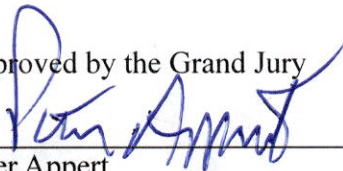


2024-2025 Contra Costa County Civil Grand Jury

Contra Costa County Hiring Challenges

Report 2508
June 2, 2025

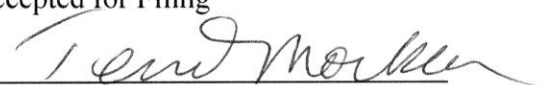
Approved by the Grand Jury


Peter Appert
GRAND JURY FOREPERSON

Date

6/4/25

Accepted for Filing


Hon. Terri Mockler
JUDGE OF THE SUPERIOR COURT

Date

6/3/25



SUMMARY

This report offers an overview of Contra Costa County's hiring process and highlights areas for improvement to enhance its efficiency.

The hiring process in Contra Costa County is complex and lengthy. The Grand Jury found that there are 27 steps in the recruiting and hiring process. For most departments, execution of these steps is shared between the Human Resources (HR) department and the department requesting the job. To ensure progress, close coordination between the hiring department and HR is necessary. Other departments choose to be responsible for all 27 steps.

The average time to hire (the duration between a job requisition being opened and an employee being hired) for the County is 113 days. Although this has improved from levels several years ago, there are still opportunities for improvement.

The County's lean HR staff contributes to challenges in hiring. The HR department supports 50 percent more county employees per HR staff member than neighboring counties. Due to limited staff, there are sometimes delays in posting job openings. As of January 6, 2025, 74 percent of the jobs pending posting have remained in that status for 30 days or more. Until a job is posted, recruiting cannot begin.

The large number of job classifications in the County also influences the complexity of hiring. With 1,300 job classifications, recruitment becomes more challenging when job requirements are highly specific. Furthermore, maintaining and updating the job classification list adds extra work for HR.

The Grand Jury also determined that several County departments use alternative hiring methods. The first is a process called dedicated resources, employed by the Employment and Human Services Department (EHSD). Under dedicated resources, EHSD funds three positions to work in HR, with these employees focused exclusively on recruiting efforts for EHSD. The second approach, known as delegated authority, is utilized by Contra Costa Health Services and Public Works. In this approach, the department assumes full responsibility for all recruiting and hiring steps to fill their positions, with no reliance upon or coordination with HR for any part of the recruiting and hiring process. These initiatives have been well-received by the departments utilizing them, suggesting that other departments might also benefit.

This report outlines the Grand Jury's research and findings regarding the challenges in the hiring process in Contra Costa County. We conclude with recommendations to help address these challenges.

BACKGROUND

An efficient and timely hiring process is crucial for maintaining appropriate staffing levels, ensuring the provision of essential services, and addressing community needs. The Grand Jury decided to investigate the factors contributing to challenges with the hiring process and their effects on the workforce.

The Human Resources Department

Under the direction of the County Administrator, HR provides a diverse array of services to county departments and employees. The department is organized into four primary divisions:

1. **Administrative Services:** Manages the overall administrative functions of HR.
2. **Employee Benefits Services:** Develops and recommends benefits strategies and policies to ensure a competitive compensation package.
3. **Information Management:** Develops, implements, integrates and maintains all County Human Resources Information Systems.
4. **Personnel Services:** The central authority for recruitment, assessment, classification, and compensation initiatives. It publishes job openings and assessments, refers qualified candidates to departments, conducts salary surveys and job audits, and prepares class specifications and classification reports. The hiring department then interviews qualified candidates.

The focus of our investigation is Personnel Services.

METHODOLOGY

The Grand Jury used the following investigative methods:

- Interviewed employees of multiple departments in the County.
- Reviewed HR hiring procedures and documents.
- Reviewed and compared personnel data of other county HR departments.

DISCUSSION

The Human Resources Department - Personnel Services

The Contra Costa County Civil Grand Jury examined HR's personnel services, primarily focusing on the County's hiring process.

