



PMFs from several agencies gathered at DC Central Kitchen in April to prepare meals for distribution throughout the Washington, D.C., area.

# PMF Advantage

Fellowship program proves rich source of future leaders // By Carlyn Reichel

The State Department has hired Presidential Management Fellows, formerly known as Presidential Management Interns, for more than 30 years. Each year, the Department hires 50 to 60 new Civil Service employees through this program. Many remain in the Civil Service at the Department or join the Foreign Service, though PMFs have also left the Department for careers elsewhere in government or the private sector.

Each year, thousands of graduate students interested in careers

in public service apply to the Office of Personnel Management to become PMFs. Applicants must be nominated by their graduate or law school and sit for an exam that gauges leadership potential. For the 2010 cycle, OPM received 8,700 nominations and selected 882 finalists, who competed for a limited number of openings at participating federal agencies. State Department positions are in high demand.

“The Department is the most sought-after agency among PMF finalists,” said Alison Barg, PMF

program manager in the Office of Civil Service Human Resource Management. Barg said more than 65 percent of PMF finalists apply to the Department, often for multiple positions. In 2009, the Department received more than 1,500 applications for 39 positions.

## Two-year Program

The Department’s PMFs participate in a two-year developmental program that requires 160 hours of training and two rotational assignments outside

of the office where they serve their fellowship. Rotations may be to other Department offices or embassies, or to other agencies or judicial- or legislative-branch offices. PMFs on rotation often fill staffing gaps at no expense to the hosting office other than the travel or training required.

“My Presidential Management Internship prepared me to seek the opportunities that the Department offers by moving around and working in different bureaus,” said Marguerite Coffey. “I gained a wealth of experience



**Above:** The PMF Advisory Council's Executive Board meets with its leadership liaison, Executive Secretary Dan Smith. From left are Johna Ohtagaki, Melissa Kopolow, Dan Smith, Rob Laika, Tamara Rivera, Michelle Warren and Colleen Ayers. **Right:** Alumna Marguerite Coffey, left, meets with PMF Advisory Council Alumni Representative Melissa Kopolow.

by the time I became a midlevel manager and supervisor, which enabled me to progress to more challenging and rewarding work.”

Coffey is the Department’s longest-serving PMI alumnus. She began her career with the Department in 1979 and is currently director of Management Policy, Rightsizing and Innovation.

The Department’s current PMFs say they are keenly aware of the opportunities their fellowships provide.

“We are incredibly grateful for the opportunity to serve the State Department as PMFs and civil servants,” said Johna Ohtagaki, a 2007 PMF who is now special assistant in the Office of Special Representative for North Korea Policy. “The Department invests in us through training and rotations and by just giving us the opportunity to watch and learn from masters of diplomatic and bureaucratic tradecraft. It is a privilege and an education just

to be able to sit in front of our computers every day.”

### Fellows Contribute

Ohtagaki chairs the Presidential Management Fellowship Advisory Council, a Department-recognized affinity group that promotes opportunities for current and former fellows within the Department and U.S. Agency for International Development. The group also supports fellows’ ability to contribute to the Department and community. Council committees facilitate interagency cooperation; promote diversity, university outreach and the use of best practices; and coordinate community service.

“PMFs already engage in volunteer activities, such as recycling initiatives, preparing and distributing food for the hungry and mentoring at-risk high school students,” said 2009 PMF Luis Toledo, a Bureau of Diplomatic Security management analyst



who chairs the PMF Council’s Community Service Committee. “This year, our goal is to establish a solid foundation for current, former and future Department of State PMFs to come together and do even more.”

PMFs work in a variety of Department offices. “PMFs bring to the job richly diverse backgrounds and experience, and have found prominent positions throughout the Department,” said Dan Smith, executive secretary and leadership liaison for the council. “They share a

strong commitment to public service and to the mission of our Department.”

According to Under Secretary for Management Patrick Kennedy, the PMF program “is a critical recruitment tool to help ensure we continue to attract the highest-quality public servants to carry out our nation’s foreign policy.” ■

*The author received a Presidential Management Fellowship in 2009 and joined the Bureau of International Information Programs.*