

A REVIEW AND ANALYSIS OF LOS ANGELES COUNTY'S CIVIL SERVICE HIRING PROCESS

APRIL 2017



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SHEILA KUEHL
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Aisha Pittmon

The mission of the Commission is to examine any function of County government at the request of the Board of Supervisors, on its own initiative, or as suggested by others, and to submit recommendations to the Board which will improve local government economy, efficiency, and effectiveness.

**CITIZENS'
ECONOMY
EFFICIENCY
COMMISSION**
LOS ANGELES COUNTY
Est. 1964

April 28, 2017

To: Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas, Chair
Supervisor Hilda L. Solis
Supervisor Sheila Kuehl
Supervisor Janice Hahn
Supervisor Kathryn Barger

Chair

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Kyo Paul Jhin

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Edward Eng

Admin Assistant

Aisha Pittmon

Dear Supervisors:

The Citizens' Economy and Efficiency Commission is pleased to report that it has completed its review of Los Angeles County's Civil Service recruitment, exam and hiring processes, as directed by your Board in a motion on November 22, 2016.

The attached report entitled, *A Review of Los Angeles County's Civil Service Hiring Process*, is hereby submitted for the Board's review. During the course of our investigation, the Commission formulated 11 specific recommendations designed both to expedite the hiring process and to assist County managers in hiring the best possible candidates, while at the same time protecting the rights and interests of applicants both from within the County and from outside the County family.

The Commission would like to acknowledge the cooperation and candid feedback from County management. We also appreciate the opportunity to present this study to your Board and recommend the Board consider adopting the recommendations of this report.

Should you or your staff have any questions, please contact the Commission's Executive Director, at (213) 974-1491, or via email at: eeng@bos.lacounty.gov.

Respectfully,



Isaac Diaz Barcelona
Chairperson

C: Each Member of the Board
Chiefs of Staff, Board Offices
Lori Glasgow, Executive Officer, Board of Supervisors
Sachi Hamai, CEO
Jim Jones, COO
Mary Wickham, County Counsel
Lisa M. Garrett
Department Heads
Economy and Efficiency Commissioners



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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Our recommendations to improve the County’s Civil Service hiring process are clustered in three groups.

Recommendations 1 – 5: Process Improvements

The County has made significant strides in accelerating hiring, from automating job applications to improving test administration. These changes have helped open the County’s hiring process to a wider applicant pool as well as reduce delay, if not, expedite the process. These improvements notwithstanding, the hiring process remains at times a lengthy process and the following recommendations address some of the issues County Managers identified.

Hiring managers should be able to advise more directly the applicant screening professionals to determine if the applicants meet the minimum job requirements, thereby better ensuring the right candidates are being moved into the selection process. Hiring managers should have access to candidates’ resumes, and perhaps ask for cover letters explaining why the applicant believes he or she is a fit for that particular job in that particular Department in the County family. Departments should be encouraged to use e-mail or texts to communicate with applicants instead of relying on repetitive phone calls. The Department of Human Resources (DHR) and the Chief Executive Office (CEO) should explore ways to shorten the “on-boarding” process (the steps after a candidate has accepted a conditional job offer) by identifying which steps can be done concomitantly instead of sequentially. Further, the County should explore ways to eliminate the need for new Live-Scans when employees move between Departments (i.e., the Live Scan updates should follow the employee). Lastly, DHR should do random surveys of recent hires to learn from their perspective what the County does well and where the applicants encountered unreasonable delays in the hiring process.

Recommendation 6: Technological Improvements

The County has implemented a suite of new software in the HR arena which will both track and analyze the County-wide hiring process and streamline the list management process (the distribution among Departments of the lists of candidates who passed a particular exam and hence are eligible to be interviewed by the hiring Departments). This new software will provide dramatic benefits to the County.

However, the Task Force heard consistently from Department personnel that list management remains a major challenge, as multiple Departments use the same list and contact the same candidates. The Task Force recommends that DHR work with the NeoGov vendor to explore the feasibility of converting the list management process from a static list to a real-time database-driven system, whereby Departments can learn instantly if a candidate has a job offer or is no longer interested in County employment, while at the same time fully protecting a candidate’s opportunity to seek concurrent employment from multiple County Departments.

Recommendations 7 – 11: Rule Changes and Policy or Cultural Changes

The County’s hiring process is rooted in the Civil Service System, based on Civil Service Rules enacted by Ordinance. Certain features of the process are specifically detailed within those Rules, which has discouraged attempts at change in the past.

Nonetheless, our Task Force heard convincing evidence for recommending two changes: 1) eliminating the Appraisal of Promotability (AP) for all interdepartmental promotional exams; and 2) exploring alternate scoring techniques to broaden the number of candidates that hiring managers have access to through the Civil Service system. Alternate scoring techniques could include alternate banding (where there is only 1 band instead of 5), or changing the “rule of 5” (which allows hiring Departments to move to the next band only if fewer than 5 eligible candidates remain) to a “rule of 10”; or moving from 5 bands to 3 bands; or increasing the scoring range for band 1. These recommendations may require changes to the Civil Service Rules, which would require Board action and consultation with the County’s bargaining units.

