

## Employment Process Policy

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Contact:	Director of Human Resources (610) 478-6118		



### Policy Statement:

It is the policy of the County of Berks to recruit and select the most qualified candidates for vacant positions and to do so in a manner that provides equal employment opportunity, ensures open competition, and prohibits discrimination.

### Purpose Statement:

The purpose of this policy is to provide supervisors with the tools necessary to recruit, select, and hire qualified candidates for vacant positions.

### Scope Statement:

This policy applies to all County employees and County-affiliated employees responsible for the employment process for prospective County of Berks' employees. Certain County employees are subject to the provisions of prevailing collective bargaining agreements. Provisions of such collective bargaining agreements shall be followed if there is a conflict between this policy and such provisions.

### Actions/Procedures:

#### Prior to Recruitment:

- A. The following steps are required before recruiting for a **new** position:
1. The supervisor is required to create a position description for the new position (refer to the Position Description policy). Position Description forms are available on the Human Resources page of the County of Berks Intranet.
  2. After the supervisor completes the position description, the form should be forwarded to the Human Resources Department for presentation to the WMS committee for evaluation. The supervisor will be invited to attend the evaluation meeting to provide background regarding the new position.
  3. The WMS committee will evaluate the position and place the position within the appropriate salary band. The supervisor will receive written notification of the salary band.
  4. After the supervisor receives written notice from the WMS committee, he/she must request approval from the Cost Containment Committee. To request approval, a Request to Fill a Position Form must be sent to the Human Resources Department. The form must be received no later than Friday noon in order to be scheduled for the following Wednesday's Cost Containment Committee meeting. The supervisor will receive written notification of the Cost Containment Committee's decision regarding the new position.
  5. If Cost Containment approves the request, a representative from the Human Resources Department will contact the department to discuss listing the position for Salary Board Approval. The supervisor is required to attend the Salary Board

meeting to discuss the new position. If the new position is approved by Salary Board, the department should contact the Human Resources Department to discuss the recruitment process.

6. If the new position is not approved by the Cost Containment Committee, the department may appeal the decision by informing a representative of the Human Resources Department that they wish to list the position for Salary Board approval.

B. The following steps are required before recruiting for an **existing** position:

1. The supervisor must review the current position description for accuracy. If a position description does not exist for a vacant position, one must be created and approved by the Human Resources Department and evaluated by the WMS committee before recruitment can begin (refer to #2 above).
2. After the position description has been reviewed and approved, the vacancy must be approved by the Cost Containment Committee (refer to #4 above). In order to avoid a delay in the hiring process, the Request to Fill a Position Form should be submitted to the Human Resources Department as soon as the vacancy occurs.
3. If the vacancy is approved by Cost Containment, the supervisor will receive written notification of the decision. The department should contact the Human Resources Department to discuss the recruitment process.
4. The Human Resources Department will notify the department if the vacancy is not approved by Cost Containment. The department may appeal the decision by informing a representative of the Human Resources Department that they wish to list the position for Salary Board approval.

### **Recruitment:**

The County of Berks is an Equal Opportunity Employer. Applicants entitled to veterans' preference who meet all required employment criteria receive additional consideration in recognition of their military service pursuant to the PA Military Code, 51PA C.S.A. Sec. 101. In the case that there are more than one equally qualified applicants, and one requests veterans' preference, the veteran shall be offered the position. In the competitive selection process in the Office of Aging and in accordance with the Pennsylvania Code, in the case 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.

A. Internal Recruitment (Non-bargaining unit and Bargaining unit positions)

1. The Human Resources Department develops and maintains a list of vacant positions. Upon receipt of an employee separation report, a representative from the Human Resources Department will contact the department supervisor to inquire if the vacancy should be listed on the vacancy list.
2. The list of vacant positions is posted in the Human Resources Department. The applicable job descriptions for the vacant positions can also be obtained from the Human Resources Department.
3. All bargaining unit positions will be posted according to the process established by the applicable collective bargaining agreement. Departments must contact a representative from the Human Resources Department to initiate the collective bargaining agreement job posting procedure.

4. In compliance with the Department of Public Welfare requirements for merit systems in County Children and Youth and Mental Health/ Mental Retardation agencies and Department of Aging requirements for merit systems in the Office of Aging, competitive appointments to any County vacancy may be made available to any paid/ unpaid intern that progresses satisfactorily through an internship as sponsored by a duly accredited institution of higher learning and as approved by the County of Berks. For purposes of hiring, interns shall be considered internal candidates for vacant positions.

