

April 1, 2003

Internal Audit Report 2003-4
Hiring Practices
Anchorage Police Department

Introduction. The Anchorage Police Department (APD) Recruitment - Background Investigations Unit (Unit) is responsible for the recruitment and background investigation of all personnel within APD. This includes sworn (police officers) and non-sworn (dispatchers, clerks, and other support personnel) personnel. In addition, the Unit performs background investigations on people who enter or work within APD, such as arson investigators and private contractors. The Unit is also responsible for conducting background investigations on citizens who apply for full-auto firearm (machine guns), silencer, and shortened shotgun permits. As of November 2002, the Unit consisted of one clerk, two background specialists, one sergeant, and one patrol officer (temporarily assigned to the unit).

Police officer candidates are recruited from a variety of sources, such as job fairs and media advertising. Interested individuals can stop by the police station at any time to pick up and submit an application. In addition, interested individuals can access the APD website and download an application or request an application by calling a toll-free telephone number 24-hours a day.

The testing process for sworn police officers consists of three phases designed to screen out unqualified applicants.

Phase I - This testing consists of the Nelson-Denny vocabulary test, the Nelson-Denny reading comprehension test, the Ergometrics FrontLine Video test, and an observation writing test. Upon successful completion of Phase I, applicants are given a conditional offer of employment and move to Phase II.

Phase II - This testing consists of a personal history questionnaire, a background questionnaire, and a preliminary interview. Applicants passing Phase II move to Phase III.

Phase III - This testing consists of a physical agility test, a written psychological test, medical and hearing tests, a psychological assessment interview, and a polygraph test.

After successfully completing all three testing phases, candidate files are given to the Chief of Police for his review and selection. Candidates selected by the Chief are given a second conditional offer of employment and are required to take a drug test. After passing the drug test, they are hired and sent to the next scheduled police academy, which can accommodate up to 28 recruits. Of the approximately 1,000 candidates who apply in a typical year, about 15 new recruits are hired to attend the police academy. After successful completion of the police academy, the candidates are moved to the Field Training Officer (FTO) program. After completing the FTO program, the new police officers are assigned to patrol and are on probation for one year.

Dispatcher applicants follow a similar testing process. The testing process for dispatchers begins with the Nelson-Denny vocabulary and reading comprehension test and a simulated dispatch audio test. After passing these initial tests, dispatcher applicants are required to complete a personal history questionnaire, a background questionnaire, and a preliminary interview. In addition, after passing the preliminary interview, dispatcher applicants must pass an oral examination, a hearing test, a written psychological test, and a psychological assessment interview. Finally, dispatcher applicants must pass a background investigation, including criminal history checks, reference checks, and fingerprint checks.

Scope. The objective of this audit was to review the recruiting and hiring practices for sworn police officers and dispatchers at APD. The audit was conducted in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards, except for the requirement of an external quality control review, and accordingly, included tests of accounting records and such other auditing procedures as we considered necessary in the circumstances. The audit was requested by the Municipal Assembly.

Overall Evaluation. The recruiting, testing, and hiring processes at APD could be improved. We found continuous recruitment has impeded the hiring process and has led to a disorganized recruitment, testing, and hiring process. In addition, APD's recruitment function needs to be separate from its background investigation function and some administrative functions can be transferred to the Employee Relations Department. Testing statistics for 1999 through 2002 are presented in Attachment A.

Management Comments. Management stated, "The Backgrounds Section has been restructured to include a Supervisor, three Backgrounds Specialists and a Specialty Clerk, all permanently assigned to the Section. The Backgrounds Section has diligently worked to eliminate the backlog of previous applications, investigations and their notifications. Proposed changes should streamline the entire application process and facilitate effective planning."

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Continuous Recruitment Impedes Hiring Process.

- a. Finding.** Continuous recruitment of police officer and dispatcher positions has impeded APD's hiring process. Since at least 1999, police officer positions have been advertised as "open continuously" by APD management, even though a decision was made not to fill some of these vacant positions. In addition, dispatcher positions were recruited for on a continuous basis until January 2002. Consequently, applicants had false expectations since they applied for positions that were not being filled and may have waited extended periods of time to know the status of their application. In addition, according to Unit staff, the Unit was unable to adequately manage its resources and plan recruiting activities since it did not know when management would permit some vacant positions to be filled. Activities not adequately planned included:

