

9/23/24

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**COUNTY OF ALAMEDA RESPONSE
TO THE
2023-2024 GRAND JURY
FINAL REPORT**

PREPARED BY:
OFFICE OF THE COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

APPROVED BY:
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

ALAMEDA COUNTY RESPONSE TO THE 2023-2024 GRAND JURY FINAL REPORT

Alameda County's Staffing Vacancy Rate Causes Concern

Findings 24-15, 24-23, and 24-24

Finding 24-15:

The Alameda County Board of Supervisors has no policy regarding how long a budgeted employee position can remain vacant.

Response to Finding 24-15:

The Board of Supervisors ("Board") agrees with this finding. Vacancy rates are reviewed as part of the budget development process and salary savings budget adjustments have been and can continue to be made based upon historical data. This approach affords County of Alameda ("County") agencies and departments much-needed operational flexibility to fill vacancies.

Finding 24-23:

Overall county salaries have not kept pace with Alameda County's goal of remaining at least in the median salary range of surrounding counties.

Response to Finding 24-23:

The Board partially disagrees with this finding. In accordance with the Meyers-Milias-Brown Act ("MMBA"), the County is required to meet and confer in good faith regarding wages, hours, and other terms and conditions of employment with representatives of recognized employee organizations (i.e., unions). In this context, employee wages are determined based on surveys of either the County's Bay Area comparator counties or other survey methodologies as outlined in an existing Memorandum of Understanding ("MOU") or driven by negotiations on a successor MOU or meet and confer. Moreover, if the County is experiencing a recruitment or retention issue with a specific classification, the County conducts salary reviews with the intent of ensuring a competitive salary. And, as part of MOU negotiations, the County also considers special salary adjustments, in addition to general wage increases, for classifications that fall below the median of the County's Bay Area comparator agencies (or MOU-driven agencies).

Finding 24-24:

The Alameda County Board of Supervisors has not conducted an annual salary survey per the requirements of the county charter.

Response to Finding 24-24:

The Board partially disagrees with this finding. Employee wages are determined based on surveys of either the County's Bay Area comparator counties or other survey methodologies as outlined in an existing MOU or driven by negotiations on a successor MOU as required under the MMBA. Moreover, if the County is experiencing a recruitment or retention issue with a specific classification, the County conducts salary reviews with the intent of ensuring a competitive salary. And, as part of MOU negotiations, the County also considers special salary adjustments, in addition to general wage increases, for classifications that fall below the median of the County's Bay Area comparator agencies (or MOU-driven agencies).

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Recommendations 24-13, 24-14, 24-16, 24-18, and 24-20

Recommendation 24-13:

The Alameda County Board of Supervisors should establish a policy to review the amount of time a position can remain vacant in individual departments.

Response to Recommendation 24-13:

The Board will not implement this recommendation because it is not warranted. Vacancy rates are reviewed as part of the budget development process and salary savings budget adjustments have been and can continue to be made based upon historical data. This practice affords agencies and departments much-needed operational flexibility to fill vacancies.

Recommendation 24-14:

The Alameda County Board of Supervisors should increase staffing in the Alameda County Human Resource Services department to enable recruitments to be processed more quickly and eliminate the backlog of recruitments.

Response to Recommendation 24-14:

This recommendation requires further analysis. Human Resource Services has identified that increasing dedicated staff in the Personnel Services Division will allow the County to expand its recruitment efforts. By the end of the calendar year, Human Resource Services will work with the County Administrator's Office to review existing vacancies and budget projections to determine whether adjustments can be made within current resources or if alternative options can be explored.

Recommendation 24-16:

The Alameda County Board of Supervisors should conduct a comprehensive analysis of the hiring and recruitment process from beginning to end, both in the Alameda County Human Resource Services department and the individual departments, to identify ways to improve and streamline the hiring process.

Response to Recommendation 24-16:

This recommendation has been partially implemented. In January of 2023, the County formed the Recruitment Task Force ("Task Force") to spearhead the Recruitment Enhancement Project. The Task Force identified high-priority initiatives that involve enhancements/changes with the goal of implementing a variety of new programs, processes, enhancements, and changes in current policies, procedures, and practices to address the recruitment challenges facing the County and speed up the recruitment and selection process. Staff has also implemented the voter-approved shortening of the recruitment posting period from 25- to 14-days, enabling the County to speed up the recruitment process and enhance the County's ability to compete for and hire top-tier talent.

Additionally, significant progress has been made on streamlining the business processes of the recruitment/selection process and to implement a wide array of technological improvements. Collectively, these efforts will make a significant impact on improving the County's recruitment/selection process.

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Recommendation 24-18:

The Alameda County Board of Supervisors should expand the hiring list “Rule of 5” to the “Rule of 8.”

Response to Recommendation 24-18:

This recommendation has not been implemented. Previously, on August 8, 2023, the County issued to all the County’s employee organizations an offer to meet and confer and proposed to move from the Rule of 5 to the Rule of 8. After several meetings with the County’s employee organizations, the County was not successful in implementing the Rule of 8. As a result, the County tabled the discussion. The County will again approach our employee organizations and endeavor to reach agreement on an alternative to the Rule of 5 that allows the County greater hiring flexibility.

Recommendation 24-20:

The Alameda County Board of Supervisors needs to conduct a comprehensive salary survey per the requirements of the county charter.

