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12 Selected to Participate in GVI 'Fellows Program' Paying \$55,000 Annually; Program is Effort to Retain Talent, Stop Brain Drain

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Linda Straker **November 10, 2021**

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Governor Bryan was elated while speaking during the announcement of the Fellows Program at the University of the Virgin Islands on St. Croix on Tues. Nov. 9, 2021 By. GOV'T HOUSE

The twelve young people who were successful after applying to participate in the 2021 Government of the Virgin Island Financial Fellows program have already begun their first six-month rotation. Thirty-eight people applied to the program.

Jenifer O'Neal, Office of Management and Budget director said the fellows program was conceived many months ago to bring more young people into public service as it will be giving

them opportunities to learn and be paid while being trained.

The successful fellows which comprise four males will be placed at OMB, the Department of Finance, the Office of Disaster Recovery, and the Bureau of Internal Revenue. The program itself is for two years and each fellow will spend six months at each of the aforementioned departments.

“They are from various backgrounds and have college degrees received within the last three years. Fellows will rotate every six months within the four departments to obtain a broad and comprehensive understanding of government over the two-year time frame,” Ms. O’Neal said during a news conference Tuesday to officially announce the chosen fellows.

“Each department, has, therefore, been assigned three fellows each, each fellow has been assigned a mentor that will assist and support them for the entire two years. Mentors are from various agencies within the Government of the Virgin Islands and will give a minimum of eight hours per month to their mentees,” she said.

Each fellow has been provided with a laptop and all tools necessary for them to be fully functional in their new roles and all training will be provided. The fellows are full-time exempt employees with all the benefits of GVI employees. Asked about their salary during the questioning segment of the press conference, Governor Albert Bryan told the Consortium the fellows make \$55,000 annually.

The first twelve fellows are:

- Roberto Tirado
- Khaleila Krall
- Mahlayi DeFoe
- Desiree Fleming
- Jamila Felix
- Lineek Williams
- Kahina Brannigan
- Malachi Peterson
- Shani Isaac
- Harold Brown
- Victoria Gario
- Acassia Ferguson

"We're serious. They're worth it... We wanted to make it competitive. They had to work to get into this program — remember there were 38 people" who applied, the governor said. "We want to make sure that we're keeping our talent and that's what talent costs these days so they're worth it." Mr. Bryan appeared elated when announcing the program along with Ms. O'Neal.

Speaking about the future of the program, Ms. O’Neal said that because it has been so incredibly hard to recruit persons with both the skills and experience to fill government vacancies, this training program will provide the foundation for hiring.

“We ultimately see this program as the beginning of an initiative that is a win-win for both individual fellows and the GVI,” she said while pointing out that it will provide the on-the-job experience that is often required when young people are seeking to become employed.

“With this program, we intend to make this issue less of a challenge and we are confident that this first group will be the impetus for the rest to join once we begin to accept applications again,” she said.

Acassia Ferguson, speaking on behalf of the other fellows said, “Coming into the program we look forward to learning and developing professional skills that will be transferable across all four departments we will be rotating to.”

“This is a unique and outstanding opportunity for us to build a greater understanding of the Virgin Islands Government and its functions,” she said while disclosing that the first weeks as a fellow has set the foundation for the various challenges they anticipate in the coming months.

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