



PARTNERSHIP FOR PUBLIC SERVICE

# The Presidential Management Fellows Program

PERSPECTIVES FROM THE CLASS OF 2011

## INTRODUCTION

The Presidential Management Fellows (PMF) program was created to attract to federal service outstanding men and women with graduate degrees in a variety of academic disciplines, who have a commitment to excellence in the leadership and management of public policies and programs.

The PMF program is one of the few enterprise-wide approaches for bringing in top people to government service and developing them into future federal leaders. In 2011 and 2014, the Partnership for Public Service, with assistance from the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), conducted surveys of members of the PMF class of 2011 to assess the program's strengths and weaknesses, and to shed light on changes needed to ensure that it remains a critical pathway to federal service for high-achieving individuals.

Based on the 2014 survey responses from 101 of the 470 fellows—a little more than a fifth of the 2011 class—the prestigious and highly selective two-year fellowship program appears to be working. The survey found that 80 percent of participants were satisfied with their overall experience in the program, and 84 percent were satisfied with their rotational assignments, which are intended to provide them with a varied and richer work experience.

After completing the two-year fellowships, 87 of the 101 fellows surveyed were offered permanent full-time federal employment, and 83 accepted the offers. However, the survey revealed some opportunities for improvement to ensure the continued success and viability of this important federal development program.

## THE PMF PROGRAM IN BRIEF

The Presidential Management Fellows (PMF) program—originally called the Presidential Management Intern program—was established in 1977 by executive order to attract to federal service outstanding graduate students who are particularly well-matched to future management and leadership roles.

Among its selling points, the two-year PMF fellowship promises successful candidates full-time salary and benefits, a mandatory four- to six-month developmental assignment with optional rotations of one to six months, challenging work, and opportunities to network with agency executives and other aspiring future leaders. Although not guaranteed, fellows who excel in the program may also be converted to permanent full-time employees upon completion of their fellowships.

Twenty-five percent of respondents, for example, completed the PMF program with a less positive impression of working for the federal government than when they started their fellowships.

In particular, the survey pointed to a number of troubling deficiencies in the way agencies dealt with the fellows that may have adversely affected their views. Only 67 percent were satisfied with the agencies in which they worked, and many of the positive first impressions the fellows had of their supervisors in 2011 gave way to lower levels of satisfaction by the end of the program.

In addition, sizable numbers of respondents were dissatisfied with various aspects of their work environment, such as the level of recognition they received for their work, opportunities for learning and growth, and the ability to work with motivated and intelligent colleagues. More than 90 percent of PMFs rated many of these issues as important to them, but it appears that federal agencies are not providing the professional environment these fellows desired.

There is a disconnect between OPM's vision of the PMF program as a leadership development program and the agency-based supervisors' implementation of the program. The OPM website asks, "What do you want to change about government?" and challenges aspiring fellows to bring "fresh, new ideas and a willingness to take on challenges never dreamed possible."<sup>1</sup> However, a little

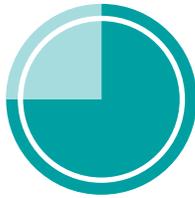
less than half of respondents said they were provided opportunities to be creative in their jobs. In the early months of the program, only about half of PMFs felt that their supervisor provided clear directions about their role and responsibilities.

The 2011 First Impressions Survey, taken during the first two to five months on the job for these PMF participants, also found a mix of positive responses and warning signs. It found that just 65 percent felt their assignments were well-matched with their skills and experience, and only 61 percent believed their assignments took their development needs into consideration. In addition, only half of PMFs felt they were provided with opportunities to enhance their leadership skills. After completing the program, the 2011 PMF class registered similarly low levels of satisfaction with these different aspects of their work assignments, perhaps indicating that their work assignments did not escalate in difficulty or responsibility during their time in the program.

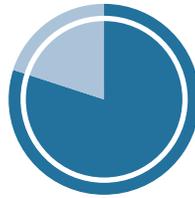
Based on both surveys, it is evident that agencies can improve the PMF experience by providing fellows with a realistic description of what they will be doing before they start their jobs, offering meaningful assignments that match their needs and skill sets, and paying closer attention to the quality of supervision and support they receive. By being up front about the realities of the program during the hiring process and improving supervisor quality and work assignments, the PMF program can be more effective at inspiring participants to commit to federal service and develop into innovative leaders.

