

“The management training provided by VHDA University enabled us to gain a collective understanding of both the responsibilities and challenges critical to our success as VHDA managers. Because we could attend the training as a team, we were able to use practice cases from a number of real world situations that we face all the time. This allowed us to successfully apply approaches and strategies in the safety of our classroom environment to maximize our learning experience.” – Rick Rupertus, VHDA Assistant Director of ITS Operations

1. Brief Description of VHDA University

Understanding that associate development and succession planning needed to be taken to the next level, VHDA implemented a creative talent management program entitled *VHDA University*. A new division, Organizational Development and Learning, was created to develop and support this initiative. By leveraging the skills of existing staff and collaborating across several departments, VHDA was able to create *VHDA University* with minimal costs.



VHDA University
Organizational Development & Learning

VHDA has historically supported learning and development through conferences and seminars, professional development and educational reimbursement. By providing continuous learning opportunities and taking a more holistic approach via a corporate university, VHDA promotes understanding and support of the authority's strategic goals and objectives while achieving economies of scale.

The Chief Learning Officer, director of the OD&L Division, is responsible for succession planning under the direction of the Executive Director. As part of this process, the directors of each of VHDA's divisions meet quarterly to discuss talent management and how it relates to succession planning. VHDA succession planning is based on both current and future needs, with *VHDA University* providing a variety of tools to enable directors to prepare for positions that may become vacant due to retirement and/or re-careering.

As a part of talent management, *VHDA University* provides training services to all associates through a blended learning approach that includes classroom and computer learning. Associates may enroll in computer training and soft-skills courses throughout the calendar year. Whenever possible, VHDA partners with other agencies to provide training at a reduced cost.

Another part of *VHDA University's* talent management and associate development focus centers on *Career Essentials*, VHDA's internship program. *Career Essentials*, which replaced a long-standing summer intern program, is an enhanced internship designed to create a pipeline of eligible college and high school students who, upon completion of the program, have learned new skill sets that will enable them to be viable applicants for job openings.

2. Why/When It Was Undertaken

Results of associate surveys conducted in 2004 and 2006 showed there was a high level of employee satisfaction with VHDA – it was “a great place to work.” However, many associates also expressed a desire for more developmental opportunities. Associate development was handled at the division level, unless there was a specific reason for authority-wide training. While this approach was often useful, it was also found to be inefficient, costly and time consuming. In addition, VHDA demographic data suggested there was an increasing number of associates who would be retiring over the next five to 10 years, and while succession planning was administered on a divisional level it was not handled with a formal talent-driven approach.

VHDA University, through the OD&L Division, was established to focus specifically on associate growth and talent management, including recruitment and retention, learning and development, and succession planning.

3. What VHDA University Has Accomplished

The Knowledge Center. In 2006 *VHDA University* introduced a dedicated site on the VHDA Intranet to provide quick and easy access to a new learning management system known as “The Knowledge Center.” In addition to providing access to online courses and simulations, the site makes it simple for associates to search a training calendar, learn more about career development tools and quickly access reference guides to software such as Access and PowerPoint.

The Knowledge Center – a learning portal for VHDA University	
Business & Professional Development Courses – Available 1/9/07	
Business Communication	Business Planning
<p>Advanced Business Communication: Business Writing for Results</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Effective Business Communication - Guidelines for Effective Communication <p>Advanced Interpersonal Communication: Building Relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Communicating to Build a Positive Culture - Communication with Co-Workers - Selling Project Management to the Organization <p>Communicating with Difficult People: Communicating with</p>	<p>Business Problem Solving: Problem Solving Teams</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Critical Thinking and Information Analysis - The Problem-Solving Process <p>Change Management: Adapting to Change</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Managing Change <p>Decision Making and Problem Solving: Decision Making Fundamentals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Problem Solving Fundamentals <p>Excellence in Service: Building a Customer Service Team</p>

A sample page from the Knowledge Center’s Course Catalog

A total of 430 courses are offered online. To date, 78 percent of all VHDA associates are already taking advantage of online learning opportunities, with 70 percent starting and/or completing courses.