But in addition to the Civil Service Rules, the County’s hiring system has centralized control that has grown up over the decades (in part, at least, in response to past failures by Departments to exercise allowed discretion). However, the County now has enterprise-wide data systems that will allow DHR and the CEO to quickly monitor Departmental personnel costs. These tools did not exist decades ago. Further, in recent years, the sophistication and expertise of our Department Heads has grown to match the increased complexity of the challenges the County faces.

Given those changes, the Task Force recommends delegating increased authority to Department Heads, specifically with regard to: 1) the ability, contingent on remaining within the Department Head’s personnel budget, to offer new employees hired from outside the County a beginning salary up to the mid-point of that job classification’s salary range, rather than having to seek permission from the CEO prior to making a job offer; 2) the authority to reallocate classified positions and adjust staffing levels within their Departments as needed, again contingent upon remaining within their authorized personnel budget; and, 3) creating a mechanism for “off-schedule” hiring, whereby a small amount of their personnel budget, to be determined by the Board of Supervisors and covering perhaps 200 positions county-wide, could be reserved for unidentified needs, allowing Department Heads (in consultation with the CEO) to hire exceptionally and uniquely talented individuals even if there is no officially identified vacancy.

II. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The purpose of this report is to provide suggestions for improving the Civil Service hiring process (for both new hires and promotions) in Los Angeles County. This paper is not intended to criticize the perceived bureaucratic structure and rules, but instead is meant to provoke thought and discussion aimed at improving the County's ability to govern and to motivate and manage its workforce. In particular, this report will highlight common insights and concerns provided by our interviewees, some of which are based on actual data on the hiring time cycle.

Principles of the County Civil Service and Personnel Systems

Article IX of the Los Angeles County Charter mandates a civil service system that ensures the County has a "productive, efficient, stable, and representative work force." The Charter directs the County to recruit, select, and retain employees "on the basis of their relative ability, knowledge, and skills relevant to the work to be performed." Virtually¹ all County employees are covered by Civil Service, including sworn officers.

The Civil Service System is administered by the Department of Human Resources (DHR) pursuant to the Civil Service Rules (hereafter, Rules), established by ordinance by the Board of Supervisors (and last substantively amended in 1988). These twenty-six Rules lay out, in intricate detail, the operational procedures ensuring that equal opportunity and merit drive the County's personnel system. Modifying the Rules requires, at a minimum, consultation with County bargaining units, as well as approval by the Board of Supervisors. Over the last 20 years, several efforts were launched to update these Rules, in particular to conform them to developing federal and state labor law; none of these efforts led to any modifications or updates.

The other key elements governing the County's personnel practices are the classification ordinance, which specifies in minute detail the job duties and necessary skills of each of the approximately 2,400 different jobs within the County; the salary ordinance, which sets salary ranges for those classifications; and the collective bargaining agreements with the various represented employee groups. Overlaid atop all of this are federal and State statutes protecting both private and public-sector employees in areas stretching from discrimination and pay equity to job safety.

The Rules are intended to ensure that the Civil Service process is free of political influence, patronage or bias in the hiring, promotion and dismissal of employees. While these Rules were originally created to improve government operations, this aging set of hiring rules now evokes a consistent response from managers on its ineffectiveness. Managers interviewed uniformly voiced their concerns that the system hinders rather than helps them hire suitable employees, and with some citing these outdated rules as the most serious impediment to accomplishing their mission. One manager lamented, "How can

¹ Those exempted include: the Board of Supervisors and their appointed deputies; elected and appointed Department heads, their direct reports, and those managers' direct reports.

merit be served when supervisors are only allowed three choices from among hundreds of possible candidates for a job? How can merit be served when pay is determined mainly on the basis of time on the job?"; another manager commented, "the County cannot hire like normal managers, advertise a position, take resumes, interview people and talk to references. We have to hire most employees from lists of those who have taken written civil service exams. Often we have to take the top scorer or one of the top three scorers—regardless of whether that person is motivated or otherwise qualified."

III. THE COMMISSION CHARGE, SCOPE OF WORK AND METHODOLOGY

On November 22, 2016, the Board of Supervisors directed the Economy and Efficiency Commission (EEC) to examine the County's Civil Service recruitment, exam and hiring processes. The Commission delegated this study to a Task Force of eight Commissioners, assisted by the Commission's Executive Director.

The Board of Supervisors directed this Commission to assess the County's hiring system because of consistent anecdotal reports that the process seemed unaccountably slow, and the Board's concern that these lengthy delays undermine both the effectiveness of County managers and the hiring of the best candidates.

