

Effective:
June 12, 2014

MERIT SYSTEM POLICY AND PROCEDURE

Purpose: To provide a merit hiring process.

Scope: This policy applies to Office of Aging, Children & Youth, Drug & Alcohol, Behavioral Health and Development Services and select positions in the Emergency Management Department. NOTE: This Policy does not supersede procedures outlined in any applicable Collective Bargaining Agreement. Nothing in this policy shall prevent employee(s) from exercising their right to collectively bargain, however, a Collective Bargaining Agreement may not infringe upon the Merit Based principles.

The County of Lancaster's Merit Hiring Policy shall be posted on the County of Lancaster website and the County of Lancaster employee website. A hard copy shall be posted in the Office of Human Resources within the public job posting area. All supervisors shall receive and retain the Merit Hiring Policy.

On an annual basis, the Director of Human Services analyzes the current census data and referral data for each age group to determine workforce staffing needs for the County of Lancaster's programs formerly covered under Civil Service.

The County of Lancaster is an Equal Opportunity Employer. All applicants, internal or external, must meet the minimum qualifications to be considered for the vacant position. Additionally, all applicants, internal or external must complete and submit a County Employment Application during the posting period to be considered for the vacant position. Applicants entitled to veterans' preference who meet all required employment criteria receive additional consideration in recognition of their military service pursuant to the Pennsylvania Military and Veterans Code, 51Pa. C.S.A. Sec. 101. In the event that there are more than one equally qualified applicants and one is a veteran, the veteran shall be offered the position. The veterans' preference shall only be granted for initial employment or rehire, and shall not be applied to requests for transfers or promotions. In the competitive selection process for positions within the Office of Aging, in the event that there are more than one equally qualified applicants, preference shall be given to persons 60 years of age or older who meet all required employment criteria.

In compliance with the Department of Public Welfare requirements for merit systems, competitive appointments to any County vacancy may be made available to any paid/unpaid intern that progresses satisfactorily through an internship with the County of Lancaster as sponsored by a duly accredited institution of higher learning. For purposes of hiring, interns shall be considered internal candidates for vacant positions.

Applicants who are applying for a position that would be considered a promotion shall be considered in addition to other inside candidates and outside candidates. The best qualified candidate, considering any applicable hiring preferences as listed above shall be offered the position. The rate of pay shall be determined by the current County of Lancaster Salary Administrative Plan.

All employment applications will be accepted at:

County of Lancaster
Office of Human Resources
150 N. Queen Street
Ste. 312
Lancaster, PA 17603.

The Office of Human Resources will only accept applications for positions advertised as a vacancy announcement. Applications may be hand-delivered, or sent via the United States Postal Service, facsimile (Fax) or e-mail. No unsolicited applications will be accepted. If an applicant only submits a resume without a completed application, Office of Human Resources will contact the applicant and request him/her to complete an application.

If an applicant attempts to apply directly with a department, the department may not accept the application and is required to direct the applicant/application to the Office of Human Resources.

The Office of Human Resources will review all applications to determine if the applicant meets the minimum qualifications of the position for which he/she applied. Only applicants who meet the minimum requirements will be forwarded to the Hiring Manager in the applicable department for review.

Each department shall be responsible to complete all background and reference checks, except for I-9 verification and driver license history, which typically is performed by Human Resources. NOTE: It is essential that any background checks performed are done so for bona fide business reasons as related to the position. Consult with the Office of Human Resources for guidance if uncertain.

The Hiring Manager must keep accurate records of the hiring process, including reasoning on the selection of which candidates to interview and the candidate selected for employment. The Hiring Manager is responsible for notifying in writing any unsuccessful candidates who have been interviewed but not hired (refer to the standard letter at the end of this policy).