B. External Recruitment

1. Advertisements in Periodicals, Journals, and Newspapers
  - a. **All advertisements must be pre-approved by the Human Resources Department prior to their placement.**
  - b. The department must inform the Human Resources Department at least one week in advance of the requested advertisement date to ensure that all applicable deadlines are met.
  - c. The department should write a rough draft of the advertisement and submit it to the Human Resources Department.
  - d. All advertisements will identify the County as an equal opportunity employer. As such, only the essential job functions should be included in any type of recruitment advertisements. It is important that only Bona Fide Occupational Qualifications (BFOQs) are listed in the advertisements in order to avoid serious legal ramifications.
  - e. The Human Resources Department will review the draft and discuss any recommended revisions with the department.
  - f. The Human Resources Department will recommend potential advertisement sources and the duration of the advertisement to the department. The placement of advertisements in local newspapers, minority, publications, local Bureau of Employment office(s) and appropriate professional and technical journals will be determined by the vacancy and the County's workforce.
2. CareerLink  
The Human Resources Department will automatically list all vacancies that are advertised externally on the CareerLink website. Departments may not advertise a vacancy with CareerLink without prior approval from the Human Resources Department.
3. Job Fairs  
Any department interested in participating in a job fair should contact the Human Resources Department for information.
4. Internet Websites  
There are numerous web sites available for posting job vacancies. The County Commissioner's Association of Pennsylvania (CCAP) web site is an example of a beneficial tool. Departments may not advertise a vacancy on any website without prior approval from the Human Resources Department.
5. Employment Agencies  
If a department wishes to utilize the services of an employment agency, the department should contact Human Resources. The Human Resources Department will contact the agency and negotiate billing rates, etc. If an employment agency contacts the department directly, the department should refer the agency to

Human Resources. The Commissioners must pre-approve the utilization of an employment agency.

6. Concerned Community Groups

On a quarterly basis, the Human Resources Department will distribute the list of vacant positions to concerned community groups such as the Hispanic Center of Reading/Berks, the NAACP, Threshold, etc. in an effort to solicit the groups' assistance in recruiting qualified candidates.

**Application Process:**

- A. All applications will be accepted at the main County Human Resources Department, the Berks Heim Human Resources Department (for Berks Heim positions), the Youth Center (for Youth Center positions), and the Prison (for Prison positions). **If an applicant attempts to apply directly with a department, the department may not accept the application and is required to direct the applicant to the County Human Resources Department.**
- B. The Human Resource Department will only accept applications for positions advertised as "open to applicants." No unsolicited applications will be accepted.
1. If an applicant submits a resume for an open position, the Human Resources Department will mail an application to the candidate.
  2. If a specific position is not listed on the application, or the applicant indicates "any available" position, a postcard will be sent asking the applicant to reapply for a specific open position. The original application will be considered incomplete and will be destroyed.
- C. The Human Resources Department 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. Applicants who do not meet the minimum requirements will be notified in writing by the Human Resources Department.
- D. The Human Resources Department will conduct a Berks County criminal background check before forwarding the application to the appropriate department.
- E. The Hiring Manager must keep accurate records of the hiring process. Applications not selected must be returned to the Human Resources Department with a notation that the applicant was not selected and the rationale for the decision. The Hiring Manager is responsible for notifying the unsuccessful candidate in writing (refer to the standard letter included with this policy).
- F. Applications not selected will be kept on file for two (2) years but will only be considered "active" for one year from the date of application.
1. Active applications may be reviewed and forwarded to departments for consideration for positions similar to the one(s) listed on the application. For example, if the applicant applies for an Office Support III position in Tax Claim, the application may be sent to the Clerk of Courts for consideration for an Office Support II position. The Hiring Manager must contact the Human Resources department to request copies of active applications.

2. If an applicant wishes to apply for a position different from the one listed on the application, he/she must contact the Human Resources Department with the request. The Human Resources Department will then forward the application to the appropriate department for consideration.
3. No "inactive" applications will be reviewed or forwarded. Applicants will be required to submit a new application after one year.

#### G. Application Review

1. 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 also allows the County to conduct necessary and applicable background checks. The application must be completed in its entirety; applications that indicate "see resume" will be considered incomplete and will not be accepted.
2. There are several items 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 Human Resources Department 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 Human Resources Department if an applicant checks off that he/she has previous criminal convictions.
  - h. Did the applicant sign the application?
  - i. How does the application compare to the resume, if applicable?
3. There are several items to consider when reviewing a resume:
  - a. Honesty. Does the information on the resume agree with that provided on the application form?
  - b. Written communication skills. How well is the resume written?
  - 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**

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

Age/Date of Birth  
 Marital Status or any information regarding family situation  
 Medical Information  
 Race  
 Religion  
 Sexual Preference  
 National Origin  
 Political Affiliation

**This includes photocopies of Drivers' Licenses, Photo Identification, or any Identification Cards, etc.**

This list is not all-inclusive - managers should consult with the Human Resources Department for more specific information. (Refer to the Interviewing Guidelines Policy)