Due to the complexity of the subject, the Board granted the Commission a 90-day extension. The Task Force narrowed the objectives of the study to the following two objectives:

- I. To identify major areas of concern where the Civil Service hiring process is in urgent need of reform, and to identify specific issues, the resolution of which could have significant impact on improving County operations.
- II. To provide recommendations which can substantively improve the operation of the Los Angeles County Civil Service hiring system.

In reviewing these topics, the Task Force met with 9 County Department Heads, Board Offices, the CEO's Office, County Counsel, the Executive Office, union representatives, and conferred extensively with DHR. The Task Force also attempted to gather data from Departments and from DHR on their actual timelines that our hiring processes are experiencing.

This report addresses the major issues examined by the Commission in response to the Board's request. While this report focuses on vetting of departments' suggestions for hiring process improvements, it also includes updated information regarding steps that DHR has recently undertaken and/or completed in order to reduce the hiring cycle times.

IV. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

a. An Overview of the Hiring Process

The hiring process begins by identifying a specific “item”, meaning a particular position in a particular job category in a particular Department. That “item” carries with it a job title, a job description, a scope of responsibility, and a salary range, and the hiring Department must have the budget authority to fill that position. Departments must get approval from the CEO’s Class and Compensation Office for each “item” in their organization chart. The Task Force heard clearly that the process with the CEO’s Office to authorize new items, to define a new job category and determine the appropriate salary range, can be time consuming. The Task Force encourages the CEO’s office to find ways to streamline this process while ensuring that its fiscal obligations are met.

Once an item has been approved and budget authority obtained, then a job bulletin announcing a vacancy can be drafted. This job bulletin specifies the minimum requirements applicants must meet to be considered for the job and sets a deadline for applicants to apply. At the same time that the job bulletin is drafted, either the hiring Department itself or DHR must develop an examination plan to measure the ability of applicants to do the job. That test, like the job bulletin, uses the job description to identify key qualifications or abilities or competencies that should be tested to assess applicants.

The variety of different jobs within the County lead to a variety of approaches in testing applicants. Some jobs are unique to the hiring Department, so the Department handles testing internally or requests DHR’s assistance. Others are common to Departments throughout the County, so DHR develops and administers tests on a “master calendar” for county-wide job categories. Some jobs are promotions open only to internal candidates; other jobs are open to external applicants as well as County employees. Tests can be written or computerized, or be oral interviews, or reviews of resumes or work histories or combinations of these elements. Promotional exams may also require an AP to be completed by the employee’s current manager; the Director of Human Resources can approve using the Work Style Assessment (WSA) computerized test instead of the AP.

Applicants responding to job bulletins use the County’s computerized system to submit resumes and other documentation as appropriate. Applicants are then screened to determine if they in fact meet the minimum requirements specified in the job bulletin. This screening task is done by HR personnel either within the hiring Department or within DHR, but those personnel must be separate from the hiring managers to eliminate the potential for favoritism or bias. Once an applicant passes the screening process, they are contacted and scheduled for the exam.

The exam process itself can be remarkably complex to administer. For some open competitive exams, DHR has had up to 16,000 applicants. DHR’s Wilshire testing facility can accommodate only 50 applicants per session. The Department has often had to rent space at the Convention Center, when it was available. But however complicated written tests are, interviews are significantly more time consuming and difficult to

organize, due to the difficulty in finding raters for the interview panels and in coordinating schedules. DHR found that exams without interviews were, on average, 79 days shorter, eliminating nearly three months from the hiring timeline.

After all applicants have taken the exam and been scored, a list of eligible candidates is compiled and candidates, based on their scores, are grouped into “bands”. Band 1 includes candidates scoring 94.5 to 100; bands 2 through 5 cover lower scores. There can also be a band V for candidates with veteran’s preferences who score higher than 100.

For county-wide positions, DHR compiles these lists and distributes the lists of eligible candidates to all the County Departments that may be hiring. Thus, multiple Departments are working the same list, calling the same candidates, and possibly making contingent job offers to the same candidates. Thus, not surprisingly, list management was high on the list of obstacles that Department Heads identified.

Once hiring managers have a list of candidates, they may interview and choose candidates only from the highest band, unless there are fewer than 5 eligible candidates remaining, in which case the hiring manager can then consider candidates from the next band. This “rule of 5”, and the score levels that define each band, are “hard-wired” into the Civil Service Rules, in Sections 11.01 (C), (D) and (E).

After the hiring manager makes a selection, the County extends a contingent job offer to the applicant. If the applicant accepts the offer, they must then pass a Live Scan background check and any other medical, physical or security checks appropriate for the particular job being sought. If a County employee accepts a transfer or promotion within their current Department, no new Live Scan is required, but if the employee moves to a new Department, a new Live Scan is required, even if one was just done only weeks ago for the employee’s current Department. Upon reporting to work, the employee must then get a County e-mail address, a user profile, and various other administrative tasks must be completed before the new employee can actually start working.