Per County Policy, every vacant position is posted for a minimum of four (4) days (although longer posting periods are recommended to widen the applicant pool). If, after the normal interview/selection procedure is followed, a current County employee is the best candidate and selected to fill a vacancy, the supervisor may offer the position to the candidate contingent upon approval from the Department Head and successful completion of pre-employment screening (where applicable). If the applicant selected is not a County employee, then proceed with Interview and Selection steps described below. If no candidate is selected for the position, the department head may re-post the position and decide on additional resources to attract qualified applicants. Salary shall be determined according to the current salary plan. The Office of Human Resources will contact the department to schedule benefits orientation, if applicable.

Applications not selected will be kept on file for one (1) year in the Office of Human Resources but will only be considered "active" for six (6) months from the date of application. Active files may be requested

by the hiring manager should the response to the current posting not meet the pool minimum requirements. "Inactive" applications will not be reviewed or forwarded to the Hiring Manager in response to a vacancy posting. Applicants will be required to submit a new application after six (6) months of former submitted application.

Applicants for County Position Vacancies Requiring a College Degree

Interested applicants may apply for positions requiring a college degree, if they are currently enrolled in school and expect to receive their degree within the next 90 calendar days. Applicants must provide proof of a degree and satisfactory completion of any required coursework, via official transcript within 60 days of hire.

Application Review

1. The employer should never write anything on an application, but separate notes are acceptable. An application must be completed and signed by each candidate. The application serves as a more objective tool than a resume because it requires candidates to complete a form requesting standard information. The signature on the application authorizes the County to conduct necessary and applicable background checks, and the applicant attests to the validity of the information on the application. The application must be completed in its entirety; applications that indicate "see resume" will be considered incomplete and will not be accepted. An applicant need not complete the statistical survey attached to the application. Failure to complete the statistical survey attached to the application, does not render the application incomplete.

2. There are multiple matters to consider when reviewing the application:

- a. Compatibility. Does a reasonable match exist between what the applicant is seeking and the actual vacant position?
- b. Availability. Can the applicant work the necessary days and hours?
- c. Salary requirements. Can the applicant's salary requirements be met?
- d. Legal right to work in the United States. Contact the Office of Human Resources if an applicant checks off that he/she is not eligible to work in the United States.
- e. History of problems. What are the reasons the applicant terminated from previous employment?
- f. Unexplained gaps in work history. The Hiring Manager should question the applicant about the gaps during the interview process.
- g. Previous criminal convictions. Contact the Office of Human Resources if an applicant checks off that he/she has previous criminal convictions. A conviction does not automatically remove the job applicant from further consideration.

- h. Did the applicant sign the application?
- i. How does the application compare to the resume, if applicable?
- j. Does the applicant meet all education/certification/work experience requirements?
- k. Was the application received during the posting period?
- l. Is the applicant a veteran or over age 60 (Office of Aging)? Note: Veterans' preference extends to spouse of a disabled veteran and to widow or widower of a veteran.
- m. Is the applicant a current or former County of Lancaster employee?

3. There are also multiple matters to consider when reviewing a resume:

- a. Consistency with the application: Does the information on the resume agree with that provided on the application form?
- b. Written communication skills. How well is the resume written? (Grammar, spelling etc.)
- c. Organizational skills. Is the information on the resume presented in a logical manner?
- d. Professionalism. Was the resume accompanied by the appropriate cover letter?
- e. Sequence of credentials. The order of the applicant's listed credentials could be an indication of the applicant's strengths and weaknesses.
- f. Information omitted by the applicant.

Interview and Selection (Refer to County Policy A-2)

1. It is essential for all managers who are involved in the employment process to be aware that the following information should NOT be discussed or obtained prior to a conditional offer of employment being extended:

- Race
- Religion
- Age/Date of Birth
- National Origin
- Medical Information such as genetic information and disability
- This list is not all-inclusive - managers should consult with the Office of Human Resources for more specific information.

The County provides for reasonable accommodation in both the application and employment stages per the Americans with Disabilities Act, and also provides for veterans and age preference where applicable.

