

RESPONSE TO GRAND JURY REPORT

Report Title: Humboldt County Hiring: Status, Process, and the Future

Report Date: June 21, 2024

Response by: Humboldt County Board of Supervisors

FINDINGS

The county agrees with the findings numbered 1-10 and 12.

The county partially agrees with Finding 11.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations numbered 1, 4, 8 and 9 will be implemented

Recommendations numbered 6 and 10 are in the process of being implemented.

Recommendations numbered 2, 3, 5 and 7 will not be implemented.

Date: September 10, 2024

Signed:

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Rex Beh", is written over a horizontal line.

Number of pages attached: 7



COUNTY OF HUMBOLDT

COUNTY ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE

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INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM

TO: BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
FROM: COUNTY ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE
SUBJECT: RESPONSE TO 2023-24 GRAND JURY REPORT "HUMBOLDT COUNTY HIRING: STATUS, PROCESS, AND THE FUTURE"
DATE: SEPTEMBER 10, 2024

In the Grand Jury Report, "*Humboldt County Hiring: Status, Process, and the Future*," the Grand Jury has requested that the Board of Supervisors respond to all Findings (1-12) and all Recommendations (1-10). The County Administrative Office is proposing the following response as detailed below.

FINDINGS

Finding 1: *Humboldt County Human Resources is now sending exit questionnaires to all departing County employees. Analysis of these responses may allow Humboldt County Human Resources to determine strategies to improve recruitment and retention.*

Response: Agree.

Finding 2: *The Humboldt County Sheriff's Office has longer hiring times than other county positions due to necessary written and oral testing, and required background checks. However, overlapping testing and interviews have allowed them to shorten the hiring process by weeks. This shortened hiring time increases the likelihood of successful recruitment.*

Response: Agree.

Finding 3: *Many departments continue to be short-staffed, including Humboldt County Human Resources itself. Productivity decreases when staffing is inadequate, and the workload for individual staff increases, affecting employee retention. (R1, R2, R3)*

Response: Agree.

Finding 4: *The average length of time from announcement to hire is on a par with other counties, but the process still takes months. This long time reduces the qualified pool of applicants and potentially forces the hiring department to start over. (R4)*

Response: Agree.

Finding 5: *Hiring times are longer for departments that do not work efficiently or proactively with Humboldt County Human Resources during the hiring steps to provide subject matter experts and oral examiners. Longer hiring times make it more likely that applicants will give up, endangering the success of finding and hiring qualified employees. (R4)*

Response: Agree.

Finding 6: *The California Department of Human Resources controls the hiring of Merit System Staffing positions. Until Humboldt County Human Resources has control, the lengthy hiring process will continue to delay filling positions and may cause applicants to withdraw, making the recruitment less successful. (R6)*

Response: Agree.

Finding 7: *As of a 2020 survey, county pay levels are low relative to similar counties. This hinders both recruitment and retention across many departments. (R7)*

Response: Agree.

While the county agrees with this finding, as noted in the Grand Jury’s report, the data from the survey was used for the last round of negotiations in 2021 and 2022. What is not noted in the report is that all staff received at least a base salary increase of 7.5%, while those represented by the Humboldt Deputy Sheriff’s Organization (HDSO) and Law Enforcement Management (LEM) received a base salary increase of 10%. In addition, many classifications received additional salary adjustments **above and beyond** the base salary increase to maintain equity. Below is a table including the the salary increases from the last round of negotiations, and equity adjustments for each bargaining unit:

Increases to bargaining units’ base salary by year			
Bargaining Unit	2022	2023	2024
HDSO	10%	2.0%	3.0%
LEM	10%	2.0%	3.0%
County Attorneys	9.0%	2.0%	3.0%
M&C	9.0%	2.0%	3.0%
AFSCME	7.5%	2.0%	2.5%
Department Heads (Appointed and Elected)	9.0%	2.0%	3.0%

HDSO

Equity Adjustments:

District Attorney Investigator: 2% to 4%
Deputy Sheriff Recruit: 9.5%
Deputy Sheriff I: 5.5%
Deputy Sheriff II: 8.0%
Probation Officer: 1.0%
Deputy Sheriff's Sergeant: 8.0%

LEM Equity Adjustments

Chief Investigator (D.A.): 6.5%
Senior Investigator (D.A.): 2.5%
Correctional Captain: 12.0%
Correctional Lieutenant: 12.0%
Undersheriff: 2.0%
Sheriff's Captain: 18.0%
Sheriff's Lieutenant: 12.0%

County Attorneys Association

Child Support Attorney I-IV: 4%
Deputy District Attorney I-IV: 4%
Deputy Public Defender I-IV: 4%
Senior Deputy District Attorney: 4%