General Challenges Impacting Hiring

Based on multiple interviews, the Grand Jury learned of the following staff recruitment challenges facing the County:

- Lengthy hiring timelines: Prolonged recruitment processes can delay filling vacancies.
- Attracting qualified candidates: Finding candidates with the right mix of skills and experience can be a significant hurdle.
- High competition for talent.
- Limited resources: Insufficient HR staff or tools can hinder the efficiency of the hiring process.

- Complex job classifications: Navigating more than 1,300 job classifications can slow down or complicate recruitment efforts.

Recruitment and Hiring Process

The recruitment and hiring process represents a collaboration between the job-requesting department and HR. The requesting department and HR are each responsible for completing their assigned steps in a timely manner. Employees utilize NeoGov, a human resource management system that provides a suite of software tools and services, to assist in completing these tasks and generally manage HR functions.

The following chart of the Recruitment and Hiring Process outlines the 27 steps involved and the average time required to complete each step. The **green** steps outline the responsibilities of HR, and the **gold** steps outline the duties of the requesting department.



RECRUITMENT & HIRING PROCESS

NeoGov Reporting Crosswalk - 2024 Averages

Task	Department	Human Resources
Department internal authorization to hire process		
REQUISITION APPROVAL STEPS - 12 days		
Open a Requisition in NeoGov		
Review Requisition for available position and class		
Determine whether Job Description needs to be updated		
Determine whether a Job Analysis needs to be completed		
RECRUITMENT PLANNING/ANALYSIS - 7 days		
Develop Job Announcement and Recruitment Timeline		
Send Union Notice (union has 5 days to respond)		
Develop Exam Plan		
Select Subject Matter Experts		
JOB POSTING - 18 days		
Post Job Announcement (generally 2-4 weeks)		
ASSESSMENT PROCESS - 12 days		
Review applicants for Minimum Qualifications (MQs)		
Issue Pass/Fail Notices to Applicants After MQ Review		
Applicant Appeal Period (5 business days)		
Selection of Raters		
ELIGIBLE LIST - 16 days		
Administer first step of exam plan (oral board, tech, written, etc)		
Issue pass/fail notices to applicants after initial exam		
Create Eligible List - send candidates to Dept (Rule of 3, 5, 10, List)		
DEPARTMENTAL HIRING PROCESS - 30 days		
Schedule Departmental Interviews		
Complete and Score Departmental Interviews		
Select Candidate(s) for Hire & contact to make verbal job offer		
PRE-EMPLOYMENT PROCESS - 18 days		
Open Personnel Action Form (PAF) in NeoGov		
Send Conditional Offer - includes fingerprinting instructions		
Send notice to Equifax to initiate I-9 process self-scheduling		
Review results of criminal history search (follow up if needed)		
Dept specific pre-employment steps (physical, fitness etc)		
Departmental Final Review of PAF		
HR Final Review and Enter New Hire in PeopleSoft		

Three operational models are available for County departments and HR to follow when completing the outlined steps:

Standard: The department requesting a job is responsible for completing the **gold** steps, while HR is tasked with finishing the **green** steps. Each group must fulfill its responsibilities in a timely manner, as delays from either the department or HR will impact the hiring timeline.

Delegated Authority: Staff in the department requesting a job is responsible for all recruiting and hiring steps to fill their positions. In this way, there is no reliance on, or coordination with, HR for recruiting and hiring.

Dedicated Resources: The department requesting a job funds full-time HR staff to focus solely on their department’s recruitment and hiring.

Time to Hire

The chart below shows a steady improvement in the average days to hire for the County:

Average Time to Hire (Days)					
<i>This measure tracks the average number of days to hire.</i>					
Calendar Year	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Average Days to Hire	217	199	158	134	113
Percent of Change	-42%	-9%	-26%	-18%	-19%

HR implemented strategies to aid in improving the time to hire. These include:

- Implementing the I-9 Anywhere program – an online program for applicants that allows for greater flexibility and ease of use to reduce time for candidates to apply.
- Providing the Dedicated Resource model to allow larger departments to work with specific HR team members 100 percent assigned to their recruitment.
- Reviewing eligible applicant lists that are cross-referenced with current department vacancies.
- Rebuilding partnership with colleges and workforce organizations for job postings, job fairs, and career fairs.
- Providing proactive vacancy data to support departments’ recruitment planning.