1 U.S. Office of Personnel Management, "The Opportunity: PMF as a Pathway," *Presidential Management Fellows Program*, <http://www.pmf.gov/opportunity/index.aspx> (accessed 22 Jul. 2014).

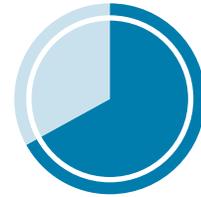
# RESULTS FROM THE 2014 PMF SURVEY



**75.0%** of respondents agree/strongly agree to the question:  
**“I desire a career in the federal government.”**



**80.2%** of respondents gave a positive answer to the question:  
**“Considering everything, how satisfied were you with your experience in the PMF program?”**



**66.7%** of respondents gave a positive answer to the question:  
**“Considering everything, how satisfied were you with your agency?”**

“After my PMF experience, my overall impression of working for the federal government is...”



## Respondent Satisfaction with Work Assignments

(Percent of positive responses)

Question	2011 First Impressions Survey	2014 Post-Program Survey
My development needs were considered when I was given assignments	61.0	56.4
My assignments were a good match for my skills and experience	65.0	62.4
My work assignments provided opportunities to enhance my leadership skills	50.0	49.5

## WORK ASSIGNMENT SATISFACTION

When the Partnership for Public Service surveyed members of the 2011 PMF class after their first few months on the job, their work assignments emerged as a key factor of workplace satisfaction levels, which did not rise above 65 percent on any of the three questions asked.<sup>2</sup> The first survey found that only 50 percent thought their work assignments offered opportunities to enhance leadership skills; 61 percent believed their development needs were considered; and 65 percent felt their assignment was a good match for their skills and experience.

After completing the PMF program, fellows’ responses to the question on opportunities to enhance leadership skills stayed about the same. However, satisfaction dropped to 56.4 percent on the question about developmental needs and to 62.4 percent on whether assignments were a good match with skills and experience.

<sup>2</sup> “The Presidential Management Fellows Program: First Impressions from the Class of 2011,” Partnership for Public Service, November 2012.

**Work Environment Issues: Importance to PMFs versus Satisfaction**

Work Environment Issue	2011 First Impressions Survey, Percent of Respondents Placing Importance on Issue†	2014 Post-Program Survey, Percent of Respondents Overall Satisfaction with Issue‡
Opportunities for professional learning and growth	99.2	63.4
Working with intelligent and motivated colleagues	97.7	60.4
Ability for your work to help the nation	95.0	61.6
Pride in the organization you work for	95.0	60.4
Ability for your work to help individuals	91.2	57.0
Recognition for your work	83.1	58.4
Ability to be creative	83.1	47.5
High-profile assignments	76.7	61.0

† In the First Impressions Survey, respondents were asked, “How much do you agree or disagree that the following aspects of employment are important to you today?”

‡ In the Post-Program Survey, respondents were asked, “How satisfied were you with the following aspects of employment during your time in the PMF program?”

**Respondent Ratings of Supervisors** (Percent of positive responses)

Question	2011 First Impressions Survey	2014 Post-Program Survey	Difference (2011-2014)
My supervisor was an effective people supervisor	78.2	49.0	29.2
My supervisor was an effective technical supervisor	79.8	57.0	22.8
My supervisor valued PMF contributions	86.6	71.0	15.6
My supervisor communicated well	71.9	59.4	12.5
My supervisor treated PMFs with respect	89.0	77.2	11.8
My supervisor made good use of PMF talents	60.5	51.5	9.0
My supervisor was available when needed	73.4	72.3	1.1

**Respondent Satisfaction with Rotational Assignments** (Percent of positive responses)

Question	2014 Post-Program Survey
My supervisor supported a rotational assignment outside of my agency	65.3
Overall, I was satisfied with my rotational assignment experience	84.4

**PMF Responses to Questions Regarding Conversion to Permanent Full-Time Employment** (Percent of responses)

Question	2014 Post-Program Survey		
	“Yes”	“No”	“Other”
Were you offered conversion?	87.0	1.0	12.0
Did you accept a conversion offer?	95.4	4.6	0.0
Are you employed with the same federal agency where you conducted your PMF?	83.0	11.4	5.7

## WORK ENVIRONMENT ISSUES

During the 2011 First Impressions Survey, PMFs were asked to rate the importance they placed on certain aspects of their jobs and workplace, and the 2014 Post-Program Survey measured their satisfaction with the same job and workplace issues. In many of the areas that PMF fellows rated as important, they indicated they did not have a satisfying experience.