- ***Testing Not Scheduled*** - Testing was not held on a scheduled basis. Thus, potential applicants could not anticipate when they could expect to be tested and eventually hired by APD.
- ***Dispatcher Assessment Delayed*** - According to dispatch staff, dispatcher applicants may have to wait to complete their psychological assessment interview until police officer applicants are also ready to complete the interview. As a result, the dispatcher hiring process may be delayed. To help reduce costs, the psychological assessment interview is conducted at the same time for both police officer applicants and dispatcher applicants.
- ***Police Officer Training Not Scheduled*** - Police officer academy training was not scheduled on a regular basis. As a result, candidates selected for the police academy could not anticipate the start date of the police academy training. Many applicants may not be able to wait up to a year or more to know if they will be hired and, consequently, may find jobs elsewhere.
- ***Vacancies Not Projected*** - Projections were not made for upcoming vacancies, such as retirements. Therefore, future staffing needs could not be adequately determined. According to data provided by APD, in calendar year 2001, the average number of monthly vacant police officer positions was approximately 33, or about 12 percent; and in calendar year 2002 it was approximately 22, or about 9 percent.¹ Furthermore, in both calendar years 2001 and 2002, the average number of monthly vacant dispatcher positions was approximately 11, or about 22 percent. Although APD did provide staffing data, this data was not easily understood or readily available. Readily available staffing information is needed to help ensure that recruiting activities are properly managed.

In addition to poor planning, police officer and dispatcher applicants were not provided feedback in a timely or scheduled basis regarding the status of their application and test results. For example, some police officer applicants not passing one of the three testing phases were not notified of the test results until the completion of the entire recruiting cycle, which could have taken up to a year or more to complete.

¹ Staffing data provided by APD was not audited.

Although vacant positions may exist, are advertised, and applications are sought, APD may not fill any of the positions for budget purposes. For example, to help reach its budgeted “vacancy factor”, some positions may remain unfilled until the projected vacancy savings are realized. We agree that management must consider the effect vacancies have on its budget; however, this does not mean a recruitment process cannot be systematic and well-planned. For example, our discussions with the Alaska State Troopers and Anchorage Airport Police revealed they both perform vacancy analyses and make projections of the number of positions they need to fill. They also maintain recruitment and testing schedules for each fiscal year and have established time lines to notify applicants of testing results.

b. Recommendation. APD management should consider implementing a systematic process for personnel recruitment, testing and hiring. Specifically, APD should consider:

- 1) Discontinuing continuous recruitment for police officers and advertising these positions only when they will actually be filled.
- 2) Conducting testing on a regular, scheduled basis, with testing results communicated to applicants according to reasonable and established time frames.
- 3) Conducting police academy training on a scheduled, regular basis.
- 4) Projecting future vacancies to help determine recruitment and hiring goals and ensure that this information is readily available.

- c. **Management Comments.** Regarding the audit Finding, management stated,

“Testing not scheduled

Concur - The frequency of testing may be addressed by using the number of applications as a trigger, or by setting predetermined dates within the year to initiate testing. The proposed trigger number being considered is one hundred. Setting regular posted test dates could also be used to address this issue. Regularly scheduled testing would allow for organization and planning of background unit tasks, and would stabilize the workload for the unit. APD is developing performance measures for the Background Section. The short range goal is to match existing vacancies with applicants currently being processed. Long range goal for the Section would be to maintain a certified applicant list to ensure that future vacancies can be filled swiftly.”

“Dispatcher testing delayed

Concur - The backgrounds process must be completed in the most effective and efficient manner possible. Scheduling of dispatch psychological testing coincided with the testing of police officer applicants in order to keep costs down. However, APD can make use of a local psychologist when coordination with the sworn test schedule test is inconvenient.”

“Police officer training not scheduled

Concur - The academy schedule is based on when authorization to hire is given. There are many criteria that determine the academy start date, of which the MOA budget for APD is most important. APD is working with OMB to establish performance measures for recruitment, testing, and training. Two fixed academy

dates per year may resolve this issue. APD has one academy in progress and another is scheduled for July 2003.”

“Vacancies not projected

Non-concur - APD anticipated the loss of personnel due to retirements, voluntary and involuntary terminations from sworn and non-sworn personnel. APD with the assistance of Employee Relations developed an Employee Retire-Rehire plan that allowed eligible senior officers and command staff to retire and be rehired at a lower cost. Determination of when to fill vacant positions is based on budgetary constraints. APD will work with Auditing and OMB to calculate vacancy factors within the department to project future academy dates.”

Regarding the Recommendation, management stated,

“Continuous recruitment should end

Non-concur - Open recruitment allows individuals to submit applications at any time. Application backlogs may occur when testing is not done on a regular basis. However, implementation of regularly scheduled testing and academy training should eliminate those backlogs.”

