



A Makeover That Matters: The Extreme Hiring Makeover

Current events have raised the stakes on government's success – and to perform effectively, government needs top talent. But the federal government is in double jeopardy: More than half of all federal employees will be eligible to retire within the next five years, and there is a very thin pipeline of talent waiting in the wings to replace the skilled and experienced workers who will walk out the door. Worse yet, the way the federal government hires is often inadequate – it takes too long, is cumbersome, and may fail to produce quality results.

The federal hiring process is one of the biggest impediments to attracting new employees to government service. In some cases, federal job application instructions run 35 pages long – and applicants often have to wait six months to a year before getting a federal job offer, sometimes with little or no communication from agencies. There is also growing concern that methods used by federal employers for assessing the skills of potential employees are among the least effective available. If it takes federal agencies a year to hire, and they don't properly assess applicant skills, they will lose the most highly qualified candidates to more nimble organizations.

The Extreme Hiring Makeover project has shown that **change is possible.** Last year, three federal agencies agreed to tackle their hiring challenges under the watchful eye of the public. For the past 12 months, all three have worked with a team of public and private sector experts to remake federal hiring. Each has a story to tell.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Modeled after the popular *Extreme Makeover* television shows, this project united some of the nation's premier experts on recruiting and assessment with three federal agencies to implement some of the most effective hiring practices used in any sector. Together, these agencies are paving the way for better hiring. Like the television shows, participating agencies boldly and bravely came forward with a simple desire to improve. But unlike the TV show participants, their measure of success is not cosmetic, but something far more important: bringing the best talent into the federal government by improving the way the government works. This is a makeover that matters.

AGENCIES

The three participating agencies are the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), within the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS); the Department of Education (ED); and the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA), within the Department of Energy. It was important to us to have three agencies participate. If we worked with only one agency, it was likely others could dismiss any success as an anomaly. With three agencies of varying mission and need, we hoped to identify the practical issues encountered by our participants, the commonality of challenges, and the effectiveness of shared solutions.

PARTNERS

The Extreme Hiring Makeover project was enhanced by the participation of world-class experts in the area of recruiting and hiring. The Partnership for Public Service has united a number of private and public sector organizations to help CMS, ED and NNSA. These organizations, who have donated their

products and services, are providing the tools and expertise necessary to assist the agencies in their specific areas of need. Whether the issue is planning, marketing, assessment, or selection, the *Extreme Hiring Makeover* team has the skills and knowledge to help participating agencies improve their practices. In addition to the Partnership, this team included: Monster Government Solutions, ePredix, CPS Human Resource Services, AIRS, Brainbench, the Human Capital Institute and Korn/Ferry International.

APPROACH

We launched this project in the summer of 2004 with a phased approach. From July to January, we helped agencies diagnose the key issues they face through a series of interviews and by mapping the hiring process. We also implemented “quick wins” to demonstrate rapid progress. Those included creating new looks and marketing appeal for vacancy announcements, targeting passive candidates for existing positions, helping to script communications for job fairs, and providing interview guides for managers. From January through the end of April, we constructed short term fixes – designing the new hiring process, creating a new front-end toolkit to facilitate better planning for managers and HR teams, tightening up the pre-screening and assessment process, designing new recruiting materials, and training the agency recruiting experts. The remaining portion of the project focused on long-term planning for building on and sustaining change.

At all three organizations, mapping the hiring process allowed them to gain a realistic and practical understanding of their hiring issues. While it is difficult to prescribe the optimal number of steps for any given agency, this exercise highlighted areas where non-value added steps had crept into the process over a period of years. Many of those steps were not generated by statute or regulation, but through a layered history of Department, agency, and functional practice. Most importantly, it allowed the collective leadership of the organization to understand each others’ activities and where to hunt for real process improvements. The simple visual of this multi-step process evoked enthusiastic commitments for change from all the Makeover teams.

KEY LESSONS

While this project illustrated several areas where rapid improvement can be achieved, it also underscored the obstacles facing government agencies as they try to implement and manage change initiatives. To improve their hiring results, each agency could improve the planning phase of their process, better sell their job opportunities, and focus on quality. To enable these changes, the involvement of top leadership was clearly the most critical factor leading to success, but it’s also apparent that staff members implementing such efforts must support the project. In effect, agencies need to change from the inside out. Though the Extreme Makeover shows focus on the surface, this project pushed agencies to review their deeper internal practices to find better ways to present themselves to the public. Some team members called this “battling inertia,” daring to do things differently.

Even with notable accomplishments at all three participating organizations, each agency team can identify specific areas where they could have improved their results. Team members agree that enhanced internal communication, extending to those outside the project, would have benefited the outcome. Further, there was consensus that dedicated project resources, specifically assigning staff members solely to this effort, would have eliminated competing priorities and allowed the team to focus exclusively on their intended goals.

