
CHAPTER 2

HRD's role in state hiring has been process-oriented rather than strategic

Although HRD, through SRT, does not make hiring decisions for agencies, it does administer important parts of the hiring process by approving and posting vacancy announcements, screening applications for minimum qualifications, and generating registers of qualified applicants from which agencies can choose. However well HRD performs these duties determines the quality of its contribution to the state hiring process.

HRD remains focused on the electronic application process and screening.

We found shortcomings in some parts of the hiring process that fall under HRD purview. The Division has the statutory charge to initiate and administer recruitment programs designed to attract suitable and qualified employees. However, after reviewing HRD-approved vacancy announcements, we concluded that their wording was often either too general or too technical to attract applicants. Recruiting is largely left up to individual agencies, since HRD remains focused on the electronic application process and screening efforts. In addition, the application process can confuse some applicants.

HRD has not yet strategically developed components of the state's hiring process as envisioned in statute, with a view to creating an innovative, comprehensive, and value-added service. For Wyoming state government to be competitive in obtaining qualified employees, HRD will need to enhance its contribution to the hiring process and become more of a central resource that not only offers speedy electronic processes, but also actively assists agencies in meeting their hiring challenges.

HRD recruitment efforts are limited

HRD recruitment efforts consist primarily of reviewing and posting vacancy announcements online, suggesting recruitment

Large agencies with HR staff devise their own recruitment strategies.

outlets such as Monster.com, and attending job fairs. HRD officials acknowledged their own recruitment efforts are passive, relying on agencies to identify their own needs and develop recruiting efforts. Large agencies with in-house HR staff say they have devised tactics to target and attract qualified employees. For example:

- One agency is focusing its recruitment efforts on states it identified as having applicants with the requisite skills who are willing to move.
- Two agencies are able to offer tuition reimbursement due to federal funds they receive.
- One agency considers itself a “training ground” and so works closely with the University of Wyoming’s College of Engineering to attract its students.
- One agency is increasing its flexibilities in work hours, location, and worker duties to make itself more attractive.

The result is that each large agency is “reinventing the wheel” independently of the others; small agencies that lack HR specialization have not had even this capability. HRD indicates it plans to take a more active role in recruiting future applicants.

Competition for new employees calls for non-traditional measures

To promote government service, states market selves as “employers of choice.”

Facing the same hiring obstacles as Wyoming, other states are developing state-of-the-art recruitment materials to improve the image of professional government service. The aim is to create interest from candidates who might otherwise consider different employment options. For example, we found it common to market the state as an “employer of choice” by highlighting the benefits and security of public sector jobs. To help make them competitive with the private sector, some states identify “flexibilities,” or innovative ways to attract and retain job seekers. These tactics range from specialized to very broad: one state has its own full-time professional recruiter who develops both electronic and paper promotional and information presentation materials; another offers state employee referral bonuses.

Some other states take the approach of dividing responsibilities so the central authority (similar to Wyoming's HRD) more actively recruits to maintain a pool of candidates for *cross-agency* positions such as administrative assistants. Individual agencies actively recruit applications for *agency-specific* positions such as agricultural inspectors. This strategy frees up agency time, with the central authority handling more general hiring so the agency can concentrate on technically specific positions. A key component of identifying agency hiring needs will come from SRT's Electronic Human Resource Management System (eHRMS), which is discussed in Chapter 4.

Online vacancy announcements are generic

Agencies create position vacancy announcements and submit them to SRT for approval. Now that SRT has converted from a paper to an electronic system, the section manager says the time to create and approve vacancy announcements has been reduced from two weeks to two hours. SRT currently posts the announcements online and agencies may also post them in other media they select.

Announcements are quick to prepare but not attractive to applicants.

With a focus on reducing the time needed to get vacancy announcements approved and posted, SRT has created a system that encourages agency personnel to "cut and paste" descriptions of vacant position duties from either Position Classification Specification or Position Description Questionnaires (PDQs). These documents are lengthy descriptions used to detail job duties for classification and performance appraisal purposes. Using them as the basis for vacancy announcements results in lengthy, and in some cases somewhat intimidating, job descriptions, rather than ones that are crafted to attract applicants.

Agencies are unsure about modifying announcements.

Although HRD does not require that agencies use language from these sources in creating vacancy announcements, many agency personnel who prepare the announcements told us their understanding was that they must. Others said they were hesitant to deviate from the standard approach because of concerns that SRT would not approve the different wording. In creating announcements, it is much easier for agency personnel to "cut

HRD approval of announcements does not include creative guidance.

and paste” from approved documents than summarize and reorganize the same information in a more inviting manner. The specter of HRD approval seems to have effectively constrained agencies from modifying the standard vacancy format, when in fact; HRD does not check the announcement language against either the Specifications or PDQs. Further, by approving the verbose and technically worded announcements rather than offering advice on how to make them more attractive to applicants, HRD does not meet its statutory responsibilities.

Some announcements may discourage applicants.

For example, we found essentially the same technically detailed approach is used to write announcements intended to attract applicants for positions as diverse as computer specialists and (laundry) support service positions (see examples of agencies’ vacancy announcements in Appendix B). Vacancy announcements that have not been tailored to fit the complexity of the positions and the likely applicants seem both off-putting and intimidating. While the “cut and paste” method creates announcements that are quick and easy for the agencies and HRD to produce and post, it is not necessarily the most effective approach to attract applicants, and in fact, may discourage potential applicants from applying.

Other states indicate they closely tie a job announcement with the actual job requirements and its specific duties. Also, they express expectations of the potential employee in language geared to attract the candidate. For example, Figure 2.1 compares Wyoming and Maine job announcement language for an entry level highway construction laborer:

**Figure 2.1
Comparison of Wyoming and Maine announcement language**

Maine’s is more straightforward.

