Strategy to Reduce the Time-to-Hire

First Quarter, Fiscal Year 2015

June 22, 2015
Fiscal Year 2015 Report to Congress

Homeland Security

Under Secretary for Management

Message from the Under Secretary for Management

I am pleased to present the following report, "Strategy to Reduce the Time-to-Hire" for the first quarter of fiscal year (FY) 2015, which has been prepared by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Office of the Chief Human Capital Officer.

This report was prepared pursuant to the direction provided by the Joint Explanatory Statement and Senate Report 113-198 accompanying the *Fiscal Year* (FY) *2015 DHS Appropriations Act* (P.L. 114-4). The report contains background information on the DHS hiring reform initiative, current challenges, as well as strategies to improve hiring processes. The appendix provides DHS time-to-hire data from FY 2011 to the first quarter of FY 2015.

Pursuant to the congressional request, this report is being provided to the following Members of Congress:

> The Honorable John R. Carter
> Chairman, House Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security
>
> The Honorable Lucille Roybal-Allard
> Ranking Member, House Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security
>
> The Honorable John Hoeven
> Chairman, Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security
>
> The Honorable Jeanne Shaheen
> Ranking Member, Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security

Inquiries regarding this report may be directed to me at (202) 447-3400 or the Department's Chief Financial Officer, Chip Fulghum, at (202) 447-5751.

Sincerely,

Russell C. Deyo
Under Secretary for Management

Executive Summary

The report contains background information on the DHS hiring reform initiative, current challenges, as well as departmental and Component strategies to improve hiring processes. The appendix provides DHS time-to-hire data from FY 2011 to the first quarter of FY 2015.

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I. Legislative Language

This report is in response to language in the Joint Explanatory Statement and Senate Report 113-198 accompanying the *Fiscal Year* (FY) *2015 Department of Homeland Security* (DHS) *Appropriations Act* (P.L. 114-4).

Specifically, the Joint Explanatory Statement states:

Hiring Delays

DHS shall report to the Committees not later than 60 days after the date of enactment of this Act on a strategy for reducing the time required for hiring personnel, and shall provide quarterly data on hiring timelines by component, as directed in the Senate report.

Senate Report 113-198 states:

HIRING DELAYS

The Committee is concerned with the length of time it takes to hire an employee at several DHS components. According to information from the Office of Personnel Management, the average number of days to hire an employee at DHS was 146 days in 2013, while the Government-wide average was 90 days. Certain areas of concern are with the Department's law enforcement components such as CBP and the United States Secret Service where, on average, it takes 278 days and 327 days, respectively, to hire an employee. Non-law enforcement hires at the headquarters level take 106 days on average and 198 days for senior executive employees. The President's 2010 memorandum on improving the Federal Hiring and Recruitment process said that "Americans must be able to apply for Federal jobs through a commonsense hiring process and agencies must be able to select high-quality candidates efficiently and quickly." Unless the Department improves upon its lengthy hiring process, the best and brightest candidates will more than likely choose other Federal agencies or opt for the private sector. DHS is to report to the Committees not later than 60 days after the date of enactment of this act on its strategy to decrease the number of days it takes to hire and report quarterly on time-to-hire statistics by component.

II. Background

As part of the Hiring Reform Initiative in 2010, the President directed federal agencies to measure the quality and speed of the hiring process. DHS headquarters staff created an action plan to address the areas of assessment and applicant evaluation, hiring process improvement, and hiring manager involvement and engagement. Through this process, DHS:

- Streamlined job opportunity announcements;
- Decoded "human resources" (HR) jargon into plain language to assist applicants in the hiring process;
- Required five applicant notification points (the Office of Personnel Management [OPM] requires only four) to increase communication and transparency with applicants;
- Provided policy, guidance, and tip sheets to managers, employees, and HR professionals to help them navigate the hiring process; and
- Trained approximately 11,000 hiring managers on the hiring process and their associated roles and responsibilities.