Response to Recommendation 24-20:

This recommendation has been partially implemented and the County is in substantial compliance with the charter. Employee wages are determined based on surveys of either the County’s Bay Area comparator counties or other survey methodologies as outlined in an existing MOU or driven by negotiations or meet and confer. As part of MOU negotiations, the County also considers special salary adjustments, in addition to general wage increases.



**Oakland Police Department:
Missed Opportunities
with Technology**

**Hasty Council Decision
on Billboards
Costs Oakland Millions**

**Alameda County
Staffing Vacancy Rate
Causes Concern**

**Great Expectations for the
Alameda County
Probation Department**

**Hurry up and Wait:
Ambulance Service Delayed
by Long Turn-Around Times
at Emergency Rooms**

**Jail Inspections in
Alameda County**

**2023-2024
ALAMEDA COUNTY GRAND JURY
FINAL REPORT**

ALAMEDA COUNTY'S STAFFING VACANCY RATE CAUSES CONCERN

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The grand jury received a complaint requesting an investigation of the Alameda County staffing vacancy rate. After requesting documentation of vacancy rates the grand jury found that in Alameda County, as of March 1, 2024, 2,716 positions of 10,338 total positions were reported as budgeted and vacant for an overall vacancy rate of 26%. However, the grand jury also heard testimony that the reported vacancy rate could be substantially overstated.

A vacancy rate of 26% implies that approximately one position out of every four budgeted positions remains vacant and unfilled. If the budgeted positions are an accurate reflection of staff needed, three staff are therefore doing the work of four. This would mean that county services cannot be properly fulfilled without extreme effort, and that county workers must shoulder an extraordinary burden in their daily jobs. These conditions cannot be maintained over a long period of time without consequence to the county as employee burn-out, turnover, and operating inefficiencies take their toll.

In this report, the goal of the grand jury is to shed light on the county vacancy rate and to offer recommendations to reduce the current vacancy rate.

BACKGROUND

Alameda County, the seventh most populous county in California, is comprised of 14 cities and six unincorporated areas spread over 821 square miles. The county serves over 1.6 million residents by providing programs and services through 21 departments and agencies.

Alameda County administers a \$4 billion budget approved annually by the board of supervisors. The services provided by the county are extensive, including social services, child welfare, public protection, health care, public works, voting services, tax collection, the public defender and many more. Through its 400-page budget, the county also contracts for services and provides funding to over 260 local community-based organizations.

Alameda County, as many other counties in California, operates through a complex system of stakeholders including the electorate, county charter, board of supervisors, labor unions, state and federal mandates, county departments, and a variety of districts and commissions. Its five-person board of supervisors are elected by the voters of Alameda County, with each supervisor representing a specific district. Most departments in the county report to the board of

supervisors via the county administrator. This office coordinates the departments but does not possess hiring or firing authority. Exceptions to this governance structure are the departments which are led by elected officials and other certain departments.

The grand jury found that in Alameda County, as of March 1, 2024, 2,716 positions of 10,338 total positions were reported as budgeted and vacant for an overall vacancy rate of 26%.

The grand jury first examined the extent of governmental vacancy rates. The UC Berkeley Labor Center, in its December 2023 report on civil service vacancies, reported that pandemic recovery in the public employment sector has lagged the private sector. The center estimates that among local government agencies in California, a vacancy rate of 6-10% would be considered historically normal. This report also stated that other cities and counties had recent vacancy rates ranging from 7-20%, with a few ranging up to 31%. Over half of California agencies reported having difficulty filling vacant positions, particularly in public works, public safety, nursing, mental health, and human services departments. The

report further indicated that emergency increases in state funding for specific public and mental health programs after the pandemic created many new positions and placed additional burdens on filling open positions.

High vacancy rates are attributed to a variety of factors not always under the control of local government, including the changing expectations of a younger workforce, increased demand for remote work or hybrid positions, the trend of employees dropping out of the workforce during the pandemic, and a sizeable number of employees who have reached retirement age. Other factors that affect recent vacancy rates are a tight labor market, rapid wage growth in other sectors, high cost of living, population declines and separation (retirement and resignation) rates outpacing hiring rates. The UC Labor Center Report also surmised that public service as a job or career, even with its commensurate benefits and retirement plans, may have a lower appeal to younger populations than in previous years.

Not all large counties suffer the high vacancy rate of Alameda County. In 2022, San Diego County's (population 3.3 million) vacancy rate was 12% and Los Angeles County's (population 9.6 million) was 14.8%. San Francisco County's (population 808,000) vacancy rate was 13.7% in 2023. Given that other large counties have much lower vacancy rates than Alameda County, the grand jury examined whether the 26% vacancy rate was accurate and identified what the county could do internally to address its staffing needs.

INVESTIGATION

During its investigation, the grand jury heard testimony from eleven witnesses including Alameda County employees, department/agency heads, internal department managers, labor representation, Alameda County Human Resource Services Department (HRS), and the board

of supervisors. Additionally, the grand jury reviewed hundreds of pages of reports and data from Alameda County and other sources.

Vacancy Rate Overview

The Alameda County reported job vacancy rate of 26% is the average rate for the combined departments and agencies covered in this report.

