SANTA CRUZ COUNTY
Civil Grand Jury

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New Recruiting Ideas for the Personnel Department

Residents Deserve a Fully Staffed Workforce

Summary

County residents rely on fully staffed County agencies to provide timely services. Prior Grand Jury reports and media articles both point out chronic staffing shortages in key departments. This report explores the root causes and suggests specific actions that the County Personnel Department could take. These actions, which could help all other departments fill their vacancies more quickly, include:

- Improve the website search engine optimization to increase visibility of job listings.
- Adopt a countywide integrated HR software platform.
- Add department-specific recruiting expertise and bandwidth.
- Publish per-position candidate pool policies and hiring results on a semi-annual basis.
- Guide departments to strengthen "Promote from Within" programs and embrace continual improvement for advancement.
- Improve communication to candidates during recruitment and make current candidate status easily available.
- Increase transparency of Personnel Data by using a countywide Dashboard.
- Conduct a salary comparison study based on nearby counties which have recently hired County employees.
- Engage external expertise, such as peers and consultants, in order to improve hiring processes.

The Grand Jury's hope is that making progress toward full staffing will improve service levels to residents and improve the morale of current County employees.

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Background

The charter of the Grand Jury is to identify areas where local agencies can improve effectiveness and efficiency. Past reports from the 2022-2023 Grand Jury noted that staffing shortages and long recruitment processes kept County agencies and departments from delivering required services.

The focus of this investigation is to highlight issues and opportunities to accelerate the hiring for difficult to fill positions across county departments. The end goal is improved skills and processes that deliver fully staffed agencies with top quality people. Long term positive outcomes can be fewer vacancies, shorter recruitment times, improved staff morale and higher employee retention rates.

Scope and Methodology

Specific issues that the Grand Jury investigated included:

1. The frequently lengthy process from posting to hiring.
2. Inconsistent recruiting practices across departments.
3. Analysis of the root causes of slow hiring processes.
4. The lack of accurate integrated recruiting and hiring data.
5. The lack of status information to in-process candidates.
6. Continuous vacancies taking months to fill, especially for supervisors and those requiring professional licenses.

The Grand Jury is very aware that processes at the County agency level take time to change. This report guides residents through issues as well as opportunities for near term process improvement. This investigation completed these tasks:

1. Compared an ideal hiring process to how the County operates today. This includes reviewing today's current best practices in recruiting for government jobs.
2. Evaluated practices in neighboring counties. This includes current technology being used.
3. Interviewed County staff across agencies and roles, as well as external experts. Specifically, that included Personnel Department staff and other County department's staff tasked with hiring and recruiting. Recent hires were interviewed to understand their perspective on the process.
4. The Grand Jury looked for gaps in the current County recruiting policy.
5. Reviewed statistics from the Personnel Department recruitment reports.
6. Looked at "out of the box" approaches to improving access to candidates for difficult to fill job profiles.

Investigation

The Grand jury interviewed a cross section of Personnel and Departmental staff, new hires and experts in Human Resources well educated in best practices. Figure1 below is a composite of a number of interviews that describe County recruitment experiences.

Imagine you are a resident of Santa Cruz County working over the hill. You are considering a job working for Santa Cruz County, which is much closer to home. You have a job, but you are tired of the private sector and commuting over Highway 17.

You have heard the pay in Santa Cruz County is much less than Santa Clara County, but you are ready for a change regardless. And you heard there are good benefits with government jobs.

You have rented a home for many years in Santa Cruz with a great landlord. Since you have been a good tenant, you have a below market rent. So you wouldn't want to move closer to your current job. You feel fortunate because you have heard Santa Cruz is the highest priced rental market in the country and, besides, you like the Santa Cruz lifestyle.

Searching "Santa Cruz County jobs," Google offers several websites, mostly consolidators of jobs, not necessarily the Santa Cruz County website. Your search also takes you directly to the Santa Cruz Probation Department website, but also to the Personnel Department website. You can see that the County is not using up to date Search Engine Optimization techniques (SEO) that help a website rank on the first page of browser results. On the Personnel website you find a link for open positions with the County and begin searching for analyst jobs in IT.

Just your luck you find a data analyst opening but there is no indication as to which Department you would be applying. You send off the application and wait. You quickly get an acknowledgement form letter. Two weeks later you receive an email indicating you did not make a top ten list of applicants and your name will not be submitted to the hiring manager for consideration. You are told if you want to wait they will call you if candidates fall off the list and you are moved up.

Six months go by. It's June, and you have written off the possibility of getting a position with the County. Then, you get a call from someone in the Personnel Department asking if you're still interested. Lucky for the County, you have held onto your current job! So you express interest in pursuing a position with the County. You are told that you will be called back soon.