“Regular testing with timely notification of results

Concur - APD is implementing a more efficient notification process. A method of more timely notification is now in place. Self-addressed postcards are sent with test results within ten days. Past applicants are now being advised of their status by mail.”

“Conducting regularly scheduled police academies

Concur - Two fixed academy dates per year with a minimum of ten officers. APD has one academy in progress and another scheduled for July 2003.”

“Vacancies not projected

Non-concur - Already addressed.”

- d. **Evaluation of Management Comments.** Management comments were partially responsive to the audit finding and recommendation.

Vacancies not projected: While management states that APD anticipated the loss of personnel, we found no evidence during the audit that any projections were used for recruiting, testing or academy scheduling. We were told by APD personnel that it was difficult to schedule recruiting and testing because they were never sure as to how many positions were needed or when they could be hired.

Continuous recruitment should end: Management comments state that open recruitment allows individuals to submit applications at any time. This is true. However, the problem we found with open recruitment is that applicants may not be tested, trained and hired for up to a year from the time they turn in their application. As a result, individuals that need work may not be willing to wait and may find jobs elsewhere. In our opinion, open recruitment can work if there is continuous hiring and applicants are interviewed, tested and hired within a specified time from when they submit their application, not when hiring is done only one or two times a year.

2. **Recruitment and Investigations Need Separation.**

- a. **Finding.** APD's recruitment function needs to be separate from its background investigation function. Currently, APD's Recruitment-Background Investigations Unit is responsible for both recruiting and administering tests and performing background investigations for sworn and non-sworn applicants, and other people such as citizens who apply for firearm permits. The basic goal of recruitment is to obtain qualified applicants. The basic goal of background investigation is to screen applicants for activities which may jeopardize an applicant's role as a police officer. As a result, the Unit recruits police officer candidates and, at the same time, may dismiss these same candidates for further consideration as a result of testing and background investigation results. APD staff also told us that they cannot complete their work in a timely manner due to the large work load. According to APD staff, these problems could result in someone being hired who should not have been hired. For example, APD staff stated that in 2002 two police officers were terminated due to information which should have been discovered during the hiring process or the background investigation process. A separate recruiting function and a separate background function could help APD better focus and manage these responsibilities. Good control standards require that an appropriate organizational structure be established to effectively carry out program responsibilities.
- b. **Recommendation.** APD management should consider separating the recruitment function from the background investigation function.
- c. **Management Comments.** Management stated, "Concur - Recruiting and Backgrounds are currently separate functions. Recruitment tasks are being fulfilled by teams comprised of ethnically diverse APD personnel. One additional PCN has been designated for recruitment, however this position has not been filled."

- d. **Evaluation of Management Comments.** Management comments were responsive to the audit recommendation. However, at the time of the audit, recruiting, testing and background investigations functions were performed by the Recruitment-Background Investigations Unit and not by two separate units.

3. **Assistance With Hiring Function Needed.**

- a. **Finding.** APD is the only Municipal department performing all of its own hiring activities with limited assistance from Employee Relations. For other Municipal departments, including the Anchorage Fire Department, Employee Relations staff assist with the hiring process by processing the applications, determining who the eligible applicants are, scheduling medical examinations, and notifying the applicants if they were selected. At APD, these functions were performed by the Recruitment-Background Investigations Unit.
- b. **Recommendation.** APD management should consider transferring some of its administrative hiring functions to the Employment Division of the Employee Relations Department.
- c. **Management Comments.** Management stated, “Concur - APD already coordinates with Employee Relations regarding testing and interviewing procedures. Employee Relations also provides conditional offers of employment and contracts for psychological evaluations and medical exams.”
- d. **Evaluation of Management Comments.** Management comments were partially responsive to the audit finding and recommendation. While APD may coordinate procedures with Employee Relations, actual tasks of processing and pre-screening applications, scheduling medical exams and notifying applicants were performed by APD. We were told that the Recruitment-Background Investigations Unit was not always able to handle all of their work due to an overload of tasks, resulting in delays

in the hiring process. Our recommendation is one way to relieve some of the administrative burden allowing the Recruitment-Background Investigations Unit staff to devote their time to recruiting, testing and investigating the applicants.

OTHER PERTINENT INFORMATION

APD Hiring Standards.