Across government, agencies post vacancy announcements and assume top-flight candidates will apply. Each agency in this project has benefited from outreach to candidates who may not regularly seek government work, broadening their reach and expanding their organizational capabilities. Through a variety of means, agencies can market their job openings to new and diverse sources of candidates, often with exceptional results. While targeted recruiting promotes agencies, it also demonstrates the appeal of serving our nation. When Uncle Sam calls, top talent answers.

SUMMARY

This is a makeover that matters. It's one that affects the health of our citizens, the performance of our schools and the safety of our nuclear systems. We have witnessed cross-cutting challenges, crafted shared solutions, and demonstrated how these lessons can be applied across government. The following case studies provide the stories of three federal agencies willing to share their challenges and successes with others, in an effort to improve the federal hiring process. In the TV vernacular, this is the unveiling of our "before and after" results. And this is only the beginning.

The Science of Marketing: National Nuclear Security Administration

While almost every organization sees itself as unique, the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) is truly one of a kind. Where else can you harness nuclear energy for security and scientific advancement, and save the world from nuclear proliferation and terrorism? Established in March 2000, NNSA merged the efforts of several federal programs responsible for nuclear security: defense nuclear weapons, nuclear non-proliferation, the naval nuclear propulsion program and other supporting efforts.

Just as NNSA's mission is highly specialized, so are the skills and talents that it needs in its federal workforce. Given the critical shortages in scientific and technical talent in America and a rapidly changing security environment, recruiting needed talent presents a major challenge for NNSA. How can this new organization attract the very best scientific, engineering and business talent in the country? How do NNSA leaders win the "War for Talent" when the new employees they hope to attract are also in such high demand in the private sector? How will they replace the 33% of their workforce eligible for retirement in 2006?

For national security reasons, NNSA did not maintain a highly visible public posture. Potential candidates for employment were not aware of NNSA's exciting and challenging programs. Compounding the difficulty of hiring the right talent is the challenge of finding people to work in remote locations. NNSA directs and oversees operations at three national laboratories and various production facilities in locations that are understandably remote. Given the nature of the work, hazardous research, development, testing and production operations cannot be carried out in metropolitan centers. NNSA site office locations therefore include rural areas in Texas, South Carolina and New Mexico, in addition to its Washington, DC headquarters and Albuquerque Service Center. To overcome these challenges, NNSA needs world-class recruiting capabilities. Agency leaders recognized that old methods would not allow them to compete effectively for their highly sought-after talent.

CHALLENGES

NNSA leaders had already begun to take a close look at their hiring process when the Extreme Hiring Makeover (EHM) team arrived. The HR team, located at DC headquarters and at the agency's Albuquerque Service Center, was seeking to make the best possible use of automated HR systems and had several other initiatives underway to enhance their services to managers. If they could just get a good slate of candidates, they were prepared to work with managers to select and hire the best. However, NNSA was having difficulty attracting a sufficient number of qualified candidates to apply for its highly specialized – and vitally important – jobs.

Scientists and engineers are not trained to be marketing experts. They are trained to provide facts and information – which when translated into the hiring environment can be more information than an applicant cares to absorb. So, even a highly qualified applicant could be left wondering "what did they just say?", "how does this relate to me?" and, "why should I be interested?" That was exactly the way that job applicants might feel in reading a multiple page job announcement for some NNSA jobs. The announcements did not capture the power of the critical mission that NNSA serves, did provide an overly extensive list of job duties that obscured the major features and selling points of the job, and did not highlight the most important skills and experience that the candidate needed to bring to the organization.

As a result, some of NNSA's critical positions went unfilled. In launching the Extreme Hiring Makeover effort, Mike Kane, the Associate Administrator for Management and Administration, used the example of a non-productive effort for a senior scientific position as a proxy for their larger issues. After looking for months, using the current, longstanding, job announcement formats, they had only 3 candidates and none fit the bill. How could the Makeover turn that situation around?

SOLUTIONS

Extreme Makeover Team members rose to the challenge. After reviewing the prior vacancy announcement for the senior scientific position and meeting with the hiring manager and HR team, the root of the problem became clear: NNSA was not selling or marketing its unique employment opportunities. When asked about the vacancy, the hiring manager could describe the position at length in technical terms but had not considered how to convey the job in such a way as to excite a potential applicant. So, the Extreme team led him through a series of questions to elicit what the position really entailed, why a candidate would want to work there, and what competencies and credentials were most important for the job.

NNSA GETS A FACE LIFT

Following the manager interview, the team worked with NNSA to produce a marketing pitch and targeting strategy. Monster Government Solutions helped to create a new look and language for their position announcement that conveyed the importance and excitement of the position. Not only did the new announcement start with a description of why NNSA is a great place to work, but it utilized a user-friendly, five tab vacancy announcement format developed for the Office of Personnel Management's (OPM's) USAJobs website. The announcement was also written in plain English – no government jargon. The web-based posting also included photos of the unique work environment at NNSA that would appeal to the scientists and engineers it sought to attract.