III. FY 2014 Time-to-Hire Challenges

In FY 2014, DHS saw a 13-percent decrease in the number of hires and a slight increase of 11 percent in the time-to-hire. Before the government shutdown in October 2013, DHS was trending down in the average number of calendar days per hire. Components reported common barriers to improving time-to-hire, including:

- **Uncertainty of funding, and lingering effects of sequestration and the government shutdown.** The uncertainty of funding makes it difficult to plan complex applicant assessment processes. Hiring freezes and the government shutdown affected time-to-hire because of the sequential nature of the complex hiring processes across the Department.

- **Reduction in mission support personnel.** Hiring freezes and attrition contributed to the reduction of HR professionals in Components who execute and oversee the hiring process. Additional surge hiring requirements with fewer support staff lengthened the hiring process for Components in FY 2014.

- **Additional justification for backfilling positions and hiring.** As a result of sequestration, hiring freezes, and uncertainty of funding, additional processes for hiring were added, such as higher level approval to backfill vacancies, which increased the time-to-hire.

- **Lack of an Automated Solution to Track Time-to-hire.** DHS lacks an enterprise-wide, automated methodology for tracking time-to-hire. Components and their operational offices use different mechanisms to collect data on each hiring action. Their approaches represent a combination of simple automated staffing system reports, bolt-on tracking programs integrated with staffing systems, and manual data entry into spreadsheets and databases.

- **Discrepancies in government-wide time-to-hire collection methodologies.** In 2012, when reviewing other agencies' data, DHS realized that there were significant discrepancies in the way that other agencies were reporting their time-to-hire data.

- **Variety in occupational series and hiring processes across the Department.** DHS has more than 1,000 occupations across the Department, with approximately 71 percent being mission-critical positions. OPM's End-to-End Hiring Model does not address the variety in occupations, complexity of DHS hiring processes, and therefore does not address underlying quality and HR operational process issues. Many of these positions require extensive

assessments and background investigations during the hiring process, which extend the time-to-hire for DHS. The hiring process for DHS law enforcement positions is intentionally rigorous and promotes the appointment of only those candidates who are found as trustworthy and suitable. For example, applicants who fully complete the Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Officer and Border Patrol Agent hiring processes will undergo a series of assessments over several months that includes a written exam, a structured interview, medical exam, drug screening, physical fitness testing, polygraph, and background investigation, before a final employment decision is made. CBP must maintain continuous, uninterrupted processing to ensure the steady flow of applicants through the hiring pipeline.

- **Complexity of the hiring process/staffing regulations.** Although Hiring Reform in 2010 aimed to streamline and simplify hiring processes for applicants, federal agencies must still adhere to complex processes that are prescribed by law. These complicate and extend the hiring process.

IV. Departmental Hiring Process Improvement Initiatives

- Track Component time-to-hire efforts quarterly, including requesting additional qualitative information about specific hiring process improvement efforts and challenges in Components. From quarterly data, analyze time-to-hire trends and hiring process improvement efforts. Leverage promising practices that are applicable Department-wide.

- Improve time-to-hire data collection methodologies by piloting select priority mission-critical occupations to focus on obtaining data on specific phases of the hiring process, set targets for those phases, and measure the percentage of actions completed according to those targets. Availability of data on specific phases of the hiring process will provide a stronger understanding of where bottlenecks are occurring.

- Use the DHS Hiring Reform and Staffing Policy Council, Delegated Examining Working Group, and the HRstat quarterly meeting to help define, implement, and assess hiring process improvements and effective practices. Engaging these three Department-wide groups provides readily accessible and routinely engaged subject matter experts to help the Department identify hiring process improvements.

- Leverage the President's Management Agenda benchmarking efforts to improve DHS HR organizations' efficiency and service delivery. By improving the performance and value of HR operations and enhancing productivity, the human capital community can better support DHS mission needs and DHS can maximize the value of its investments.

- Improve transparency in the hiring process by highlighting open job opportunities on DHS Connect (Intranet).

- Publish updates to the required Department-wide job opportunity announcement templates to promote plain language job applications and to help candidates understand the DHS hiring process.

- Continue to monitor areas where Components may need additional hiring flexibilities. In FY 2014, the DHS Office of the Chief Human Capital Officer:

    o Worked with Components to obtain OPM approval for 16 Schedule A and two Schedule B excepted authorities within the last year, including the request for the extension of the Schedule A authority for cybersecurity.