It is, therefore, not surprising that the County’s hiring process can take months. DHR provided some average times from bulletin close (the deadline for applicants to respond to a job opening) to list promulgation (when Departments receive a list of candidates they can begin interviewing) that can range from 31 days to 114 days. Thus, it can routinely take one to four months from submitting one’s application to becoming eligible to be interviewed for the job in question.

b. DHR Reforms

DHR is acutely aware of these long lead times, and they have implemented several improvements aimed at improving the quality and overall timeliness of the hiring process. The improvements included:

- **Broad-Based Testing (BBT):** the use of the same tests across multiple classifications that share similar minimum qualifications and competencies. Candidates can be considered for multiple positions with one examination score.
- **NEOGOV:** an HR software to manage the recruitment and hiring process by automating the entire recruitment and selection process.
- **New Work Style Assessment Model:** a behavioral-based alternative to the AP test, whose use must be approved by Personnel Director if being used to replace the AP. The results have shown an enormous reduction in appeals and tremendous cost and time savings.
- **Use of computerized exams instead of interviews:** for information technology positions, DHR has contracted with a vendor to obtain computerized tests that assess highly technical IT competencies. Using these tests instead of interviews reduced the bulletin close to list promulgation timeline from 172 days down to 84 days.
- **Eliminating Live Scan for internal departmental promotions.**
- **Classification reforms²:** CEO has had a long-running effort to streamline the County's job families/class structure by consolidating classes and re-designing job descriptions.

DHR is in the process of automating many of the county's backend personnel systems. A next generation employee data analytics platform - Human Resources Analytics – is currently under development and it will provide a dashboard full of statistics, and if funding is made available, can be complemented with prescriptive and forecasting analysis tools. This will enable County managers to track personnel from the time an employee applies, what sorts of workforce training would aid in their job or help them move up, to forecasting tools that would predict how long they will stay with the county. This project is scheduled to go live in the summer of 2017.

Nonetheless, despite DHR's best efforts, the hiring process remains lengthy and subject to unanticipated delays. Our Task Force has identified 11 recommendations, clustered in three groups, which respond to some of the issues we heard repeatedly from County Department Heads.

² A thorough analysis of the County's classification system was completed some years ago by DHR, the results of which are contained in the Human Resources Study Assessment of Four Core Human Resources Systems: Recruitment, Selection, Classification, Compensation and Opportunities for Improvement." C.M. Consultants and Reward Strategy group, Inc., November 2009.

c. Process Improvements

The County has made notable progress in automating both front-end processes, allowing applicants to submit applications on-line, as well as back-end processes. However, it appears that the County's internal coordination requires process improvement.

In order to prevent inappropriate bias in the selection process, hiring managers cannot also be the individuals who screen candidates to determine if they meet the minimum job requirements and thus are eligible to take the exam for that job. This is an entirely reasonable separation of duties to protect the integrity of the hiring process and to protect the rights of candidates. However, it appears to the Task Force that in its efforts to prevent bias, the County formally or informally created an excessively strict separation between the hiring manager(s) and the screeners. Language used to describe Minimum Requirements listed on classification specifications can be confusing to both the exam analyst and candidate. The Task Force heard cases where screeners, even in the same Department as the hiring manager, either misunderstood the minimum job requirements or misinterpreted typical applicant responses, or hiring managers failed to communicate the qualities they were truly searching for in job applicants. DHR recognizes the potential for this and, for the larger exams they run, has sometimes run "calibration panels" where, early in the process, hiring managers can review preliminary decisions by screening panels and identify disconnects. The worst-case scenarios entail jettisoning months of work by screeners and starting over, adding three to four months to the hiring process.

Recommendation 1: The Task Force recommends that DHR establish and sanction clear communication channels between hiring managers and screeners, to review the screening process before and during its implementation.

This will enhance the accuracy of the screening process (whether done by DHR or by the hiring Department) and help ensure the right candidates are given the opportunity to compete for the jobs for which they are qualified.

In talking with Department Heads, it became clear that there was some disagreement as to whether hiring managers were entitled to review candidates' application materials. Further, individuals who had served on interview panels similarly had been denied access to candidates' resumes that impaired their ability to rate those candidates accurately. DHR noted that out-of-date training materials may have given a false impression as to the rules surrounding this issue. Many hiring managers had difficulty determining if an individual on a county-wide list was really an appropriate fit for a particular Department. As an example, an applicant on a County-wide Administrative Manager 1 list might have the background for work in Regional Planning but not in Health Services, yet each Department is given the same list with the same candidates. Job requirements for county-wide positions are necessarily general, and they often do not identify needs unique to a specific Department. DHR has tried to ameliorate this issue by establishing 18 selective certification lists for the Administrative Services Manager series. Providing a resume

might help hiring managers choose candidates with a better fit. Asking candidates to submit a cover letter, when being asked to interview for a specific job with a specific Department, might be of even greater assistance to hiring managers in finding candidates best suited for their Departments.