2. Selecting Applicants to be Interviewed

a. As a result of the initial review of applications, the Hiring Manager will sort the applications into one of the following categories:

i. Lead candidates: Those applicants whose qualifications, experience, and salary requirements best match the vacancy requirements.

ii. Possible candidates: Those applicants that do not represent as good a match as the lead candidates but who do meet the minimum qualifications.

b. If there is a minimum of three (3) lead candidates, then it is acceptable that only lead candidates be selected for an interview. If less than three (3) lead candidates are available, top candidates from the possible candidate list should be selected to interview such that at all times, there are no less than three (3) candidates interviewed for a vacant position.

c. If none of the lead candidates are selected for hire, the applicants considered possible candidates should be carefully reviewed and selected for an interview. A minimum of (3) three applicants must be interviewed for each vacant position.

d. If no qualified candidates are found, the Hiring Manager should consult with the Office of Human Resources to discuss additional options.

3. Assessing the Candidate

After completing the interview process, the following guidelines are provided to help avoid some common problems when assessing candidates:

a. All of the candidates shall be measured by the same criteria. All candidates shall be assessed on how qualified they are to perform the essential functions of the job.

b. Each candidate should be evaluated to determine the degree to which they possess the necessary education, experience, and skills.

c. Personal biases must be avoided, i.e. physical appearance, accents, age, gender, etc.

d. All those who participated in interviewing candidates for a given position shall use the same criteria for assessment of the candidates. A standard set of interview questions is recommended. See the employee website for a list of sample questions.

e. Once the assessments have been completed, those who participated in interviewing candidates should compare the candidates to select the individual who best meets the qualifications that were established.

4. Checking References (Refer to County Policy A-2)

a. Professional reference checks are required to verify the validity of the information the candidate provided on the application/resume and/or during the interview. Educational qualifications, work experience, military records, etc., should also be verified. Three professional

reference checks should be completed, although a minimum of two is required, for each applicant under consideration for employment. Professional references are not limited to, but may include, past supervisors, teachers, mentors, volunteer affiliation leaders, etc., and should never include friends or family.

b. The Hiring Manager is responsible for completing the reference checks.

c. The candidate should be informed that the County will be conducting reference checks as part of the selection process. The candidate should be asked to provide the names, titles, and phone numbers of previous supervisors, if they have not already provided acceptable references on the application.

d. Reference checks may not always be successful. Many employers are very reluctant to divulge any information regarding the candidate. However, most will verify very basic information. Often if they will not release answers to questions, asking if an employee is eligible for re-hire is acceptable.

e. The County employment application includes a reference check release in the body of the application document.

f. The following steps will provide an effective reference check:

1. A basic reference check form is available on the employee website. Additional questions may be asked if needed, and comply with the County's non-discriminatory practices.
2. Only job-related questions may be asked.
3. Assure the reference contacted that the applicant has signed a release (application) permitting the County to contact the reference.

Offering a Position

1. Typically, the minimum start rate is offered to selected candidates. Consult the current salary plan for additional guidelines if the Hiring Manager is requesting a start rate other than the minimum.

2. After consultation with the designated supervisor, the Hiring Manager may verbally extend a conditional offer of employment to the candidate, pending satisfactory background clearances. If the candidate accepts the offer, the Hiring Manager should follow up with the conditional offer in writing. All letters must be approved and signed by the Department Head or designee. See sample letter at the end of this policy. Note: Do not state earnings as a yearly figure, as that may be interpreted as a contract.

3. Managers should exercise caution when making the offer of employment to ensure that these offers do not promise more than what is intended. Offers should not imply a contract for

employment, and should be legally defensible against such charges and consistent with the County's policies and procedures. As such, the following guidelines should be followed when making employment offers:

- a. Do not use terms such as: permanent, life-long employment, continuous employment, on-going, guaranteed, or long and rewarding career. This kind of terminology may be construed as implying a contract.
- b. Use phrases such as "generally" and "typically" when referring to the terms and conditions of employment, particularly in reference to benefits and County policies which are subject to change. Generalized descriptions are less likely to be misinterpreted as binding promises. The County may change policies and benefits at its discretion.
- c. When discussing salary information, do not state an annual salary figure, since this may be construed as an annual contract. Instead, discuss the salary in terms of the smallest denominator (i.e. hourly, weekly, bi-weekly).
- d. Clearly state the job title of the position offered, the work location and typical days/hours of work, and other hours as necessary.
- e. The probationary period should be noted in the offer letter.
- f. See sample letter for guidance.