A couple weeks go by and you get the call. You are told you may now be considered, but there are several steps to take before you are determined to be qualified to work for the County. You are then scheduled to take the required tests and pass a background check. Once again you wait. In August you are called for an interview with a hiring manager. You thought you had applied for a position in IT, but this is an interview for a new position in the Health Services Agency. Unbeknownst to you, the application you filled out was for a generic data analyst position. You go ahead with the interview and it seems to go well. And you wait.

It's October and you are notified that you got the job. Congratulations! The position is not exactly what you expected, but the salary being offered is fair and you accept the position.

Your start date is set for November. The time from submitting your application until your date of hire is 11 months. How many people would be able to endure this process? There must be a better way.

Figure 1 Composite of confidential interviewee's recruitment experiences.

For this report the Grand Jury examined only recruiting and hiring processes. The investigation found several opportunities for process improvement. This report will highlight some of the current obstacles and alternative approaches for building strong candidate pools. Without a solid pool of candidates, hiring managers have limited choices.

What is Holding Back Hiring?

There are many reasons Santa Cruz County takes a back seat to other counties as an ideal employer. Externals include housing costs, post-Covid tight job market, salary competition with private industry/Santa Clara County, and license/credential requirements. County government issues examined include lengthy processes, wage disparity, lack of communication with candidates, poorly-written job descriptions, no designated recruiters, and others.

Of particular note is that post-Covid, employment for skilled professionals in Santa Cruz County has been turned inside out. Local employers, including the County, could previously rely on the attractiveness of the area lifestyle to overcome salary limitations. The opposite is now true. Higher salaries over the hill, combined with flexible hybrid work, have made Santa Cruz County an ideal place to live but not to work. Housing and rental prices are proof.[1] Santa Cruz was **number one** in average wage needed to rent a two bedroom in the Santa Cruz country according to the National Low Income Housing Coalition for Housing report.[2] See Figure 6 in Appendix A.

The irony is inescapable. Skilled County employees receive below market wages, have limited remote work options, and cannot afford housing in core cities.

An "Ideal" Hiring and Development Process

The following are best practices gleaned from several sources:[3] [4] [5] [6]

- Management commitment to continual improvement. For instance, embracing the principle that best practices change and all employees can provide insights. Soliciting these ideas improves current employee morale because they feel heard.
- Consistently strong candidate pools are formed when an organization combines a strong brand, savvy marketing, and competitive postings.
- Good integrated data, combined with analysis, to improve performance.
- Fast hiring cycles with strong governance for required skills and certifications.
- Encouraging all employees to seek more senior positions. Building from within can reduce job-hopping to higher paying localities.
- Fast track advancement for qualified staff based on established processes and management support.

Variability in Hiring Success

There is a consistent pattern in filling available positions within County Departments. Hiring is most efficient for entry level positions, especially with a candidate pool of qualified applicants. Other positions are difficult to fill and may remain vacant for long periods of time. This is especially true for the Health Services Agency (HSA), Human

Services Department (HSD) and Public Works Department (PWD). The Sheriff's office has had problems hiring for several years. Examples of the hard-to-hire positions:

1. Positions requiring a specialized degree or credential (e.g., doctors, nurses, and licensed social workers.[7] [8]
2. Higher level supervision (e.g., department supervisors).[9]
3. Jobs with difficult working conditions (e.g., correction officers at the jails).[10]
4. Positions that directly compete with private sector openings (e.g., IT positions).[11] [12] [13]

Recruiting and hiring requires close collaboration between departments and Personnel. There are some noted hiring gaps. Opportunities to improve them are discussed in sections below.

Impact of Hiring Gaps

Hiring gaps examined in this report reduce quality of life for county residents. Consider these cause and effect scenarios:

- Lack of nurses in the Health Services Agency can limit care for patients.
- Understaffed social worker teams in the Human Services Agency can compromise family and child safety.
- In the Planning department, staff shortages for permitting, plan review and inspections can lengthen the housing recovery time for fire victims or development of additional housing.
- Open supervisor positions across all departments puts additional burdens on senior administrators.[14]

No Data, No Answers

For the most part, County Personnel was unable to give the Grand Jury accurate report data based on common recruitment measures. As a result, most of our information came from interviews. This is unfortunate since such metrics capture data points used to track, manage, and optimize recruitment processes. Because they are so critical, they are continually captured as standard practice by many peer government organizations.[15] The lack of such published data in Santa Cruz County is an important fact for readers of this report.

Documenting which functions and practices are efficient allows departments to see which recruitment methods need improvement. Two examples are average recruitment time data and vacancy rate trend data. This would help departments and the County Personnel Department assess the results of their hiring process and the effectiveness of their hiring strategies.

Looking for More and Better Candidates

Rapidly gathering an adequate candidate pool is essential for filling critical vacancies. For many positions that are easier to hire, a pool of qualified candidates can readily be created. This is not the case for more specialized and senior positions.

Without Salary Parity, Limited Candidate Interest

A salary comparison done by the Grand Jury comparing Santa Cruz County and Santa Clara County posted salaries indicates that Santa Cruz County compensation is generally lower, on average 17% lower.[16] As a result, experienced entry level staff frequently seek out jobs over the hill to advance their careers.

