



Public Safety – Hiring Process Inquiry: Fire & Rescue

An audit of the hiring process for public safety offices within Doña Ana County was conducted as a special assignment. This audit focused on evaluating hiring procedures for Doña Ana County Fire & Rescue, to assess the efficiency of current hiring practices. The audit evaluated Fire & Rescue's process for acquiring new hires and conducting internal promotions for the period of January 1, 2023 through May 31, 2023.

The following procedures were performed:

- Acquired hiring data for all new hires (Firefighter/Emergency Medical Technician Basic) and promotions (Lieutenant) for the period under review
- Obtained both Human Resources (HR) and Fire & Rescue validation of hiring data
- Divided the hiring process into manageable phases or timeframes to identify areas of efficiency/inefficiency – See **Audit Focus**
- Evaluated attrition rates within each hiring phase

Audit Focus

Fire & Rescue recruitment responsibilities include the following steps:

- 2) - Date job posting closed to date department is ready to conduct interviews
- 4) - Date of receipt of qualified candidate listing to date department contacted candidates
- 5) - Date of interview to date of delivery of recruitment and background packets to HR
- 7) - Date of receipt of compensation offer from HR to date contingent job offer made to candidate

Human Resources responsibilities include the following:

- 1) - Date department notified HR of position vacancy to date job was posted
- 3) - Date of position closing to date of release of qualified candidates list to department
- 6) - Date of delivery of recruitment packet to HR to date compensation offer emailed to department

An in-depth analysis was conducted of the hiring process to 1) evaluate the time necessary for completion of each step, and 2) determine compliance with current Standard Operating Procedures and hiring protocols.

Audit Objectives

The audit objective was to analyze hiring timeframes for the period under review, in an effort to identify and address areas that could be made more efficient. The internal auditor met with the Doña Ana County (DAC) Fire & Rescue Fire Chief, Deputy Fire Chief, Training Officer, Recruiting Coordinator, and the Human Resources Administrator to verify data accuracy and completeness, and discuss the duties they performed in the hiring of 17 Firefighter/Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) Basic applicants (new hires) and 3 internal/higher level promotion applicants who started new positions during the period under review.

Observations, Department Input, Recommendations, & Conclusion

1. Date Job Posting Requested to Date Job is Posted

Observation(s): Hiring data indicated that this process could be completed within 9 days or take up to 16 working days. An inquiry revealed that unlike the other Departments of Public Safety reviewed in this Audit, Fire & Rescue did not have a Recruiter within its department for the audit period under review, which left Human Resources to take on more of the hiring duties.

Human Resources Input: Some hiring process requirements changed during the period under review. The changes required more work from the department, and such changes normally require adjustments and a learning curve, which also contributed to elongate the process.

Fire & Rescue Input: Management confirmed the statements above.

Recommendations: Fire & Rescue has taken the initiative to hire a Recruiting Coordinator since the audited period under review. While Human Resources confirms that prior notification was given to the department before making changes to this process, the Audit recommends updating the current Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) manual to state that when/if changes to any hiring process occur both the department and Human Resources are given a minimum 5-day notice.

As this process requires iCIMS authorization from Human Resources and Finance consecutively, the SOP should require each signing department to complete their authorizations within 24 – 48 hours of iCIMS notification. Fire & Rescue management should ensure that there is a designee in the event of an absence to avoid delays in processing.

Conclusion: This phase of the hiring process should be made a three to four-work-day process for repetitive job postings, and would only require more time in the event of needed approval for changes to the job description(s).

2. Date Job Posting Closed vs Date Department is Ready to Interview

Observation(s): Audit results indicated that Fire & Rescue was either ready to conduct interviews upon the date of job posting close, or within working three days thereafter.

Fire & Rescue Input: *No input required.*

Human Resources Input: *Non-applicable; this is a Fire & Rescue responsibility.*

Recommendations: None.

Conclusion: The Audit noted that the 3-work day delays were only applicable to internal candidates (who already worked for Fire & Rescue), thus this was not deemed to be an area of material weakness.

3. Date of position closing to date of release of qualified candidates list to department

Observation(s): The time between the closing of the job posting until Human Resources notified the department, ranged from one to six working days. As Human Resources decides which applicants meet the basic requirements for the job, the department must await Human Resources' screening of applicant/candidate qualifications before they are notified of who can be contacted for tests and interviews.

Human Resources Input: The internal auditor was able to identify that part of the delay was caused by Fire & Rescue's need to revise the interview questions, which resulted in Human Resources' having to review and approve the updated questions. While Fire & Rescue will still obtain Human Resources approval when modifying/updating interview questions, the application screening function is now handled within Fire & Rescue.