Pre-Employment Screening

After the candidate has accepted a conditional offer of employment, the pre-employment screening process begins.

1. Criminal Background/Child Abuse Background Check

- a. While the Office of Human Resources conducts the initial I-9 and drivers license verifications, a more thorough criminal or child abuse or Medicaid exclusion background check may be required for selected positions.
- b. The department is responsible for conducting any additional background checks as required for designated positions.
- c. Departments obtaining criminal background checks, credit checks, or background investigations must assure that the Office of Human Resources has verified that the designated background checks comply with the Fair Credit Reporting Act.
- d. Unless otherwise required by law, only job-related criminal convictions shall be considered when determining employment clearance for an applicant. Certain criminal convictions automatically disqualify the applicant due to state law/regulations.

Departments should contact the Office of Human Resources to determine the extent to which a conviction may be job-related, or timely (i.e., not 20 years ago) and should eliminate a candidate from selection.

Transfers and Promotions

Internal candidates are considered on their qualifications, as the goal is to hire the best candidate for the position. An internal candidate must still submit an employment application during the posting period to be considered for a vacant position. Pay shall be determined following current salary plan guide lines.

Trainees

A new employee hired as a Caseworker trainee, shall be promoted to Caseworker upon successful completion of the designated probationary period.

Interns

The County actively hires paid interns, and also utilizes unpaid interns. Paid interns shall require the same processing as a newly hired County employee. As with County employees, paid interns shall have an employee file located in the Office of Human Resources that include all official employee documents. Unpaid interns do not have employee files in Human Resources; instead, files are kept with hiring office. Unpaid interns shall be processed in the following manner:

1. Complete Employment Application and for position indicate "unpaid intern"
2. Provide appropriate identification (license, state id, passport, school id)
3. Provide references and supervisor completes references
4. Provide emergency contact
5. Review key policies and sexual harassment training/complete acknowledgements
6. Complete a "County ID Request Form" and forward to Human Resources for process

Note: Interns working at a non-County of Lancaster entity, shall not have their internship counted as professional working experience. Rather, the internship shall be considered part of the person's educational experience.

Training

Each position covered in the Merit Based Hiring System has a County of Lancaster Job Description that incorporates the Department of Public Welfare Job Specifications. The County of Lancaster adheres to all mandated specifications as mandated by the Commonwealth through staff orientations and training programs. Department Heads determine training needs based on input from managers, supervisors and the employees. County training includes orientation, individualized training, supervisor training, First-Aid and CPR, Sexual Harassment Prevention etc. Additionally, staff members attend outside seminars and training courses as approved or required by their department heads.

Evaluations

Each employee shall receive a performance evaluation on a regular basis to receive feedback on his/her performance and discuss job responsibilities. The immediate supervisor shall rate the employee on

execution of the employee's performance and set goals/objectives for the next review cycle. Additionally, the employee's Job Description is reviewed, updated if necessary, signed and returned with the evaluation to the Office of Human Resources. The performance evaluation process should be a collaborative one with input from both the supervisor and employee. Departments must use the Annual and Probationary Performance Evaluation Forms generated from PeopleSoft. The Salary Board approves the annual Salary Administration Plan. Department Heads must assure compliance with the Salary Administration Plan or submit requested deviations to the Salary Board for approval.

Probationary Period

The probationary period gives the employee time to adjust to the new job and gives the supervisor a chance to make a fair appraisal of the employee's abilities and progress. If the employee's performance is not compatible with the position requirements, County policies, practices, or procedures, the employee may be terminated any time prior to the expiration of the probationary period in consultation with the Director of Human Resources or designee. Prior to the completion of the probationary period, the supervisor must complete a performance appraisal indicating whether the employee should be retained or terminated. New hires or employees who transfer from a part-time position to a full-time position will be subject to a probationary period as follows:

Position Classification:	Probationary Period:
Exempt (Salary)	Six months
Nonexempt (Hourly)	Six months

Completion of Probationary Period

Upon satisfactory completion of the six (6) month probationary period, full-time employees are eligible to use vacation time accrued, and tuition reimbursement. Completion of the probationary period does not guarantee an employee employment for a specific period or create a contract of employment.