Management & Confidential

Supervising Probation Officer: 2.0%

AFSCME Equity Adjustments

Accountant Auditor II: 1.0%
Administrative Analyst 1: 6.5%
Bridge Crew Supervisor: 5.0%
Communicable Disease Investigator I: 15.5%
Communicable Disease Investigator II: 11.5%
Correctional Deputy I: 12.0%
Correctional Deputy II: 12.0%
Election Worker: 2.5%
Epidemiologist: 16.5%
Juvenile Corrections Officer I: 6.0%
Juvenile Corrections Officer II: 6.0%
Laboratory Assistant I: 12.5%
Laboratory Assistant II: 2.0%
Planner II: 9.0%
Senior Correctional Deputy: 12.0%
Senior Juvenile Corrections Officer: 6.0%
SSB - System Support Analyst: 10.0%
Staff Services Analyst I: 6.5%
Substance Abuse Counselor I: 4.0%
Substance Abuse Counselor II: 5.0%
Substance Abuse Counselor Trainee: 4.0%
Supervising Juvenile Corrections Officer: 6.0%
Traffic Control Maintenance Worker: 4.0%
Veterans Service Representative: 19.5%
Vocational Counselor I: 7.0%
Vocational Counselor II: 5.5%

These increases do not include regular step increases that occur annually, or longevity for long-term employees, or reclassifications/wage increases for specific classifications that have occurred since the labor agreements were executed.

Finding 8: As of a 2020 survey, the cost of medical benefits to employees is high relative to similar counties. This high cost hinders both recruitment and retention across many departments. (R7)

Response: Agree.

Finding 9: Humboldt County Human Resources has fewer strategies to improve recruitment and retention compared to some other counties. Having fewer strategies could hinder both recruitment and retention. (R5)

Response: Agree.

Finding 10: *Unlike many other counties, Humboldt County Human Resources does not have a single comprehensive policies and procedures manual for hiring. This lack of direction could lead to misunderstanding and ignorance of hiring procedures. (R8)*

Response: Agree.

Finding 11: *Humboldt County Human Resources does not have or use a standard set of metrics for the completion of hiring steps, hiring timeframe, recruitment success, or retention. Without these metrics, it is hard to evaluate hiring performance for county employment. (R9)*

Response: Partially agree.

The Humboldt County Human Resources Department has confirmed that there are standards set for completion of hiring steps and hiring timeframes; however, there are no set standards for recruitment success, other than the obvious metric of whether someone was hired, or retention of employees.

Finding 12: *Performance evaluations of Human Resources staff are not always conducted annually. This results in performance and accountability being difficult to assess. (R10)*

Response: Agree.

While the county agrees with this finding, it should be noted that many employees in the Department of Human Resources currently have up to date performance evaluations. Staff who have not yet received an annual performance evaluation will be provided with one at the earliest opportunity to do so. The Human Resources Department is committed to ensuring performance evaluations are up to date moving forward.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: *Current Humboldt County Human Resources vacancies be filled by no later than June 30, 2025. For funding recommendations see the wording below Recommendation #10. (F3)*

This recommendation will be implemented.

As of Sept. 1, 2024 all funded vacancies in the Human Resources Department will be filled other than a vacant secretary position in Risk Management. Human Resources is preparing to begin recruitment for this position and anticipates that it will be filled well before the end of the calendar year.

Recommendation 2: *The Humboldt County Human Resources Assistant Director position be funded and filled by no later than June 30, 2025. For funding recommendations see the wording below Recommendation #10. (F3)*

This recommendation will not be implemented.

The necessary funding to fill the Assistant Director of Human Resources position was not allocated in the county's approved Fiscal Year 2024-25 Budget; therefore, this position cannot be filled by June 30, 2025. Furthermore, the state of the County of Humboldt's finances is dire and funding this position would exacerbate that issue that much more.

Recommendation 3: *The three positions in Humboldt County Human Resources that were funded by expired federal grants be funded and filled by no later than June 30, 2025. For funding recommendations see the wording below Recommendation #10. (F3)*

This recommendation will not be implemented.

The necessary funding to allocate and fill all three expiring positions was not included in the county's approved Fiscal Year 2024-25 budget. It should be noted that one analyst position was allocated on Human Resources' Risk Management team to partially offset the expiration of these grant-funded positions and this position has been filled.

Recommendation 4: *Humboldt County Human Resources develop a 'best practices' guide and training program for all hiring departments to use to speed up the hiring steps, to be completed by no later than June 30, 2025. (F4, F5)*

This recommendation will be implemented.