Determining the exact vacancy rate in Alameda County is a difficult process due to how jobs are categorized. All jobs belong to one of four categories:

- Funded and filled
- Funded and unfilled (most vacancies)
- Unfunded and filled
- Unfunded and unfilled

Contributing to the grand jury's difficulty in determining the true vacancy rate is the fact that departments have the option to leave budgeted staff positions vacant and reallocate that funding to other services and programs, meaning some vacancies are intentionally left unfilled. The grand jury was unable to determine how many budgeted and vacant positions are not needed due to the way in which vacancies are calculated. In addition, the grand jury found it is unknown how long those vacancies have remained open.

The grand jury learned that the number of positions that are vacant and likely to be filled may range from 1,000-1,300, which would imply a 10-13% vacancy rate. The remaining 1,400-1,700 positions that management may not be planning to fill require further analysis of the funded and unfilled positions. The grand jury heard testimony that some employees are experiencing highly stressed, over-worked conditions in their jobs. It is not clear how department heads balance both the vacant positions and the overworked conditions that exist in some places.

Departments have the option to leave budgeted staff positions vacant and reallocate that funding to other services and programs, meaning some vacancies are intentionally left unfilled.

A chart of Alameda County vacancies, shown by department, follows.

Alameda County Vacancy Statistics by Department (Funded Positions)

Source: Alameda County Human Resource Services Department

Department/Agency Name	Total Positions as of 3/1/24	Filled Positions as of 3/1/24	Unfilled Positions as of 3/1/24	Percent Unfilled Positions as of 3/1/24
Health Care Services Agency	1,981	1,393	588	30%
Social Services Agency	2,376	1,813	563	24%
Sheriff's Office	1,922	1,433	489	25%
Probation Department	694	472	222	32%
Public Works Agency	362	228	134	37%
County Library	340	249	91	27%
District Attorney's Office	382	299	83	22%
Information Technology Dept.	243	173	70	29%
Child Support Services	196	128	68	35%
General Services Agency	448	389	59	13%
Auditor Controller's Agency	213	155	58	27%
Registrar of Voters	115	60	55	48%
Assessor's Office	199	153	46	23%
Treasurer Tax Collector	83	37	46	55%
Community Development Agency	180	148	32	18%
Zone 7 Water Agency	131	101	30	23%
Public Defenders' Office	214	190	24	11%
County Administrator	57	34	23	40%
County Counsel	74	56	18	24%
Human Resources	84	74	10	12%
Board of Supervisors	25	21	4	16%
ACERA	19	16	3	16%
Total	10,338	7,622	2,716	26%

The grand jury found that HRS has approximately 200 positions currently in the hiring process or on the wait list to have the recruitment process started. Thus, the county has between 800-1,100 or more positions it intends to fill which are not in any stage of the hiring process. The grand jury addresses issues with the hiring and recruiting process below.

Key Factors in High Vacancy Rate

The grand jury identified five key factors contributing to the county's vacancy rate.

Key Factor #1: Lengthy Recruitment and Hiring Process

A "recruitment" is the term used by HRS to encompass all phases of the hiring of an employee, not just advertising or outreach. The process of recruiting and hiring of county employees is shared by both HRS and the individual departments. Six departments (Social Services, Information Technology, Auditor, Zone 7 Water Agency, Public Works and half of the General Services Agency) have their own internal human resources staff and handle certain portions of the recruiting and hiring process themselves.

When a department decides to fill a position, it contacts HRS to begin the recruitment. While HRS coordinates the recruitment process, the departments must participate by setting a strategy including the timeline, providing subject matter experts (SMEs) for the exam/interview phase, and conducting their own interviews and selection of candidates.

The grand jury found that it usually takes between three and eight months, and even up to a year or more, for Alameda County to hire an employee. This lengthy process may help explain the difficulty in filling vacancies – what candidate can wait three to eight months to find out if they are going to receive a job offer? One assumes the candidates will find employment elsewhere rather than wait.

The grand jury found that it usually takes between three and eight months, and even up to a year or more, for Alameda County to hire an employee.

The grand jury learned that when an existing employee gives notice, it is possible that the position they filled may remain vacant for months before a new person occupies the position due to the lengthy hiring process. Even if the existing employee's departure was somehow coordinated with the new employee's arrival, the county does not allow any position at any time to have more than one person occupy it. For new employees this inability to cross train with exiting employees is problematic.

In early 2023, the HRS department assembled a team to identify key actions that could potentially improve the recruitment and hiring process and reduce the vacancy rate. They implemented the "Recruitment Enhancement Project," a plan that contains twelve initiatives. As of March 2024, the grand jury learned that eight of the initiatives have been completed, with significant progress made on three initiatives, and one pending completion. It is premature to determine if the implementation of the Recruitment Enhancement Initiatives has made or will make an impact on the vacancy rate. The vacancy rate rose another 1/2% between September 2023 and March 2024, so it is likely it will take longer for the initiatives to make their impact.