**B. Selecting Applicants to be Interviewed**

1. Any interested candidate satisfying the minimum requirements is eligible for the position regardless of gender, race, religion, national origin, disability, color, sexual preference, political affiliation, marital status, or veteran's status. It is the intent of the County and the responsibility of management to ensure equal opportunity for all persons in the area of employment.
2. As a result of the initial review of applicants, all candidates will fall into one of the following three categories:
  - a. Lead candidates: Those whose qualifications, experience, and salary requirements are in line with the vacant position.
  - b. Possible candidates: Those that do not represent as good a match as the lead candidates but appear to come close and would be considered.
  - c. Candidates who are clearly not qualified.
3. The lead candidates should be selected for an interview. The number of candidates actually interviewed will vary but a general guideline would be to interview three to five lead candidates.
4. If none of the lead candidates are hired, the applicants considered possible candidates should be carefully reviewed and selected for an interview.
5. If no qualified candidates are found, the Hiring Manager should consult with the Human Resources Department to discuss additional options.

**C. Selection Tools**

The Human Resources Department will be responsible for recommending various selection tools such as skill and aptitude testing. The Human Resources Department will publish separate recommendations regarding selection tools.

**D. Checking References**

1. 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 be verified.
2. The Hiring Manager is responsible for completing the reference checks.
3. 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 done so on the application.

4. 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.
5. The County employment application includes a reference check release in the body of the application document.
6. The following steps will provide an effective reference check:
  - a. A written list of questions should be prepared before starting the reference calls.
  - b. Only job-related questions should be asked (refer to the standard reference check form included with this policy).
  - c. Assure the previous employer that their former employee has indicated that they would be willing to offer information and that the candidate has signed a release permitting the County to contact the previous employer.
  - d. Easy, factual questions should be asked first.
  - e. Positive questions regarding the candidate's strengths should be asked next.
  - f. Questions that will evoke negative answers should be asked last.
7. Although personal references can sometimes be a good source of information, professional references are preferred.
8. The County utilizes the services of a professional background check company to check the references for all mid-level management positions. The Human Resources Department will be responsible for coordinating this reference check.

#### E. Assessing the Candidate

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

1. The essential functions of the job should be reviewed.
2. All of the candidates should be measured by the same criteria. All candidates should be assessed on how qualified they are to perform the essential functions of the job.
3. An assessment form should be prepared which includes all of the criteria needed to qualify for the position, including education, experience and skills.
4. Using the assessment form, each candidate should be evaluated to determine the degree to which they possess the necessary education, experience, and skills. To ensure that the assessment is fair and complete, all of the candidates' qualifications in relation to the criteria listed on the assessment form should be placed in writing.
5. Subtle personal biases should be avoided, i.e. physical appearance.
6. All those who have interviewed candidates for a given position should use the same assessment form.
7. Once the assessment form has been completed, it should be used to help compare the candidates to select the individual who best meets the qualifications that were established.

### **Offering a Position**

- A. Prior to extending a conditional offer for a management/confidential position, the Hiring Manager should consult with a representative from the Human Resources Department to discuss the appropriate salary for the candidate.
- B. After consultation with the Human Resources Department, the Hiring Manager should verbally extend a conditional offer of employment to the candidate. If the candidate accepts the offer, the Hiring Manager should follow up with the conditional offer in writing.
- C. The Hiring Manager should impress upon the candidate that the offer of employment is conditional upon approval by the Berks County Commissioners/Human Resources Department and successful completion of the pre-employment screening process which includes a criminal background check, a drug/alcohol screen and a physical examination which is required of all applicants.
- D. 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:
  - 1. Avoid using terms such as: permanent, life-long employment, guaranteed, and long and rewarding career. This kind of terminology may be construed as implying a contract.
  - 2. Use phrases such as "generally" and "typically" when referring to the terms and conditions of employment, particularly in reference to benefits and County policies. Generalized descriptions are less likely to be misinterpreted as binding promises.
  - 3. 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).
  - 4. Clearly state the job title of the position offered.
- E. If the candidate accepts the conditional offer, the Hiring Manager must complete a new hire requisition and submit it to the Human Resources Department no later than noon on Thursday for processing for the following week.

### **Pre-Employment Screening**

After the candidate has accepted a conditional offer of employment and has been approved by Commissioners/Human Resources Department, the pre-employment screening process begins.

- A. Criminal Background/Child Abuse Background Check
  - 1. While the Human Resources Department conducts the initial Berks County criminal background check, a more thorough criminal or child abuse background check may be required by the department.
  - 2. The department is responsible for conducting any additional background checks.
  - 3. Departments utilizing a third party to obtain criminal background checks, credit checks, or background investigations must consult with the Human Resources Department to ensure compliance with the Fair Credit Reporting Act.