The Humboldt County Human Resources Department intends to enhance its current guides and training materials by researching the best practices of other public agencies. An internal manual is already being developed and will include Standard Operating Procedures for all steps of the recruitment process. It is anticipated that Human Resources will complete the steps to develop an enhanced best practice guide and updated training materials by the Grand Jury's deadline of June 30, 2025.

Recommendation 5: *Humboldt County Human Resources implement additional hiring and retention strategies by no later than July 1, 2025. For funding recommendations see the wording below Recommendation #10. (F9)*

This recommendation will not be implemented.

For the Humboldt County Department of Human Resources to implement additional hiring and retention strategies, there will likely need to be funding made available to conduct further analysis on this topic. Due to the county's current budget constraints, this recommendation cannot be implemented by the Civil Grand Jury's recommended deadline.

The Human Resources Department has noted that it will continue to work with county departments to be creative in the hiring and retention space; however, the lack of funding to offer many of the hiring and

retention incentives that other agencies utilize is a significant barrier to a successful recruitment and retention strategy.

Recommendation 6: *Humboldt County Human Resources continue the conversion process of becoming an Approved Local Merit System county, to be completed by no later than March 31, 2025. (F6)*

This recommendation is in the process of being implemented.

The county would like this recommendation to be implemented as soon as possible, however, to implement this recommendation as stated, it is contingent upon the California Department of Human Resources (CalHR). Humboldt County's departments of Human Resources, Health & Human Services and Child Support Services are actively working with CalHR to become an Approved Local Merit System (ALMS) county. The Human Resources Department has noted that CalHR rarely meets their own deadlines for responses and the process to become an ALMS county has been unnecessarily burdensome for the County of Humboldt. It remains to be seen whether CalHR will approve the County of Humboldt as an ALMS county by the Grand Jury's deadline of March 31, 2025. The county may potentially be required to complete additional steps, create additional policies or practices and revise documentation and procedures prior to approval, which will all be determined by CalHR.

Recommendation 7: *The Humboldt County Board of Supervisors adjust compensation levels to be competitive with other counties, to be done when the county budget situation improves. For funding recommendations see the wording below Recommendation #10. (F7, F8)*

This recommendation will not be implemented.

As mentioned in response to Finding 7, following a comprehensive classification and compensation study, the county agreed to provide significant wage increases to county employees in 3-year labor agreements executed in 2021 and 2022. Outside of the budgetary capacity to provide additional compensation increases, a substantial amount of time will need to be devoted to compiling and analyzing labor market data as well as internal recruitment and retention data to determine where the County of Humboldt stands relative to the current labor market considering the county's recent wage modifications, and how any potential compensation increases should be implemented to address the most pressing needs first. Depending on the scope of such a study, the use of a consultant may be required due to capacity issues within the Humboldt County Human Resources Department.

Recommendation 8: *Humboldt County Human Resources develop a single comprehensive internal hiring policies and procedures manual, to be completed by no later than March 31, 2025. (F10)*

This recommendation will be implemented.

As mentioned in the response to Recommendation 4, the Humboldt County Human Resources Department intends to enhance its current guides and training materials by researching the best practices of other public agencies. An internal manual is already being developed and will include Standard Operating Procedures for all

steps of the recruitment process. It is anticipated that Human Resources will complete the steps to develop this manual by the Grand Jury's deadline of March 31, 2025.

Recommendation 9: *Humboldt County Human Resources develop metrics to measure the completion of hiring steps, hiring timeframe, recruitment success, and retention, to be completed by no later than March 31, 2025. (F11)*

This recommendation will be implemented.

The Human Resources Department currently has metrics for certain steps of the hiring process, but not all. Human Resource's Organizational Development and Diversity, Equity and Inclusion team actively collects data on employee engagement, which includes data on retention. It is anticipated that staff will begin tracking employee retention data prior to March 31, 2025.

Recommendation 10: *Humboldt County Human Resources conduct performance evaluations annually for all Human Resources staff, to be completed by no later than June 30, 2025. (F12)*

Funding Recommendation: *The Humboldt County Civil Grand Jury recommends that the Humboldt County Board of Supervisors fund the expenses listed in R1, R2, R3, R5, and R7 with existing appropriations in the current fiscal year. If current appropriations are not sufficient, the Grand Jury recommends that the Board of Supervisors, at its next earliest opportunity, pursue additional funding from an appropriate agency, including state or federal agencies.*

This recommendation is in the process of being implemented.

By the time that this Grand Jury report was released, many Human Resources Department staff had received an up to date annual performance evaluation. Any remaining staff that have not yet been provided an annual performance evaluation in the last year will be provided with an evaluation at the earliest opportunity. These evaluations will be completed before the Grand Jury's deadline.