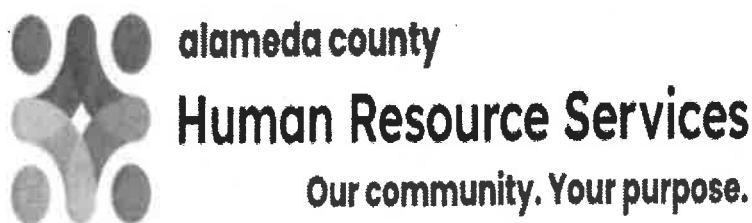
Pre-Recruitment Phase

HRS classifies recruitment work into phases, as illustrated below. The grand jury added a pre-recruitment phase to the standard ones used by HRS, identifying an early problem: insufficient staff are available to process the needed number of recruitments. To clarify, HRS processes over 12,000 applicants per year. A recruitment, however, encompasses the entire hiring process. At the time of this report, there were 112 potential recruitments waiting in the queue, meaning unable to even start the recruitment process. Because of this, departments are forced to prioritize their recruitments, delaying many so that their most important job openings can be processed.

Every department interviewed, as well as HRS, confirmed that HRS is unable to process the high number of recruitment requests in a timely fashion due to insufficient HR resources. The grand jury learned HRS analysts currently maintain caseloads double previous levels. A delay in starting recruitments can add weeks or months to the total timeline of filling a position, likely bringing the total hiring timeline to much greater than the three to eight months estimated above. The grand jury recommends that staff be added to accommodate the increased workload.

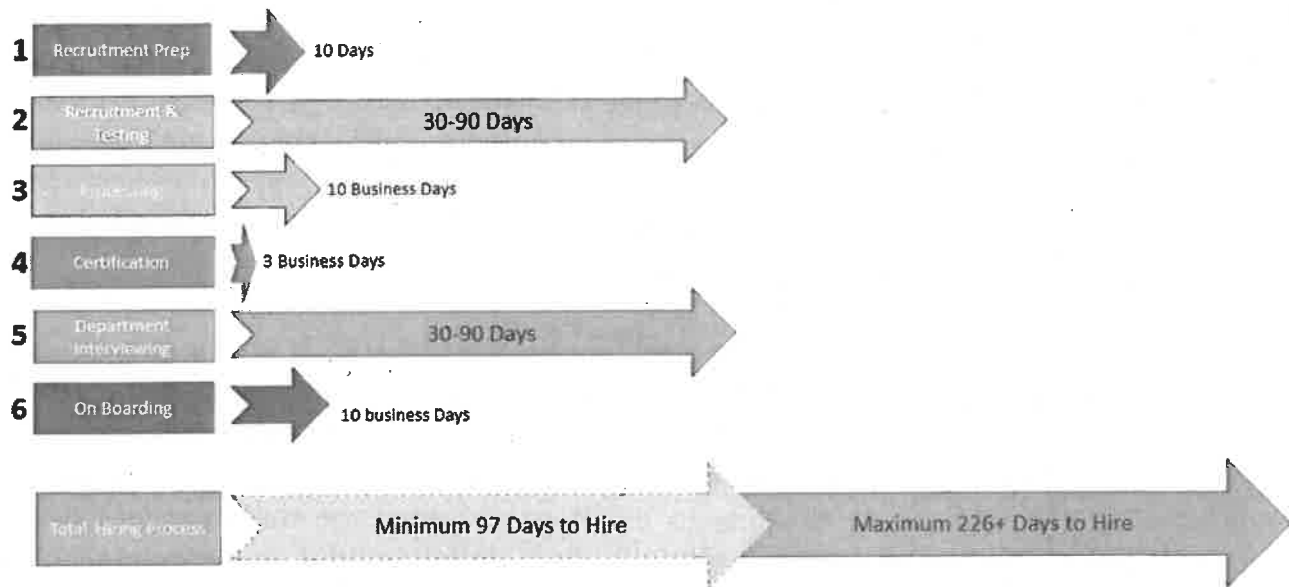
HRS itself, however, is not immune to the overall staffing shortage. The grand jury learned that qualified candidates with needed human resource expertise are difficult to recruit to work for Alameda County and thus are in short supply. HRS has recently been forced to occasionally hire less experienced candidates and train them in-house, reducing the amount of time trained staff have to do their jobs.

HRS divides the recruitment and hiring processes into six phases. These include recruitment preparation, active recruitment/testing, processing, certification, department interviewing and onboarding. The chart below illustrates the timeline for the process, but the chart does not include the time that recruitments spend in the queue, waiting to begin.



New Alameda County HRS Logo

Current Process: Alameda County Hiring Timeline



Phase One: Recruitment prep is allocated two weeks, during which time the department submits its request to HRS for a recruitment; HRS reviews the job specifications and classification, coordinates an exam, requests the subject matter expert (SME), usually provided by the department, and a recruitment plan timeline is set with the department. If reclassification or the minimum qualifications need to be changed, HRS is required to submit an agenda item request to the Alameda County Civil Service Commission for their approval.

Phase Two: Active recruitment and testing can take four to thirteen weeks to complete. During this time HRS posts the job online and waits a mandatory 14 days (formerly 25 days) before the job posting can be closed and examinations administered. This mandatory 14 day waiting period was recently reduced from a 25-day waiting period through the passage of Alameda County Measure A, approved by voters in March 2024. HRS and the SMEs then screen all candidates to see if they meet the minimum qualifications and then must wait a mandated ten days to allow for appeals by candidates. Exams are then administered and scored.