Wyoming’s description	Maine’s Description
“Under supervision, performs basic non-skilled engineering tasks and other duties in support of the construction staff.”	“This is work at a laboring level with various aspects of building maintenance and construction.”

(See Appendix C for the full text of these announcements.)

Wyoming's electronic application cuts time, but has drawbacks

Applicants complain online system is confusing.

The online application enables applicants to apply quickly, and also facilitates SRT's screening review. However, according to agency HR staff, some applicants complain that the online process is confusing and that they are unable to complete it. As a result, they say many applicants are not filling out the text boxes, which provide supplemental information upon which much of SRT's screening for minimum qualifications is based. In some instances, agency HR staff assist candidates in filling out applications; in others, they direct job seekers to SRT for assistance. We found several other states' online application processes to be more user-friendly: they have a welcoming tone and offer guidance features not found in Wyoming's electronic application.

The application itself is difficult to read and may create false expectations for applicants.

In making the application electronic, SRT did not update the traditional paper form to make it more readable and user-friendly. The application remains entirely in upper case, which, according to style editors, is not only difficult to read but also conveys the impression of shouting (see blank application form in Appendix D). One section states that applications will be kept for a year, seeming to suggest that SRT will submit them for similar vacancies in the future. Line 12 even asks applicants if they want to be considered for a similar position in another agency. However, while SRT does keep applications for a year, it does not automatically refer them for other position vacancies. Also, the application states that federal requirements mandate applicants provide personal information about gender, age, and ethnicity; in fact, providing that information is optional.

Screening is based on broad classifications rather than position-specific skills

As with position vacancy announcements, SRT screens for minimum qualifications based on the requirements for broad classifications. The intent appears to be to screen people in, rather than to identify specific job skills. Part of this inclusiveness includes granting "equivalencies," whereby SRT

allows combinations of job experience to substitute for educational degree requirements. However, some agencies told us they are perplexed when candidates with experience but no degree are screened and deemed qualified for positions that the agencies believe require degrees.

The screening process is not intended to rank applicants.

SRT's screening process does not distinguish among applicants by ranking them or identifying those who meet an agency's preferences. For example, fiscal/statistical specialist positions encompass individuals with experience in both subjects. However, agencies that want a statistical expert probably do not want to hire a fiscal person with accounting skills; the converse is true as well. Nevertheless, at present, the standard vacancy announcement and screening process allows an accountant to meet minimum qualifications for a statistical analysis position.

Other states have initial screening functions built into their application process.

Other states are developing more efficient and consistent methods for ensuring applicants meet qualifications. Candidates can be pre-qualified at job fairs and professional association recruitment events. Some states build an initial sorting function into their online applications with "drop-down check boxes," or questions that ask an applicant who has the required degree or skill to mark the box. These applications are sorted automatically and deemed qualified. Using check boxes rather than having applicants type information into text boxes helps ensure applicants are answering the relevant questions and completing the application.

Agencies favor open-until-filled announcements

HRD created the option to give agencies flexibility.

Agencies can allow a position announcement to be open for a specifically designated time (with a minimum of 2 weeks if not an internal posting), or they may choose to have it "open-until-filled." Agencies tend to favor the open-until-filled option: it accounted for nearly 88 percent of the vacancy announcements on the day we reviewed postings, while the continuously-open designation accounted for 5 percent. The remaining 7 percent had a specific closing date. This option seems to have been developed because before the system became electronic, re-

posting a vacancy announcement, if necessary because of a lack of qualified applicants, could take SRT weeks.

An agency may have made its decision before getting the register.

Open-until-filled vacancy announcements provide flexibility to agencies, but we believe this category, as used, inadvertently leads applicants to believe they are being considered automatically. Several agencies explained that they routinely keep announcements open until hiring managers identify the persons they wish to hire and are prepared to make job offers. At this point, agencies tell SRT to close the vacancies and send them registers. The names of other qualified applicants will be on the registers, but in reality, those persons may not be considered for the positions.

They are not necessarily considered for each position that becomes available.

Continuously-open vacancy announcements could mislead some applicants

Another option, “continuously-open,” is used primarily for positions that agencies need to fill on a regular and immediate basis, such as hospital staff, corrections officers, transportation technicians, and financial technician positions. In these cases, SRT selects a subset of qualified applicants based on the filtering criteria an agency can request; for example, agencies often request “only the most recent qualified applicants.” Applicants are encouraged to apply for the continuously-open pool and do so believing they will be considered for each and every position for which they are qualified. In fact, they become part of a large pool and may have only a chance of being selected for the register that will go to the agency.

Recommendation: HRD should begin actively recruiting and should review its announcement, screening, and application processes to ensure they are designed to attract suitable and qualified employees.

Since HRD houses many of the state’s highest classified HR professionals, the expertise of this staff should be made available to all agencies. In order for the state to compete successfully for

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applicants in the changing job market, HRD needs to provide leadership and expertise that will assist agencies in developing active recruitment strategies and flexibilities. Transforming itself into a central resource of this sort can begin with tangible steps such as reaching out to identify agency needs, enhancing communication with agencies, observing trends and adapting best practices from other states and the federal government, and developing strategies to accomplish the state's recruiting goals.

HRD can assist agencies in producing individualized vacancy announcements that realistically and concisely describe each position. HRD should change its recruiting efforts and online application to serve the agencies needs in screening applicants. It should review the online application process and make adjustments to accommodate the concerns of agencies and applicants. HRD can also assist applicants by fashioning a more inviting online application process.