software programs as well as standard methods for organizing and prioritizing their eventual assigned portfolio. Further, it will also facilitate the all-office orientation process.

Mentor Criterion

Senior staff will develop a pool of mentors. Ideally, Mentors will be voluntary Appraisers (S3 or above) that have been through no less than two assessment cycles with the Loudoun County Office of the Assessor. The assessment cycles consist of internal appeals within the Assessors office, Board of Equalization appeals, field review and stratification, and reassessment. One cycle typically equals one calendar year. It is at the discretion of senior management to accept into the pool volunteers that are not S3, but do meet the requirement of two assessment cycles, core knowledge, attitude, and ability.

Whenever practical Mentors should be "team" based. This would help to eliminate many logistical concerns. For example a commercial appraiser teaching residential CARAT, mentors that are not collocated with the new employee.

Core Knowledge

In addition to the required years of service and title/pay-grade level, mentors must have proven core knowledge that has been demonstrated to the satisfaction of senior management. This may be demonstrated by reviewing Performance Evaluations, completion of State Licensing, demonstrated attitude and ability and has been recognized by a potential mentor's peers as a reliable authority that has consistently demonstrated efficient and innovative approaches to their daily work.

¹ Merriam-Webster online dictionary, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/>.

DIT/HR TRAINING:

Many of the following listed as “Core Knowledge” may be considered basic software applications and knowledge. The Mentor should identify how the programs relate to the functional areas of the Office of the Assessor. If the Mentor feels the employee is deficient in their knowledge of the programs they should ensure the new employee has enrolled in the appropriate DIT/HR classes to gain knowledge with basic software applications.

Core knowledge areas include:

Standard Operating Procedures (SOP)

- Understands and can accurately apply the SOPs that directly relate to their assignment.

REASSESSMENT

- Sales data analysis
- Development of benchmark sales
- Development of neighborhood & property files
- Model Development
- Income & Expense analysis
- Valuation of assigned parcels

ASSESSMENT

- New construction permits
- Miscellaneous permits
- Value new land parcels
- Splits & Sell-offs

FIELD REVIEW METHODS

- Interaction with Property Owners/Taxpayers
- Field Measurement of Structures
- Recording Characteristics
- Sketch Procedures
- Photographing of Properties

ADMINISTRATIVE

- Administrative hearings process
- Board of equalization process
- Work plan development
- Educational opportunities
- Career Path

CARAT

- Edit/Update
- English Inquiry
- Chronolog
- Reporting

ACCESS

- Knows how to build queries
- Use formulas
- Export data into Word or Excel

LMIS

- Basic permit search
- Ability to interpret plumbing counts

WORD

- Basics
- Intermediate
- Advanced

EXCEL

- Basics
- Intermediate
- Advanced

ACCESS

- Basics
- Intermediate
- Advanced

POWERPOINT

- Introduction

GROUPWISE

- Overview

WEBLOGIS

- Can easily find a parcel
- Understands the use and application of map layers

Attitude

A mentor candidate will have a positive team-oriented attitude toward new hires as well as established appraisal staff. Mentors will maintain a high ethical standard encouraging the learning and professional growth of each new hire under their responsibility. A mentor candidate will show an open willingness to impart knowledge and not hide, suppress, or mislead new hires' access to information. They will be the example of the *high standards* that the Office of the County Assessor would like to portray to the public. The mentor program is not a "sink or swim" proposition, but instead a one-on-one training partnership, which the quantifiable success or failure is a direct reflection of the mentor's ability to effectively communicate and teach, along with the new hire's ability to actively listen and learn.

Ability

Not every appraisal staff member that meets the threshold criterion has the core knowledge or the appropriate attitude to be a mentor. A mentor candidate's ability to effectively communicate, teach, and build rapport is an art not a formulaic science.

Through trial, error and feedback from staff completing the mentor program senior management will identify and develop appraisal staff members that have the acumen to be a mentor.

Responsibilities

Mentors will be in charge of training all new hires in regularly used software programs, databases, Web-based tools, and the standard operating procedures.

Additionally, at the end of the training, mentors will help new hires in developing a work plan for their assigned area, which will include organizing, prioritizing, and executing their workload. This work plan should include a complete review and understanding of the employee's performance plan.

Timeline

The mentor program is designed to be for the duration of a new hires probationary period of 1 year. Since a formal mentor program has never been implemented in the Office of the Assessor the timeline will be monitored and amended as the process develops, but will be no shorter than 90 days, where exceptional circumstances warrant. The final mentor checklist will need to be certified as complete by the new hire, the mentor, and assigned supervisor of the new hire.

Incentive

A mentor program is a voluntary position that does not carry any additional monetary compensation. Notwithstanding, appraisal staff that are asked to be mentors will benefit directly as a result of their service to the office. Successful mentors will be recognized in their annual reviews and build leadership and supervisory skills not otherwise afforded. Further, at the discretion of a mentor's supervisor, for each successful new hire trained an extra paid day off may be given. Final compensation will be decided by upper management.

Benefit Outcomes

Implementing a mentor program will reduce the errors at all levels of the assessment process. It will also reduce repetitive work due to incorrect data, data lost, and data never recorded, as well as standardizing the way appraisers within the office complete their work. Having a properly trained staff that knows their craft and can answer questions from the public confidently and accurately will raise the public's confidence and perception of the Assessor's Office.