The grand jury found delays in this phase: one has been alleviated by the passing of Measure A. The mandatory ten-day appeals process causes further delays that could be reduced. The next delay is the difficulty in scheduling the SMEs from the departments. Civil service commission rules allow for each department to designate subject matter experts to assist with examinations where specialized knowledge, such as science or technology, is required. HRS reported continuing difficulty in departments scheduling their SMEs to participate in candidate interviews and exams in a timely manner. Very recently, the SMEs have been allowed to view the interviews virtually via recorded sessions, rather than spending an entire day out of the office doing in-person meetings. With in-person screening meetings,

HRS reports incidents of an SME not showing up, canceling at the last minute, or not being able to get the SME scheduled in the first place have been lowered considerably. A recent change allowing interviews to be conducted virtually or even reviewed later by video seems to be having a positive effect on alleviating the scheduling issue with SMEs. Additionally, the grand jury found departments need to plan and prioritize SME availability as part of their regular workload.

To provide temporary relief to the staffing crisis, the Recruitment Enhancement Project targeted two areas: increased use of the temporary assignment pool (TAP) program and provisional appointments. TAP allows departments to hire personnel quickly for special projects, to cover long-term leaves and assist the department during pending recruitment processes. These TAP positions can be filled by the employee for up to 18 months at a lower cost than budgeted for as the county does not provide employee benefits to these employees. Additionally, the Recruitment Enhancement Initiatives (REI) encourage the use of provisional employment, where an employee can fill a position by appointment without the use of the formal process. These employees receive no benefits and no promise of permanent employment. TAP employees cannot apply for a permanent position with full benefits until the position has been vacant for at least two months.

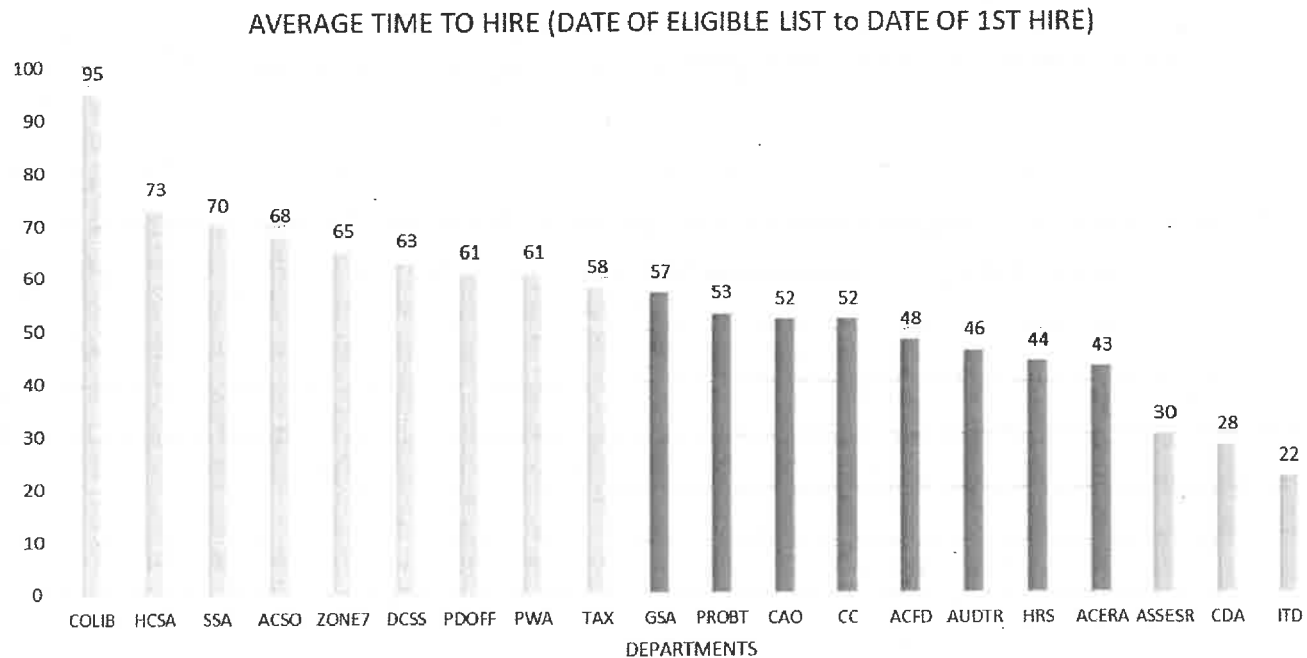
Phase Three: Processing takes approximately two weeks. HRS analysts score the exams and complete rating sheets. Scores are verified; candidates with scores above a 70 are placed on an eligible list, and the list is submitted to the civil service commission for verification.

Phase Four: Departments request that HRS certify the eligible list and can interview candidates after the third business day. Certification takes less than a week. The “Rule of 5” (list of candidates possessing the top 5 scores) is issued to the department for interviewing. The department can only interview and hire a candidate whose score is ranked in the top five regardless of perceived fit or other factors. Eligible candidates are notified and have three days to respond. It has been recommended by prior grand juries, and is recommended by this one, that the “Rule of 5” be expanded to the “Rule of 8”. The grand jury learned that during 2023 most key stakeholders agreed to make this change, but opposition from labor prevented the change from taking place and Alameda County administration declined to implement the highly recommended change over labor’s objections.

The grand jury believes that improving the delays in departmental interviewing is the most important factor in shortening the hiring process.

