

Non-Commissioned Promotional/Selection Process Sub-Committee Report

INTRODUCTION

This sub-committee has conducted a study of issues surrounding the non-commissioned hiring and promotional process, including an on-line survey of Department employees, and has found the following:

The non-commissioned hiring and promotional process is controlled to a great extent by state law in the Government Code, the Appropriations Act and the State Classification Plan. The ability to change salaries is limited to promotions, merit increases, equity adjustments and reclassifications. The non-commissioned process has several different components:

- An employee can apply for a posted vacancy and compete for a new position at a higher pay group (promotion). However, sometimes employees apply for a job at the same pay group (lateral) that results in no pay raise or a job at a lower pay group (demotion) that results in a pay cut.
- An employee can be in a position that has career progression levels and promote from one pay group to another. These levels are set up based on the complexity of job duties and the type and extent of training or education needed. The more complex a job the higher number of additional levels to the job and the less complex the fewer additional levels or even no additional levels. For example: An HR Records Clerk has two salary levels Clerk III (A8) and Clerk IV (A10).
- An employee can be awarded a standard merit increase that moves them above the entry salary based on performance, but keeps them in their same position. There is no change in title or salary group, only an increase in pay. In the past, this type of pay raise was given at a rate of 3.4% (one step).
- An employee can receive a one-time merit payment that does not increase their monthly salary rate but is more of a bonus payment.
- State law also allows for retention and hiring bonuses to be used in critical positions with high turnover and/or difficulty hiring new people. The Department has used these occasionally on a very limited basis.
- State law allows agencies to look at positions whose duties have become more complex and change the pay grade (reclassification) for that job to a higher salary group. The Department has always been very conservative with its job classifications. Also, the lower pay level of its executive Director has also created a dampening effect on its salary classifications.
- State law allows agencies to determine that a job is properly classified but that specific employees need a salary raise to make them comparable to market (equity adjustment).

Currently Department policy is to hire new non-commissioned employees in at the minimum salary for the position. Hiring a new employee at a salary above the minimum requires the approval of the Director. Most positions at the agency have a career progression; however, there are usually only two or three levels of this progression

based on the complexity of the duties. There are a few highly technical or professional positions that have a greater number of levels.

The method for moving an employee beyond entry level salary of a salary group is a merit increase based on performance. The Department has not authorized these on a regular basis for all positions since 1993. In 2000, the Chief of THP identified some field positions to receive raises every four years (like the commissioned officers). In the last few years some field positions in THP and CLE have been added to this plan, but only about a third of the non-commissioned employees are currently designated to receive these career progression merit increases. (For example: An Adjutant who is a Staff Services Officer IV (B12) that remained in that job and that pay group but received a 6.8% merit increase based on years in that position.) The Director's Staff, Driver License, Administration and Emergency Management have not placed their employees on this plan due to lack of available funds.

Most non-commissioned positions do not require DPS experience as a minimum requirement, so they are posted to the public and the agency staff at the same time. Also the Department does not designate career paths among different positions at the agency. (Ex. An employee does not have to be a Driver License Technician before being eligible to apply for a Driver License Examiner position.)

As a result of these factors, a significant percentage of non-commissioned employees are at the entry level of their salary group with no opportunity to receive a greater salary except by applying for a posted vacancy. This creates unnecessary turnover inside the agency and leads to frustration for employees who apply for jobs that are ultimately given to applicants from outside the agency.

Applications for posted vacancies are processed by the first-line supervisor over the vacancy in the field and by Human Resources (HR) at Austin HQ. (There are no HR staff in the field.) Selection is done for vacant positions through an oral interview board made up of three or five members (based on the pay group of the vacancy) who each score applicants independently. An averaged score determines the ranking of the applicants. The highest scoring applicant is selected. While applicant processing and oral board interviews are supposed to be conducted the same across the Department, divisional and area differences and/or lack of training results in different practices throughout the Department.

The Department lacks a formal talent or career development program and training opportunities for both management and professional training is lacking for most non-commissioned positions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The committee makes the following recommendations for change:

Recommendation One: The Department needs to keep current oral board system for technical and professional level positions, but make improvements in processes and controls.

- Have required training for anyone who will be serving on boards.
- Develop standard operating procedures for oral board procedures including questions.
- Apply the same rules across the Department.
- Scoring should be changed from a 500 point scale to something simpler and more recognizable, such as a 100 point scale.
- Make sure only members who can properly assess technical skills sit on technical boards.

Pros: Ensures that boards are conducted in a professional manner by following uniform processes and procedures. Builds confidence and credibility in the process and increases the perception of fairness.

Cons: Oral boards are time consuming and first-line supervisors have limited input into hiring of their staff.

Recommendation Two: The Department needs to use one-on-one interviews for jobs requiring no prior experience.

- Conduct one-on-one interviews instead of oral boards for clerical, service, maintenance and other appropriate entry level positions.
- Have one-on-one interviews conducted by the first-line supervisor and the next level of supervisor together.

Pros: Simplifies the process for routine/entry level positions and allows for quicker hiring of qualified applicants.

Cons: Close monitoring will be required to ensure uniform procedures are being followed. Presents more opportunities for favoritism than a board system.