Figure 2 below is a snapshot comparison of a handful of open positions at the County as of February 25, 2024 demonstrating this salary disparity.

Date Viewed	The Job Opportunity	Salary - Santa Cruz County	Salary - Santa Clara County	Compared to Santa Clara	Salary - Monterey County	Compared to Monterey
Feb.25, 2024	Clinical Nurse II	$106,728-$124,848	$150,552-$182,996	68-70%	$103,224-$140,964	103- 88%
Feb.25, 2024	Clinical Nurse III	$118,116-138,084	$165,607-$221,963	62-72%	$165,840-$226,392	61- 71%
Feb.25, 2024	Deputy Sheriff-Lateral	$97,944-$131,208	$111,662-$135,742	59-62%	$89,004-$121,560	108-108%
Feb.25, 2024	Deputy Sheriff-Cadet	$93,608-$131,208	$103,731	91-127%	$72,324	129-181%
Feb.25, 2024	Corrections Officer- Lateral	$78,516-$105,012	$110,032-$133,752	70-79%	$82,276-$114,684	95-82%
Feb.25, 2024	Psychologist	$106,056-$134,160	$139,986-$170,152	75-78%	$93,240-$127,464	113-105%
Feb.25, 2024	Public Defender IV	$182,352-$221,688	$226,025-$281,328	79-80%	121,584-$206,640	150-107%

Figure 2. Snapshot salary comparison for open positions as of 2/25/2024[17]

There is a Board of Supervisors approved philosophy that a salary comparison is done comparing our county with eight other Bay Area counties including our neighboring counties, Monterey and Santa Clara.[18] Our county strives to be in the middle of the pack of the eight counties.[19] Current salary compensation guidelines (defined in 1990 and revised in 2002) call out Napa, Solano, and Contra Costa counties as benchmarks. The cost of living is much lower in those counties and using them for comparison may skew salary estimates lower.[20]

Static Candidate Search Practices Cast a Narrow Net

Post-Covid, unemployment remains low and prospects have many career choices and see rising salaries. There are now many more candidates today declining job offers not just here but everywhere. Candidates have gotten used to working from home and want to work remotely, but the County does not accommodate this requirement as well as the private sector.[21] In response, mainstream candidate search practices have evolved to an "Employee Driven" marketing model.

Adjustments made by other public sector organizations include:

- Position descriptions include more flexible scheduling, including consistent hybrid/remote work.[22] [23]
- Advertising and awareness marketing extend further. For example: career fairs, colleges and universities, social media, career panels, community markets and events, in-person job fairs and networking events.[24]

The County Personnel Department has done trials with several of these approaches. There has not been a published analysis of cost/benefit analysis for these efforts. There is no public, written guidance for recruiters on best practices.

A couple of examples of pilot projects include:

- Quarterly community workshops on how to get a job with the County.[25]
- Employee testimonial videos.[26]

In contrast, continual posting remains a long-standing County practice even though it has been shown to be ineffective. In this approach, generic postings are left unchanged on the County website for months.[27] Candidates see only stale postings and search engines rank them lower than newer postings from competing employers. Search Engine Optimization tools can help to get ranked higher on the browser list.[28]

Limited In-process Candidate Communication Stalls Interest

Contact with candidates is sporadic. The initial communication is with Personnel, not the hiring department, which is often seen as a barrier.[29] Applications are acknowledged with a form email. The next contact may be months later, when the candidate is asked to schedule a test or is called in for an interview.

There is no ongoing communication with candidates who are eligible, or information on where they stand in the hiring process.[30] Candidates are not able to check their status online and systems are not in place to automatically generate status communications. Since processes and communications rely on manual employee processes, time can be lost and gaps can occur.

Candidate Pool Bottlenecks Slow Hiring Decisions

The recruiting and hiring of county employees follow strict civil service guidelines to ensure fair and equitable hiring. These requirements were put in place many years ago to block unfair hiring practices. Circumstances have changed and some, such as candidate pool sizes, now simply delay the hiring process. Some progress has been made since the Board of Supervisors approved replacing the Rule of 10 with Rule of 5 for some positions.[31] Previously the Rule of 10 required Personnel to identify 10 qualified candidates before submitting the candidate list to the hiring manager. This requirement was reduced to 5 candidates. However, there remain many rules which - while well intended to avoid the "spoils" system of the past - remain as obstacles to efficient hiring at the County.

Provisional hiring is a means to bring onboard highly qualified candidates for more specialized positions while a determination is made as to their civil service qualifications

and while their credentials are checked. This has only been rarely used in Santa Cruz County to accelerate hiring. When it is used, it has been successful in persuading candidates to wait out the months-long processes.