4. Unless otherwise required by law, only job-related criminal convictions shall be considered when determining employment clearance for an applicant. Departments should contact the Human Resources Department to determine the extent to which a conviction may be job-related.

B. Medical Screening

1. **All** new hires, including temporary, seasonal, and work study employees, are required to complete the medical screening process consisting of a drug screen and a physical exam. Certain positions (i.e. positions at Berks Heim and the Youth Center) also require the successful completion of a two-step TB test.  
Note: Berks Heim, Prison, Youth Center, and Emergency Management utilize a separate medical screening process for employees.
2. A representative from the Human Resources Department will contact the new hire to notify him/her of the medical screening process and the dates/times for which the candidate is scheduled.
3. Drug Screen
  - a. The drug screen will be administered at the Berks Heim Human Resources Department. Drug screens take place on Tuesday mornings; an appointment must be scheduled through the Human Resources Department.
  - b. If the candidate is unable to report for the drug screen on the date specified, he/she may complete the process at an off-site Medial Laboratory with prior approval from the Human Resources Department. The candidate must also obtain the drug screen paperwork from the Human Resources Department. The drug screen must be completed prior to the following Tuesday morning, or the new hire's date of hire will be delayed.
  - c. If the new hire fails the drug screen, the offer of employment shall be withdrawn by the Hiring Manager.
4. Physical Examination
  - a. The physical exam will be completed at the Berks Heim Human Resources Department.
  - b. Physical examinations typically take place on Thursdays; an appointment will be scheduled with the new hire through the Human Resources Department. If the physical exam is not completed on the scheduled day, the new hire's date of hire will be delayed.
  - c. If the new hire is unable to perform the essential functions of the position with or without a reasonable accommodation, the new hire's offer of employment shall be withdrawn by the Hiring Manager.
5. TB Test
  - a. A two-part TB test may be required for some positions within the County.
  - b. The appointment for the TB test will be coordinated with the Human Resources Department. The TB test is typically given on the same schedule as the drug screen on Tuesday mornings.

6. The Human Resources Department will inform the Hiring Manager of the results of the pre-employment screening process. Due to medical confidentiality, the department will not be given any details of the screening beyond pass/fail.
7. Upon successful completion of the pre-employment screening, the Human Resources Department will coordinate New Hire Orientation for the new hire. The Hiring Manager should also contact the new hire to discuss the first day of employment.

### **Transfers and Promotions**

- A. If a current employee is selected to fill a vacancy, the supervisor shall offer the position to the candidate contingent upon approval from the Commissioners/Human Resources Department and successful completion of pre-employment screening (where applicable).
- B. A Transfer/Promotion/Reclassification Requisition must be completed and sent to the Human Resources Department no later than Thursday noon for processing for the following week. The Human Resources Department will process the request and list it on the appropriate agenda for approval.
- C. The Human Resources Department will contact the department to schedule orientation, if applicable.

## REFERENCE CHECKING FORM

For \_\_\_\_\_ Position

Applicant Name:

Name of Reference:

1. How do you know \_\_\_\_\_?
  
2. How long have you known \_\_\_\_\_?
  
3. What can you tell me about \_\_\_\_\_?
  
4. Strengths/Weaknesses
  
5. Can you tell me why \_\_\_\_\_ wants to leave the present organization or why left already?
  
6. \_\_\_\_\_ has applied for \_\_\_\_\_ position with the County of Berks, would you recommend \_\_\_\_\_ to us?

**Sample Job Candidate Correspondence**

Sample #1: Correspondence for Candidate who was interviewed

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Thank you for your interest in employment with the County of Berks 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,

Sample #2: Correspondence for Candidate who was not interviewed

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

This correspondence will acknowledge that we have received your application/resume for the position of \_\_\_\_\_.

Please be assured that we appreciate your interest in employment with the County of Berks. However, we want to advise you that you have not been selected for an interview for the position.

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

Sincerely,

**Sample Conditional Offer of Employment**

January 1, 2008

Ms. Jane Doe  
123 Red Street  
Reading, PA 19601

Dear Ms. Doe,

This letter confirms your offer of employment with the County of Berks as an Office Support II in the Human Resources Department with an hourly rate of \$11.05\*. This offer of employment is contingent upon the following items:

- Official approval from the County Commissioners/Human Resources Department.
- Successful completion of the pre-employment screening process which includes a criminal background check, a drug/alcohol screen and a physical examination which is required of all applicants.

Once you have been approved by the County Commissioners/Human Resources Department, you will be contacted by the Human Resources Department to schedule the drug/alcohol screening and physical exam, and to discuss your new hire orientation.

Provided the above conditions are met, we have you scheduled to start employment on January 30, 2008 at 8:00 a.m.

We look forward to working with you. Please feel free to call with any questions at 610-478-1234.

Sincerely,

Jane Smith  
Director of Human Resources

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