Orientation Handbook for Elected & Appointed Officials

The State of Vermont

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Welcome to your new position as an elected or appointed official in Vermont state government. Whether new to state government or a long-time member of the state workforce, it is likely you have questions about your position and the role you are expected to play. This handbook is designed to assist you in learning basic information about the structure of state government and provide you with an overview of your role in meeting your ethical and legal obligations, managing the state workforce, monitoring and initiating legislation and preparing a budget for your agency or department.

I. Elected Officials

Vermont voters elect six statewide officials. The Vermont Constitution provides for the election of a Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Treasurer, Secretary of State, and Auditor of Accounts. These elections are held biennially on the first Tuesday after the first Monday of November. Vt. Constit. Ch. II, § 43. The position of Attorney General, while created in statute, is to be elected at the same time and in the same manner as all other elected officers. 3 V.S.A. § 151.

The Governor

The Governor functions as the chief executive officer overseeing all administrative departments of the Executive Branch. Under the broad powers delegated to the Governor under Vermont's Constitution, the Governor corresponds with other states, transacts any business required by the state, and proposes legislation, including a budget bill, to the General Assembly. The Governor is also the Captain-General and Commander-in-Chief of the forces of the state, although he does not command these forces in times of war or insurrection without the advice and consent of the Senate. Vt. Constit. Ch. II, § 20.

The Lieutenant Governor

In the Governor's absence, the Lieutenant Governor exercises all of the powers conferred upon the Governor. Vt. Constit. Ch. II, §§ 1, 3, 20.
On a day to day basis, the Lieutenant Governor acts as the President of the Senate, except when exercising the office of the Governor. As President of the Senate, the Lieutenant Governor may cast a deciding vote in the event of a tie. Vt. Constit. Ch. II, § 19

The Secretary of State

The Secretary of State has a variety of duties under state law including the oversight of the State's election processes and regulation of lobbyists within the state. The Secretary of State is also charged with the preservation of state laws, particularly the associated legislative history of those laws. The Secretary monitors and regulates professional licensees and corporate entities and records certain state land transactions and state bonds. *See generally* 3 V.S.A. Chapter 5.

The State Treasurer

The State Treasurer serves as the state's banker and chief investment officer, accounting for the receipt and disbursement of public funds, short and long-term debt management, and investment of state funds. The Treasurer administers three retirement systems and pension funds, and collects and returns unclaimed financial property to rightful owners. Most importantly, the Treasurer strives to improve the financial literacy of Vermonters, and provides advice to state policymakers on various fiscal and policy issues.

The Attorney General

The Attorney General is the chief law enforcement officer in the state and is vested with broad authority and power to protect citizens and the integrity of governmental operations. The Attorney General is also charged with representing the state in all matters in which the state is a party or has an interest, including cases naming state officials or employees. *See generally* 3 V.S.A. Chapter 7.

The State Auditor

The State Auditor conducts a variety of audits to ensure that the state is accountable to citizens, both from a financial and service delivery perspective. The Auditor conducts performance audits, which provide valuable insight into whether government programs and operations are working effectively and efficiently, including recommendations for improvement. He or she also conducts a comprehensive financial statement audit, which represents an annual audit of the State's financial statements for their accuracy, and a single audit, which looks at the use of federal funds by the state. *See generally* 32 V.S.A. §§163, 167 and 168.

II. Appointed Officials

Appointed officials are those persons who are appointed by the Governor, generally with the advice and consent of the Senate, or by other appointed authority, with the approval of the Governor, to perform the executive functions of state government. These officials serve solely at the discretion of the Governor.

All appointed officials are subject to an Executive Order setting ethical rules to be observed during and after state employment. You will be provided with a copy of the Executive Code of Ethics and will be expected to sign and return it to the Governor's Office.

Those appointed officials who are entrusted with the custody of state property or funds also must give a bond to the state for the faithful performance of their duties. The Governor determines the amount of the bond required. 3 V.S.A. §251.

All appointed state officials are required to designate not less than five emergency interim successors. The official must file the designations in the offices of the Governor and the Secretary of State. 20 V.SA. §184

Appointed Officials must notify the Governor's office when absent or unavailable to perform his or her duties. If you will be out of state, you will be asked to advise the Governor's Office of the dates on which you will be away, an address and telephone number where you can be reached and the name of your designated deputy or other agent who will act for the agency or department in your absence.

