



## On the Front Lines: UMB Champions of Excellence: Disbursements Leadership Team

October 28, 2020 | Charles Schelle

With a mix of accountability and adaptability, Department of Financial Services-Disbursements leaders kept accounts payable up-to-date during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The **Champions of Excellence** campaign is a multiyear branding campaign at the University of Maryland, Baltimore (UMB) in which we highlight individuals and teams that exemplify extraordinary accomplishment and represent excellence at the University. This year, UMB is highlighting the employees who've done exemplary work since the COVID-19 pandemic unfolded in March. During the next few months, The Elm will be featuring these UMB Champions, who are making Baltimore, our region, and in some cases the world a better place.



Today: Disbursements Leadership Team, Office of Administration and Finance

Bills do not stop for COVID-19.

When the University of Maryland, Baltimore's (UMB) stay-at-home order went into effect March 14, the leadership team in the Department of Financial Services-Disbursements (FS-D) was forced to keep accounts current despite having only one-third of its staff available to grapple with the state of Maryland's paper-based system.

"We had to come up with techniques to process the same volume, or close to the same volume, with many fewer people," said FS-D director Lynell Griffin, whose group is responsible for making check and wire transfer payments to individuals and organizations that are engaged in business with UMB.

*(Watch video below.)*

FS-D went from 12 processors down to a core of four and had to reimagine its workflow. The rest of the team initially was placed on paid administrative leave while leadership figured out how to provide them with invoices to process.

The core four — Griffin; Kenyatta Woolridge, senior disbursements program specialist; Gina R. Baker, accounts payable program specialist; and Kerrie Williams, accountant — created a central station to make the batching of invoices more efficient, accepted secure documents through a central inbox, and divided duties opening and scanning mail, entering invoices, and preparing batches for the state.

Communication with other departments was essential to determine which suppliers had greater need due to the pandemic or because they were a small business. Also included were payments to participants in the COVID-19 vaccine clinical trials.

"We have been doing our best to make sure we are making those payments on time so we can continue to keep the group study participants we have in order to help the University develop a vaccine," said Griffin, who added that the team worked with a gift card issuer, Tango, to provide electronic gift cards for some participants.

The other team members returned to work gradually beginning in early April. By July 1, all staff members began to report to the office two days a week in staggered shifts while teleworking three days a week.

"Having those two days on-site has helped with the morale," Griffin said. "Being isolated for however many months does something to your psyche. I think the staff appreciates being able to connect with other staff members safely. We were very mindful of how we brought staff back onto campus."

Griffin applauded her group's teamwork during difficult times, saying it was a testament to the UMB core value of collaboration and the fact that each team member has "unique gifts" to contribute to the mission.

"I recognize what my gifts are, and I appreciate the gifts of others," Griffin said. "I understand our gifts can be different, but if we show patience and a little bit of kindness, we can all utilize our gifts to make this world a better place."

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