Position Elimination

Occasionally, positions within the County may be eliminated due to reorganization, lack of work, work deemed obsolete, or other related reasons. A full-time employee who holds a position being eliminated may be granted severance benefits, if eligible, per County Severance policy (B-8). Where a severance agreement is offered, an employee may be eligible for rehire with the County into positions for which he qualifies after a period of six months of separation. Where an agreement is not offered, an employee may be eligible for rehire once the separation documents are complete.

Layoff

A layoff is an employer-initiated action, which may result in separation of service due to economic conditions, lack of work, reorganization, or related reasons. Layoffs shall be determined by both

performance and length of County employment for employees in a given Department or unit such as Office of Aging, Drug & Alcohol, etc. Employees with a score of MSE or below shall be the first laid off regardless of length of service. Employees scoring ME or above shall then be subject to layoff based on length of service. An employee separated due to layoff may be eligible to receive County Severance Pay benefits, if eligible, per County Severance policy (B-8). If a severance agreement is offered, the employee may be eligible for rehire with the County into positions for which he/she qualifies after a period of six months from his/her separation date. If a severance agreement is not offered, employees may be eligible for rehire once the separation documents are complete.

Furlough

A furlough is mandatory, temporary time off, without pay. The Board of Commissioners may implement a furlough action when necessary because of lack of funds, lack of work, reorganization, or related reasons. Furloughs shall be determined by performance and length of County employment as described in the above Layoff section for employees in a given Department such as Office of Aging, Drug & Alcohol, etc. The length of the furlough impacts benefits differently, for that reason benefit information will be distributed at the time of furlough notice. An employee may apply for vacant County jobs for which he/she is qualified.

Political Activity

Employees are still subject to the same regulations as described in the Pennsylvania State Civil Service Commission publication entitled "Political Activity Guidelines for Civil Service Employees" as amended from time to time.

Discipline

See County of Lancaster Policy A-9 Progressive Discipline. (Copy Attached)

Issue Resolution

See County of Lancaster Policy A-11 Issue Resolution for any conditions not covered by the Merit System Alternative Dispute resolution process. (Copy Attached)

Forms

County of Lancaster Corrective Action Report (Copy Attached)

County of Lancaster Performance Improvement Plan (Copy Attached)

Sample Job Candidate Correspondence

Sample #1: Correspondence for Candidate who was interviewed

Dear

Thank you for your interest in employment with the County of Lancaster and interviewing with us for the position of-----

Although we were impressed with your background and qualifications, we have selected another candidate whose background and qualifications better met our current needs.

Thank you once again and best wishes in your future endeavors.

Sincerely,

John Smith

Director, Dept ABCXYZ

Sample Conditional Offer of Employment

January 1, 20XX

Ms. Jane Doe
123 Any Street
Lancaster, PA 17604

Dear Ms. Doe,

This letter confirms your offer of employment with the County of Lancaster as an Office Support II in the Lancaster County ABCXYZ Department with an hourly rate of \$xx.xx*. This offer of employment is contingent upon the successful completion of any pre-employment screening process which may include a criminal background check, child abuse check, Medicaid exclusion check, a drug/alcohol screen and/or a physical examination; and validation of identification required to complete new-hire paperwork.

The typical schedule for this position is 8:30 am through 5:00 pm, Monday through Friday.

We expect you to report for work Monday June X, 20XX at 8:30 am. The ABCXYZ Department is located at 150 N. Queen Street in downtown Lancaster.

We look forward to working with you. Please feel free to call with any questions at 717-295-XXXX.

Sincerely,

John Smith

Director, Dept ABCXYZ

*For salaried employees, list compensation in bi-weekly increments.