Appointed officials must execute certain types of documents on behalf of an agency or department, including applications for grants, contract approval requests, and transfer of fund request. (Agency of Administration Bulletin 3.3). A full list of the documents requiring your signature can be found in Bulletin 3.3. Where adherence to this rule may involve repetitious or routine matters, you may apply to the Secretary of Administration for an exemption. If you are absent from the state or unavailable for a lengthy period of time, you should formally delegate authority to a person within your agency or department to execute these documents on behalf of the agency or department. You should provide a copy of the delegation to the Department of Human Resources as well as the Department of Finance and Management.

III. Organization of the Executive Branch

In addition to the independently elected offices discussed above, the Executive branch is organized into six major agencies, the Agencies of Administration, Human Services, Transportation, Natural Resources, Agriculture Food and Markets and Commerce and Community Development. These Agencies are led by Secretaries, who are appointed by the Governor. A Secretary may appoint a Deputy Secretary if authorized by statute and approved by the Governor.

Agencies are comprised of many separate departments with an overarching central administrative office. These departments are led by commissioners who report through the agency secretaries to the Governor. A commissioner may appoint a deputy if authorized by statute and approved by the Secretary of Administration.

In addition to the organizations that fall within the agency structure, many free standing organizations are led by commissioners or other leaders who report directly to the Governor. Such organizations include, for example, the Banking, Insurance, Securities and Health Care Administration, the Department of Labor and the Department of Public Safety.

For a full understanding of the organizational structure of state government, and a description of the work done by the Executive Branch, visit the State of Vermont's website at www.Vermont.gov.

IV. The Executive's Role in the Legislative Process

In the first year of the biennium, the legislative session begins on the first Wednesday following the first Monday in January. Bills will be introduced almost immediately after the opening of the session, and will continue through much of the legislative season. Appointed officials should monitor all bills that are introduced to assess whether the bills have any impact on their agency or department and advise the Governor of any bill of import. Bills can be tracked using the Legislature's website.

A proposal for legislation may be written by anyone, although all bills must be introduced and sponsored by a legislator. The Governor may request that an agency or department head work with a legislator to draft or introduce a bill on the Governor's behalf.

Bills may originate in either house, with the exception of all revenue bills, which must originate in the House of Representatives. After being introduced, or read for the first time, a bill is assigned to a committee in the house where it was introduced. These committees may then hold public

hearings, at which interested individuals and representatives of groups and businesses express their opinions on the bill. At the Governor's request, agencies and departments may be asked to testify to support or oppose a bill. At times, legislators or their staff may request that a representative of an agency or department appear to testify. When such a request is made, it should be reported to the Secretary of Administration, who will provide guidance on any testimony to be provided.

Following testimony and discussion, a committee may vote a bill out favorably, unfavorably or without any recommendation. In the alternative, a committee may table the bill, ending its consideration.

If the committee decides to move the bill, they will draft a committee report and put it on the notice calendar. The next day, one of the members of the committee will "report" the bill to the general assembly, and members may ask questions, debate the merits and offer amendments.

At the end of the debate, the members will vote on whether the bill shall be read a second time. If they vote affirmatively, the bill is put on the notice calendar for third reading the next day.

Before third reading, the members may ask questions of the reporter, offer amendments and debate the merits, although most bills are thoroughly debated before second reading and there is no discussion at this point.

If the bill passes in the house where it was introduced, it goes to the other chamber to begin the same process over again. When a bill has passed both the House and Senate, but in different versions, the two chambers try to agree on a single version by appointing a conference committee, with three members from each house.

Ultimately, the Governor can sign the bill into law or veto it. The Governor will often request recommendations from agency and department heads on whether to sign or veto a bill. When the Governor signs a bill, it becomes law. A bill can also become law if the Governor does not return it to the General Assembly within five days, Sundays excepted. If, however, the General Assembly adjourns within three days of the presentation of the bill, preventing the return of the bill, the bill shall not become law. If the Governor vetoes a bill, a two-thirds majority in both houses is required to override the veto.

The Secretary of State's website contains additional information expanding on this process, and providing excellent basic definitions of common words used in the legislative process. Facts about the Legislature, its members, schedule, and its bill tracking process are also provided on the Vermont Legislature's website.