Fire & Rescue Input: *See the response in Human Resources Input, above.*

Recommendations: As Fire & Rescue has hired a Recruiting Coordinator since the audit period under review, who will take over this screening function, the Audit recommends that Fire & Rescue management:

- 1) Fully utilize the current iCIMS recruiting software to better screen applications; and
- 2) Cease the practice of only contacting candidates after the job posting closes. Instead, applications for Firefighter/Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) Basic positions should be screened upon receipt.

Conclusion: The screening of job applications should be completed within three working days of application receipt for Firefighter/Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) Basic positions.

4. Date of receipt of qualified candidate listing to date department contacted candidates

Observation(s): After receiving Human Resources' notification it is up to the department to contact the candidates for an interview. The time between Human Resources notifications of qualified candidates to the department until the candidates were contacted took up to five working days for three candidates while all others were notified on the same day.

Fire & Rescue Input: *No input required.* The Audit noted a direct correlation between the Thanksgiving Holiday and the incidents that took four and five working days for candidate notification by the department.

Human Resources Input: *Non-applicable; this is a Fire & Rescue responsibility.*

Recommendations: None.

Conclusion: Qualified candidates should be contacted within two working days of the completion of the application screening.

Auditor's Note: While statistical data indicated that Fire & Rescue had lost approximately 50% of its *Firefighter/EMT Basic* applicants before the interview date in the next section, an evaluation of these statistics revealed that half of the applicants had not responded to requests for testing while the other half did not pass the required tests.

5. Date of interview to date of delivery of recruitment and background packets to HR

Observation(s): The time between the completions of interviews until completed recruitment packets were delivered to HR ranged from as few as 16 working days up to 44.

Fire & Rescue Input: As this delay falls within the department, management explained the tediousness of the background investigation, eye detect, and reference checking processes, which can take an extended amount of time. The Audit notes that the occasions wherein reference checks were completed in three to four working days pertained only to the three internal promotions wherein only a personnel file review is required.

Human Resources Input: *Non-applicable; this is a Fire & Rescue responsibility.*

Recommendations: The internal auditor learned that 1) departments have a checklist of required data for employment packets that can be followed to reduce incidents of missing information, and 2) Information Discovery Services (IDS) is a contractor that has been used by another department to deliver to Human Resources the required applicant data within 15 – 30 calendar days, in a consistent, professional, and complete report.

The Audit recommends that Fire & Rescue management employ the following guidelines:

- 1) Recruiting personnel should verify reference contacts while with applicants, ensuring that applicants submit a listing of job references in the desired detail and hierarchy (with current contacts), informing them that outdated references could greatly delay the hiring process;
- 2) Set a time limit for candidates to provide requested follow up information; and
- 3) Set an initial submission of recruitment packet delivery to HR, of 15 working days; or
- 4) Consider the **costs* versus benefits of employing the services of an IDS type of contractor (many organizations offer such services), on a trial basis, and assess the results. *The Audit recommends consulting with HR if this option is selected, as the organization using such services would be subject to additional statutory requirements per the Fair Credit Reporting Act.*

Conclusion: This phase of the hiring process can take the greatest amount of time, however the recommendations above should result in completion of this process within 20 - 25 working days.

* Estimates for IDS services for public safety personnel equate to approximately \$1,000 - \$1,200.00 per candidate, while estimates of DAC personnel costs for the background checks made on 17 candidates ranged from \$17,800.00 - \$18,400.00 (approximately \$1,047 - \$1,082 per candidate).

Auditor's Note: An evaluation of the data indicates that Fire & Rescue had lost a total of 59% of its original *Firefighter/EMT Basic* applicants by the time this process was completed.

6. Date Packet Delivered to HR to Date HR Rendered Compensation Offer

Observation(s): Human Resources may respond to the department in 3 working days or take up to 20 working days to render a compensation offer/response.

Human Resources Input: Human Resources notes the completeness versus incompleteness of background checks as a reason for the large fluctuations in this phase of the hiring process. Incomplete background packets have to be returned to Fire & Rescue for updates, thereby extending the time needed to complete this phase of the hiring process.

Fire & Rescue Input: *Non-applicable; this is a Human Resources responsibility.*

Recommendations: When it comes to the completeness of recruitment and background packets, Fire & Rescue should conduct a quality control review before remitting packets to Human Resources. Also, the Audit refers Fire & Rescue management to recommendations #1, #3 & #4, as cited above in the previous bullet.