- o Worked with the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, OPM, and other federal agencies to obtain OPM concurrence on a Title 50 authority covering intelligence positions within the Office of Intelligence & Analysis and U.S. Coast Guard (USCG), and issued implementing guidance on administering the authority. The authority permits non-competitive conversion to the excepted service of competitive service positions, and the establishment of new positions in the excepted service that are necessary to carry out intelligence functions.

- o Assisted CBP in obtaining the approval for bona fide occupational qualifications (BFOQ) as a result of the difficulty they faced in recruiting and attracting female CBP Officers and Border Patrol Agents at the GS-5/7 grade levels nationwide. The BFOQ allows CBP to recruit females to conduct gender-based searches, pat-downs, and screenings of female detainees.

- On the basis of analysis of quarterly time-to-hire data calls, evaluations of component human capital programs, and information discussed in quarterly Staffing Policy Council meetings, publish additional policy and guidance to assist Components and equip them with the necessary tools.

- Provide tips sheets to managers, HR specialists, and employees to help them navigate the hiring process more effectively. Three tips sheets have already been published in FY 2014 and FY 2015:

  - o Hiring Manager and Human Resources Specialist Tips for Providing Feedback to Applicants on the Selection Process;

  - o DHS Interviewing Tips for Hiring Managers and Employees; and

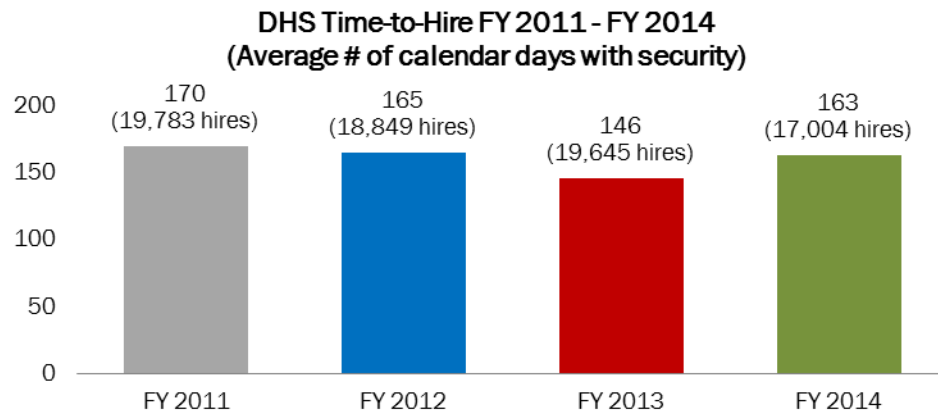 - o Guidance for Hiring Managers and Human Resources Specialists for Filling Supervisory Positions.

V. Component Hiring Process Improvement Initiatives

- CBP's major enhancements in FY 2015 have allowed applicants to move through the pre-employment process effectively and more efficiently. CBP has implemented modifications to the front-line hiring process, which include:

    o Changing from an OPM-customized announcement process to the USA Staffing announcement process, as is done with other announcements;

    o Changing from OPM-proctored, written knowledge tests to using a contract company to deliver electronic tests, which also allows more locations;

    o Having more frequent and smaller announcements to get applicants into the process more quickly; and

    o Perform qualification reviews before knowledge tests are administered to save money on testing costs.

- CBP is also developing proposals seeking DHS and OPM approval to use various hiring flexibilities that will aid the recruitment and retention of polygraph examiners. CBP Internal Affairs (IA) has implemented several hiring improvement initiatives, including:

    o Actively recruiting additional personnel to enhance the current cadre of polygraph examiners to conduct examinations at seven high-priority geographical locations;

    o Establishing "on-call adjudicators" to provide immediate decisions on cases, thereby allowing IA to terminate cases earlier in the process and increase the number of interviews per day; and

    o Creating mini-hiring hubs to more efficiently process applicants pending polygraph exams, which is a proven, time-saving efficiency in clearing applicants from the polygraph process.