Extended Time to Hire Slows Departments

Due to practices described above, the process in use today often takes six months to a year. Candidates frequently accept other opportunities before the Personnel department makes an offer. Normally, public sector hiring takes three times longer than the private sector for higher level, special skills or credentialed positions.[12] This is another factor that puts Santa Cruz County at a huge disadvantage. The end result is service gaps for residents and increased workload for existing staff.

Faster Per-position Result

The prior section looked at difficulties in attracting sufficient candidates. This section looks at how to move from a pool of candidates to a hired employee.

Limited Agency-specific Recruitment Skills

We found that most County departments and programs lacked dedicated hiring managers. Most of the time department managers, in addition to their regular duties as administrators, are also charged with hiring. These managers often lack personnel hiring experience.[32] The exception is the Sheriff's department, which has an officer dedicated as a recruiter. However, comparable large departments such as HSA, HSD and Public Works, with similar complex position requirements, do not.

Typically, the most difficult positions to hire for are psychiatrists, senior medical specialists, social workers, nurses, and senior building officials. These are all positions that require specialized knowledge as well as a license.[8]

Human Resources Best Practices

The Grand Jury interviewed a Human Resources expert with many years' experience consulting for California cities and counties to improve their HR practices. The consultant sampled some advertised open positions on the County Personnel website.

One Santa Cruz County job description for an engineer, for example, was not interesting to prospective candidates.

- The salary description was monthly (not annual), the salary that was listed later in the ad used a range without any context.
- There was nothing compelling in content when compared to another rural county entity's job description for an engineer that included multi-media links talking up the job, with multiple pictures.
- Best practice was to write a job description from the perspective of what the candidate is looking for and would be interested in. An engineer would love to see a link to current County projects to see what they might be working on if hired.[33] Simply running an ad does not work today.[34]

The consultant recommended several best practices which were divided into four categories:

- Effective advertising methods for open positions
- Creative "outside the box" recruiting tips
- Managing new hires for retention and promotion
- Obtaining new recruits from employees.

Best Practices for Effectively Advertising Open Positions:

- Personnel staff and the department hiring manager should co-write the job announcement and supplemental questions. Often HR develops an initial draft, based on priorities articulated by the hiring manager and key details of the job description plus required EEO/ADA language.[35]

- Show hourly salary for entry-level and part-time jobs and annual salary for journey-level and above. It is acceptable to list both hourly and annual salary ranges.[36]

- Include a benefit summary, with links to a graphic presentation "selling" benefits to potential applicants.[37]

- Sell the job opening to qualified candidates by highlighting key features of the job to the target market. The common element here is blending specific job tasks with benefits and tapping into the reason folks choose a specific career path.[38]

- Continuous postings should be refreshed every month. This includes updating the posting date, so web crawlers and search engines will "see" the posting as new. Another best practice is to add new information each month, such as "Next Application review date: Oct 30. All applications received by that date will be reviewed by the hiring manager within 2 weeks."[27] [39] [40]

- Contact each applicant within one week of the close of any job posting with a status update.[41]

- Departments with chronic staff shortages would benefit from opening social media accounts where information about department happenings and future open positions may be highlighted.[42]

As an example of best practice innovation to increase exposure, the Sheriff's Department has its own Facebook and Instagram accounts and attends law enforcement job fairs.

The Personnel Department has implemented a wide variety of outreach methods which have had some success. These methods include social media, online job boards, career panels, information sessions, direct US mailings, direct emails, direct phone calls, attending community events (Farmer's markets, Pride Day, County Fair), attending online and in-person job fairs and internship fairs, radio ads, newspaper ads, fliers posted at local businesses, attending professional conferences and networking events.

Best Practices for creative "outside the box" recruiting:

- A referral bonus is another nice perk for current staff. An employee contest or reward program can be fun and effective. Some departments use a payment split: 50% on hire; 50% when the probation period is successfully passed.[43]

- Use job titles and keywords that resonate with current industry nomenclature even if they do not match the County's current job title.[32]

- Provide candidate immediate access to the hiring manager if they clearly appear to be a good candidate.[44]

- Have a union rep present during the interview process. This sensitizes the union member to what the process is and promotes a better understanding from the hiring manager's point of view. By collaborating with the union representative for creative ways to meet civil service requirements it may be possible to come up with unique ways to hire good candidates.[45]

Best Practices for managing new hire retention and promotion:

- Investing in communication skills for leads, supervisors and managers is vital, so they have the tools to effectively lead their staff. Recommend coaching and mentoring trainings.[46]

- Establish regular meetings throughout the probationary period with feedback on performance and expectations. This allows the supervisor to assess if assignments are appropriate, and/or if additional resources are needed to help an employee. It also helps the employee to have a clear idea of how well they are doing.[3]

Best practices for obtaining new recruits from employees:

- Annual reviews that include a professional development training plan will actively encourage staff to improve their skill for advancement. This can help retain valuable employees, while helping struggling employees improve and feel good about staying with an employer long-term.[47]

Complex and Intertwined Personnel Department and Agency Roles

The County Personnel Department covers many areas within the Human Resources operations besides recruiting. These include employee payroll and benefits, state and federal compliance issues, employee grievances and union collective bargaining issues.

