



TECHNICAL BULLETIN

Hiring and Selecting the Most Appropriate Qualified Applicants

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Organizations are built through the careful selection of quality employees; they prosper through the development and retention of staff. Today, many correctional facilities are struggling to fill vacancies because there are fewer and fewer skilled candidates available in the increasingly competitive applicant pool. As a result, personnel staff can feel pressured to hire applicants simply to 'fill openings' rather than carefully selecting the best. This bulletin will highlight strategies for identifying candidates who will make a difference in your organization and provide three 'take-aways' to improve your hiring process. The strategies and 'take-aways' presented are based on successful studies conducted for the Missouri and Florida Departments of Corrections.

The Missouri Department of Corrections (MDOC) is in the process of developing a corrections officer (CO) certification system. The goal of the system is to ensure consistency in skills at all institutions; provide a pathway to improvement, recognition, and success for officers; and to attract quality applicants. The certification process will be used for all COs and jailers in Missouri. As such, the state needed to know and understand correctional officer job requirements at state, county and municipal levels to inform selection procedures and training. MDOC conducted a complete job analysis and training assessment across each of the levels in 2004. Results of these studies provided detailed information regarding the tasks, knowledges, skills, and abilities (KSAs) that are critical to CO and jailer performance. The findings provide the backbone of the selection procedures and certification system that will ultimately be used in Missouri.

Take-Away 1: A complete job analysis is the keystone of a valid and legal selection system

The selection procedure recommendations provided for Missouri's certification system includes six components. The first component is a set of minimum qualifications (MQs) that all applicants need to meet to be considered for employment as a CO. MQs reduce the amount of time personnel staff spend evaluating applicants who do not meet a minimum threshold, thus saving department resources. The next components of the certification system include five selection assessments: 1) Situational Judgment Test (SJT), 2) Video-role play, 3) Work sample, 4) Personality test, and 5) Tests of physical abilities. These exams were recommended because they measure the critical tasks and KSAs identified in the job analysis and most have high-fidelity to the job.

This type of multifaceted assessment battery is useful because it allows the department to select the most promising applicants who will be more likely to remain in the organization. Applicants who remain with a facility save Department money through increased productivity and reduction in money spent on re-hiring and training another employee.

Take-Away 2: Multiple assessments can improve selection system validity and, in the long-run, save department money

Creating a valid and legal selection system is only half the battle however. Successful administration of the hiring process is just as important. The Florida Department of Corrections (FDOC) recently conducted a complete organizational assessment that included a review of all personnel procedures. Assessment results indicated that, while the Department had a well-designed hiring system to bring in quality applicants, breakdowns in personnel processes were creating some selection issues. Findings indicated that the Department needed to increase administrative support for essential personnel functions and flatten the organizational chain-of-command to increase efficiency. Streamlining the hiring process in this manner will likely increase the amount of quality applicants entering the organization because inefficiencies and time-lags can lead to loss of qualified applicants who may have other competing job offers.

Take-Away 3: Day-to-day administration of a Department's hiring system is as important as the development of the system

Carefully developing a valid selection system that correctly identifies the best candidates in the applicant pool and efficiently administering the process are two keys for successfully hiring qualified applicants. For more information about either of these studies, please contact Dr. Brian E. Cronin at bcronin@icfi.com or (703) 934-3633.

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