

Merit Systems Protection Board Logo

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## **PRESIDENTIAL INTERN PROGRAM CAN HELP AGENCIES COPE WITH LOSS OF LEADERS**

Federal agencies facing the challenge of finding high-quality leaders to replace those who are retiring can find help in the Presidential Management Intern (PMI) Program, according to a new report from the Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB or the Board). The report, titled "Growing Leaders: The Presidential Management Intern Program," notes that in the next 10 years, almost 70 percent of the Federal Government's managers and supervisors will become eligible to retire. It concludes that the PMI Program, established in 1977 as a means of attracting individuals with exceptional management potential to the Federal service, is an important source of high-quality replacements for those who are leaving, but notes that clarification of the program is necessary for the program to accomplish its purpose.

"Our report finds that the PMI Program has been effective in attracting promising individuals to work for the Government and is especially important in addressing what could become a significant leadership gap if we fail to act now," said Board Chairman Beth S. Slavet. "In the past four years alone, the program has been successful in bringing almost 1,400 high-quality, high-potential interns into the Federal service. It is essential that agencies take advantage of special programs like the PMI to have talented and capable people ready to assume management responsibilities as current managers retire over the next decade."

According to the report, the PMI Program has earned a reputation during its more than 20 years in operation for being one of the Government's most prestigious hiring mechanisms. What makes the program special is its focus on recruiting and selecting individuals with management potential who have recently received or are about to receive a graduate-level degree. Interns in the 2-year program are

provided with intensive on-the-job development in preparation for planning and managing public programs. The report notes that a significant percentage of these interns eventually become managers and supervisors, but there has been a significant decline in the percentage. According to the report, 40 percent of interns hired between 1978 and 1983 were in supervisory positions 6 years after being hired. Of those hired from 1982 to 1989, however, only 11 percent were supervisors 5 years after they were hired. And only 6 percent of those hired from 1990 to 1994 progressed to supervisory jobs after 5 years. The report notes that the decrease could be attributed to several factors, one of which is how the program is viewed and used by agency officials.

"Our study found a lack of consensus regarding the purpose of the PMI Program," said Chairman Slavet. "Some agencies view and use the program as a mechanism to hire and grow their future leaders, while others view it simply as a method for hiring master's level graduates for non-management jobs and those with no management potential. The study found, for example, that supervisors were least likely to cite supervisory or managerial potential as the reason they hired interns from the program."

The report concludes that the Executive Order underlying the PMI Program clearly intends the focus to be on identifying individuals with management potential. The report recommends that this objective be reinforced and explains that such reinforcement is especially important at a time when the Government is facing a serious talent drain as current managers reach retirement eligibility.

The MSPB is an independent, quasi-judicial agency with responsibility for deciding Federal employee appeals from personnel actions taken against them, protecting the integrity of the civil service and other Federal merit systems, and conducting studies of the civil service and other merit systems in the Executive Branch. The report may be downloaded from the Board's website at [www.mspb.gov](http://www.mspb.gov). To request a printed copy of the report, e-mail [STUDIES@mspb.gov](mailto:STUDIES@mspb.gov); call (202) 653-6772, extension 1350; or write: Merit Systems Protection Board, Office of Policy and Evaluation, 1615 M Street, NW, Washington, DC, 20419.