As a result, data is not readily available and acted upon. County Personnel staff are not as familiar as they could be with current data on vacancies across the departments they serve, time to hire, retention rates, etc.[48] They wait for the department or agency to report a need for new hires. The data is held within the departments. Because of this, consolidated county-wide job vacancy data is not available.

Home grown tracking systems and spreadsheets to capture hiring information continue to be used in this county. Data collection is therefore labor intensive and inefficient.

From Personnel Department interviews, Figure 3 below is an outline of the hiring process.

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1. A vacancy opens up. The hiring manager fills out the required form and submits it to the Personnel Department.
2. After review by the Personnel technician, the hiring manager signs off on the forms.
3. Personnel may already have a list of candidates which can be filtered to identify suitable candidates for a particular position.
4. The list is shared with the department hiring manager.
5. The hiring manager reviews the list.
6. The hiring department and Personnel jointly oversee candidate qualification evaluation, testing, background checks, and training if required.
7. The Personnel technician takes part in weekly follow up meetings with the hiring manager.
8. Candidates are identified.
9. The hiring manager does reference checks.
10. The Personnel technician does paperwork and completes a Payroll Action Form.
11. The form goes to the Records team for audit.
12. A pay grade is assigned to the candidate.
13. Personnel clears the hire.
14. The Personnel technician then contacts the candidate and schedules them for in-processing.
15. A welcome letter with onboarding information is sent to the candidate.

Figure 3: Santa Cruz County Hiring Process Steps.[49]

Every recent hire interviewed said it takes at least six to twelve months to fill a County position.[34] Sometimes things slow down because of the government hiring process.[50] For example, candidates fill out tests and essays not necessarily for the position they will be eventually offered. In other cases, it is because the hiring managers take months to interview candidates provided by Personnel causing candidates to lose interest.[51] Everyone seems to be resigned to the long process.[52] The Hiring Flow Chart in Figure 7 in Appendix A shows it is a complicated process that a candidate must endure.

Many peer agencies rely on integrated software tools to automate such processes and integrate data gathering.[53] Most importantly, these tools free up managers from manual paperwork tasks in order to focus on sourcing, interviewing, and hiring. As an example of the value of integrated HR systems, San Francisco reduced hiring time by 40% through streamlining the application, interview and hiring process.[54] Specific examples of advantages of using an integrated system are shown in Figure 4 below.

Software capability	Impact on recruiter efficiency and/or candidate perception
Increase pool of qualified applicants.	Reach more candidates all at once, easier to track cost-effectiveness on sourcing targeted applicants.
Easier tracking and screening.	Improved/easier application process for candidates. Screening automated for recruiter and hiring manager.
Immediate response to online application.	No recruiter effort.[55] Immediate feedback to candidates.
Candidates can self-schedule interviews.	No recruiter effort. Quickly locks down interaction with the hiring team. Engages candidates, demonstrates their interest.
Job posting content is displayed as easy to follow indexed pages	Easier for candidates to evaluate topics of interest.
Captures recruitment metrics, such as time to hire, recruitment effort results. Generates related reports to track progress.	Lessens time for staff to pull data. Improved process governance, capture of best practices for oversight and planning.
New hire onboarding.	Ensure compliance to policies while making new hires feel welcome.

Figure 4: Typical capabilities of integrated HR software packages.[56]

Examples of Online Software Platforms for Organizing Personnel Departments

Candidate Relationship Management (CRM) software streamlines the recruiting and hiring process. Adapting CRM software would complement and/or improve inhouse software and allow the County to more effectively compete with local counties and cities.

NeoGov is an example of a company that provides CRM to public and civil service employers. Santa Cruz County currently uses some NeoGov modules for applicant tracking and online training of employees.[57] One advantage of using NeoGov is that when an advertisement is posted on the County website, it is also picked up on the NeoGov website.[58] Currently NeoGov is used by Watsonville, Santa Cruz City, Los Gatos, San Jose, Monterey, Salinas, Santa Clara County and San Benito County.[59] NeoGov saves lots of time because it sends out notices to candidates and allows them to self-schedule interviews.[60]

Careers in Government is another CRM software system that is available. Their service scrapes subscribers' websites and publishes listings on their own, increasing visibility to potential recruits. It would also push interested candidates back to the County website.[61]

Handshake is a service that is free where links to County job posting can be posted, increasing visibility to new candidates seeking job opportunities.[62]

Limited Focus on Accelerating Recruitment and Hiring

As mentioned above, because administrators also act as hiring managers at agencies such as Public Works, Planning, HSA, and HSD, they are typically very busy people. Time spent on the hiring process is often hard to find. However, a shortage of staffing due to chronic unfilled positions can lead to employee frustration on one hand and overtime charges on the other. Neither is good for these agencies.[51]