Recommendation Three: The Department needs to change hiring policies to attract and retain the best employees.

- Base starting salary on what is brought to the job - inside experience or outside experience.
- Also, allow more jobs with career progression to hire at a level above entry if an applicant has experience with DPS or other employer that warrants advancement.
- Authorize retention and hiring bonuses for appropriate positions.

Pros: Attracts better motivated and higher skilled applicants and will assist in keeping current staff. Better enables the Department to attract applicants looking for a career rather than a job.

Cons: Costs\Lack of funding. This will create conflict between high performing tenured staff and new employees hired at a higher salary level, unless current staff salaries are fixed first.

Recommendation Four: The Department needs to make current employees' salaries comparable to other similar state employees and allow for continued growth based on performance.

- Look at all non-commissioned positions to make sure they are classified and paid similarly to other state agencies. This may require an outside consultant to do in a timely manner.
- Increase current employees' salaries; however, pay raises must be based on performance. Also the length of an employee's time in their job, either here or through outside experience, should be considered; however, pay should not be based solely on time in grade.
- Authorize the giving of raises to keep key staff who have received offers of employment at other agencies doing similar work.
- Initiate a merit system that gives regular increases with more going to the best performing employees. The performance evaluation process will need to be changed to provide a uniformed process for such a merit system.

Pros: Builds employee dedication to the Department, reduces turnover rates especially within the higher skilled positions, results in better performing employees.

Cons: Costs\Lack of funding. May create some morale issues as lower performing employees are identified and told they are not receiving greater pay.

Recommendation Five: The Department needs to plan for the career growth of non-commissioned employees.

- Implement lead positions that provide more money/greater position to the "go to" employee who is the defacto leader on technical/practical issues. While these key employees should not necessarily make more money than their supervisors, there should be recognition of their leadership. This will allow for employees to stay in line functions and still progress in their career/salary.
- Update current evaluation system to identify not only strengths and weaknesses in current job, but also for job advancement to other agency positions and give goals for both.
- Controls will need to be put in place to ensure identification for advancement/lead positions is based on objective factors.

Pros: Trains current supervisory personnel to recognize early the subordinates with leadership and advanced technical potential. Better enables the Department to retain employees looking for a career and allows the Department to show employees that they are valued members of the team.

Cons: Some employees may feel left out when not recommended for specific career growth plans and may perpetuate views of favoritism.

Recommendation Six: The Department needs a talent development plan for non-commissioned employees.

- Develop training modules on the Department's management/leadership philosophy, which can be modified as the Department changes. (This could and perhaps should be used for both commissioned/non-commissioned.) Have different modules for different levels. Use these in conjunction with outside management training already utilized. Develop both written curriculum and classroom courses. Allow persons wishing to pursue supervisory promotions to attend courses for the purpose of learning what will be expected at the next level.
- Offer more career/in-service training opportunities to non-commissioned employees. Use both inside and outside sources. Hold classes in Regional and District offices to allow for more attendance by field employees.

Pros: Builds the strengths of individuals in a way that provides even greater strength to the Department overall. Better enables the Department to retain employees looking for a career and allows the Department to show employees that they are valued members of the team.

Cons: Costs\Lack of funding.

Recommendation Seven: The Department needs to have an agency-wide non-commissioned pay structure and personnel procedures.

- Apply the same rules across the Department for similar positions. Rules should not be dependent on division - but on the needs of the position.
- Buy technology for field to match system used in Austin for employee skill testing (i.e. typing, clerical, phone skills, etc.).
- Generally provide for more consistency in how the hiring process is done - additional training of supervisors is needed and look at the possibly having HR staff in field to do the same part of the process as done at HQ.

Pros: Establishes an equitable standing amongst employees/applicants, ensures that employees across divisional lines feel they are receiving the same opportunities and helps establish confidence in fairness of system.

Cons: Managers may feel that they have less control over employee issues.

CONCLUSION

Aside from the need to raise pay, the most consistent comment from the survey concerned how non-commissioned staff felt like second class employees. This is a systemic issue that permeates all facets of DPS policy and procedures, not just the hiring and promotional process. Some of this is due to factors beyond the control of DPS management such as the legislature's focus on pay and benefit issues for law enforcement only. However, the agency is also run with a "one-size-fits-all" law

enforcement model, rather than focusing on each program separately. Management routinely refers to non-commissioned programs as “support.” This ignores the fact that most of the non-commissioned staff are employed in programs that could be stand-alone regulatory or professional programs.

Communication with non-commissioned staff needs to be as proactive and regular as with commissioned staff. For example: Recently there was a meeting with field captains from various divisions where Lieutenant Colonel McEathron addressed the changes going on at the Department and all of the studies and audits, including the promotional study. The talk was informative and morale boosting. This was a normal monthly field captain’s meeting and it is common for the Colonels to come by those meetings. It is not common for the Colonels to address non-commission manager meetings and no similar talk was done for the Austin HQ non-commissioned managers at the same level.

Management needs to have a strategy for running the non-commissioned part of the agency (55%) that focuses on having policies and procedures that meet the needs of non-commissioned staff and compares non-commissioned staff to other agencies or other businesses rather than comparing them to the commissioned part of the agency (45%).