- The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) reduced their time-to-hire from FY 2012 to FY 2014 by 51 percent; is continuing its hiring manager communication campaign, including monthly Hiring Management Engagement Sessions to share information about the hiring process; and is having an open dialogue with hiring managers about removing obstacles.

- Components such as U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), DHS Headquarters, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and Office of Inspector General (OIG) are using service-level agreements with hiring managers to ensure roles, responsibilities, and timelines are clearly established.

- USCIS established a new Quality Team that is responsible for regular audits of the hiring process and is providing performance reports to USCIS leadership. The team created a robust online reporting center for all agency leadership and mission support to use to view various HR-related reports, including hiring data and timelines. The team provides continuous training and communication to support the effectiveness and usefulness of the reporting center.

- FEMA is streamlining processes and developing tools for hiring managers to improve the hiring process and time-to-hire performance. These include:

  - Providing a Hiring Managers Tool Kit, which includes guidance on position descriptions, conducting job analyses, developing assessment questions, conducting interviews, and performing reference checks;

  - Holding multiple training sessions (32 hours each) for HR Liaisons assigned to each program office/region;

  - FEMA hosted a Non-Competitive Hiring Fair on December 11, 2014. The Hiring Fair was targeted for the following individuals: Veterans, those with disabilities, and others eligible for non-competitive hiring authorities such as Peace Corps and Boren Fellowships. FEMA will continue to participate in non-competitive hiring fairs in the future;

  - Establishing a contract with OPM to develop standardized position descriptions for agency mission-critical occupations; and

  - Developing standardized questions to assess applicants in common competencies such as communication, leadership, teamwork and cooperation, customer service, etc.

- ICE is focusing on hiring process improvement by:

  - Educating management and staff regarding time-to-hire key process points and hiring timeline requirements;

  - Increasing communication with hiring managers concerning hiring needs and recruitment trends;

- o Targeting hiring with new or updated position descriptions, requested reorganizations and general organizational updates;

- o Shortening recruitment and response times, enabling extra time for the actual processing of new hires;

- o Focusing on proper position management, reclassification of position descriptions, and job analysis; and

- o Creating standard operating procedures to streamline internal processes.

- The United States Secret Service (USSS) is leveraging an excepted service hiring authority for its Special Agent and Uniformed Division positions to expedite hiring and streamline the assessment process. Several enhancements have been put in place, including:

  - o New hiring process that provides field offices more input in the recruitment process and in determining the suitability of applicants.

  - o The previous Structured Panel Interview process will be eliminated and replaced with a "Resume Review" and a "Super Interview." These two elements will give the field greater latitude in determining an applicant's suitability to proceed in the hiring process successfully. In addition, this will reduce the high volume of applicants.

  - o Implementation of an accelerated hiring process that includes five phases of the hiring process being completed or scheduled over a 2–3 day period.

  - o Established an internal Hiring Initiative Team to closely monitor and assist field offices with processing applicants in a timely manner.

Appendix – DHS Time-to-Hire Data

DHS Time-to-Hire FY 2011 - FY 2014
(Average # of calendar days with security)

FY 2011	FY 2012	FY 2013	FY 2014
170 (19,783 hires)	165 (18,849 hires)	146 (19,645 hires)	163 (17,004 hires)

Component	FY 2015 Q1			
	# of Hires	Avg. # of Days in Security	Avg. # of Calendar Days to Hire Without Security	Avg. # of Calendar Days to Hire With Security
CBP	880	317	94	411
FEMA	258	17	170	186
Federal Law Enforcement Training Center	50	9	94	103
Headquarters (HQ)	144	23	99	122
HQ - Senior Executive Service	14	49	140	189
ICE	350	17	128	144
National Protection and Programs Directorate	122	30	42	72
OIG	3	3	14	17
TSA	1,630	15	37	52
USCG*				
USCIS	1,006	49	43	92
USSS	52	89	193	282
Totals	Q1 Average w/security			164
	Q1 Average w/o security		96	

* USCG is unable to provide the first quarter 2015 time-to-hire because of technical issues with the automated hiring management system, Monster Government Solutions. USCG is working with Monster to fix the problem.