Fellows placed the most importance on opportunities for professional learning and growth, as well as working with intelligent and motivated colleagues. More than 97 percent of PMFs regarded these as important, but only about 60 percent were satisfied with these issues by the end of the program.

Among all work environment issues, fellows were least satisfied with their ability to be creative. More than 80 percent of fellows believed it to be important, but fewer than five out of 10 fellows were satisfied that their workplace allowed for them to use their creativity.

## SUPERVISORS

Immediate supervisors play an important role in determining how employees feel about their jobs and organizations. Despite largely positive first impressions of supervisors, many 2011 PMF fellows left the program feeling less satisfied with their bosses. The initial positive impressions of supervisors in the areas of valuing PMF contributions and possessing good technical, communication and people skills declined over the course of the program. Fellows initially gave low marks to supervisors in how they made use of PMFs' talents and their satisfaction levels dropped in the second survey.

In the early stages of the PMF program, nearly 80 percent of fellows believed that their supervisors possessed adequate technical and people skills. However, by the end of the program, less than half of fellows agreed that their supervisors were effective "people supervisors," and only about 60 percent agreed their supervisors were effective "technical supervisors."

For many in the 2011 PMF class, communication with their supervisors also suffered during the course of the program. Overall, only about 60 percent of fellows agreed that their supervisors communicated well, compared with nearly 72 percent in the first survey. In addition, only about 50 percent of fellows thought their supervisors made good use of their talents.

Many respondents indicated that PMF supervisors varied significantly in quality. For example, one fellow wrote, "The person who hired me left before I arrived, and my new supervisor never knew what to do with me and treated me like an intern. Other PMFs at my agency had wonderful experiences with supervisors who really wanted the best for them."

## ROTATIONAL ASSIGNMENTS

A big part of the PMF experience is the mandatory rotational assignment, which gives fellows the opportunity to work for several months in another office within their agency or in another federal agency. Rotational assignments allow PMFs to gain a broader perspective on federal careers while continuing their professional development. Most 2011 PMF respondents completed one rotational assignment for a period of three to five months.

More than 80 percent of the fellows surveyed were satisfied with their rotational experience. Many reported that they valued these assignments as opportunities to explore the breadth of career opportunities available in the federal government.

However, despite the rotational assignment requirement, a small number of respondents said they did not meet the requirement during the course of the program. Additionally, only 65 percent of PMFs surveyed felt their supervisors supported rotational assignments.

Several PMFs used their rotational assignments as a chance to shop around for a better job assignment, taking advantage of the opportunity for professional exploration. Five fellows reported accepting a permanent full-time job offer in their rotational assignment agency at the end of their fellowship, where they felt their experiences and interests would be a better fit.

Rotational assignments also served as a safety valve for PMFs who were unhappy at their home agencies. Some PMFs completed the program in their rotational assignment agencies instead of returning to their home agencies. Such flexibility helped address mismatches between fellows and agencies during the course of the program.

## PMF EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Since its inception, the PMF program has provided a path to federal employment for exceptional young professionals with leadership potential and a strong commitment to public service.

Our survey, representing about one-fifth of the PMF class of 2011, found that government agencies extended permanent full-time job offers to 87 of the 101 participants, with 83 accepting offers to become permanent full-time federal employees. Additionally, eight out of 10 fellows surveyed who still work in the federal government are employed by the same agencies in which they served as PMFs. Of the remaining 14 fellows, some noted that their job offers were still in progress or they received an offer from their rotational assignment agency. Others dropped out of the program early due to a negative experience. OPM does not publish data on the total number of PMF participants who receive permanent full-time employment offers from the federal government after their fellowships are completed.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The PMF program was designed to be a resource for developing the talent necessary to run an effective and innovative government for the next generation. As baby boomers continue retiring in large numbers,<sup>3</sup> agencies will rely increasingly on younger talent to fill workforce and leadership gaps. The PMF program can help ensure that those talented young professionals are ready to lead.

