



Interns are “Keystones” of Fu

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The Keystone Program is the Defense Contract Management Agency’s internship program. The agency established the Keystone Program in 1997 as part of its succession plan to adjust to the demographics of a retiring workforce, principally in the key areas of acquisition and contract management. Since its inception, DCMA has trained and placed more than 1,400 professionals in a variety of positions throughout the agency.

The Defense Acquisition Workforce Development Fund, better known as Section 852, provides specific funding to build the acquisition workforce. These funds permit hiring and training civilians outside the

Department of Defense for jobs in acquisition. There are specific criteria an agency must meet to use the funding — most importantly, a new hire was not working for DoD as a civilian employee on Jan. 28, 2008. DCMA is a DoD leader in using these funds and is on target to hire 300 interns in fiscal year 2009 and an additional 400 interns over the next two years.

To achieve the goal of hiring 550 Keystone Program participants this fiscal year, DCMA has conducted targeted recruitment activities on college campuses, in professional career fairs and military transition centers, through job announcements on the federal jobs Web site

(USAJobs.gov) and through the Federal Career Intern Program. To expedite the hiring process, DCMA has conducted hiring “blitzes,” where recruiting personnel conduct on-site interviews, make selections, make conditional job offers and complete security applications during a three-day period. DCMA filled more than 25 positions during DCMA’s last hiring blitz.

In 2008, DCMA began a major effort to restructure and revitalize its intern program. The agency conducted studies in three major areas: requirements identification, recruitment/hiring and training and development. Following the study, DCMA instituted a centrally



Recent Keystone Program interns

uture Acquisition Workforce

managed, locally executed intern recruitment program.

Newly hired interns participate in a three-year, three-phase career development program designed to teach technical knowledge and skills in accordance with DCMA guidelines and the Defense Acquisition Workforce Improvement Act. Keystone interns attend one of DCMA's two distance learning campuses for a four-week period upon entry into the program to learn about the acquisition community, DCMA and the Keystone Program. Interns participate in real-world work with the best acquisition workforce there is to offer. Upon completion, interns return to their permanent duty locations to continue their education and hands-on training.

To ensure that students acquire the knowledge and competencies required of a journeyman-level employee, a master development plan controls each phase and functional area of the intern program. The MDPs are essential to ensuring that the training and development activities of the interns align with the missions of DCMA and the acquisition community. In addition to learning decision making, communications, teambuilding and strategic thinking skills, Keystone Program participants graduate with

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DAWIA Level II certifications in their acquisition specialty.

Keystones develop through a variety of training methods such as formal classroom training, distance learning (computer-based training) and rotational assignments. On-the-job training is critical to each Keystone's learning experience. Through OJT, interns learn realistic job functions and develop the necessary skills and experiences to master their respective professions.

Interns have a dedicated mentor — an agency-level program manager — to oversee their professional and personal development and centrally directs their training and development. Approximately 75 Keystone Program coordinators and 100 training coordinators manage each employee's development through the entire internship period. Training in other job specialties also allows the interns to gain a better understanding of the mission and the working relationship between the various functional areas in DCMA.

As the Keystone Program interns progresses through the program's three phases, less time is required for training and more is spent performing work. Rotational assignments provide Keystones with a breadth of experience greater than would be available from a single assignment. Lasting up to 90 days, rotational assignments may be in or out of the permanent duty location with a customer, buying command or DCMA International (after the second year of the program).

To facilitate knowledge sharing and communication, the Keystone portal is also available in *The Keynote*, the Keystone-developed newsletter, for exchanging ideas to benefit all Keystones.

Keystone Program graduates are the mainstay of DCMA's future skilled, professional and experienced employees. Currently, DCMA proudly has 1,400 Keystone Program graduates. One of them may be your coworker. 