Phase Five: This is the phase where departments interview and select the candidate they wish to hire, taking up to thirteen weeks or longer. Departments are not accountable to HRS with regard to their interviewing timeline, and HRS has no authority in this regard. This is the phase with the longest delays. Below is a “Time to Hire” chart which displays the amount of time each department takes to interview candidates once it receives the eligible list. The chart

shows that departments take an average of 60 days to interview and hire candidates that have already been vetted and tested by HRS and are certified as eligible and qualified. Although this data was collected in 2021, the grand jury learned that the delay in hiring times since then has not improved. The grand jury believes that improving the delays in departmental interviewing is the most important factor in shortening the hiring process.



Source: Alameda County Human Resource Services Department.

Phase Six: Onboarding. The onboarding process for a new candidate takes approximately three weeks. This process includes obtaining permissions and approvals from HRS, setting the employee up in the database, reviewing and launching emails to the candidate, verifying the candidate data, and determining the effective date of hire.

Key Factor #2: Out-Of-Date Website and Ineffective Outreach

Lack of Advertising and Outreach

The grand jury searched employment websites including those listing current jobs vacant in the county and those specific to government jobs. In addition, the Alameda County employment website and those operated by individual county departments as well as independent job sites were reviewed. At the time of this report, the Alameda County website listed 13 jobs open to the public, six jobs open to employees only for promotional opportunities, and 24 jobs open only for reinstatement/transfers/voluntary demotion, for a total of 43 positions out of potentially many hundreds of more vacancies.

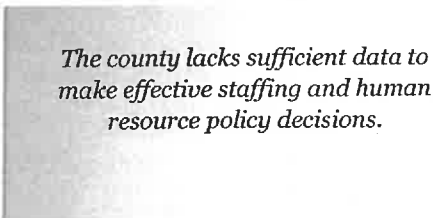
A specific example is the Alameda County Social Service Agency, which has 563 openings. The Alameda County HR website had zero job postings for positions open to the public, and one job posting for a promotional opportunity. On the Social Services Agency jobs website, the grand jury found only one job opening for the public, one promotional opportunity and seven reinstatement/transfer/voluntary demotion job opportunities.

The grand jury learned that at present, HRS's budget is insufficient to purchase booths at job fairs, place advertising, or even to subscribe to websites that post jobs.

Out-of-Date Website

The grand jury believes the Alameda County HRS website must be re-designed with easy-to-use, attractive functions that provide for more transparency in the hiring process. The website needs to allow applicants to monitor their status and serve as a communication platform for recruiting. Insufficient data is being collected by the current website and associated apps which would be the primary means of communication with candidates and tracking of employment. The county does not collect data on who visits the site, why they leave the site, why they leave the application process, why applicants do not apply, why they turn down job offers, and much other data that could prove very useful.

One of the goals of the REI project was to retain a marketing/social media expert to "prepare attractive and dynamic recruitment materials, including a new employment opportunities website, logo and tagline." After a lengthy search, a marketing/social media expert was not



The county lacks sufficient data to make effective staffing and human resource policy decisions.

selected, instead HRS awarded the project internally to the Information Technology (IT) department, citing cost savings. The IT department is now responsible for the marketing of human resources, conducting focus groups, administering surveys, developing recruitment materials and improving the look and feel of the employment website. Some of the website work has been completed and it has a fresher, cleaner appearance than before.

Community Outreach and Training Pipelines Need to be Developed on a Large Scale

It is critical that Alameda County create strong, effective partnerships supporting pipelines extending from schools, colleges, community organizations and other county departments providing job training, leading directly to county job opportunities. In particular, there is a critical need for mental health providers, social workers and health care workers. This outreach could potentially include internship programs, assigning staff to help prepare curriculum material or representing the county at employment fairs and school programs. These internships would encourage opportunities to 'shadow' staff, possibly leading to future permanent employment with the county.

Lack of Selling Alameda County as an Employer

The grand jury believes that younger generations do not seem to be gravitating toward government service employment. The grand jury suggests that a public relations/education campaign be created to educate the public about the advantages of public service. In addition, the value and services that government provides should be made part of the campaign. The value of benefits that Alameda County offers need to be clearly presented with more emphasis, ensuring potential applicants understand the positive impact those benefits could have on their lives. Social media outreach can be greatly enhanced to tell a new story of government, and careers in government geared toward creating a new and exciting public awareness.

Key Factor #3: Candidates Not Wanting to Work for Alameda County

The grand jury learned that many candidates who navigate the website to apply for a position drop out along the way. No data is collected by the county, but one presumes the length of the hiring process is a key reason. Candidates who go through the process and are offered positions but do not accept the job have cited as their primary reasons: inadequate salary, a lack of opportunity for remote work, and crime near county workplaces. Many candidates end up as no-shows at the scheduled interviews and cite crime and safety reasons. HRS recently implemented the option of conducting virtual interviews, and the no-show rate of applicants dropped dramatically.

During 2023, as part of an REI effort, the county authorized a monetary incentive program for existing employees to refer candidates to the county for pre-determined hard-to-fill jobs. The county employee would receive \$500 upon hiring and another \$500 upon the new employee's one-year anniversary of work. The grand jury learned that HRS received 567 referrals from employees. Of those 567 referrals, the grand jury further learned that only one person was hired.

Candidates who go through the process and are offered positions but do not accept the job have cited as their primary reasons: inadequate salary, a lack of opportunity for remote work, and crime near county workplaces.

