

**Introduction**

This brief report evaluates the Food-SafetyJobs Online pilot conducted from May 2001 to June 2002 using the Quick-Hire and USA Staffing automated systems. The Human Resources objectives for the automated systems were to (1) automate the application process; (2) streamline the time to evaluate, refer, hire and promote candidates; (3) have applicants self-certify the level to which they possess competencies; and (4) provide administrative reports to satisfy regulatory requirements.

The purpose of this evaluation was to determine if the four objectives were met and suggest recommendations. The evaluation of the QuickHire system reflected experiences of Human Resources staff in Headquarters and Minneapolis who used the new system advertising and hiring government and non-government candidates for administrative, analytical, supervisory, scientific and other positions. The pilot of the USA Staffing system was more limited because it was only used by the Minneapolis Human Resources Field Office for a standing register of Veterinary Medical Officers.

**Methodology**

The methodology for the evaluation of QuickHire included interviews with Human Resources staff and selecting officials, online survey of applicants, observation of demonstrations of the systems, and an online review of other automated systems used by selected government agencies.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Other federal government agencies using versions of QuickHire include Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Agricultural Marketing Service, National Park

The USA Staffing review was limited to Minneapolis Human Resources Staff.

The major limitation of the evaluation was that neither system was fully tested to handle all the current recruitment needs of FSIS alone. The use of two systems and their linkages to future classification systems are important issues to be resolved.

**Key Findings**

Unless indicated the findings and recommendations address QuickHire only.<sup>2</sup>

All respondents agree that the pilot met the four Human Resources objectives:

(1) Application process was automated.<sup>3</sup>  
(2) Streamlining the time to evaluate, refer, hire and promote candidates was accomplished through:

- Reduced time to post announcement on USAJOBS,
- Less time and cost of panels through self certification and system rating and ranking,
- Reduced time and cost of mailings with the use of email,
- Issuing certificate of eligibles electronically rather than regular mail.

(3) Applicants self-certified their competencies by responding to a series of online questions. Human Resources Specialists then reviewed resumes and

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Service, United States Geological Survey, Environmental Protection Agency, Department of Energy, National Science Foundation, Bureau of Land Management, and Fish and Wildlife Service.

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix A for survey and interview summaries.

<sup>3</sup> Respondents reported some complaints from applicants without access to computers who were unable to apply through QuickHire. This issue was resolved during the pilot when OPM issued a memo requiring QuickHire to have a provision for manual applications. USA Staffing always permitted manual submission and the Minneapolis staff estimated twenty-five percent of the applicants submitted manual applications.

other supporting documentation to verify the veracity of the applicants' self-certifications. If discrepancies were discovered, HR Specialists exercised their professional judgment to ensure that only the best-qualified candidates were referred to selecting officials. Notwithstanding the creation of the online question library, the process is much faster than evaluating KSA's (narrative descriptions of applicants' knowledge, skills, ability, and other characteristics) and does not risk the referral of other than best-qualified applicants.

(4) Both systems provided reports but they were not readily available and respondents said they were difficult to customize to meet regulatory requirements. Because of uncertainty about the completeness and convenience of these reports, many staff continue to maintain manual files of materials that might be audited.

QuickHire met the four Human Resources objectives but did not provide an adequate system for permanent applicant inventories.<sup>4</sup> USA Staffing did a satisfactory job with the standing register, but other capacities were not tested.

### **Recommendations for Training**

Respondents recommended additional training on the QuickHire system. Human Resources staff said that training occurred before they had access to the software so they were not able to fully use some features such as data mining, reports, and email notification. Some selecting officials said that lack of training

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<sup>4</sup> Minneapolis staff is testing a custom version of the QuickHire permanent applicant inventories system the results of which will be available later in the summer.

also kept them from using all the features. Recommendations included:

- Develop presentation for Human Resource and Agency selecting officials emphasizing key points of benefits and use.
- Provide training on the new version 4.0 of QuickHire for Human Resources specialists including specialized training on data mining, how to prepare and use reports, applying search criteria, how to prepare certificates, and how to use diversity notification capabilities.
- Provide detailed and step-by-step instructions to selecting officials on how to use features such as selecting questions, developing additional questions, verifying question responses with online resumes and viewing electronic certificates.
- Develop improved reference manuals for both QuickHire and USA Staffing.
- Publicize where to get help in using the system and encourage to staff to seek help.