To further improve NNSA's odds of attracting highly qualified applicants, AIRS helped to implement an Internet-based targeted recruiting strategy. They searched various job boards and other internet sources for experienced candidates who met the highly skilled NNSA criteria. A senior NNSA official then called the most desirable candidates that came out of this targeted search to encourage them to apply. The new look for the announcement and the proactive outreach approach produced a slate of 28 qualified candidates.

Emboldened by this success, NNSA leaders took up their own sales and marketing efforts. They developed an advertisement that ran in Government Executive magazine featuring the new face of NNSA - "Where Engineering, Science and National Security Intersect in a Challenging Career."

**WHERE ENGINEERING, SCIENCE AND
NATIONAL SECURITY
INTERSECT IN A
CHALLENGING CAREER**

Come help the National Nuclear Security Administration manage highly visible programs involving nuclear weapons and controlling nuclear threats, both here and abroad. We offer careers where you are compensated for your performance. We also oversee national laboratories that help maintain U.S. leadership in science and technology. NNSA is an agency of the U.S. Department of Energy.



For more information, visit us on the web at: www.nnsa.doe.gov
Specific job opportunities can be found at: jobsonline.doe.gov



ENGAGING THE NEXT GENERATION

To build a pipeline of future leaders, NNSA also launched an emerging leaders program that took the recruiting message to a new level. NNSA recruiters targeted fifteen universities, many in the South and West, with an emphasis on diversity. Building on some of the lessons from the EHM, professional recruitment materials, including a state-of-the-art flash presentation, were prepared for use in on-campus recruiting efforts. NNSA developed a core intern training program built around three separate functional curricula tracks in facility oversight, business functions, and information technology.

Each intern will be assigned a sponsor within NNSA who will provide mentoring and assure meaningful assignments and challenging work.

To compete successfully with private sector organizations, NNSA now aggressively employs a wide range of recruiting flexibilities and benefits. They tackle the money issues head-on by offering candidates the possibility of student loan repayment, signing bonuses and relocation assistance. NNSA's senior leadership is committed to institutionalizing this program, and they have protected funding for the effort even in the face of other mission-related needs.

PARTNERING WITH MANAGERS EFFECTIVELY

The NNSA HR team is constantly looking for ways to enhance their service to managers and forge a collaborative working partnership. Over the last several months, they have worked with managers to reexamine their hiring process to reduce the time and effort required to bring someone on board while improving the quality of candidates delivered by the process. Extreme Makeover sponsor CPS assisted NNSA in mapping their existing process and identifying areas for improvement. Of paramount importance was investing greater attention to the front end of the process. Managers and HR representatives agreed that engaging in a comprehensive strategic conversation at the outset would speed the process, eliminate redundancies and guarantee improved quality of outcomes.

PROVIDING GREAT RECRUITING RESOURCES

Also in the course of the diagnostic phase, NNSA determined that they needed to enhance their human resources staff, and the HR Director took action. As part of their targeted approach to address that issue, a new position was created to lead HR operations. Additionally, the HR team embarked on renewed workforce planning to identify current and future skills gaps; provide training where needed; improve its use of automated HR systems and tools, including a new, consolidated approach to performance management and recognition.

RESULTS

Science and marketing do mix to create a potent force.

- The pilot project to fill a senior scientific position yielded an eight-fold increase in the number of applicants.
- Selecting officials have chosen the first class of about 30 interns, and their feedback indicates that the candidate pool was of a very high quality. Having heard about the success of this program, leaders recruiting candidates in other functional areas have asked for a custom program of their own.

Perhaps the best example of success comes from the HR Director himself. Having participated in the first pilot effort to recruit the senior scientist, Ray Greenberg decided to set an example by revamping his own approach to hiring. He needed an HR operating executive who was ready to embrace a challenge and help make change happen in this new organization. Ray spent time upfront in developing a clear position description and an effective marketing pitch, job announcement and recruiting strategy. It worked. His final candidates were so good that he faced an entirely new kind of challenge: how to select the best from a range of outstanding candidates.

LESSONS LEARNED

TOP LEADERSHIP COMMITMENT IS CRITICAL

As with the other participating agencies, NNSA witnessed how the commitment of top leadership within their organization could advance the goals of the project. NNSA Administrator Linton Brooks continues to be a strong champion of the project and has lent his muscle as required.

EVERYTHING FLOWS FROM STRATEGY

The HR staff saw the benefits of having a deeper knowledge of the business of NNSA, including the type of talent they need to attract, where to look for ideal candidates, and what top talent would find attractive about working at NNSA. This foundational understanding of the organization helps the HR team enhance its partnership and collaboration with management. By building their own organization, they help build NNSA in its entirety.

NEW IDEAS FUEL INNOVATION

Openness to external assistance and seeking outside expertise is extremely valuable when tackling major change initiatives. Many agencies don't have the resources to hire outside consultants or expand their operational practices. In this project, NNSA had access to both the pro-bono assistance provided by the EHM partners as well as to further outside assistance to produce recruitment materials for the intern program. This openness to outside assistance helped to improve its internal practices.