Personnel Department leadership positions that are filled by long-time employees can be beneficial for the county. But it also has limited the acceptance of new ideas from employees.[63] It is important to try new methods that appeal to a new generation of workers and have worked elsewhere in hiring for difficult to fill positions.[64]

Agencies depend on the Personnel Department to optimize the hiring process. In many cases peer organization best practices or employee suggestions are available to the Personnel Department to improve efficiency and effectiveness. However, for these ideas to be of any benefit, Personnel Department management must take a leadership role that encourages their evaluation and testing. Continual improvement depends on Personnel Department leadership as well as measurement.[65]

In-house, Bottom Up Advancement

The County has a tremendous resource to draw from - their existing employees. As described above, the Grand Jury found that processes and candidate pools for entry level employees are up to the task.

One hindrance to a bottom up approach is a lack of consistent policies, funding, and training to encourage employees on that path.[47] As a result, employees considering advancement often look elsewhere. This is a self-reinforcing downward spiral which reduces the internal talent pool while encouraging some employees to leave. The advantages of promoting from within are described in Figure 5 below.

Existing Employee Characteristic	Advantage to County
Easier to hire a Level 1 and promote to Level 2	More entry level applicants who meet minimum qualifications
Knows the opportunities for advancement	Can track employee progress
Has already secured local housing	Able to work locally without having to commute
Understands local issues	More likely to effectively contribute to innovative organizational solutions
Can make a living at current County wage levels	Less likely to seek out other locations that offer higher wages
Gaining seniority and experience	Becomes more invested in Santa Cruz County organization

Figure 5. Advantages to County departments gained by promoting from within.

Conclusion

The Grand Jury recommends changes that improve efficiency and effectiveness of the county's hiring processes. This is done to improve service levels for County residents that support the local agencies with hard-earned tax dollars.

All of the recommendations below are specific, but do not call out the elephant in the room: County services for residents suffer because management is not able to prioritize staffing levels, or deploy time-saving integrated software, or fix broken processes. Residents deserve the improved services that fully staffed departments can deliver. For county residents, the "just business as usual" attitude of local agencies towards filling these critical vacancies is very concerning.

The Recommendations in this report anticipate continual improvement in County hiring and recruiting. These will result in more completely staffed agencies and departments that deliver high quality services on time with improved morale. The County will accrue cost and time savings through integrated data and processes.

Time is money and the clock is ticking. The Grand Jury thinks this problem is urgent and needs to be addressed now.

Findings and Recommendations

Group 1: Fast-track Candidate Pool Quality / Quantity

Add Department-level Recruiting Expertise and Bandwidth

F1. Requiring candidates for difficult to fill positions coordinate with Personnel rather than directly with hiring managers in departments slows the hiring process and reduces candidate interest.

F2. The Personnel Department recruiter training does not provide recruiter skills to the hiring managers necessary in today's job market.

F3. Outdated personnel "candidate pool" rules and Civil Service recruiting policies inadvertently force long term vacancies for supervisory and credentialed positions.

F4. By not sending candidates for difficult to fill positions directly to hiring managers the chances of hiring well qualified candidates are reduced.

F5. Most county departments lack dedicated hiring managers leading to overloaded administrators.

R1. The Grand Jury recommends that by December 31, 2024, in order to reduce the backlog of difficult to fill positions, the Personnel Department creates dedicated recruiter positions for the HSA, HSD and Public Works departments. (F1–F5)

Improve Marketing to Candidates

F3 applies to this area as well.

F6. The Personnel Department has not changed policies and procedures in the face of fewer candidates applying for County positions resulting in additional vacancies and slower recruitment and hiring processes.

F7. The Personnel Department's website advertising continuous open positions without regular updates makes it very difficult for candidates to find opportunities on search engines because the information is stale and not up to date.

R2. The Grand Jury recommends that by December 31, 2024, the Personnel Department update recruitment and hiring procedures. For example, requiring the updating of job postings on a regular basis in order to improve search engine visibility. (F3, F6, F7)

R3. The Grand Jury recommends that by December 31, 2024, the Personnel Department begin publishing per-position candidate pool policies and hiring results on a semi-annual basis. (F3, F6, F7)

Promote from Within

F8. Continuous improvement for promoting existing employees in departments with difficult to fill positions can help to maintain effective staffing levels.

F9. Promoting employees within departments with many difficult to fill positions can limit the damage caused by attrition, especially at more senior levels.

R4. The Grand Jury recommends that by December 31, 2024, the Personnel Department, in collaboration with HSA, HSD and Public Works, embrace continuous improvement and publish a skills and advancement plan to accelerate promotion from within, including budget requirements and goals. (F8, F9)

Group 2: Improve Hiring and Recruitment Results

Adopt Integrated HR System

F10. The months-long hiring process is frustrating to candidates and jeopardizes the County's chances of hiring good candidates.