V. The Budget Process

Preparation of the Budget

Preparation of the Governor's annual budget for the State of Vermont is the responsibility of agency and departmental budget staff, the Commissioner of Finance and Management, and the staff of the Budget and Management Division. The development and implementation of the budget is an on-going annual cycle.

At the end of a fiscal year, the Budget and Management staff reviews and analyzes the financial data for each agency, department and program. This analysis provides insight into how state government raises revenues and spends tax dollars. The results of this financial analysis are reviewed with the Governor and his or her senior staff to make preliminary budget allocations that reflect the Governor's spending priorities.

In September and October, instructions are distributed to each agency and department, with a budget allocation for the coming fiscal year. Using the Budget Development System (BDS), agencies and departments then construct their budgets in accordance with the Governor's instructions.

In November, the Budget and Management Division staff analyzes these proposed budgets and revises the original allocations as necessary. By the middle of December, the Governor has made most of the decisions important to the budget.

Funding Sources

In constructing the budget for your agency or department, it is important to understand the different types of funding sources, and any limitations on the use of those funds. There are a number of special funds with special limitations that will apply to particular agencies and departments, but the following five funding sources are particularly important in constructing many agency and department budgets.

General Fund

The Legislature has established the General Fund as the basic operating fund for the state. These funds are used to finance all expenditures for which no special revenues have otherwise been provided by law. All revenues that are not expressly required to be placed in another fund are allocated to the General Fund.

Transportation Fund

The Transportation Fund is used primarily for the preservation, maintenance and improvement to the state's infrastructure, including highways, bridges, railroads, airports and rest areas. The primary sources of revenue in this fund are motor fuel taxes, motor vehicle purchase and use taxes, license and registration fees, and federal funds for certain transportation projects.

Education Fund

The Education Fund was established by the Legislature to equalize statewide education funding. Permissible expenditures from the Education Fund include payments to school districts and supervisory unions for the support of education, the cost of short term borrowing and education property tax rebates. Funding includes the statewide education tax, lottery profits, Medicaid reimbursements and appropriations from the General Fund.

Federal Revenue Fund

All federal grants are recorded in the Federal Revenue Fund, unless designated for transportation or fish and wildlife purposes. These funds must be expended in accordance with the terms of the grants.

Global Commitment Fund

This fund was created as a result of Vermont's entering into Medicaid waiver agreement with the federal government. The agreement caps federal expenditures on Medicaid services for five years but gives Vermont latitude in promoting access to health care, cost containment and effective administration. The state is currently in the process of negotiating a three year extension of this waiver agreement with the federal government.

Submission of the Budget to the General Assembly

In January, the Governor submits his budget proposals, including proposed General Fund, Transportation and Capital Bill Budgets, to the General Assembly. The General Fund proposal, or the Big Bill as it is called, provides funding for most agencies and departments in state government.

The Governor usually accompanies the budget proposals with a formal address to a joint meeting of all House and Senate members. After the Budget Message has been presented, the appropriations process is initiated

and all appropriation bills are referred to the Appropriations Committee of the House.

Agency and department heads are expected to testify in support of their organizations' budgets before the Appropriations Committee and any other committee with jurisdiction. Agency and department heads should be fully conversant with their proposed budget and able to respond to all inquires with respect to their budget.

Once the House and Senate pass the Appropriations Bill, a Budget Conference Committee, comprised of three members of the House and three from the Senate, is established to resolve any differences. Once differences are resolved, both the House and Senate must approve the final version of the Appropriations Bill. After approval, the Appropriations Bill is forwarded to the Governor. The Governor can sign the bill into law, veto it or allow it to become law by not signing or vetoing the bill within five days of its arrival at the Governor's Office. If the Governor vetoes the bill, the legislative approval process begins anew.

Budget Implementation

When passage of the Appropriations Bill is complete and it is enacted into law, the appropriations are entered into the State's accounting system by the Department of Finance and Management. On July 1, the beginning of the fiscal year, agencies and departments can then spend the appropriated funds. At the same time, the Department of Finance and Management is "closing the books" and preparing the financial statements describing the prior fiscal year. At this point, the budget process begins again for the next fiscal year.

VI. Managing the State Workforce

As elected and appointed officials, you are responsible for managing all state employees within your agency or department. All employment within the Executive Branch of state government is either classified or exempt. A classified employee is one whose employment is governed by a structured program set forth in state statute. 3 V.S.A. §310-§312. In contrast, an exempt employee is employed at will and subject to dismissal at the discretion of the Governor, through his appointees. The standards and rules that apply to recruitment, selection, retention and advancement of employees differ depending upon the employee's status.