A PICTURE SPEAKS A THOUSAND WORDS

Mapping the hiring process provided a shared understanding of current activities across the HR and management teams. Many times during the process mapping exercise, participants were surprised to see the steps they currently require, particularly in the upfront part of the hiring process, the hand-offs that occur and the cumulative effort needed to make a single hire. The visual of the process facilitated efforts to develop a shared vision for improvement, and enabled NNSA to smartly target areas for training and development – for both HR staff and hiring managers – as they seek to make improvements in the recruitment process.

RECRUITING FLEXIBILITIES MAKE A DIFFERENCE

NNSA offers many exciting jobs and a compelling mission, but in the War for Talent an organization can never have too many weapons in its arsenal. As NNSA works to advance the marketing of their career opportunities, it has also committed to optimizing its use of available flexibilities. In each component of this project, where applicable, NNSA has interwoven the application of student loan repayments, recruitment bonuses and relocation payments along with special hiring authorities. This both heightens NNSA's appeal to potential applicants and brings the agency toward its goal of recruiting and retaining top talent.

WHAT'S NEXT?

As with many federal agencies, NNSA has seen that successful transformational efforts require follow-up and follow-through. To achieve the goals outlined in this effort, and to encourage enduring change, the team is prepared to make a long-term commitment to improvement. In the next few months, NNSA will map a plan to institutionalize the changes made this past year, folding them into their standard hiring process and spreading their knowledge throughout the agency by communicating more broadly with agency staff.

Inspired by their own progress in this effort, NNSA has launched an “Employer of Choice” initiative, demonstrating its commitment to recruiting and retaining top talent. The agency will begin with a survey of all employees, using the Partnership for Public Service’s Best Places to Work in the Federal Government analysis of employee satisfaction data as one benchmark. From those results, the team will assess its strengths and weaknesses and craft corresponding efforts to address key issues.

Building on the foundational elements of the Extreme Hiring Makeover project, the NNSA team also plans to expand and address efforts central to human capital issues, including a major workforce planning effort. This will help identify the skills and competencies needed in the workforce, identify skills gaps, and fine-tune future workforce planning. On a parallel track, the team is developing a “one-NNSA” approach to HR systems that emphasizes linkages between HR initiatives and the organization’s strategic goals. This will include implementation of a single performance management system to replace eight different legacy systems. To deepen collaboration with managers, the HR team will also begin to use additional automated tools.

NNSA may be unique in many ways, but its experiences in the Extreme Hiring Makeover and its additional efforts to improve its practices offer lessons that are applicable to any agency across government.



Hire Education: U.S. Department of Education

The Department of Education's (ED) hiring challenge is the same one confronting agencies government-wide: it simply takes too long to hire qualified employees. With more than \$65 billion in grants and student loans at stake, touching everyone from children to adults, ED literally cannot afford to wait six months or longer to hire its most critical employees.

Last year, the Department updated its Strategic Human Capital Plan based on feedback from leaders and managers across the organization. The most commonly cited source of aggravation among those interviewed was the hiring process, and it became apparent to ED's leaders that the hiring status quo was not acceptable. The number one goal in the resulting plan was to "Fix the Hiring Process."

When ED joined the Extreme Hiring Makeover (EHM), its HR team had already been engaged for the better part of a year in developing new tools and techniques to improve the process, but struggled to effectively engage their managers in the process. Faced with filling approximately 500 vacancies a year, ED wanted to gain a better understanding of its hiring process and determine whether there was a better, more efficient way to recruit and hire.

CHALLENGES

THE COMPLAINT HEARD GOVERNMENT-WIDE: HIRING TAKES TOO LONG

Whether their previous experience came in the public sector or the private sector, the common refrain among ED's leaders and managers is: hiring takes too long, the process is overly complex, and, despite the time and effort required to navigate the process, the candidates it delivers do not always possess the skills and experience required for the job.

We Do All of This to Hire One Person...

To get to the bottom of ED's time-to-hire, the Extreme Makeover team took an in-depth look at the process itself. While hiring processes vary among ED's 19 program and staff offices, the team focused its initial process review on the largest program office within ED – Federal Student Aid (FSA). FSA employs about 25 percent of ED's total workforce; it is also the government's first Performance-Based Organization (PBO), and has some Congressionally-granted management flexibilities that allow it to be more nimble. FSA therefore served as an ideal pilot for a process reengineering effort.

In addition to reviewing existing process maps, recruiting and hiring rules, guidance, plans, tools and other relevant documents already collected by ED, the Extreme Makeover team conducted interviews and focus groups with senior leaders, hiring managers, administrative officers, HR, new hires and others – over 30 individuals in all. These interviews both validated the anecdotal accounts of ED's hiring challenges and provided a more nuanced picture of the process as it operates at FSA.

Based on the information gathered through the interviews, the team developed a detailed process map that reflected every activity, requirement and hand-off associated with FSA's hiring process. The map shed some light on why the process was taking so long: it consisted of 114 discrete steps, and over 45 hand-offs between managers, administrative officers and HR specialists.