The Audit recommends that Human Resources management set a goal/standard of two to three working days for the completion of this process, upon receipt of complete recruitment packets.

Conclusion: This phase of the hiring process should be completed within three working days.

7. Date HR Rendered Compensation Estimate to Date of Job Offer

Observation(s): This process can take from one to nine working days to complete. Per the Fire & Rescue Training Officer, the P1 approval process requires six signatures/approvals via iCIMS.

Fire & Rescue Input: This final approval process requires signatures from the Fire Chief, Human Resources Information Systems Specialist, Human Resources Administrator, Human Resources Director, Budget & Research Officer or Finance Director, and County Manager.

Human Resources Input: While Fire & Rescue initiates this process, Human Resources also has approval responsibilities.

Recommendations: The Audit recommends that Standard Operation Procedures direct a two to three working day timeframe to complete this process, requiring notification of Fire & Rescue management in each event wherein this deadline is not met. Management in each applicable department should ensure that a secondary designee is identified for each of the required approvals to prevent delays in the event the primary approver is unavailable.

Conclusion: Because this is an all-digital process wherein all county signatories are notified via computer, it should be completed within two to three working days.

Auditor's Note: Audit analysis indicates that Fire & Rescue had lost 61% of its original *Firefighter/EMT Basic* applicants by the time a job offer was made.

Period of Time from Job Interview to Job Offer

The internal auditor deemed the period from the job interview until receipt of a contingent job offer as a most critical time period for determining if the County would actually acquire the sought-after talent or lose out on the recruitment opportunity. Analyses indicated that Fire & Rescue notified internal applicants with a job offer in 16 – 17 total calendar days, while it took 48 - 77 total calendar days to make such an offer to external applicants, after the interview.

Fire & Rescue protocol currently requires applicants to manually fill out a 32-paged paper Personnel Information Questionnaire (PIQ). A paper checklist is used to record pass or fail scores for applicants. The use of paper documentation in both cases can be inefficient. Thus, the Audit recommends that DAC Senior-level Management provide the option of digital PIQ and checklist documents.¹

While a clearly written *Hiring Process for Fire & Emergency Services (January 2023)* SOP exists, an area of improvement could be the addition of timeframes for the completion of stated processes. Inputting recommended time limits for the completion of Human Resources and departmental processes can assist in managing expectations of all involved. As with all SOPs, an annual review should occur wherein necessary updates are made and shared with the applicable department.

Conclusion

While each phase of the hiring process is designed to eliminate those who are not qualified to serve as Firefighter/EMTs, implementation of the recommendations above should allow for a higher retention of qualified Firefighter/EMT Basic candidates. If estimated timeframes are to be met, all personnel must consistently comply with the *Hiring Process for Fire & Emergency Services (January 2023)* SOP and current protocol. As Fire & Rescue is in the best position to understand current processes and time requirements, the onus is on Fire & Rescue (in collaboration with Human Resources) to revisit the current hiring protocols as necessary and convene with Senior-level Management concerning required adjustments.

In comparing current estimated hiring timelines with institutions comparable to Doña Ana County's Fire & Rescue, the following hiring timeframes are reported:

Sandoval County Fire:	38 total calendar days
Eddy County Fire:	47 – 49 total calendar days
Santa Fe County Fire:	Data Unavailable: Extended Recruitment Periods
Las Cruces Fire Department:	40 - 70 total calendar days
DAC Fire & Rescue:	29 – 51 total calendar days (internal candidates) 70 – 100 total calendar days (external candidates)
*Integrity HR	90 – 120 total calendar days
Audit recommended timelines:	30 – 55 total calendar days (estimate accounts for holidays)

* Integrity HR conducted a diagnostic audit of DAC's Human Resources function in 2019, citing the typical range of time needed to fill vacant positions.

NOTE: Neither volume of applicants nor staffing levels of departments were considered in the comparison above.

¹ - A discussion with the Information Technology Director resulted in the following options to consider for the PIQ (not applicable to the checklist):


- The use of a SharePoint site,
- Password protection of documents, or
- Provide an FTP site or web portal wherein applicants access our site and upload documents as necessary.

This both ensures that only the applicants make necessary updates, and enforces information security, allowing for shorter turnaround periods to make updates/corrections. Such precautions may not be needed for the digitized checklist.

ATTACHMENTS

Hiring Process for Fire and Emergency Services SOP

Fire & Rescue Recruitment Process Analysis

 20 October 2023
Ernest Harvin, CIA Date
Internal Auditor – Doña Ana County