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The United States Virgin Islands Certified Public Manager Program: A New Paradigm in the Management of Government



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By Sunday Odezah
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St. Croix graduates from the U.S. Virgin Islands CPM Program.



St. Thomas graduates from the U.S. Virgin Islands CPM Program.

On Aug. 26 and 27, 2014, the accomplishments of the first ever class of 43 graduates from the United States Virgin Islands (USVI) Certified Public Manager (CPM) program were celebrated; making the CPM program a reality and a dream come true in the USVI. As the photographs reveal, the graduates received their CPM certificates with great joy and proud smiles on their face, indicating that they admire the well-deserved professional title “CPM” behind their names.

The graduates represent a wide range of government agencies and departments. This broad representation is an indication that the graduates are poised to make a real difference in the quality of the services they provide to the people of the Virgin Islands.

Several individuals delivered the graduation speeches at the graduation ceremony. One of the featured speakers was Dr. Mary Hamilton, Vice Chair of the National Certified Public Manager Consortium and a former executive director of the American Society for Public Administration. In addition to being one of the distinguished CPM graduation speakers, Dr. Hamilton also conducted the capstone project seminar to complete the requirements for the CPM certificate.

The graduation ceremonies were also an opportunity to celebrate the culmination of an eight-year effort to establish the CPM program in the U.S. Virgin Islands. The proposal to establish the program was initially presented to the board of directors of the National Certified Public Manager Consortium at its

November 2004 annual meeting in Kentucky. However, the program did not officially begin until May 17, 2013, when the University of the Virgin Islands (UVI) and the Virgin Islands Division of Personnel officially launched the program. From this beginning, classes started July 9, 2013.

Sponsored by the Government of the Virgin Islands, the program is offered by the University of the Virgin Islands' Institute for Leadership and Organizational Effectiveness and delivered at the university's campuses on St. Croix and St. Thomas. Completion of the CPM program took 12 months and classes were offered in a three-day per month format.

The CPM program graduates completed 300 contact hours of structured learning activities which addressed the CPM's core competencies – personal and organizational integrity, managing work, leading people, developing staff, systematic integration, public service focus and change leadership. The program culminated in a public management capstone project that each student was required to complete before graduation.

The CPM program in the United States is a nationally recognized and accredited management development program specifically for public sector managers at all levels of government. What distinguishes the U.S. Virgin Islands CPM program from other CPM programs in the U.S. is that the Virgin Islands program is more than a management development program. It is also a "torch" and all Virgin Islands CPM graduates are considered to be torch-bearers.

As torch-bearers, the CPM graduates are the light of the Virgin Islands public service. They are obligated to pass the torch from one person to another until the entire Virgin Islands public service is illuminated with superior performance. With such a public service ethic in place, the people of the Virgin Islands can proudly say "Kum ba yah" – "come by here" and join us to enjoy the splendors of our beautiful islands – our paradise.

The CPM program in the United States is results-driven and built on the belief that well-trained public managers provide better service to the public. To that end, the accomplishments of the 43 graduates from the USVI CPM program will improve the quality of public service in the Virgin Islands. With the growing demand for government to do more with less and at the same time meet citizens' increased demand for more and better services, the CPM program is an effective way to meet those challenges in the Virgin Islands.

Second, the CPM is an outcomes-based program because it has a built-in return on investment. To illustrate, the program will take well-trained public managers, build on their current skills, and develop them into the core around which the Virgin Islands will build a model of effective government management.

Third, the Virgin Islands CPM graduates will transmit their agencies, departments, programs, and the Virgin Islands public service to their successors "not only not less, but greater, better and more beautiful" than they were transmitted to them. Given the change in culture that will take place in the Virgin Islands public service from the application of knowledge acquired in the CPM program, the program is indeed a wise investment.

Making the USVI CPM Program More Effective

Interestingly, the USVI CPM program is off to a good start. However, in order for the program to have a significant impact on the quality of public service in the Virgin Islands, the graduates must take the next step. They must establish local and national professional associations in the Virgin Islands, such as the Virgin Islands Society of Certified Public Managers (VISCPM), the American Academy of Certified Public Managers (AACPM) and the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA). These professional associations are not only essential to the continuation of the CPM program in the Virgin Islands, they are also the back-bone of the CPM program.

To illustrate, the CPM program is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire – the application of "best practices" on the job and delivery of "high-quality" public services. When the USVI CPM graduates attend best practices conferences sponsored by VISCPM, AACPM and ASPA, they gain cutting-edge knowledge from experts in public management.

At this writing, efforts are underway to establish a local professional association.

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