Recommendation 2: The Task Force recommends that DHR clarify that each hiring Department has the right to access resumes for each candidate. Further, we recommend that hiring Departments be authorized to encourage each interview candidate to submit a cover letter addressing the candidate's experience and interest. Exam panel interviewers should be provided with candidates' applications and/or resumes.

Once Departments obtain lists of qualified candidates, scheduling candidates for hiring interviews can be a surprisingly time-consuming task. Many Departments try to contact applicants by telephone on no less than three successive days before they can code the applicant as unresponsive. This process appears both antiquated and distant from how many applicants would prefer to be contacted.

Recommendation 3: The Task Force recommends that DHR clarify that each hiring department can communicate with candidates by e-mail and/or text message.

This change of procedures would be substantially less burdensome on County personnel, and be more effective in reaching candidates. The County would need to emphasize to applicants that communications will be via e-mail and/or text messages, and that applicants will need to respond promptly if they wish to be considered for the job. Since applicants already apply through online applications and communicate through email for these purposes, this change in communications is not unreasonable or counter to current methods.

One manager requested an additional option to contact employees when they are out of the area either on personal business or have to attend to business requirements.

Recommendation 4: The Task Force recommends that DHR and the CEO explore ways to shorten the “on-boarding” process by identifying which steps can be done concomitantly instead of sequentially. Further, the County should explore ways to eliminate the need for new Live-Scans when employees move between Departments.

There are a variety of steps that occur after a candidate has accepted a conditional job offer, generally referred to as the on-boarding process. One, in particular, involves Live-Scans. These are a relatively expensive background check required for all County employees. Employees that transfer to new jobs within their Department need not get a new Live-Scan, but current employees who move to a new Department must get a new Live-Scan, no matter how recent their last scan was. This appears to stem from the concern that information reported back to the employee's old Department would not be

communicated to their new Department. This can be corrected by a technological fix, either transmitting all Live-Scan updates to DHR, which would then pass along the data to the employee's current Department, or simply having Departments exchange data. Departments, after all, belong to the same County. Aside from cost savings, the Task Force heard that half the Live Scans come back in one day, a quarter within one week, the remainder arrive considerably later, if at all. Eliminating Live-Scan for all cross-Departmental promotions and transfers would be a substantial savings in time and money.

Similarly, the CEO and DHR should explore what other processes can be done concurrently, rather than waiting for Live-Scan results or other steps, once a candidate has accepted a conditional job offer.

Recommendation 5: The Task Force recommends that DHR conduct random surveys of new or recent hires to learn from their perspective what the County does well and where the applicants encountered unreasonable delays in the hiring process.

One Department suggested including a survey in the New Employee Orientation program. The information could be a useful complement to the statistical analyses the County will soon be able to conduct using the HR-Analytics platform.

d. Technological Improvements

The NeoGov Phase 2 (list management function) will be implemented beginning in April, 2017. This software package handles many of the tasks of list management – the compiling of eligible candidates for each job and distributing those lists of candidates to one or more Departments with job openings. The simple job of uploading eligible candidates into the system used to take up to 4 – 5 days, and that delay will be eliminated with NeoGov.

The primary obstacle Departments face is not getting the list, but rather using the same list as numerous other Departments. This issue applies only to the “master calendar” job categories, where DHR compiles a single list from which all County Departments must choose candidates. Unfortunately, there are many such jobs categories, and Departments often use shared lists.

Currently, a certified list of eligible candidates is sent to a hiring Department via a PDF document. The final outcome for each candidate on this list (selected candidate, interviewed and not selected, candidate failed to reply, etc.) must be communicated to DHR by the hiring Department by handwriting the outcome (at times for hundreds of candidates) on a hard copy of the list and sending it back to DHR so the information can be entered into NeoGov. Other Departments can learn of updated status only by requesting a fresh list.

Recommendation 6: The Task Force recommends that DHR work with the NeoGov vendor to convert the list management process from a static list distribution system to a real-time database-driven system, whereby Departments can learn instantly if a candidate has a job offer or is no longer interested in County employment, while at the same time fully protecting a candidate’s opportunity to seek employment from multiple County Departments concurrently.

Probably the single most consistent complaint we heard from Department Heads was the inefficiency in combing through the same list as six other Departments, calling the same candidates, and hearing that they had already taken a job with another Department. Further, the repeated contacts from multiple Departments often left the applicant both confused and less than impressed with the County’s lack of efficiency. Departments should be enabled to enter real-time updates that can assist other Departments in avoiding unnecessary contacts without prejudicing applicants’ rights to compete for jobs in different County Departments at the same time, and even to entertain conditional job offers from multiple Departments at the same time.

e. Rule Changes

A typical part of County promotional exams is an AP, an assessment completed by an employee’s current manager evaluating the employee’s readiness to be promoted and their ability to perform the new job for which they are applying. The Task Force heard that AP’s can be an effective tool for intra-Departmental promotional (restricted to employees to a specific department) exams, when managers understand the new job requirements and can collectively assess employees, thus avoiding individual variations in grading style or perception.