At the same time, HR has acknowledged that there is still room for reducing the time to hire and improve recruitment and retention. Some potential improvement initiatives include:

- Multiple affordable medical plans
- Wide variety of benefit options
- Contra Costa County Employees’ Retirement Association pension plan
- 457(b) deferred compensation plan that includes county contributions

- Remote work opportunities
- Cost-of-Living Adjustment pay increases competitive with the Bay Area salary market
- Generous holiday and leave accrual plans
- Progressive culture celebrating diversity, equity, inclusion and access

Impacts of HR Understaffing

The Grand Jury learned that, despite a reduction in hiring time over the past five years, the average hiring time of 113 days remains lengthy and contributes to understaffing. This extended hiring process is partly attributed to the small size of the County’s HR Department.

In a county with more than 11,000 authorized positions, there are only eight HR Analysts to facilitate recruiting across 25 departments. These same HR Analysts are also responsible for classification and compensation studies countywide.

Due to the lean HR recruiting staff there can be delays in posting job openings. Each department requesting a new hire has to prioritize its requests. As of January 6, 2025, 74 percent of pending job postings remained unlisted for 30 days or longer. The following chart illustrates the delays in posting:

Jobs Pending Posting

(as of January 6, 2025)

Time Frame Since Created	Count
0-30 Days	12
30-60 Days	6
60-90 Days	7
90-180 Days	6
180-365 Days	7
365+ Days	8
Grand Total	46

Contra Costa County HR has 55 authorized positions, supporting a current employee base of 9,932. This represents a ratio of one HR staff member for every 181 County employees. In contrast, surrounding counties operate with one HR staff member per 122 employees on average, as highlighted in the table below. Contra Costa’s HR supports 50 percent more employees per HR staff member than the five-county average. To address this issue, in 2024, HR requested the Board of Supervisors (BOS) approve funding for five additional full-time employees; however, that request was denied. HR will petition the BOS again in 2025.

Comparison of HR Staffing Levels

County	County Employees	HR Staff	Ratio HR Staff: Employees
Alameda	9,900	78	1:127
Marin	2,534	42	1:60
San Francisco	34,373	209	1:164
San Joaquin	8,046	51	1:158
Solano	3,279	33	1:99
Average ratio			1:122
Contra Costa	9,932	55	1:181

Notes:

- San Francisco employee and HR staff count includes county and city employees
- Ratio of HR Staff to Employees measures how many county employees there are for each HR staff member

Software Tools: A Need for Knowledge

PeopleSoft is a suite of enterprise applications that help businesses manage various operations, including human resources, finance, supply chain, and customer relationships. The County uses PeopleSoft to help manage its HR operations. Specifically, it is used to create reports on the following HR functions:

- recruitment, onboarding, and termination
- standard employee data
- compensation analysis
- workforce demographics
- performance management
- training and development
- turnover analysis
- benefits

HR utilizes PeopleSoft reports; however, not all County departments have knowledge of, access to, or training to run them. Additionally, departments can request custom reports from HR. Department staff are not always aware of these custom reports and/or how to request them. In addition, PeopleSoft can track why candidates decline job offers; however, the county does not utilize this feature. Not fully utilizing the capabilities of its PeopleSoft tools contributes to inefficiencies in the County’s hiring process.

Job Classification Challenge

The County supports approximately 1,300 job classifications, totaling around 11,000 authorized positions. As departments specify individual job requirements, the number of job classifications increases, leading to more time required for their review and maintenance. For example, the County has 27 job classifications for accountants. More generic job classifications allow multiple departments to utilize them for similar roles. Conversely, highly specialized job specifications

often cannot be shared among departments, which limits the pool of qualified applicants. Broader specifications attract a larger number of candidates. The Grand Jury acknowledges that changes in job specifications require consultation with labor groups.