The mapping exercise was eye-opening for all involved. When the process map was rolled out, it spanned an entire conference table. Color-coded boxes – with different colors assigned to each of the

participants in the process – served to highlight the fact that there was no one “culprit” for the problem: the steps were roughly split between leaders and managers and their HR teams. Layers of approvals wove up and down throughout, and there was no clear owner of the end-to-end process.

...And We Are Still Not Satisfied

While the sheer length of the process might explain why hiring was taking so long, it did not address the other major concern about the process: delivering enough highly qualified candidates to managers.

Here, too, the interviews provided insight into the root of the problem: managers were generally disengaged from the hiring process. Their interactions with HR at the outset of a hiring action focused almost exclusively on defining the position’s occupational series and grade level (i.e., “I need a GS-14 Program/Management Analyst”), rather than on the essential education, skills and experience required for success.

Absent a strategic front-end conversation between the hiring manager and HR to clearly define the job – not just the job series, but the major duties associated with the position – most job postings consisted of dense, jargon-laden language pulled directly from generic position descriptions. Vacancies did not clearly describe the duties associated with jobs, much less the competencies required to be successful in them. Assessment questions were developed based on this same, generic information, and as such were not consistently effective in screening out unqualified applicants.

Managers would receive certificates and be unable to find any truly qualified candidates to fill the position. The managers would then sit on the certificates, not make a selection, and ultimately re-post the position – resulting in a longer time-to-hire.

SOLUTIONS

STREAMLINING THE PROCESS

The Chief Operating Officer at FSA was the first to take up a pen and excise some of her steps, challenging the team to streamline the process by eliminating redundancies and steps that did not add value. In addition to reducing the time required to hire, the process reengineering provided an opportunity to integrate new steps that would address quality concerns – specifically, to introduce a greater level of position-specific job analysis (in the form of more strategic conversations with hiring managers) into the front-end of the process.

FSA assembled a team comprised of administrative officers, HR specialists and managers to examine the existing process, segment by segment. Viewing the process as a collection of four discrete tasks – establishing a position, marketing and recruiting, assessment and selection, and making a hire – the team developed proposals for more streamlined and efficient ways to complete each phase in the process.

The changes needed to improve FSA’s internal management processes were clear cut, and most steps were condensed or eliminated in one of three ways.

- 1. Consolidating the flow of information between the hiring manager and the HR specialist into a single, strategic front-end conversation.** Traditionally, the information required to advertise for vacancies and assess candidates has been collected piecemeal over the course of dozens of steps. In the new process, hiring managers and HR professionals have a comprehensive conversation at the outset of a hiring action to generate all of the information needed to better attract, recruit and select the best qualified candidates. The EHM team developed a simple interview guide to help HR specialists elicit all of the key information needed.

2. Replacing e-mail chains with meetings that engage all stakeholders.

At numerous points throughout the existing hiring process, tasks such as developing and approving a vacancy announcement required eight or more steps because of excessive back-and-forth among managers, HR and administrative officers. The process reengineering team's proposal replaced e-mail chains with conversations wherever possible, cutting dozens of steps from the process.

3. Asking senior managers to prepare – and follow – annual staffing plans. Just obtaining permission to fill a position required five steps in the existing process. The redesign team proposed that FSA unit leaders submit annual staffing plans outlining the number and type of employees they plan to hire over the course of a year, as well as budget and FTE justifications for those hires. Approved by the senior leadership team at the beginning of the year, managers would then be empowered to hire according to those guidelines without seeking additional approvals. The plans would be revisited at least quarterly to adjust them as needed.

The next step was to apply the lessons of FSA's process redesign Department-wide. While all stakeholders agreed that the process mapping had been a valuable and worthwhile undertaking, it had required a significant time commitment from hiring managers and HR resources from both FSA and the Department. Not wanting to re-invent the wheel in each program office, ED looked to smart solutions to help spread the knowledge gained through FSA's experience for the benefit of the entire department.

To jump-start the knowledge-sharing, the EHM team hosted a three day Boot Camp for HR representatives, Executive and Administrative Officers and hiring managers from across the Department. Day One of the Boot Camp outlined the fundamentals of the new process. Participants contributed a range of ideas and insights to the session, revealing that they had already been experimenting with some new approaches – the Makeover effectively enabled the Department to capitalize on the best of what its program offices had already introduced. The second and third days of the Boot Camp training dealt with creating compelling job postings and with assessment, respectively.

FOCUSING ON THE FUNDAMENTALS

Requiring Managers to Drive the Process

The enhanced front-end conversation had general applicability to all of ED, and an interview guide developed by the EHM team was introduced broadly across the Department-wide during the Boot Camp.

This seemingly simple change to the way ED conducts its hiring process will pay dividends at every step of the process – from reducing the time required to navigate the process, to creating clearer and more compelling vacancy announcements, to ensuring that candidates are assessed according to appropriate and meaningful criteria. The front-end conversation is therefore the cornerstone of all of ED's efforts to improve the way it hires.