Since 2011, the PMF program has undergone some major changes. A December 2010 presidential executive order placed the Presidential Management Fellows under the Pathways Programs, a multi-tiered initiative established to provide students and recent graduates with clearer paths to internships and permanent full-time federal employment. The PMF class of 2013 will be the first to complete the program under the Pathways initiative. Pathways establishes several new requirements for the PMF program. For instance, agencies also are now required to provide PMFs with mentors, a valuable resource as they launch careers in the federal government.

Despite these changes, work still needs to be done to solidify the PMF program as one of the most prestigious professional development programs in the federal government. OPM and federal agencies should take several steps to continue to improve the PMF program.

### OPM SHOULD:

- Invest in the PMF program by collecting and sharing data from participants, agencies and other stakeholders. This would allow for an iterative improvement process to ensure the PMF program remains responsive to the changing needs of agencies and fellows.
- Work with federal agencies to craft a PMF program that lives up to fellows' expectations and resolve discrepancies between program advertisement and program realities around leadership development and innovation.
- Create an effective mechanism for airing and addressing PMF questions, challenges, and grievances to catch small problems before they become big ones.

### AGENCIES SHOULD:

- Ensure that PMF job descriptions are clear and accurate, and, during the hiring process, provide a realistic description of responsibilities, to prevent mismatches between fellows and agencies.
- Hold supervisors accountable for developing fellows' leadership and technical skills.
- Treat PMF supervision as a privilege and pay particular attention to the quality of PMF supervisors, as they have a great deal of influence on how the PMF experiences the agency.
- Take inventory of agency needs and try to assign fellows to projects that will develop their leadership skills.

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<sup>3</sup> "Fed Figures 2014: Federal Workforce," Partnership for Public Service, April 2014.

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The Partnership for Public Service would like to thank the Office of Personnel Management for its assistance.

## METHODOLOGY

The Partnership for Public Service administered surveys to a group of 375 Presidential Management Fellows (PMF) from the class of 2011. Data was collected for the First Impressions Survey between November 8 and December 20, 2011. Data for the Post-Program Survey was collected between April 8 and May 1, 2014. Participation was voluntary and confidentiality was assured. The First Impressions Survey collected responses from 274 PMFs working in federal agencies, and the Post-Program Survey collected responses from 101 PMFs working in federal agencies. In total, 470 PMFs from the 2011 class received assignments at federal agencies. The surveys asked respondents about their satisfaction with multiple aspects of the PMF program, including questions dealing with agencies, supervisors, work assignments, onboarding, orientation, rotational assignments and the PMF program overall.

## APPENDIX

### What type of work did PMFs do?

Percent of respondents who selected one or more type(s) of work performed during their fellowship

Type of Work	%
Policy Analysis or Development	62.4
Budgeting or Financial Management	33.7
Outreach (e.g., Legislative Affairs, Community Affairs, Public Relations)	26.7
Research and Evaluation	33.7
Grantee Oversight or Support	17.8
Program Design and Management	40.6
Human Resources	7.9

### Which of the following would best describe your occupation during your time in the PMF Program?

Percent of PMF respondents within various occupations

Occupation	%
Other (Occupation not listed below)	35.6
Social Science, Psychology or Social Services	12.9
Accounting or Budgeting	8.9
Business or Industry (e.g., Contracting, Procurement, Building Management)	6.9
Natural Resources Management	5.9
Legal	5.9
Communications or Art	5
General Administration, Clerical or Office Services	4
Personnel Management or Industry Relations	3
Investigation	3
Information Technology	3
Education	2
Transportation (e.g., Transportation Safety, Transportation Technician)	2
Quality Assurance, Inspection and Grading	1
Medical Science	1

**Percent of PMF respondents at various agencies**

Agency	%
Department of Health and Human Services	16
Department of Housing and Urban Development	14
Department of State	11
Department of the Interior	7
Department of Homeland Security	6
Department of Veterans Affairs	6
United States Agency for International Development	5
Department of Energy	4
Department of Labor	4
Environmental Protection Agency	4
Office of Personnel Management	3
Department of the Treasury	3
Agency not provided	2
Consumer Financial Protection Bureau	2
Department of Transportation	2
Export-Import Bank	2
General Services Administration	2
Department of the Air Force	2
Department of Agriculture	2
Department of Education	1
Federal Housing Finance Agency	1
International Trade Administration	1
Office of Management and Budget	1