Employment Human Services Department (EHSD) Dedicated HR Staff

To expedite the hiring process, EHSD funds three full-time HR staff members. These professionals, who report to HR, focus solely on recruitment for specific roles within EHSD, thereby enhancing the department’s recruitment and hiring capabilities.

In January 2024, with one full-time HR staff member, EHSD had 335 vacancies. By July 2024, the first month EHSD added the second and third full-time HR staff members, the number of vacancies decreased to 326. As of February 2025, overall vacancies had been reduced to 270, a 17 percent reduction.

The chart below shows vacancy rates of Contra Costa County departments. Those with higher vacancy rates may benefit from dedicated resources as EHSD did.

County Vacancy Rates

Department Name	Filled	% Filled	Vacant	% Vacant	Auth Positions
Agriculture-Weights/Measures	49	86.0%	8	14.0%	57
Animal Services	74	83.1%	15	16.9%	89
Assessor	91	84.3%	17	15.7%	108
Auditor-Controller	57	90.5%	6	9.5%	63
Board of Supervisors	31	93.9%	2	6.1%	33
Child Support Services	113	89.0%	14	11.0%	127
Conservation and Development	171	81.8%	38	18.2%	209
Contra Costa County Fire Distr	572	92.6%	46	7.4%	618
County Administrator	43	93.5%	3	6.5%	46
County Clerk-Recorder	71	85.5%	12	14.5%	83
County Counsel	53	93.0%	4	7.0%	57
Dept of Information Technology	97	92.4%	8	7.6%	105
District Attorney	229	94.6%	13	5.4%	242
Employment and Human Services	1660	86.1%	267	13.9%	1927
Health Services	4320	85.6%	726	14.4%	5046
Human Resources	51	92.7%	4	7.3%	55
Library	238	88.5%	31	11.5%	269
Probation	297	84.9%	53	15.1%	350
Public Defender	186	95.4%	9	4.6%	195
Public Works	478	87.4%	69	12.6%	547
Racial Equity/Social Justice	2	50.0%	2	50.0%	4
Risk Management	30	73.2%	11	26.8%	41
Sheriff-Coroner	974	84.8%	174	15.2%	1148
Treasurer-Tax Collector	32	97.0%	1	3.0%	33
Veterans Services	13	100.0%	0	0.0%	13
Grand Total	9932	86.6%	1533	13.4%	11465

External Consultant

EHSD collaborated with an external consultant from July 1, 2024, to June 30, 2025, to examine EHSD operations, including the hiring processes. The following are positive impacts from the consultant's recommendations related to hiring:

- Conducted assessments with the EHSD Personnel staff to identify issues and develop solutions for their hiring processes.
- Established a hiring strategy that currently guides hiring activities.
- Oversaw hiring interviews for key positions. Collaborated with HR to post vacancies, screen applicants, organize hiring panels, supply materials to hiring panels, proctor interviews, and facilitate the onboarding and development of 30-60-90 Day Onboarding Plans for new employees.
- Identified several necessary personnel procedures and documented them for EHSD's review and approval.

EHSD is currently implementing the consultant's recommendations. Given EHSD's success in improving its hiring process (as evidenced by the meaningful reduction in the number of vacancies), external consultants working with HR could provide an impartial perspective on the County's overall hiring practices. Measure X funds, as discussed below, could be used for such consulting services.

Delegated Authority

Another approach to HR hiring is known as delegated authority. In this model, the department takes full responsibility for all recruiting and hiring steps necessary to fill its positions. This involves the power granted to specific departments to oversee all 27 steps in the hiring process, eliminating the need for back-and-forth communication between HR and the department. This delegation promotes more localized decision-making and enables hiring processes tailored to the specific needs of each department. Contra Costa Health Services and Public Works employ delegated authority.