There is universal agreement that AP’s are costly, time-consuming, and ineffective for inter-Departmental promotions, when managers have no familiarity with the requirements of the job being examined for. Department Head comments ranged from: “Too many departments inflate their scores. In general, it adds no value.”; “there are unnecessary and lengthy delays in getting AP’s for applicants from other Departments.”; “the process is too subjective. Look at the grade variance, it creates morale issues.” to “Eliminating it will save a lot of time and reduce the number of appeals greatly.”

In lieu of the AP, DHR responded by offering a WSA alternative, a behavioral-based model that assesses a candidate’s approach toward solving a situational problem, designed to assess their readiness for managerial roles. It is used for all broad-based testing for Master Calendar promotional exams and for specific exams when Departments request them.

Recommendation 7: The Task Force recommends that the County eliminate the AP for all inter-departmental promotional exams and mandate the use of the WSA instead. Departments should be given the option of choosing the WSA or the AP for intra-Departmental promotional opportunities, with a stated preference for the WSA.

Nearly all Departments interviewed preferred the WSA alternative. Replacing the AP with the WSA resulted in cost and administrative efficiencies. In head to head comparison across 6 exams using APs and WSAs, using WSAs saved on average 56 days and \$626,000. Further, looking at Civil Service Commission appeal rates in FY 2015 – 2016³, 256 appeals were received challenging AP scores, while only 34 appeals were received challenging WSA scores. Twenty-seven of the AP appeals were granted, while only 1 WSA appeal was upheld.

A few Departments indicated that the WSA tests helped hiring managers to know which soft skills and behavioral interview questions they should pay attention to during the interview. One Department commented: “Employees and job candidates have a broad range of skills, abilities, and work styles. These differences are not always apparent on a resume or during an interview, so behavioral assessments can give you another tool for understanding what the candidate has to offer and how they will fit into your work culture.”

The Task Force did hear some cautionary notes about the WSA. The most common theme was the “great employees can’t pass the WSA, but DHR is not able to provide specifics on why they failed or how to prepare for future WSAs. DHR does not offer practice tests.”

The requirement for AP’s is found in Rule 7.13 (C) 1. However, the following section, (C) 2, says “The appraisal of promotability may be excluded from the examination when it is deemed by the director of personnel to be in the best interest of the service.” This appears to give the Director of DHR the unrestricted authority to exclude APs from all inter-Departmental exams. Thus, the Board of Supervisors may seek to amend the Rules, after consultation with bargaining units, explicitly to exclude APs from use in inter-Departmental exams, or DHR may determine that they can act unilaterally. Either way, there seems to be nearly universal agreement that the use of APs should be discontinued.

Recommendation 8: The Task Force recommends that the Board of Supervisors broaden the number of candidates that hiring managers have access to through the Civil Service system.

This could be achieved by one or more of the following alternatives:

- Providing Department Heads greater discretion to use Alternate Banding, whereby all candidates that pass the minimum qualifications are placed in less

³ 8,840 WSAs were administered for promotional exams (interdepartmental promotional and departmental promotional) vs 8,546 administered AP’s submitted for equivalent exams.

than 5 bands. This has been used by Health Services, but generally in cases where there were more vacancies than there were applicants.

- Changing the “rule of 5”, which allows hiring managers to move on to the next band only when there are less than 5 eligible candidates in the higher band. One suggestion was to change this rule to the “rule of 10”.
- Changing the number of bands from 5 to 3, so that band 1 might include candidates scoring between 83 – 100, instead of from 95 – 100.
- Increasing the width of band 1 and then adjusting the remaining bands to accommodate that change.

The most common concerns expressed by most Department Heads were that: (a) the current restrictions impose significant challenges on hiring managers, and (2) Department Heads wanted greater flexibility. Several questioned whether small differences in scores between Band 1 and Band 2 candidates had any significance whatsoever. While most agreed that candidates at the top of the ranking in Band 1 typically were better suited than candidates at the lower end of the ranking in Band 5, most believed that the hiring manager interview was by far the most effective tool for identifying candidates who would be successful in the job.

f. Culture Changes

The County has always struggled to find a balance between empowering decentralized Departments and retaining sufficient centralized controls to protect the County from legal and fiscal liability. That conflict is quite apparent in the hiring process.

Department Heads are tightly constrained in how they organize and staff their Departments and how they set salaries for external hires. The need for pre-approvals from the central agencies can sometimes add additional time to what would, in the private sector, be a straightforward hiring action. Department Heads consistently noted the difficulty in recruiting high-level talent under these constraints.