New Associate Training. As a part of talent management and retention efforts, *VHDA University* also works with Human Resources to help make an associate’s first year of employment with VHDA an enriching experience. Along with having their own team room through the Knowledge Center, where they can access information specific to their needs, new associates also go through a four-phase training process that begins during the first 30 days, which includes a meeting with the Executive Director, and continues until the end of the first year.

Succession Planning. In addition to setting up a quarterly meeting schedule for division directors to discuss talent management and how it relates to succession planning, directors are also responsible for identifying who is in charge during extended absences. In the event of an emergency, there is now a documented business continuity plan of action at every level of VHDA leadership. And through *VHDA University*, emerging leaders have the opportunity to attend developmental programs through Virginia Commonwealth University’s Office of Public Policy and Training.

4. Why VHDA University is Meritorious and Meets NCSHA Judging Criteria

Innovative

By working with the Commonwealth of Virginia’s Department of Human Resource Management, *VHDA University* offers associates access to an e-learning portal, for which VHDA pays a nominal fee. Because this learning management system is an automated services provider (ASP) solution, it is accessible to all associates through any Internet connection. This accessibility enables associates to take classes at home or work, thus providing scheduling flexibility that encourages continuing education.

Replicable

The *VHDA University* model can be easily replicated at other HFAs – all related activities and events are documented and available for sharing.

Responds to a management challenge or opportunity

VHDA University is a direct response to 1) associate input via two separate authoritywide surveys, in which a majority of respondents requested more focus on developmental opportunities; 2) succession planning, due to the increasing number of associates planning to retire; and 3) emerging business needs, which emphasize the need for a talent-development approach to employee retention and succession planning.

Achieve measurable improvements in agency operations

In one year, VHDA has implemented a learning system offering over 400 courses, supported many organizational development issues, retained numerous interns, provided management development opportunities for recently hired supervisors and improved morale by providing more developmental opportunities for VHDA associates.

Provides benefits that outweigh costs

VHDA University was created at minimal costs, and it swiftly responded to growing needs by leveraging the skill sets of existing staff and collaborating across departments.

Demonstrate effective use of resources

To effectively achieve economies of scale VHDA creatively managed three important resources—people, time and money—in the following way:

- **People**—The Human Resources Director moved into the role of Chief Learning Officer. Subsequently, the Human Resources Manager was promoted to Human Resources Director. Two training positions, which were originally part of HR, were transferred to the new OD&L Division.
- **Time**—Because existing processes were already built into strategic business plans, moving e-learning processes from business units into *VHDA University* was done quickly. Time allocation for projects, which was part of the decision, has significantly improved with the separation of Human Resources and talent management.
- **Money**—For less than \$1,000, VHDA was able to obtain yearly access to Virginia's Meridian learning management system. In addition, VHDA paid a minimal pro-rated fee for classes not available through the Meridian system. VHDA's intranet content, which was already in place, was repackaged by internal resources at no direct cost.

Achieves strategic objectives

At the time *VHDA University* and the OD&L Division were created, VHDA's strategic objectives included: 1) providing resources and opportunities for staff to acquire and develop knowledge, skills and competencies essential to their jobs and the work of the authority through a central learning and knowledge center; and 2) using creativity and proactive approaches to attract and retain diverse candidates.

Conclusion

In one year, by creatively leveraging the skill sets of existing staff and encouraging collaboration across multiple-function areas, VHDA efficiently and effectively responded to growing training needs. With the innovation of *VHDA University*, the authority has successfully:

- Responded to an in-house need by supplying associates with more than 400 training courses.
- Provided management development for recently promoted or newly hired managers and supervisors.
- Improved associate morale by providing new developmental opportunities.
- Supported succession planning by successfully retaining numerous interns.
- Provided support for many organizational-development issues.