

Lean Six Sigma—Improving the Competitive Development Group/Army Acquisition Fellowship (CDG/AAF) Program

Joan Moses

When the CDG/AAF program was launched in 1997, more than 800 GS-13s competed for the first 25 positions. Within 1 decade, applicant numbers dwindled to less than 50 applicants competing for approximately 11 positions each year.

Alvin Bing, YG09, poses with a T-9 Dozer, one of the programs he is managing during the first year of his developmental assignment in the CDG/AAF program. (U.S. Army photo courtesy of Aberdeen Test Center.)

While better odds may be good for applicants eager to participate in this prestigious program, red flags were raised at the U.S. Army Acquisition Support Center (USAASC). Was CDG/AAF still meeting the needs of Army senior leaders? Were other long-term training programs drawing away qualified applicants? These concerns prompted Shirley Hornaday, USAASC Western Regional Director and CDG/AAF year group (YG) 97, to sponsor a Lean Six Sigma (LSS) black belt project to improve the program.

As a certified Army LSS Black Belt and Acquisition Career Manager (ACM) in the USAASC Warren, MI, Customer Support Office (CSO), I knew that using LSS tools such as Voice of the Customer surveys and cause and effect diagrams would help the project team to identify solutions and make fact-based decisions. Project team members included Chandra Evans-Mitchell, USAASC CDG/AAF Program

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Manager; Laverne Kidd, USAASC ACM; Roosevelt Ingram, USAASC ACM; Marque Cryderman, Program Executive Office Combat Support and Combat Service Support (PEO CS&CSS) and CDG/AAF YG02; and Willie Brazile, HQ U.S. Army Materiel Command (AMC) G-4/7/9 and CDG/AAF YG07.

CDG/AAF is a unique combination of high-quality leadership training and practical on-the-job career experience. Fellows receive rotational assignments to complete Level III certification in their primary acquisition career field (ACF) (if needed) and to obtain certification in a secondary ACF. There are two 1-year developmental assignments and one 6-month assignment.

Leadership training courses are planned between developmental assignments, allowing fellows to focus on learning and bringing new insights to their next assignment.

The project team designed several surveys to measure the program's effectiveness in meeting the Army's needs. Senior leaders of several Army organizations, including the U.S. Army Aviation and Missile Command Life Cycle Management Command (LCMC); U.S. Army Aviation and Missile Research, Development, and Engineering Center; PEO Ground Combat Systems (GCS); and the U.S. Army Tank-automotive and Armaments Command LCMC, were surveyed via personal interviews. Web-based surveys



CDG/AAF YG06 fellows proudly display their certificates at the graduation ceremony held Feb. 4, 2009. From left: Robert Hamilton, Joseph Baldauf, Craig Fleming, Kimberly Carroll, Paula Taylor, Leonard Jefferson, Richard King, and Joseph Pellegrino. (Photo courtesy of PEO Simulation, Training, and Instrumentation.)

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gathered feedback from potential applicants, supervisors, and CDG/AAF fellows. We knew that a 360-degree approach would help us observe the CDG/AAF program from the customer's point of view. Obtaining detailed customer feedback was vital to identifying improvement opportunities, while still retaining the most valued features of the program.

Leadership Training—Strength of the CDG/AAF Program

The leadership training provided in the CDG/AAF program was cited as a key strength by 88 percent of supervisors, 76 percent of CDG/AAF fellows, and 67 percent of potential candidates. One YG07 fellow noted that the program has “outstanding [leadership courses] ... [I] would never have had the opportunity to attend these classes without the CDG/AAF program.”

USAASC invests \$32,000 in leadership training (tuition and TDY) for each CDG/AAF fellow, including:

- Intermediate Qualifications Course in Austin, TX (4 weeks).
- Operational Experience Training at the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, CA (4 days).
- Congressional Operations Course on Capitol Hill (1 week).
- Darden Business Executive Education at the University of Virginia (two 1-week courses).
- Top priority for any Defense Acquisition University class needed for certification in all fellows' chosen primary and secondary ACFs, including PMT 352B for fellows on the product/project manager leader track.

6-Month Assignment in DC

All CDG/AAF fellows are assigned to the Pentagon or HQ AMC in the Washington, DC, area for at least 6 months. All senior leaders surveyed for the black belt project highly valued this program feature. Exposure to the DC environment is an experience that benefits both the careerists and their organizations. Understandably, 6 months away from home discourages many potential candidates, with family commitments cited as the number one reason for not applying to the CDG/AAF program.

“I applied for the potential opportunities of the program, to include developmental assignments in other career fields and exceptional training,” said Colleen Setilli, YG03. “The only

thing I worried about was leaving my 3 children for the 6-month assignment in DC. I felt very guilty, but it ended up being a very rewarding and fun experience and my children were fine.”