Selling ED Opportunities to Job-Seekers

ED's vacancy announcements, like those at many agencies across government, are too often remnants of old vacancy announcements. This runs the risk of reflecting the hiring needs of 20 years ago, rather than the critical talent needs of the Department now and for the future. Job duties and requirements are described in the language of government HR professionals, making them difficult for job-seeking professionals from the public or private sectors to understand them. Applicants are left scratching their heads, unable to assess whether or not it is a job they want, let alone one that is a good fit for them.

To assist ED's HR team in creating clear, compelling, plain-English vacancy announcements, the EHM team developed a template – designed to work with the USAJobs five-tab format – that includes an outline for creating vacancies, as well as prompts, examples and hints to guide HR specialists. ED team members participated in a creative workshop to learn the fine art of marketing jobs. Through the workshop, the ED team developed language that describes the agency's vital mission and work in an engaging and persuasive manner.

Improving Candidate Selection

The improvements to the front-end of the process will help the hiring team create a better selection strategy. HR Specialists will more clearly understand the nuances of the position and important selection components. In addition, the ED HR team has been working very closely with their Quick Hire professionals to overhaul their screening questions across many common job families. This effort will pay real dividends in enhancing quality of hires.

For technical positions, the HR team has enlisted the help of subject matter experts from the program offices to fine tune the selection process. For these hires, technology will jump start the process, but advice and counsel from experts is expected to make a noticeable difference in critical skills assessments.

Finally, the Department is adjusting its policies and updating its technology applications to enable it to utilize category rating later this year.

What Gets Measured Gets Done

One of the projects ED had in process even before the Extreme Hiring Makeover was the creation of a hiring tracking system that could be used across the Department. The ED HR team has continued to refine that tool to allow for precise measurement of process success and issues.

RESULTS

Although their results are still preliminary, ED is prepared for success. First, consider the results of FSA's hiring process reengineering efforts: the elimination of more than 50 percent of its internal management activities. Cutting its process steps from 114 to 53, FSA demonstrates to agencies government-wide that the hiring process need not be a maze of confusion. As FSA learned, most of what is needed to streamline hiring is within agencies' purview to change.

Just as important, ED has a roadmap for streamlining and strengthening the foundation of the entire Department's hiring process. ED's management and HR team is embracing the changes, and the challenges of implementation. Building on the tools and technology ED had been developing prior to the start of the Extreme Hiring Makeover, there is a new suite of resources available to HR and others.

Most significantly, ED has overhauled the questions in the EdHIRES system used to assess applicants for more than half of its occupations. That means that managers and HR now have access to effective on-line applicant questions linked directly to the skills needed for success on the job. The anticipated result when fully implemented: it will be more difficult for applicants, whether intentionally or unintentionally, to "game" the system and appear qualified when in fact they are not.

LESSONS LEARNED

The most critical lesson for ED coming out of EHM: change is possible, but it is not easy. Successfully improving the recruiting and hiring process requires a commitment of time and effort on the part of leaders, HR, managers and others touching the process.

ED has made tremendous progress in the year since it embarked upon this project, and much work still lies ahead. Armed with a roadmap, ED has everything it needs to see the change process through to completion. ED's EHM team knows that the Department's continued success will hinge on the energy it invests in these efforts.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Implementation. ED has an aggressive action plan to roll-out its streamlined processes, test new approaches, and pilot the use of available hiring flexibilities. Over the next two months, the Department will pilot the new process and tools with a half dozen non-bargaining unit positions. Results of those pilots will feed the final process, tools and technology updates Department-wide.

At the same time, ED will continue refining and upgrading its technology. In addition to improving the content of the EdHIRES system, ED is scheduled to update the technology itself to make job postings more visually appealing to job-seekers and easier to navigate for HR and support staff.

ED is drafting a policy that will enable it to use category ranking in place of the rule of three where appropriate. Once the draft policy is complete, ED will pilot this flexibility and assess its effectiveness and impact. Following union outreach to ensure compliance with its collective bargaining agreement, ED will implement category rating Department-wide.

Although there is work left to be done, ED has already taken significant steps toward demonstrably improving the timeliness and quality of its hiring process. Not only has ED paved the way for other agencies – showing what can be possible – it has paved the way for its own long-term success. When its makeover is complete, ED will have a process that ensures the Department recruits and hires the experts needed to lead our national investments in education.

Prescription for Hiring Success: Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services

They serve your parents and grandparents - and, maybe even you. They are the largest health care insurer of Americans and the largest purchaser of health care in the world. They are doctors and scientists, IT specialists and economists. And through their work, they assure access to health care in times of need. They are the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS).

Responsible for programs like Medicare, Medicaid, the State Children's Health Insurance Program, and the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), CMS touches the lives of nearly 1 in 4 Americans. CMS processes more than 1 billion claims per year, providing service to nearly 42 million beneficiaries who receive Medicare benefits.