F11. The time required for complex paper processes steals time from creative recruitment and ongoing contact with candidates.

R5. The Grand Jury recommends that by December 31, 2024, the Personnel Department publish a cost/benefit analysis comparing their current approach with that offered by integrated HR solutions. (F10, F11)

Embrace Continual Improvement within Personnel Department

F6 applies to this area as well.

F12. Despite the finding in F9, having leadership in Personnel Department positions filled by long-time employees that have spent most of their career in the department has led to limited acceptance of ideas that have worked elsewhere in hiring for difficult to fill positions.

R6. The Grand Jury recommends that by December 31, 2024, the Personnel Department develop a plan detailing how they will solicit and evaluate employee recommendations that could help reduce the backlog of difficult to fill positions. (F6, F12)

R7. The Grand Jury recommends that by December 31, 2024, the Personnel Department publicly document how they have engaged external expertise which would likely improve hiring and promoting processes. (F6, F12)

Evaluate Peer Counties for Best Practices

> **F6** applies to this area as well.

F13. The 8-county salary comparison in place since 2002 is no longer a useful benchmark for wages and salaries given the high cost of living in Santa Cruz County resulting in many vacancies.

F14. To attract a wider pool of candidates for difficult to fill positions, pay needs to be at least 90% of what Santa Clara County offers.

R8. The Grand Jury recommends that by December 31, 2024, and annually thereafter, the Personnel Department conduct a salary comparison study based on nearby counties. It is recommended that this study include counties which have routinely recruited Santa Cruz County employees and residents. (F6, F13, F14)

Create a Public Dashboard of Key Hiring and Recruitment Metrics

F15. The County Personnel Department was consistently unable to provide comprehensive hiring statistics. Without accurate data, Personnel and other departments cannot make sound judgements on how to measure improvements in the hiring process for difficult to fill positions.

F16. The Personnel Department expects the department units themselves to track hiring and recruitment metrics and keep important data such as turnover statistics and vacancy rates. This leaves the Personnel Department and oversight bodies without a clear picture of the situation and depth of the problem.

F17. By not filling essential positions for months at a time, services for residents suffer harm when vacancies persist.

R9. The Grand Jury recommends that by December 31, 2024, the Personnel Department post a public dashboard, based on real time data, to include time-to-hire and vacancy rates for difficult to fill positions in County departments. (F15, F16, F17)

Commendations

C1. The Grand Jury commends the Personnel Department for testing ways to improve recruiting for difficult to fill positions. These include preparing a video selling the lifestyle of Santa Cruz County, attending job fairs, having a booth at the County fair, attending conferences where professionals meet, advertising in magazines that target professionals with needed skills, reaching out to universities and meeting students about to graduate.

C2. On the recommendation of the Personnel Department, the Board of Supervisors eliminated the civil service requirement for a top ten list for a set of hard to fill positions. Department hiring for those positions accelerated since managers were able to interview candidates more quickly.

Required Responses

Respondent	Findings	Recommendations	Respond Within/ Respond By
Santa Cruz County Board Of Supervisors	F1–F17	R1–R9	90 Days September 25, 2024

Invited Responses

Respondent	Findings	Recommendations	Respond Within/ Respond By
Director, Santa Cruz County Personnel Department	F1–F17	R1–R9	90 Days September 25, 2024

Definitions

Terms requiring an explanation that would not fit in the report flow.

- **SEO:** Search Engine Optimization. The practice of orienting your website to rank higher on a search engine results page (SERP) so that you receive more traffic. The aim is typically to rank on the first page of Google results for search terms that mean the most to your target audience.[28]
- **HR:** Human Resources. A term often attached to Personnel Department services.
- **Provisional hiring**: Committing to a candidate prior to fully completing the hiring process. Allows for mutual commitment of the agency and candidate while providing sufficient time for all required steps to complete.
- **Rule of 10:** A civil service rule that says until ten candidates have been vetted by the Santa Cruz County Personnel Department they cannot be forwarded to the hiring department.[31]
- **CRM:** Stands for Candidate Relationship Management in human resources, talent acquisition, and recruiting software.

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Appendix A – Supporting Figures

National Low Income Housing Coalition for Housing Report

MOST EXPENSIVE JURISDICTIONS

Metropolitan Areas	Metropolitan Counties²	Housing Wage for Two-Bedroom FMR¹
Santa Cruz-Watsonville, CA MSA⁴	Santa Cruz County, CA	$63.33
San Francisco, CA HMFA³	Marin County, San Francisco County, San Mateo County, CA	$61.31
San Jose-Sunnyvale-Santa Clara, CA HMFA	Santa Clara County, CA	$56.56
Salinas, CA MSA	Monterey County, CA	$51.44
Santa Maria-Santa Barbara, CA MSA	Santa Barbara County, CA	$51.29
Boston-Cambridge-Quincy, MA-NH HMFA		$50.67
Stamford-Norwalk, CT HMFA		$49.29
Santa Ana-Anaheim-Irvine, CA HMFA	Orange County, CA	$48.83
Seattle-Bellevue, WA HMFA	King County, Snohomish County, WA	$47.21
New York, NY HMFA	Bronx County, Kings County, New York County, Putnam County, Queens County, Richmond County, Rockland County NY	$47.13