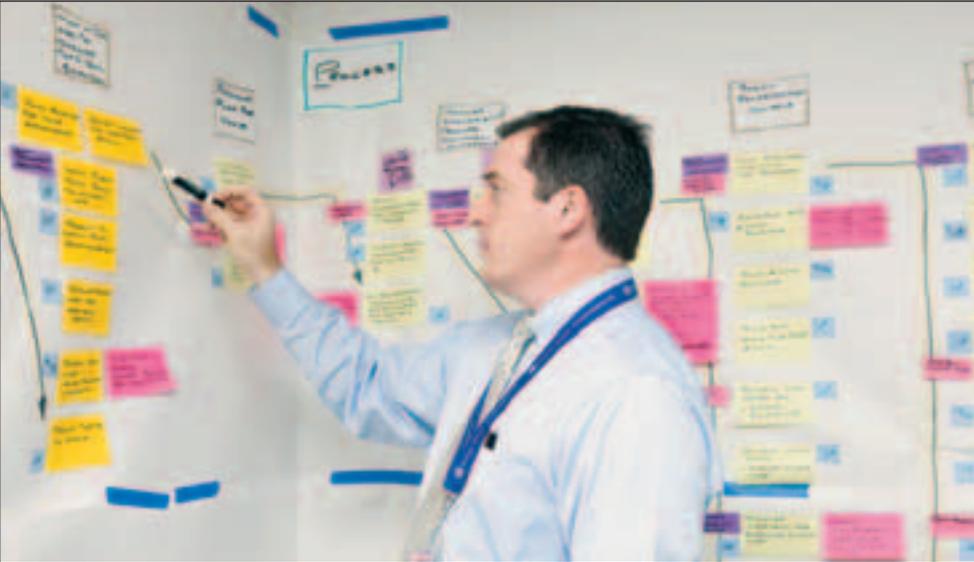
Developmental Assignments—Customized Career Path

Applicants and their nominating organizations have complete flexibility when designing CDG/AAF developmental assignments. The fellow and his or her senior leader mentor work together to identify career development assignments that strengthen functional area experience and broaden skills in new career fields. Alvin Bing, YG09 at Warren, was pleasantly surprised when both BG R. David Ogg (PEO GCS) and Kevin Fahey (PEO CS&CSS) personally sat down with him to plan his rotational assignments after his selection to the CDG/AAF program.

The CDG/AAF program has two tracks. The product/project manager leader track provides developmental experience in one or more PEOs. The acquisition leader track offers fellows

The screenshot shows the University of Virginia Executive Education website. The header includes the university logo and navigation links for Home, Executive Education, MBA, MPA for Executives, PhD, and Executive Education. The main banner features the text "Executive Education" and "Improve the Way You Do Business!" with a circular seal indicating "25th Anniversary". Below the banner, there are sections for "About Us", "Darden Business Executive Education" (describing programs that address current issues and challenges), and "Upcoming Programs" (listing "Negotiating Success: A Learning Laboratory").

The Darden Business Executive Education at the University of Virginia is just one of the leadership training courses that is available to CDG/AAF fellows.



Tools such as the LSS Value Stream Map, being prepared here by LSS Master Black Belt Chad Jones, helped the LSS project team improve the CDG/AAF program. (U.S. Army photo by McArthur Newell II, BRTRC.)

developmental experience in both their functional organization and in the PEO environment. Developmental assignments also prepare fellows for future leadership responsibilities when assigned as team leaders for integrated project teams or special projects.

Stepping out of their comfort zone is a strong motivator for many applicants. One YG01 fellow remarked, “I saw it as an opportunity to expand my professional horizons. I was Level III certified in systems planning, research, development, and engineering, but found myself very interested in business cost estimating, financial management, and project management. I saw the CDG/AAF program as a way to develop and grow.”

Fellows also draw on the advice and mentorship of past CDG/AAF fellows, Acquisition Career Management Advocates, ACMs, and USAASC Regional Directors. CDG/AAF fellows are equipped with the right support network to learn and grow.

Opportunities for Advancement

Advancement opportunities were cited by candidates as the number one reason for considering the CDG/AAF program. Seventy-six percent of the

graduate CDG/AAF fellows responding to the survey agreed that their participation in the program helped them to gain a promotion. Of the 147 graduate CDG/AAF fellows since 1997, 80 percent achieved GS-14 positions (or broad/pay band equivalent), 35 percent went on to become GS-15s (or broad/pay band equivalent), and 3 percent have progressed to the Senior Executive Service level.

While nominating organizations guarantee return rights, many CDG/AAF fellows are promoted before completing their 3-year CDG/AAF commitment. Fellows promoted after graduation are still entitled to full USAASC funding of the leadership training opportunities of their YG. This is a win-win scenario for both the gaining organizations and CDG/AAF fellows.

Fact-Based Improvements

The LSS project is currently in the “improve” phase. Based on survey suggestions and team analysis, the CDG/AAF YG10 will feature the following enhancements:

- Elimination of the requirement to sign a mobility agreement.
- Applicants may be certified at Level III in any ACF (no longer required to

be Level III certified for their current position).

- U.S. Army Acquisition Corps (AAC) membership is now optional, although still highly recommended.
- Marketing and promotion efforts will be improved. (A major finding from the customer surveys was that many potential applicants simply had not heard of the program.)
- Applicants selected to CDG/AAF YG10 will be assigned a senior leader mentor who will help design developmental assignments. Generic rotational plans are being developed to aid mentors and fellows in identifying the best career path to future leadership opportunities.

The report card for CDG/AAF revealed high satisfaction levels by the fellows. The keystones of the program, developmental assignments and leadership training, received high marks from all four customer groups. Nominating organizations benefit from USAASC funding salaries, tuition, and TDY expenses during the 3-year program. The Army benefits by growing a pool of future leaders. During the Analyze Tollgate review, Craig Spisak, USAASC Director, congratulated the team on the exceptional job and the complexity of the analysis they performed.

For more information about the CDG/AAF program, visit <http://asc.army.mil/career/programs/cdgaaf/default.cfm> or contact Chandra Evans-Mitchell at (703) 805-1247/DSN 655-1247 or chandra.evansmitchel@us.army.mil.

JOAN MOSES is an ACM at the USAASC Warren CSO and a certified Army LSS Black Belt. Moses holds a B.A. in general studies from the University of Michigan, is certified Level III in contracting, and is an AAC member.