The agency's mandate was recently expanded with the enactment of the Medicare Modernization Act (MMA)—the most extensive modification to the Medicare program since its inception in 1965. The MMA includes a drug discount card in 2004, new preventive benefits including a "Welcome to Medicare" physical for new Medicare beneficiaries in 2005 and a much anticipated prescription drug benefit plan by 2006, in addition to other improvements to CMS programs.

CHALLENGES

CMS had a pressing need for change in staffing to meet the requirements of the MMA. Implementation of the new law demanded significantly increased hiring, growing the size of the workforce by approximately 500 professionals within two years. This increase constituted 10% of the existing workforce and twice the agency's normal annual hiring. Such changes involved not only consideration of new lines of business but also new skills and competencies to effectively rollout provisions of the MMA.

But the agency's hiring challenges did not begin, nor did they end, with the MMA. Managers were very vocal about their dissatisfaction with both the length of time it took to hire and the quality of applicants that emerged through the certification process. Moreover, like the rest of government, CMS has an aging workforce and will likely face significant retirements in coming years. It must attract and retain a highly skilled workforce to address the increasing pressures of America's aging population.

Hiring challenges were further compounded by the introduction of a new automated staffing system and the transition to a new human resources servicing model as the Department of Health and Human Services consolidated staffing and other services at the Department level. Given the considerable amount of change taking place in the organization, volume hiring for MMA and anticipated retirement turnover, it was clear the old system would not meet the needs of the new CMS.

SOLUTIONS

Working in deference to the priorities and concerns of each Makeover agency, we tailored our workplan to areas of emphasis that each identified as critical to their ongoing success.

At CMS, a focus on effective selection and assessment processes was central to addressing managers' concerns. They wanted to ensure that the CMS of the future would have top talent to meet changing circumstances and their increasing mission requirements. With high volumes of applicants for many CMS positions and an automated staffing system that few understood how to use effectively, screening and assessing candidates for quality was often a challenge.

ANALYZING THE PROCESS

All of the Makeover efforts included an “end to end” mapping of the hiring process and identification of short term and long term fixes. With resources from across the agency and partners at CPS Human Resources Services, the hiring process was mapped from end to end—starting when a manager identifies their need and concluding when the person reports for duty. That is notable because the effort extends well beyond the traditional HR functions that have received the most comment and attention in typical improvement initiatives. We conducted a series of focus groups with representatives from the key functional areas which allowed us to document the process, identify roles and responsibilities, and to assess obstacles to quality and timeliness.

FOCUSING ON QUALITY

Concurrent with the process mapping and diagnosis, CMS conducted a demonstration hiring process for one of its components. This demonstration process employed a selection of successful pre-screening and assessment processes from best practice organizations, thereby providing a model on which other CMS groups could base their practices. This demonstration also presented the opportunity to test category rating, demonstrating greater flexibility in considering a range of qualified candidates.

The managers of CMS’ Families and Children’s Health Programs Group bravely volunteered for duty in test driving new practices that might be used more broadly in the organization. Designing and implementing the test required significant time commitment on their part.

CMS identified the position of health insurance specialist as the best candidate for the test process for several reasons:

- It was the most common occupation series across the organization. There will always be hiring needs in this area.
- There were immediate hiring needs for multiple positions.
- Many of the projected retirements are expected to deplete these positions going forward, so the work done in this area could benefit future hiring.
- There were no special flexibilities or direct hiring authorities for these positions, so positive results might benefit all hiring efforts and be even more significant for MMA positions.
- CMS could conduct this demonstration outside the current MMA hiring effort, which was already underway, to avoid slowing that process.

Whereas the goal of the demonstration effort was to highlight effective approaches in candidate assessment and selection, building a method to generate high-quality candidates would require the team to apply best practices across the hiring process from end to end.

We began the demonstration effort with a strategic conversation with the hiring manager to clearly define the needs of the position. Information gathered during this critical discussion and during job analysis enabled our expert team (Monster Government Solutions, AIRS, Brainbench, and ePredix) to:

- market the position using a visually appealing, plain-English vacancy announcement,
- proactively target qualified candidates via a number of internet accessible resume databases, and
- build tools to effectively screen applicants and assess their skills and fit for the position, combining several different approaches to enhance results.