The Task Force also heard the perspective of the CEO’s office, shared by at least one other Department Head, about the concerns for County-wide equity and fairness, both across Departments and to current employees potentially in the same job classification as a new hire. Pay equity and morale among incumbents were issues raised, in addition to concerns about salary creep and overall costs to the County if current restrictions were eased.

Nonetheless, the Task Force believes that in three specific areas, the County should go further in empowering County Department Heads. While past Department Heads may have abused discretion resulting in budgetary overruns, the Task Force believes that current technology, and in particular the County’s enterprise-wide financial systems, now give both the CEO and the Auditor-Controller more powerful tools and more immediate feedback to detect financial overruns or issues of pay inequity.

The County's management corps has grown in skill and expertise and professionalism. The Board expects more of our most senior managers, and believes they can deliver. This Task Force recommends empowering those senior managers to do their jobs efficiently and effectively, but also to hold them accountable for their actions. Rather than needing to seek pre-approval, which some Department Heads indicated took an inordinate amount of time for relatively routine decisions, this Task Force recommends allowing the Department Heads to act, but also requiring them to justify their actions for the files, and then routinely auditing them to ensure their actions were well justified.

The Task Force recognizes that the following three recommendations are exceedingly intricate and will need to be examined closely by the CEO and County Counsel.

Recommendation 9: The Task Force recommends allowing Department Heads, contingent on remaining within their Department's personnel budget, to offer new employees hired from outside the county a beginning salary up to the mid-point of that job classification's salary range, rather than having to seek permission from the CEO prior to making a contingent job offer.

Currently, Department Heads seek approval from the CEO to make salary offers beyond step 1. Typically, this would cover cases where an applicant is already earning a salary well above Step 1 for that pay grade, and the applicant can provide W-2's or other evidence to verify that salary level. This is otherwise known as Special Step Placement. In general, such requests are granted by the CEO, but often after several weeks of negotiations back and forth, during which time a particularly attractive candidate may well receive and take competing offers.

Recommendation 10: The Task Force recommends delegating increased authority to Department Heads to reallocate classified positions and adjust staffing levels within their Departments as needed, again contingent upon remaining within their authorized personnel budget.

This recommendation is for Departments with vacancies and not intended for use to circumvent the Civil Service system. There is an existing process, called OPA (Ordinance Position Authority), which allows Departments to request variations in their established structure to the CEO Classification unit. It is designed as a temporary fix, with the variance to be formalized through the next budget cycle. The Task Force heard different views on whether OPA requests were routinely approved or disputed. From the perspective of Department Heads, we heard significant concerns that their ability to staff their Department was often impeded by central authorities. And the need for central approvals often delays the front end of the hiring process.

One of the key underlying issues was the method by which the CEO's Classification Unit determines the appropriate level for a job. Because they attempt to use only entirely objective standards, decisions often come down to analyzing an incumbent's span of control, rather than assessing the technical substance of their responsibilities (which often

relies on a subjective judgment). Several Department Heads focused on that process as one which led to disputes with Departments.

One Department Head summed up his perspective of the central challenge for a manager of multi-billion dollar enterprise, “more than any structural or financial decision, attracting exceptional talent is the lifeblood of a successful enterprise. Private sector organizations recognize this and have mechanisms to facilitate that. Public sector organizations often do not.”

Recommendation 11: The Task Force recommends that the County create a mechanism for “off-schedule” hiring, whereby a small amount of the personnel budget, to be determined by the Board, could be reserved for unidentified needs, allowing Department Heads (in consultation with the CEO) to hire exceptionally and uniquely talented individuals even if there is no officially identified vacancy for them to fill.

This is perhaps our most unconventional recommendation, which might be counterintuitive to the core concepts of the Civil Service system. Yet, other public enterprises – in particular, the City of Los Angeles – have such mechanisms. Under our existing Charter, the County can hire outside the Civil Service system for Department Heads, their immediate subordinates, and those managers’ immediate subordinates, otherwise known as unclassified personnel. But this mechanism should be available for individuals lower down the hierarchy. An example might be when a Departmental Chief Information Officer (CIO) meets an extraordinary cyber-security specialist at an Information Technology (IT) convention. Even if we do not have an established item for that person, the Department Head argued, we should have a mechanism whereby we can hire that person. The ability to compete for that sort of talent is critical to the long-term success of the County’s workforce. As a reference point, the City of Los Angeles limits this process for hiring to 200 individuals, and the Task Force envisioned a similarly small number of such off-schedule hires county-wide.

V. CONCLUSION

Los Angeles County's hiring process is as complex as the County's workforce, which numbers over 100,000 employees in a vast variety of jobs stretching across thirty-four Departments. It is not surprising, then, given the many facets of the system and the unique demands placed upon the County, that the process can be not merely methodical but slow. This Report presents a set of 11 recommendations, varying from modest improvements in communication between elements within the hiring enterprise, to potential changes to the Rules which frame and constrain the process, through to potentially fundamental cultural changes in the relationship between Departmental leadership and centralized County administrators. The Commission's fundamental goal has been to bring greater speed and efficiency to the process while still ensuring that the Civil Service system achieves its core objectives - to prevent bias or patronage in the workplace, and to protect the rights of job applicants throughout the County system.