The grand jury is concerned that this incentive program did not provide the outcome expected; without further data collection, it is difficult to know exactly why it failed.

Salary Below Other Counties and Insufficient for Local Cost of Living

The grand jury heard from several witnesses that the county's salary goal is to be at the median of the five surrounding Bay Area counties (San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Contra Costa and Marin). Testimony from witnesses regarding salaries has varied with some maintaining that Alameda County is 'mostly' competitive and others stating that it has slipped below the median or even to the bottom for similar work in nearby counties.

Other witnesses felt that the county's pay scale must be at or more likely above the median. The grand jury learned that there is no regular survey of county salary scales. When a job is reclassified, or HRS wants to confirm the salary scale, a phone call or email communication takes place to the corresponding department in another county, or equivalent research is conducted on other counties' websites. Assuming the jobs are roughly equivalent, HRS then determines the recommended pay scale. Additionally, the county relies on its partnerships with labor unions to provide much of the salary information. The grand jury learned one difficulty in comparing salaries from other counties is that the job classifications and descriptions often do not correspond. Every county defines their job titles and responsibilities differently. Hence, HRS must use its own judgement to determine the correct salary.

The grand jury received testimony that due to salary levels, a number of current or former employees have either moved out of the area and now have long commutes; have transferred to a neighboring county whose pay scale is higher; or have left county employment altogether. Section 36(e) of the Alameda County Charter addresses this by requiring the Civil Service Commission to conduct an annual comparison of salaries of comparable public and private employment. The grand jury is not aware of such a survey having been recently conducted.

A complex system of stakeholders, responsibility, accountability, and authority makes change cumbersome, difficult, and lengthy. Key stakeholders must find ways to work together and make progress in a timely manner.

Opportunities for Remote, Hybrid or Flexible Schedules May be Limited or Inconsistent

The absence or limited availability of remote work was mentioned as a major roadblock to successful recruitments by most witnesses. The grand jury learned that some potential employees refused positions when told remote work would not be possible. Remote work is not feasible with many jobs, such as health care services, some social service jobs, janitorial, public works field

positions, etc. But in many cases department heads were simply reluctant to revise work requirements to include remote work and have not been required to do so. As an example of how one large department handled this issue, the Alameda County General Services Agency has created a successful program offering flexible work schedules as well as remote work opportunities.

The grand jury learned that in 2023 an attempt was made by HRS to gather all department heads together at a retreat to set parameters for remote work, but a date could not be agreed upon. Consequently, a consultant was hired to interview each manager separately. As of now, the possibility and extent of remote work and its management is left in the hands of each department, creating inconsistencies among departments. While HRS has prepared some training for supervisors in handling remote work, the grand jury believes that a major effort should be undertaken to define, structure, and embrace remote, hybrid and flexible work schedules for jobs that qualify.

Crime Compromises Safety and Threatens Morale

Many office buildings in Alameda County are located in neighborhoods that have seen a dramatic increase in robberies, carjackings, auto break-ins, etc. Several of our witnesses had personally experienced crime near their workplace. For jobs requiring the presence of workers in the office, this poses a problem in recruitments and can be a factor in eventual resignations. Safety has been mentioned by most of the department heads who appeared as witnesses, making this issue an important one for addressing the vacancy rate in the county. Several witnesses have reported that they or clients or passers-by have been victims of crime on the way in and out of county office buildings or the parking areas. Alameda County should make it a priority to work with local law enforcement to address security for employees and employee candidates.

Key Factor #4: Lack of Data, Outdated Technology, and Outside Human Resource Expertise

Throughout the process of its investigation, the grand jury was surprised to discover a lack of data with regard to human resource management. The staff of HRS work valiantly to assemble data, often by hand. The county lacks sufficient data to make effective staffing and human resource policy decisions. The grand jury found minimal data was available to determine the following:

- Why do applicants leave the application process?
- Why do applicants not show up for interviews?
- Why do applicants turn down jobs?
- Why do employees quit and leave their jobs?
- Are employee exit interviews being conducted, and is the information gathered from them being communicated to management?

Key Factor #5: A complex system of stakeholders, responsibility, accountability, and authority makes change cumbersome, difficult, and lengthy. Key stakeholders must find ways to work together and make progress in a timely manner.

Department heads and the county administrator work together to implement board of supervisor directives. Many human resource policy changes need to be implemented through the Civil Service Commission, created in 1956 and its rules last amended in 2009. It is vital that the Civil Service Commission rules be brought into alignment with current human resource management practices. Other changes may need to be made to the Alameda County charter, requiring a vote of the electorate, but those changes can only be accomplished if the efforts of all stakeholders are unified.

As many as 18 labor unions negotiate salary, benefits, working conditions and other matters on behalf of Alameda County employees. The county regularly holds meet and confer sessions with union representatives on a wide array of topics in addition to matters covered in their contracts.

It is vital that the labor unions, board of supervisors, and county administration be united in their efforts to streamline and improve the hiring and recruitment process of county employees.

CONCLUSION

Given the interwoven structure of governance, effecting change, particularly with the hiring and recruitment process, is typically slow, complex and challenging. Meanwhile, testimony revealed that department heads cast blame on the Alameda County Human Resource Services Department for its inability to handle the recruitment workload, which in turn casts blame on the individual departments for their lack of timeliness in providing SMEs, interviewing and selecting candidates.