Hiring and Compensating Exempt Employees

Many exempt employees are paid in accordance with unique pay plans for certain categories of employment, specifically, the Attorney Pay Plan, the Executive Director Pay Plan, the Defender General Pay Plan, the State's Attorneys Pay Plan, the Public Service Board Pay Plan, and the Vermont Labor Relations Pay Plan. Each pay plan establishes initial and maximum pay rates and sets conditions and guidelines for administration of each plan. In particular, the starting salary and any subsequent salary adjustments must be approved by the Commissioner of Human Resources.

At the request of an appointing authority, some exempt positions may be covered by the Classified Pay Plan for salary administration purposes. The normal rules for the classified plan apply, except that requests to hire above the minimum pay grade may be approved by the Department of Human Resources.

Some exempt employees, including deputies, principal or executive assistants, and private secretaries, are not covered by a Pay Plan or the Classified Pay Plan. Hiring salaries and salary increases for these employees are subject to the approval of the Governor under 32 V.S.A. §1020. When recruiting for these positions, a working salary range may be authorized by the Department of Human Resources. An *Exempt Salary Request* form for all salary offers must be completed by the appointing authority and forwarded to the Department of Human Resources, for approval by the Commissioner of Human Resources, the Secretary of Administration, and the Governor. No specific salary may be offered to the candidate until that salary has been approved

Standards Applying to the Classified Service

Pay, benefits and working conditions of most classified service employees are determined through collective bargaining. The State Employees' Labor Relations Act (3 V.S.A. §§901 *et. seq.*) provides the basis for collective bargaining between the State and its employees. The Vermont State Employees' Association (VSEA) is the certified bargaining agent for members of the Non-Management, Supervisory, and Corrections Bargaining Units. The Vermont Troopers' Association (VTA) is the certified bargaining agent for State Police officers in the rank of Sergeant and below. Membership in the VSEA and VTA is open to all eligible employees who wish to join.

Two types of classified employees are not eligible for union membership: confidential and managerial employees. A confidential employee is a classified employee who has responsibility for, knowledge of or access to information relating to personnel matters, collective bargaining or budgetary

matters, making union membership incompatible with their job duties. 3 V.S.A. §902 (17). A managerial employee is an individual who functions as an agency, or department leader or an individual who heads a major program, division or section of an executive organization. 3 V.S.A. §902 (18). While confidential and managerial employees are not entitled to the benefits of collective bargaining, the Secretary of Administration can, and generally does, extend some of the benefits of the collective bargaining agreement to these employees. 3 V.S.A. § 2222(f).

Hiring and Compensating Classified Employees

Vacant positions in the classified service are filled by selection from a list of eligible applicants who meet specific published eligibility criteria. The recruitment process is managed by the Department of Human Resources, although the department filling the vacancy manages the selection process.

All employees entering the classified service by any means other than restoration and reemployment must successfully complete an original probationary period, usually lasting six months, in order to gain status as a permanent state employee. Rights and privileges of permanent status include, but are not limited to, reduction in force, reemployment, and appeal rights, and consideration for promotion, transfer, and restoration.

The State maintains a classified pay plan that establishes a common set of salary ranges for each position. Entry level rates, maximum rates, and other mechanisms are used to ensure that employees are compensated in a uniform and consistent manner. The classified pay plan is structured with pay grades, each with a defined rate of entry and maximum rate. Using a point-factor job evaluation system, each job class within the classified service is assigned to one of these pay grades, each of which has fifteen steps. Usually employees start at step one, and move to step two upon completion of probation.

In certain limited circumstances, a classified employee may be hired above the minimum pay grade. For example, if there is a shortage of qualified applicants, or a candidate possesses exceptional or special qualifications or training, the employee may be hired into range and compensated at a higher rate. All requests to hire above the minimum of the pay grade must be submitted for approval to the Department of Human Resources. These requests are reviewed for compliance with personnel policies and cannot be offered to a candidate until approved. In some instances, where certain job classes are affected by unusual labor market conditions, a market factor adjustment may also be made to increase the compensation for a particular position.