### **Recommendations for Online Certification**

There was concern that the on-line certification process was not sufficient to rate candidates and some hiring officials were not satisfied with the candidates received. Both hiring officials and Human Resources staff questioned the completeness of the questions library. The following recommendations address these concerns.

- Improve the completeness of the library of questions to include more job series.
- Improve quality of questions and tie more specifically to job.

- Limit number of questions per vacancy, use more laymen's terms, and clean up duplication.
- Have additional response choices for multiple choice questions including NA.
- Provide additional guidance on applying the weighting criteria and include classification staff in the process.
- Encourage staff to include additional text boxes for applicants to expand on actual experience.
- Develop a separate track for non-federal employees eliminating all the federal experience questions.
- Include questions about job experience outside federal government and volunteer work experience.
- List questions at back of job announcement so applicant can get material together before starting.
- Correct problems with the question choices bouncing back to the top.
- Provide additional way to reference jobs information without printing.
- Allow electronic submission of required supplemental forms and better capture of resume/attachment. (formatting, spacing, etc).
- Expand resume size to 30,000 characters.
- Provide instructions on how to copy and paste for resume.
- Include provision for cover letter.
- Better link to USAJOBS and other QuickHire and jobs sites, direct link to OPM resume builder, and allow answers to same question to apply to more than one job.
- Allow user to quit and come back without submitting incomplete applications.

### **Recommendations for Customer Online Interface**

Most applicants (81%) who completed the survey preferred the online application. They provided the following recommendations to improve customer access and make the page more user friendly.<sup>5</sup>

- Clarify initial instructions to include which buttons to press to proceed.
- Keep vacancy number and title throughout application process.

### **Recommendations for Processing**

Respondents provided the following additional recommendations for processing.

- Have an email to confirm that application has been received, if application is not complete and additional updates of where application is in system.
- Use online signature to select candidates.
- Revise email letters to more closely reflect FSIS policies.

**If you have any questions, please contact Jane Roth at 202- 720-6735**

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<sup>5</sup> Most agencies using QuickHire have very similar introductory screens. Examples of clear introductory screens are those used by NIH for an in-house resume and job announcement system found at the following address: <http://careerhere.nih.gov/>.

**Appendix A: Responses from Surveys and Interviews****Applicants' Views**

The evaluation received 1515 responses to the online survey from applicants. Overall, their responses to questions about the online system were very positive.

- Most (81%) preferred the on-line process.
- Almost all said
  - it was easy to access vacancy announcement (97%),
  - instructions were easy to follow (97%),
  - application was easy to use (94%).
- Most said
  - multiple-choice questions provided a good method for presenting qualifications for the positions (79%),
  - FoodSafetyJobs Online compared favorably to other online systems (73%).
- Only 34% said they preferred to provide a written narrative to the multiple-choice questions.

There were over 300 open-ended comments, dealing with automation and the Federal application process. They ranged from the following:

“All of the questions were specific and made the process easy. This was the best online application and resume submittal I’ve used since I began applying online.”

to:

“The application was dreadfully long. Although I have only applied to one job at this point, it appears that I would have to repeat much of the process were I to apply to another which is not encouraging.”

The most frequent comments were the following:

- positive, liked it, user friendly;
- need more response categories such as N/A;
- allow more elaboration in responses;
- include questions on other experiences besides work and school;
- provide more room, easier attachment for resume and others;
- link information to other jobs/agencies.

**Human Resources Staff's Views**

Overall, the Human Resources users interviewed in both Headquarters and Minneapolis preferred an online process. Most said it was easy to use and most were satisfied with the system. However, their experience was limited. Only about half used the QuickHire system daily or weekly, the other half less than that. The USA Staffing was only used by two individuals who were pleased overall with its appearance and ease of usage.