The grand jury believes that a thorough analysis must be conducted to determine the true vacancy rate. The board of supervisors needs to define how long budgeted positions are allowed to remain vacant and under what circumstances. There must be transparency between departments, HRS, the board of supervisors and labor unions regarding salaries that have been budgeted for one position but were moved to fulfill another use.

The grand jury recommends that the county allocate funding to hire an external human resource and organizational expert to analyze the total recruiting and hiring process from beginning to end, as well as data collection and analysis and additional issues in human resource management.

The grand jury believes that all stakeholders must work together to shorten the recruitment and hiring process, increase salaries to competitive levels, allow flexible scheduling and hybrid work (including more remote work opportunities), and work with local law enforcement to address crime concerns in order to make Alameda County an appealing place to work.

FINDINGS

Finding 24-14:

The grand jury found that as of March 1, 2024, it was reported that 26% of Alameda County jobs are funded and unfilled. County Human Resource Services department has not been able to determine the accurate vacancy rate for the county due to departments intentionally leaving positions unfilled and reallocating the funds to other purposes.

Finding 24-15:

The Alameda County Board of Supervisors has no policy regarding how long a budgeted employee position can remain vacant.

Finding 24-16:

It usually takes between three to eight months for agencies in Alameda County to fill an open position, and sometimes even a year or more.

Finding 24-17:

Alameda County Human Resource Services department does not have sufficient staff to meet current recruitment processing needs in a timely manner.

Finding 24-18:

There is a 10-day notification requirement prior to interviewing applicants.

Finding 24-19:

The Alameda County Human Resource Services department is only allowed to provide departments with the names of the candidates with the top 5 scores for a position. Departments are only allowed to interview from this top 5 list.

Finding 24-20:

Some individual departments' long interview time frames are one of the biggest delays in the hiring process.

Finding 24-21:

The Alameda County Human Resource Services department has taken the first steps to modernize the employment website to maximize recruitment efforts and collect useful data, but much more needs to be done.

Finding 24-22:

Applicants' most common reasons for turning down job offers are insufficient salary, lack of remote work opportunities, and crime near county offices.

Finding 22-23:

Overall county salaries have not kept pace with Alameda County's goal of remaining at least in the median salary range of surrounding counties.

Finding 24-24:

The Alameda County Board of Supervisors has not conducted an annual salary survey per the requirements of the county charter.

Finding 24-25:

The Alameda County Human Resource Services department fails to collect sufficient data on many aspects of human resource management.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 24-12:

The Alameda County Human Resources Services department should conduct an analysis to determine a more accurate vacancy rate for the county.

Recommendation 24-13:

The Alameda County Board of Supervisors should establish a policy to review the amount of time a position can remain vacant in individual departments.

Recommendation 24-14:

The Alameda County Board of Supervisors should increase staffing in the Alameda County Human Resource Services department to enable recruitments to be processed more quickly and eliminate the backlog of recruitments.

Recommendation 24-15:

The Alameda County Human Resource Services department should require departments/agencies to schedule their subject matter experts when the recruitment timeline is scheduled.

Recommendation 24-16:

The Alameda County Board of Supervisors should conduct a comprehensive analysis of the hiring and recruitment process from beginning to end, both in the Alameda County Human Resource Services department and the individual departments, to identify ways to improve and streamline the hiring process.

Recommendation 24-17:

The Alameda County Human Resource Services department should reduce the ten-day notification requirement prior to interviewing applicants.

Recommendation 24-18:

The Alameda County Board of Supervisors should expand the hiring list “Rule of 5” to the “Rule of 8.”

Recommendation 24-19:

The Alameda County Human Resource Services department should perform a comprehensive analysis of all data needed for recruitment, hiring and retention purposes, and ensure its implementation.

Recommendation 24-20:

The Alameda County Board of Supervisors needs to conduct a comprehensive salary survey per the requirements of the county charter.

RESPONSES REQUIRED

Alameda County Human Resource Services

Findings 24-14, 24-16 through 24-23, and 24-25
Recommendations 24-12, 24-15, 24-17 and 24-19

Alameda County Board of Supervisors

Findings 24-15, 24-23 and 24-24
Recommendations 24-13, 24-14, 24-16, 24-18 and 24-20

RESPONSE REQUIREMENTS – CA PENAL CODE SECTION 933.05

Pursuant to California Penal Code section 933.05, the grand jury requests each entity or individual named below to respond to the enumerated Findings and Recommendations within specific statutory guidelines, no later than 90 days from the public release date of this report.

As to each grand jury finding, the responding person or entity shall indicate one of the following:

- (1) The respondent agrees with the finding.
- (2) The respondent disagrees wholly or partially with the finding, in which case the response shall specify the portion of the finding that is disputed and shall include an explanation of the reasons therefor.

As to each grand jury recommendation, the responding person or entity shall report one of the following actions:

- (1) The recommendation has been implemented, with a summary regarding the implemented action.
- (2) The recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future, with a timeframe for implementation.
- (3) The recommendation requires further analysis, with an explanation and the scope and parameters of an analysis or study, and a timeframe for the matter to be prepared for discussion by the officer or head of the agency or department being investigated or reviewed, including the governing body of the public agency when applicable. This timeframe shall not exceed six months from the date of publication of the grand jury report.
- (4) The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable, with an explanation therefor.

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