Our review of APD's minimum qualifications for a police officer revealed that these qualifications were lower compared to other organizations. For example, APD's education requirement only stipulates graduation from high school or GED equivalent. However, our review of 10 city law enforcement departments revealed that 7 required 30 or more college credit hours and/or military service experience to become a police officer.² In addition, another city law enforcement department was considering adding college credit hours as part of their minimum requirements. Finally, minimum qualifications for a police officer do not require any public contact experience or the ability to demonstrate typing skills. However, the minimum qualifications to work as an APD dispatcher require 2 years of public contact experience and the ability to type 35 words per minute.

Management Comments. Management stated, "Concur - Changes in minimum requirements for the position of police officer must be coordinated with Employee Relations to ensure that it will not cause disparate impact to minorities. Any revisions would be coordinated with the Employee Relations/Classification section."

² City law enforcement departments selected for the comparison were Memphis, TN; Wichita, KS; Boise, ID; Tucson, AZ; Albuquerque, NM; Gainesville, FL; Buffalo, NY; Portland, OR; Colorado Springs, CO; and Spokane, WA.

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Discussion With Responsible Officials. The results of this audit were discussed with appropriate Municipal officials.

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APD Testing Statistics Based On Demographics 1999-2002

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Phase I Testing: Nelson-Denny Test, Ergometric Video Test, Observation Writing Test

Phase II Testing: Assessment Interview/Background Check

Phase III Testing Medical, Psychological, Polygraph and Drug Test

1999*									
	<u>Phase I Testing</u>			<u>Phase II Testing</u>		<u>Phase III Testing</u>		<u>Hired</u>	
	# Tested	# Passed	% Passed	# Passed	% Passed	# Passed	% Passed	# Hired	% of Tested
Black	96	18	19%	2	11%	2	100%	1	1%
Hispanic	105	23	22%	6	26%	2	33%	0	0%
Native	76	12	16%	2	17%	2	100%	0	0%
Asian	83	15	18%	7	47%	7	100%	2	2%
White	1303	439	34%	131	30%	99	76%	26	2%
Other	22	4	18%	1	25%	0	0%	0	0%
Unknown	28	2	7%	1	50%	0	0%	0	0%
TOTAL	1713	513	30%	150	29%	112	75%	29	2%

*June & December Test

2000									
	<u>Phase I Testing</u>			<u>Phase II Testing</u>		<u>Phase III Testing</u>		<u>Hired</u>	
	# Tested	# Passed	% Passed	# Passed	% Passed	# Passed	% Passed	# Hired	% of Tested
Black	29	2	7%	1	50%	1	100%	0	0%
Hispanic	40	9	23%	5	56%	3	60%	2	5%
Native	36	4	11%	4	100%	4	100%	0	0%
Asian	36	7	19%	2	29%	2	100%	2	6%
White	382	159	42%	79	50%	75	95%	20	5%
Other	21	6	29%	2	33%	2	100%	1	5%
Unknown	12	4	33%	1	25%	1	100%	0	0%
TOTAL	556	191	34%	94	49%	88	94%	25	4%

ATTACHMENT A

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APD Testing Statistics Based On Demographics 1999-2002

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Phase I Testing: Nelson-Denny Test, Ergometric Video Test, Observation Writing Test

Phase II Testing: Assessment Interview/Background Check

Phase III Testing: Medical, Psychological, Polygraph and Drug Test

2001									
	<u>Phase I Testing</u>			<u>Phase II Testing</u>		<u>Phase III Testing</u>		<u>Hired</u>	
	# Tested	# Passed	% Passed	# Passed	% Passed	# Passed	% Passed	# Hired	% of Tested
Black	37	9	24%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Hispanic	38	12	32%	6	50%	5	83%	3	8%
Native	27	2	7%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Asian	52	4	8%	1	25%	0	0%	0	0%
White	422	150	36%	72	48%	56	78%	16	4%
Other	48	14	29%	5	36%	4	80%	0	0%
Unknown	12	1	8%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
TOTAL	636	192	30%	84	44%	65	77%	19	3%

2002**									
	<u>Phase I Testing</u>			<u>Phase II Testing</u>		<u>Phase III Testing</u>		<u>Hired</u>	
	# Tested	# Passed	% Passed	# Passed	% Passed	# Passed	% Passed	# Hired	% of Tested
Black	42	13	31%	4	31%	1	25%	1	2%
Hispanic	42	21	50%	8	38%	4	50%	1	2%
Native	42	10	24%	3	30%	2	67%	2	5%
Asian	28	10	36%	5	50%	4	80%	3	11%
White	480	302	63%	115	38%	44	38%	23	5%
Other	19	12	63%	3	25%	0	0%	0	0%
Unknown	78	41	53%	10	24%	1	10%	0	0%
TOTAL	731	409	56%	148	36%	56	38%	30	4%

** January & June Test

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