Employee Grievances

Classified employees and their certified bargaining units have the right to initiate a grievance process to resolve complaints and ensure compliance with applicable labor agreement, personnel policies and state law. Employees and supervisors are expected to make a sincere effort to reconcile their differences at the lowest possible organizational level. Managers and supervisors must consult with their agency or department's human resources professional regarding grievance issues to obtain guidance during the process.

There are four levels through which a grievance may progress. Step I is the immediate supervisor level. At this level, the complaint is discussed informally. Step II is the level at which a formal grievance is filed in writing with the department head. The department head may hear the grievance personally or delegate this responsibility to a manager or human resources professional. It is the responsibility of the management representative conducting a grievance hearing to act fairly, and without prejudice. If the grievance proceeds beyond Step II, it is handled by the Department of Human Resources, and if it cannot be resolved at that level, is referred to Step IV, which is conducted by the Vermont Labor Relations Board. In some instances, grievances may be appealed to the Vermont Supreme Court.

Performance Management and Corrective and Disciplinary Action

Performance evaluations are required annually for all employees on the anniversary date of their hire. Such evaluations are a good opportunity to discuss an employee's past performance and address the expectations of each position. Many problems with employees can be avoided simply by keeping the line of communications between a supervisor and employee open and providing clear expectations for an employee's performance. Nonetheless, situations may arise that require corrective or disciplinary action. Corrective and disciplinary actions must be done in strict accordance with applicable labor contracts. You should consult the Labor Relations Unit of the Department of Human Resources or your human resources professional whenever discipline or an unsatisfactory performance rating is considered.

It is the policy of the State of Vermont to administer discipline fairly, reasonably and impartially. Progressive disciplinary actions will generally be used unless an employee's conduct constitutes misconduct. It is the responsibility of each supervisor, human resources professional and appointing authority to evaluate the circumstances and facts as objectively as possible and then apply the most suitable form of discipline.

Employees who are not eligible to join bargaining units, such as confidential or managerial employees, may only be disciplined for cause, but the contract provisions regarding discipline do not apply to them. Human Resources professionals or Labor Relations staff should be consulted when discipline for non-bargaining unit employees is under consideration.

VII. Management of State Business

All elected and appointed officials in the Executive Branch must comply with specific legal requirements set out in state statutes, rules and regulations when conducting state business. The following statutes, rules and regulations apply to all elected and appointed officials.

Open Meetings Law

Agency and department heads must ensure that certain types of meetings that are conducted by their agencies or departments comply with Vermont's Open Public Meetings Law. 1 V.S.A. §§310-314. For advice on what types of meetings fall under the Open Meetings Law, contact your legal counsel.

Under the Open Public Meetings Law, an agency or department must give notice of the meeting, the public must be allowed to attend and be heard and minutes of the meeting must be taken. A meeting can go into executive session, however, to discuss certain matters. Among the types of issues that may be discussed in executive session is the appointment or evaluation of public officials, the negotiation of real estate purchases and the consideration of records or documents that are not available to the public. For further information concerning the Open Public Meetings Act's requirements, visit the Secretary of State's website.

Records Management Program

State agencies and departments are required to have a records management program that meets with the approval of the Vermont State Archives and Records Administration. 3 V.S.A. § 218. Agencies and departments may only destroy records in their custody if they are authorized to do so by a specific law, or through a records schedule approved by the State Archivists. 1 V.S.A. § 317(a). Each agency or department head should assign at least one records officer to be responsible for maintaining a records management program. Records liaison officers from the archivist's office can work with these records officers to carry out the tasks associated with records management. If you would like more information on records management, the Secretary of State has published a Records Management Procedure Manual, which is available on the Secretary of State's website.

Public Records Act

Under the Public Records Act, any person has a right to inspect or copy any written or recorded information that is produced or acquired in the course of the business of a state agency or department, under certain conditions, and subject to certain exemptions. 1 V.S.A. §§315-320. The Act lists a large number of types of documents that are exempt from disclosure, so it should be reviewed closely before the production of any records that are requested. It is also important to remember that privileged documents can be withheld, including documents covered by the Governor's executive privilege.

The Act requires an agency to respond to a records request within a certain amount of time. The Act also sets forth rules on the manner in which the documents must be produced and the payment of certain costs in connection with their production. For a full description of your obligations under the Public Records Act, visit the Secretary of State's website, which includes a Guide to Vermont's Public Records law.