State Nonmetropolitan Areas (Combined)	Housing Wage for Two-Bedroom FMR	Nonmetropolitan Counties (or County-Equivalents)	Housing Wage for Two-Bedroom FMR
Massachusetts	$46.91	Nantucket County, MA	$50.35
Hawaii	$37.86	Dukes County, MA	$44.71
Alaska	$26.88	Kauai County, HI	$41.31
Connecticut	$26.62	Eagle County, CO	$39.04
New Hampshire	$25.21	Monroe County, FL	$38.90
Colorado	$24.50	Pitkin County, CO	$36.73
California	$22.35	Hawaii County, HI	$36.56
Nevada	$22.28	Summit County, CO	$35.77
Washington	$21.80	Bethel Census Area, AK	$34.98
Vermont	$21.69	Aleutians West Census Area, AK	$34.56

Figure 6: National Low Income Housing Coalition for Housing Report.[2]

County Personnel Recruitment and Examination Flow Chart
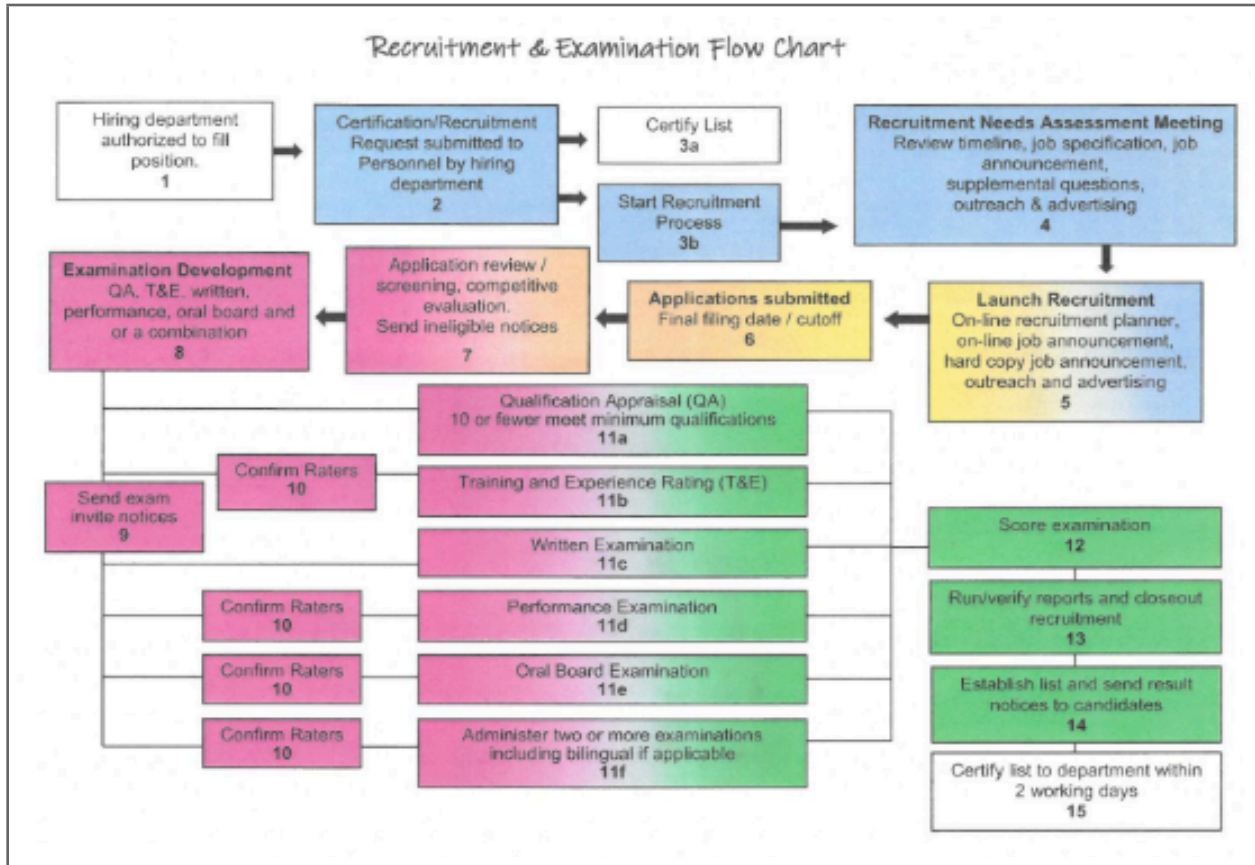
Figure 7: County Personnel Recruitment and Examination Flow Chart.[66]