The Commission hopes it has achieved these goals and has provided worthwhile recommendations to the Board. The Commission recognizes the numerous complexities within the County's recruitment and hiring processes. While we believe the potential for process improvement is high, we acknowledge that many of the challenges facing the civil service hiring process are highly technical and that our recommendations need to be vetted with operational staff who have deep expertise in the day to day administration of the system and who can bring the perspective of both the hiring departments and the central administration to the table.

VI. ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The Economy and Efficiency Commission gratefully acknowledges the substantial contributions of our respondents. These interviewees were generous with their time and candor. Their help has been instrumental in our efforts to craft recommendations that we hope will improve County government.

APPENDIX A: BOARD MOTION



**STATEMENT OF PROCEEDINGS FOR THE
REGULAR MEETING OF THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
OF THE COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES HELD IN ROOM 381B
OF THE KENNETH HAHN HALL OF ADMINISTRATION
500 WEST TEMPLE STREET, LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 900**

Tuesday, November 22, 2016

9:30 AM

27. Recommendation as submitted by Supervisors Antonovich and Kuehl: Instruct the Economy and Efficiency Commission, working with the Chief Executive Officer, County Counsel and Director of Personnel, to evaluate and report back to the Board in 60 days, on ways to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the County examination and hiring processes. (16-5789)

Arnold Sachs addressed the Board.

On motion of Supervisor Ridley-Thomas, seconded by Supervisor Solis, this item was approved.

Ayes: 5 - Supervisor Ridley-Thomas, Supervisor Kuehl, Supervisor Knabe, Supervisor Antonovich and Supervisor Solis

Attachments: [Motion by Supervisors Antonovich and Kuehl Report](#)
[Video](#)
[Audio](#)

The foregoing is a fair statement of the proceedings of the regular meeting, November 22, 2016, by the Board of Supervisors of the County of Los Angeles and ex officio the governing body of all other special assessment and taxing districts, agencies and authorities for which said Board so acts.

Lori Glasgow, Executive Officer
Executive Officer-Clerk
of the Board of Supervisors

By

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lori Glasgow".

APPENDIX B: Department Head Interview Questions

General Questions:

1. Based on staff hired in recent years, do you feel that the vetting process has resulted in staff that have the skills to carry out the jobs for which they were hired? Are there any deficiencies in the screening / hiring process that result in challenges in selecting appropriate staff hires? How has it hindered your organization in hiring quality employees in a timely fashion. Please be specific.
2. Are there specific changes that you would like to see that would assist your efforts in the timely hiring of key employees?
3. What rule changes might enhance both the fairness of the hiring process as well as its efficiency?
4. Have you found the current system of classification of employees adequate for your needs? The term "classification" refers to an employee's official job title (with specific duties, responsibilities, and salary levels enumerated).
5. Are there critical positions in your department that you feel need to be handled on a "fast-track" hiring process? If so, what are they? What makes these positions critical to your operations? What has your experience been to date in filling these vacancies in a timely manner? Are there any legal, operational or other constraints that need to be taken into consideration if a "fast-track" hiring process is proposed for these positions?

Promotion

6. Have the recent changes in the Performance Evaluation (PE) process and/or the Appraisal of Promotability (AP) process helped you identify, promote, and reward high-performing employees?
7. Do you feel that you have access to a strong pipeline of trained and skilled staff to move up into management positions over time? If so, what about the current system makes this possible? If not, where are these deficiencies and what changes might you recommend?

Hiring Time Cycle

8. Can you provide the last 2 years' average Time-to-Hire cycle from beginning (from the time a vacancy is created) to employee start date (if possible, please also provide the times associated with the intermediate steps for the process) for the following items:
 - A key position unique to your department (if applicable)
 - Any Supervisory/Managerial position that is common across departments (i.e., Admin positions, Budget Analyst, etc.).

APPENDIX C: REFERENCES

Mahaffey, Cheryl, and Sandra M. Comrie. “Los Angeles County’s Human Resources Study: Assessment of four Core Human Resources Systems.” June 2010.

Economy and Efficiency Commission. “A Review and Analysis of Los Angeles County’s Human Resources and Civil Service Commission Process.” November 2010.

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Economy and Efficiency Commission. “A Review of Los Angeles County’s Investigative and Management Phases of the Disciplinary Process.” May 2016.

Lemus, Raul. Interview. 8 March. 2017.
City of Los Angeles, Personnel Department
Assistant General Manager

Rodriguez, Tina. Interview. 8 March. 2017.
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Chief Personnel Analyst