Copies of Reports

Whenever a report is printed at the expense of any agency, department, board or other entity in the executive branch, ten copies must be given to the state librarian. 29 V.S.A. §1152. One copy should also be sent in PDF format to libraries-publicdocuments@state.vt.us. Include with this email information concerning the department originating the document, the name of the publication, the author, and the name of the contact person responsible for the submission.

Purchasing

The Office of Purchasing and Contracting in the Department of Buildings and General Services (BGS) is responsible for purchasing and contracting for all supplies for state government. 29 V.S.A. § 902. BGS maintains numerous statewide contracts for materials, equipment and commodities, which must be used for all purchases unless otherwise approved in advance. A listing of these contracts can be found at BGS's website. The Commissioner of BGS can delegate authority for an agency or department head to make certain types of purchases without going through the Office of Purchasing and Contracting to enable agencies and departments to conduct everyday operations. In addition, an agency or department may purchase any item under $3,500 without prior approval if that item is not available through an existing state contract.

In order to establish a more efficient method of purchasing and paying for small dollar transactions or high-volume repetitive business, you may wish to obtain a purchasing card from BGS. A purchasing card is a Visa credit card issued for the State of Vermont. Cards are issued to specific employees by name, and each agency or department must implement controls to ensure that the card is used appropriately.

Contracting

Contracts are used by the state to acquire specific, clearly defined services that cannot be obtained through state employees. A service contract is appropriate only where: (1) the agency or department will not supervise the time of work or manner of performance of the contractor; (2) the service is not the kind usually provided by an agency or department; and (3) the contractor generally engages in an independently established trade, occupation, profession or business.

The state generally adheres to an open bidding process that affords all businesses equal access and opportunity to compete for state contracts. Contracts of $15,000 or less are not subject to the competitive bidding process, however, and in certain circumstances, a sole source contract may be appropriate.

The process required for bidding contracts over $15,000 is set forth in Bulletin 3.5 and guidelines for the creation and issuance of a request for proposals can be found on BGS's website. Information concerning the process of drafting contracts, including necessary provisions in the contract and approvals required to enter into a contract, can be found in Bulletin 3.5.

Internal Controls

Appointed officials are responsible for managing the resources entrusted to them in a manner that safeguards state assets and prevents and detects errors and fraud. Officials must ensure that written procedures exist that document the acquisition and disposal of physical assets, and ensures that purchases are initiated and approved by authorized personnel. Any instances of suspected fraud, theft or damage must be reported to appropriate authorities. Agency secretaries and commissioners will be required to attest to such procedures, and random audits are conducted to confirm that adequate controls exist throughout state government.

VIII. Compensation of Elected and Appointed Officials

Salary

Salaries for elected officials are set by statute, and salary adjustments may be made only by the Legislature. The Governor has the authority to establish salary levels for all agency and department heads, but must do so within certain statutory limits. 32 V.S.A. §1003(b).

Salary is paid bi-weekly on every other Thursday for the most recently completed pay period in accordance with the State payroll system. All employees of the State of Vermont are required to receive their pay via direct deposit. A schedule of pay periods and pay dates is available on-line at the Department of Finance and Management, Payroll Division's website.

Agency and department heads are not eligible to participate in any formal leave benefit or leave accrual plan. Appropriate time off is taken on a discretionary basis and the administration of time off is informal.

Medical Benefits

As part of their compensation package, elected and appointed officials can elect to participate in one of four different medical plan options. Under each plan option, the state pays 80% of the premium, and the employee is required to pay 20% of the premium. The coverage provided under each option differs, and documentation concerning the plan options will be provided to you to help you to assess which coverage is best for you and your family.

For each plan option, employees must sign up for coverage within the first 60 days of employment or during the annual Open Enrollment period in November. In some circumstances, however, such as a birth, marriage or divorce, employees may be allowed to enroll at other times during the year.

Dental Benefit

Dental benefits are also provided automatically at no cost after six months of active service. You are responsible, however, to enroll any dependent by completing a health benefits enrollment form.

Life Insurance

Life Insurance coverage is also provided by the State with a benefit of two times an official's annual base salary, with additional coverage for accidental death and dismemberment. The State pays 75% of the premium for this

coverage, with the remaining 25% paid by the employee. To receive coverage automatically, an official must sign up within the first 60 days of employment. Thereafter, coverage will be provided only if you can demonstrate evidence of good health and are approved for coverage by the carrier.

