Performance Audit of the City's Classified Employee Hiring Process

Why OCA Did This Study

The City of San Diego (City) has operated with an elevated employee vacancy rate perpetuated by the length of time it takes to hire. City leaders have expressed concern regarding the high vacancy rate and its effect on the City's ability to provide public services. Analyzing budgeted classified not-sworn positions, we conducted a performance audit with the following objective:

Determine whether changes to the City's hiring process and Civil Service Rules would increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the hiring process for classified employees.
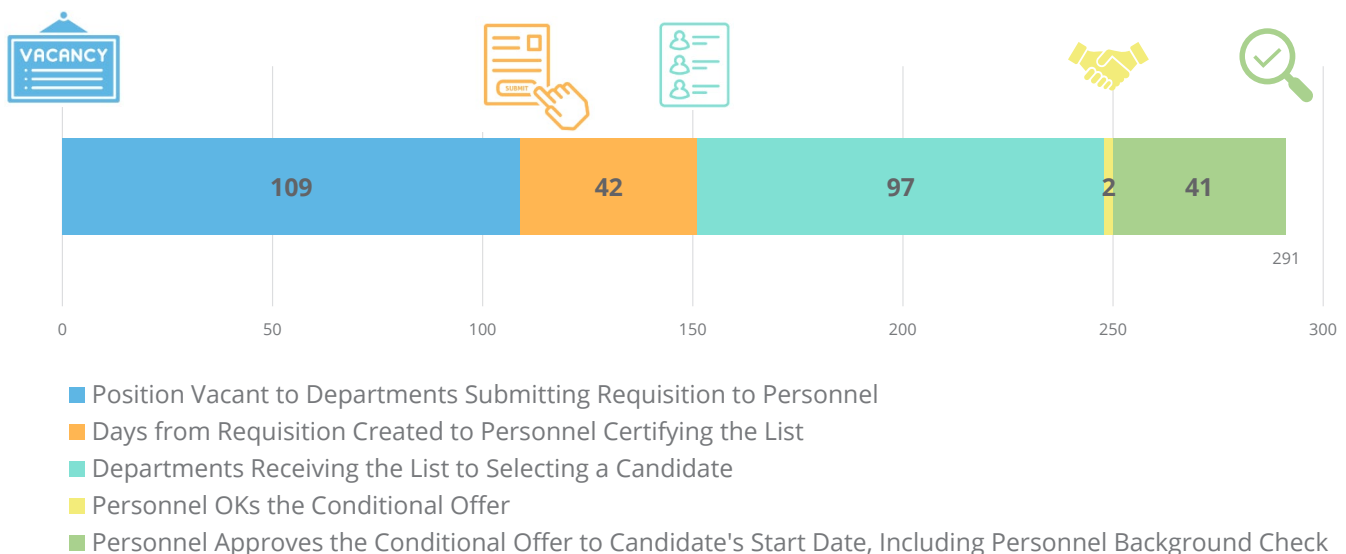
What OCA Found

Finding 1: The City Administration should take a more active role in monitoring and advocating for efficiency in the hiring process, which took approximately 9 months to complete on average.

- The City's lengthy hiring process likely contributed to **19 percent of vacant positions remaining vacant for more than 14 months**.

- In total, the **classified hiring process took approximately 9 months** to complete. The **unclassified hiring process, which is run primarily by the Administration, took almost as long**—nearly 8 months.

- The **Administration does not monitor or have goals** for how long hiring departments take to hire classified or unclassified employees.

- In our sample, the lengthiest step in the classified hiring process was the time it took hiring departments to submit a requisition to Personnel requesting a list of candidates (109 days).

- Once hiring departments requested a list of eligible candidates, the positions in our sample still took an average of 26 weeks to fill, **42 percent longer than the average local government organization** according to NEOGOV.

- Hiring at the City takes so long because the overall hiring timeline is **not transparent**, there is **no centralized oversight of hiring departments**, and there is **no expert on the Administration side** driving efficiency.

Exhibit 7: Hiring Departments Were Responsible for About 70% of the Hiring Timeline in Our Sample

Average Days to Fill a Budgeted Classified Not-Sworn Vacant Position from Our Sample

| 109 | 42 | 97 | 2 | 41 |

291

- ■ Position Vacant to Departments Submitting Requisition to Personnel
- ■ Days from Requisition Created to Personnel Certifying the List
- ■ Departments Receiving the List to Selecting a Candidate
- ■ Personnel OKs the Conditional Offer
- ■ Personnel Approves the Conditional Offer to Candidate's Start Date, Including Personnel Background Check

Source: OCA generated based on a sample of data from SAP, Personnel, NEOGOV, and hiring departments.

Excerpt from Exhibit 9: In Our Sample, Applicants Started the Position 224 Days After They Applied

On Average, Applicants Started More Than
7 Months
After They Applied
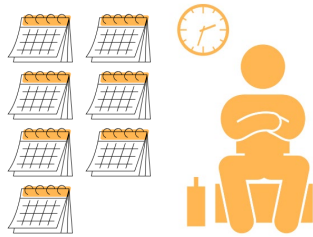
Source: OCA generated based on sampled data from SAP, Personnel, NEOGOV, and hiring departments.

Finding 2: **The Personnel Department can better balance its focus on fairness in hiring with efficiency by streamlining Personnel regulations and practices.**

- The hiring process requires **more than 60 steps**. The extensiveness of the current hiring process makes it unclear and confusing, and **Personnel's guidance on the hiring process is inconsistent and incomplete**.

- The Civil Service Rules are generally broad enough to allow flexibility and expediency in the hiring process, but **Personnel Regulations go beyond requirements** and create administrative burdens without sufficient benefit in some cases. For example:

  - Many hiring departments believe Personnel requires positions to be fully vacated before hiring departments can request a list of candidates to hire from in most cases.

  - Personnel requires hiring departments to fill out more than 90 pages of forms during the interview process alone, many of which require duplicate information.

  - Personnel Regulations require employees to be fingerprinted in a machine installed in the Personnel Department.

  - Personnel requires pre-employment medical checks and drug screenings for many not-sworn classifications, while many cities simply require pre-employment drug screenings for candidates applying for safety-sensitive positions.

  - Personnel still relies on physical forms and is not clear that it accepts electronic signatures on all forms.

What OCA Recommends

We made 12 recommendations: 8 to Personnel and 4 to the City Administration. Key recommendations include:

- The Chief Operating Officer should designate a **central point of oversight and coordination** for hiring departments' hiring of classified employees.

- The Administration should identify the key phases in the hiring process timeline, **set goals** for how long each step should take, and **monitor and report hiring timeline information** by department.

- The Administration should determine if there are administrative requirements or other barriers contributing to the length of time phases in the hiring process take and **propose changes** to make the process more efficient and effective.

- Personnel should work with the Administration to **provide the information it needs** to implement these recommendations and present to the Civil Service Commission.

- Personnel should formalize the practice of allowing hiring departments to **begin the hiring process as soon as they are aware of an upcoming vacancy**.

- Personnel should **streamline the documents it requires departments and applicants to fill out**.

- Personnel should **develop a hiring process overview and step-by-step guide** that depicts the overall hiring process and is clear, understandable, up to date, and easy for all City stakeholders to find.

- Personnel should create a background check, medical check, and drug and alcohol screening process that requires **fewer steps and paperwork** for classified not-sworn positions.

The Personnel Department and the City Administration agreed to all recommendations.

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