RESULTS

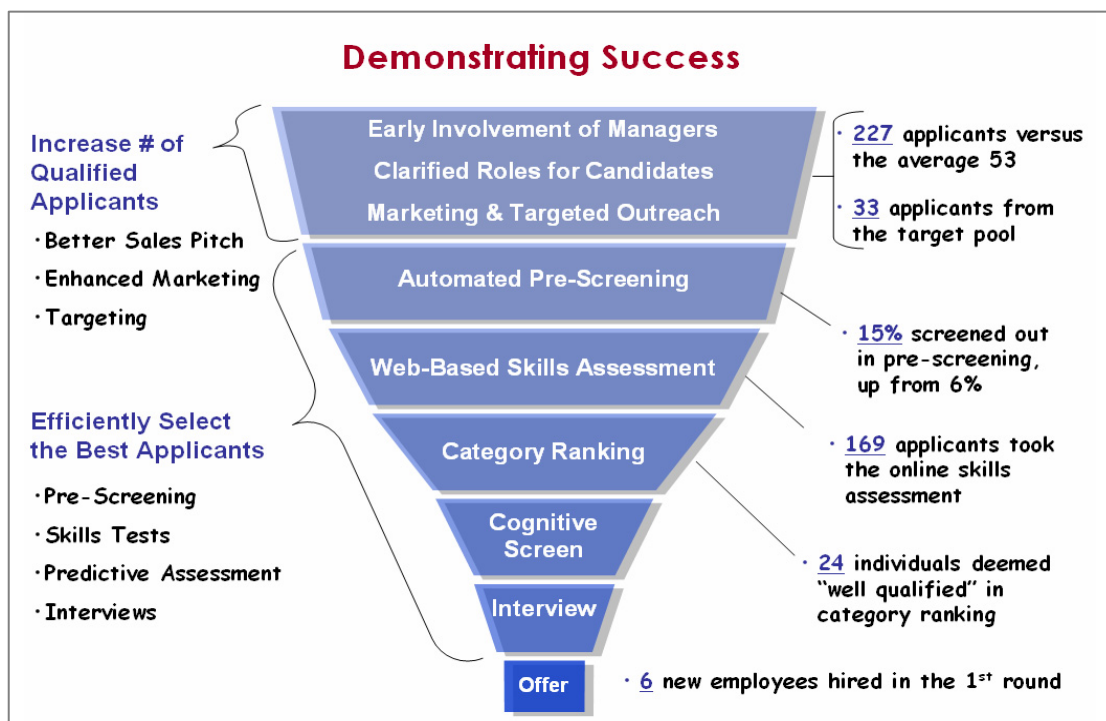
Results from the demonstration process were very impressive. In the first round, more than 200 people applied for the GS-13 health insurance specialist position. This was particularly impressive when considering the average number of applicants for similar positions in HHS was slightly more than 50. Of that population, 33 applicants were a direct result of our proactive recruiting efforts using internet accessible resume databases.

Pursuing a phased approach to screening and assessment, CMS required the applicants to complete a questionnaire in QuickHire. The well-crafted questions screened-out about 15% of applicants, a significantly higher percentage than in most other CMS efforts. The remaining applicants were then required to complete an online skills-test. Applicants were ranked based on the combined score from the questionnaire and skills test.

Applying category rating, the hiring manager was presented 24 applicants to consider rather than three as in the conventional process. Finally, candidates invited to interview were required to complete an additional assessment. Whereas the first online skills test reviewed specific knowledge and writing skills, the final assessment was predictive, reviewing behavioral competencies and cognitive abilities.

In the final analysis, the hiring manager was able to hire seven people—the first within 22 business days of closing the vacancy announcement—and was extremely pleased with the caliber of candidates. Having committed significant time to the project, he stated “the process produced great candidates and was well worth the effort!”

In addition to conducting the pilot, CMS also implemented some “quick fixes” to the hiring process. This included modifying the vacancy announcements to better market the agency and streamlining the hiring process to eliminate redundancies and unnecessary handoffs. In streamlining the hiring process, we identified more than 60 steps in the hiring process that represented a series of actions involving the hiring managers, their executive officers, budget resources, agency and HHS executives, EEO and multiple HR resources. Illustrating the steps highlighted some of the inefficiencies that had crept into their practices over time and helped each function better understand its involvement in the overall process.



The illustration also led to a focus on accountability. When a process crosses so many organizational functions, who owns it? It would be impossible to fix it without an owner, and at CMS, the Deputy COO has enthusiastically embraced responsibility for the process and the fix. Following our process mapping effort, experts helped CMS reduce the steps in their hiring process by more than 20%. The agency has since taken steps to further streamline the process.

NEXT STEPS

Building on the lessons learned in this project, CMS has begun to look beyond fixing their screening and assessment process toward a fundamental change in the way it acquires talent. Under the leadership of the Deputy COO, there is an impressive effort underway to shift the view of hiring as an administrative function to a critical, strategic function in which the partnership between managers and their HR/recruiting counterparts is essential for success. Recognizing this will require a monumental culture change, CMS is developing a comprehensive strategy to gain buy-in across the agency by delivering results.

A multi-functional team comprised of CMS managers, executive officers and HR specialists from the Baltimore Human Resources Center, are working to further streamline the hiring process and to implement best practices in recruiting from end to end to ensure every candidate presented to a hiring manager for consideration meets their needs. Current efforts are focused on providing hiring managers with tools to facilitate their engagement in the process and building the knowledge and skills of HR professionals to ensure consistently satisfying hiring outcomes.

In the coming months, CMS will pilot the streamlined hiring process along with improved practices in strategic planning, marketing, proactive recruiting and applicant screening and assessment. The agency has already begun to apply some best practices learned in this effort, most notably, with regard to vacancy announcements. CMS jobs posted on the USAJobs website are now more than an obligatory requirement to “announce” a job but are important vehicles in marketing job opportunities and the CMS mission to potential employees.