Flexible Spending Account

Upon employment with the State, you are entitled to participate in a flexible spending account plan. This plan allows you to have up to $5,000 deducted from your paycheck, on a pre-tax basis, which can then be used throughout the year to reimburse yourself for certain out of pocket health care expenses. There is no cost to enroll in the plan, but you must sign up for the plan in the first 60 days of employment or during Open Enrollment in November.

Long-Term Disability Plan

One year after continuous active employment, you will be enrolled in a long term disability plan, at no cost to you. This benefit pays 66 2/3 percent of your monthly earnings if you become disabled, after a 180 day waiting period. This payment continues as long as the disability continues, up to age 67.

Your human resources professional will provide you with forms and informational handouts related to medical coverage and other benefits. As indicated, most benefits require enrollment within 60 days of employment, so be sure to complete the forms in the timeframes provided. For more information contact the Benefits Division of the Department of Human Resources or your human resource professional. Or visit the Department of Human Resources website.

Retirement

The Vermont State Retirement System is the public pension plan provided by the State to all state employees, including elected and appointed officials. For more information about the state retirement system, and other savings options, visit the Treasurer's website at **http://vermonttreasurer.gov**.

IX. Resources Available to You

There are a number of resources available to newly elected or appointed State officials. First and foremost, the Department of Human Resources is available to answer basic questions regarding:

- The State's four collective bargaining agreements (Non-Management, Supervisory, State Police, and Corrections)
- Recruiting and hiring exempt employees and classified employees (the latter group are employees governed by one of the four collective bargaining agreements)
- Classification of employees (how positions are classified by job description and pay grade)
- Benefits available to state employees (medical, dental, disability, life insurance, and others)
- State personnel policies and procedures
- Best management practices to promote employee retention, growth and productivity
- Transition, succession, and strategic planning
- Change management
- Employee grievance process
- Equal Employment Opportunity plans, ADA requirements, and federal and state employment laws
- Investigation and discipline of employees

The Department of Human Resources provides services statewide through a field operations structure overseen by a Field Operations Director. Six Human Resources Managers report to the Director, and each HR Manager leads a team of 3-5 human resources professionals. Each HR team provides cross disciplinary services to designated agencies and departments.

Human resources questions related to the recruitment, hiring, retention, and management of all executive branch state employees should be posed to the HR professional assigned to your agency or department. By design, HR professionals are housed in the field among their client agencies and department, and are easily accessible to answer all inquiries. In urgent cases, elected and appointed officials can contact their assigned HR Manager or the HR Field Director.

Helpful Websites

The following websites also have valuable information concerning state government and your role as an elected or appointed official:

How a Bill Becomes Law

Basic explanations easily understood by the uninitiated.

See http://www.sec.state.vt.us/kids/bill_becomes_law.html.

Common Questions Regarding the Vermont Legislature

Some basic facts about the Legislature, its members, schedule, bill tracking process and other useful information is provided on the Vermont Legislature website so that you don't feel completely adrift in a foreign land. *See* **http://www.leg.state.vt.us/misc/faq2.htm**

Also, make the time to take a tour of the State house before the session begins. You won't regret having oriented yourself to the location of the House Chamber, the Senate, Chamber, committee rooms and of course the bathrooms, before the gavel comes down to start the session.

Navigating the Human Resources Landscape

The Department of Human Resources website provides a good guide to all necessary resources. *See* http://humanresources.vermont.gov/. We strongly encourage you to call the Commissioner's office for further advice, as you will find DHR to be a friendly and helpful ally in your efforts. (828-3491)

Contracting

Any newly elected or appointed official should be familiar with Bulletin 3.5, issued under the authority of the Secretary of Administration. It can be found, with various addendums, at http://aoa.vermont.gov/sites/aoa/files/pdf/AOA-Bulletin_3_5.pdf. For guidance and support related to this bulletin and state contracts in general, officials are advised to contact BGS, Office of Purchasing & Contracting (828-2211) or at http://bgs.vermont.gov/purchasing.

Rule Making

The Secretary of State plays a critical role in the state's rule making process. This process is explained in detail at the Secretary of State website at http://vermont-archives.org/aparules/. Legal counsel should always be consulted before embarking on rule making in order to ensure the applicability and validity of the process.