Public Works implemented delegated authority in December 2024. However, a notable weakness of the Public Works Department's implementation of delegated authority is its dependency on a single in-house employee without any backup. This individual is responsible for performing the HR tasks assigned as shown (highlighted in green) in the Recruitment and Hiring Process chart above. This singular reliance puts the hiring process at risk if that individual becomes unavailable.

Measure X Funding

The BOS placed a sales tax proposal on the November 2020 ballot with the goal of providing local funds for local priorities. The tax was passed on November 3, 2020, and generates approximately \$120 million each year to support a variety of county services.

Measure X funds are for general purposes, and the BOS directs how the funds should be used. The BOS seeks input from the Measure X Community Advisory Board and the community about priorities and community needs. The ballot language for Measure X stated that the intent is "To keep Contra Costa's regional hospital open and staffed; fund community health centers; provide

timely fire and emergency response; support crucial safety-net services; invest in early childhood services; protect vulnerable populations; and for other essential county services.”

As recruiting and retaining sufficient staff is necessary to maintain essential County services, use of Measure X funds to support HR is an approved use of these resources.

FINDINGS

- F1. The hiring process is a complex, multi-step process involving 27 steps.
- F2. The hiring process is lengthy, with an average of 113 days to hire.
- F3. The Employment and Human Services Department (EHSD) has implemented dedicated resources that allocate funds for three individuals in the County Human Resources (HR) Department who are exclusively focused on recruitment and improving EHSD’s hiring capabilities.
- F4. Contra Costa Health and Public Works departments utilize delegated authority for recruiting and hiring, under which they assume full responsibility for the hiring process for those classifications unique to their respective departments.
- F5. Public Works has one in-house person managing HR recruiting and hiring without any backup.
- F6. Lean HR staffing compels departments to prioritize job postings, which can lead to delays in posting job openings.
- F7. Employees in Contra Costa County responsible for hiring often lack knowledge on how to fully utilize the capabilities of PeopleSoft.
- F8. The County does not track the reasons candidates decline county jobs.
- F9. The time needed to maintain County job classifications grows as similar job specifications become more specialized.
- F10. The County’s specialized job classifications narrow the pool of potential applicants.
- F11. EHSD contracted with an external consultant from July 1, 2024, to June 30, 2025, to evaluate its hiring process and make recommendations for improvements.
- F12. The County HR department does not currently contract with an external consultant to review its hiring processes.
- F13. The HR staff-to-employee ratio in Contra Costa County suggests that the HR department is understaffed compared to those in neighboring counties.

RECOMMENDATIONS

R1. By January 1, 2026, the Board of Supervisors (BOS) should consider using Measure X funds to hire an external consultant to assess hiring processes across the County.

R2. By July 1, 2026, the BOS should consider directing HR to work with County departments to assess whether they could benefit from delegated authority or dedicated resources to enhance the hiring process.

R3. By July 1, 2026, the BOS should consider directing HR to initiate the process of consolidating existing job classifications across departments.

R4. By January 1, 2026, the BOS should consider directing the Public Works department to ensure there is a backup for the internal HR staff member responsible for performing delegated-authority tasks.

R5. By January 1, 2026, the BOS should consider directing HR to implement a procedure to identify and track why candidates decline job offers.

R6. By January 1, 2026, the BOS should consider hiring additional HR analysts.

REQUEST FOR RESPONSES

Pursuant to California Penal Code § 933(b) et seq. and California Penal Code § 933.05, the 2024-2025 Contra Costa County Civil Grand Jury requests responses from the following governing bodies:

Responding agency	Findings	Recommendations
Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors	F1 - F13	R1 - R6

These responses must be provided in the format and by the date set forth in the cover letter that accompanies this report. An electronic copy of these responses in the form of a Word document should be sent by e-mail to ctadmin@contracosta.courts.ca.gov and a hard (paper) copy should be sent to:

Civil Grand Jury – Foreperson
725 Court Street
P.O. Box 431
Martinez, CA 94553-0091

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