The following findings address responses to QuickHire. All agreed that the system

- automatically posts job announcements,
- allows targeting of announcements to diversity organizations (although not widely used as yet),
- allows for inputting and updating resumes,
- sorts applicants by ratings scores, and
- sorts by rating with veteran’s preference.

Most said that it allows for

- ranking of specific job requirements,
- assignment of weighted criteria for job elements,
- separating applicants into categories such as status and non-status, and
- issuing of separate DEU and Merit promotion certificates (with some extra effort).

Respondents said QuickHire did not allow for

- posting of resumes without announcements,
- scanning and scoring resumes.

Most were involved in selecting questions to be included in vacancy announcements and all were satisfied with the process. All said the questions in the library were relevant to the job qualifications. Comments included: “Most questions relevant and provide a lot to choose from,” “Pretty accurate,” “The level of detail of questions lets you separate out qualified candidates,” “Everything you ever wanted is there”.

Respondents stated that some questions are duplicated and some questions need to be revised by subject matter experts.

Most said that the documentation was sufficient to provide for a complete audit trail of actions but they were still maintaining paper folders.

Most said that the system

- would issue standard business letters,
- allow for retrieval of a ranked certificate,
- allow for collection of demographic data,
- allow for preparation of ad hoc and canned reports, and
- protect data from unauthorized use.

They were undecided about

- modification of reports (only with difficulty),
- transfer of data from other systems, and
- issuing one vacancy announcement for internal and external candidates.

With the automated system, respondents saw an increase in number of applicants but not the quality.

They said the system has

- increased the Agency’s ability to recruit and staff positions,
- filled vacancies in a more timely fashion,
- decreased the amount of paper work,

- increased their work output, and
- increased their ability to provide customer service.

They were undecided on whether the multiple-choice questions provided a better measure than the paper system although they believe it provided enough information.

Features they liked included:

- email notification of applicants,
- self-scoring by candidates,
- ability to see all applications quickly,
- issuing certificates electronically,
- vacancy announcement builder,
- web-base so updates can be loaded automatically by vendor,
- ability to upload resume electronically, and
- assessing KSA's through questions.

Features they did not like included:

- having to compare question responses with resume to verify qualifications,
- screens that look so similar they are confusing,
- bouncing between screens,
- questions library that needs updating, and
- security, although important, can be a hassle.

All had attended training but were divided on whether training was effective and what additional training was needed. Respondents reported that the initial QuickHire training was less effective than it could have been because it occurred long before actual use of the system.

### **Selecting Officials' Views**

The selecting officials interviewed provided mixed responses about QuickHire. Most respondents had limited exposure to QuickHire, using it for only one or two positions over the pilot period. None had used USA Staffing.

Overall respondents did not prefer the online system: "It's not ready for prime time". Their responses to the online system did not vary by type of position recruited or location. They were divided on whether to apply the system agency-wide and whether the multiple-choice questions provide a better measure of applicants' abilities than paper application.

Most said they received enough qualified candidates and the certificate list electronically. Most said the questions in the library were relevant to the job qualifications; however most did not develop additional questions and did not use the weighting criteria for the questions.

They were divided on

- whether it was more timely,
- whether Human Resources staff provided enough guidance, and
- whether the quality of the candidates increased.

Contrary to the experience in other agencies, respondents did not feel the process had increased the number of qualified applicants. Some said that the system had the potential to be faster than the manual system, and should improve with increased experience and use.

Despite these reservations, they identified these strengths:

- easier for people to search for jobs on the Web and apply,
- wide variety of skills are defined,
- range of questions give range of skills to be assessed.

Said one “Has good qualities of old system without the cumbersome redundancy of the old system in writing”.

The weaknesses identified included:

- rating may not reflect true abilities and experience,
- repetitive questions,
- inadequate documentation,
- need to include questions on willingness to take temporary jobs, work less than full time,
- requires greater review of resume.

They stated that the drop-down menus for questions were confusing and jumped to the top after each selection. Because of this, most reported printing out the question list and selecting manually, then going back in or having a secretary or other staff do the actual selection.