

# Project 2015

**Onondaga County**  
***DEPARTMENT OF PERSONNEL***

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## **DEPARTMENT OF PERSONNEL**

### ***INTRODUCTION: INTERNAL SCAN***

The Onondaga County Department of Personnel has a dual role. In our role as the local civil service commission, our department is responsible for the recruitment, testing and appointment of a well-qualified work force to fill positions not only in County government but also in the 63 other local public employers under our department's civil service jurisdiction. These other agencies include the City of Syracuse, school districts, towns, villages, libraries and special authorities and districts. A complete listing of these agencies and data related to the civil service division can be found in our department's annual report.

In our role as the human resources department for the County, our department is responsible for the administration of personnel related programs and policies, employee relations, affirmative action, employee wellness and training.

The demographic trends that precipitated Project 2015 will impact both the civil service administration and the human service/employee relations services and programs provided by this department. The impact of an aging population will be felt in our recruitment program, as there is a decrease in the number of people in the traditional employment age group. The impact of the change in the demographics in our community will present challenges in our recruitment program. The traditional workforce has been made up largely of employees who began and continued long term careers in public sector. The new generation workforce seeks increasing mobility in their jobs and younger generations from the community may not be as apt to remain and work in the community. They want different compensation/benefit/recognition packages than past generations of workers. This generation of workers, referred to as a "non-traditional" workforce, will require changes to the more traditional workforce structure currently in place. This workplace culture and mobility will present challenges to the current compensation/benefit structures and mandated recruitment process. The need to attract and retain workers will become a critical component. The need to offer them training and career advancement will place demands on the current merit system for public employees. The need to re-employ retired workers to bridge the gap between the older generation workforce with knowledge and experience and the new generation workforce poised to be trained may require changes in current state and federal laws.

The selection process for over 65% of the positions under our jurisdiction requires passing an examination; the examinations administered by our department are constructed and rated by the NYS Department of Civil Service. The demographics suggest there will be a higher percentage of the population for whom English is a secondary language. We have already seen this as a potential hurdle for some of the test taking population for whom English is not a native spoken or written language. This is certainly a situation the State Civil Service Department is experiencing as well as other local commissions in this state and we will certainly partner with the state to address this issue.

The aging population will have a twofold impact on the county workforce. One is the impact of aging on our current employee population and the other is the challenge of recruitment of

employees in the traditional employment age group. The impact of an aging workforce is felt in a number of ways. Increased absenteeism due to aging related illness, the employee's own illness and the illness of aging parents; the impact on health related benefits, including the increase in prescription medication costs; the ability of the older employees to retire from their positions. This last issue has become especially key in light of the last two decades functioning with a reduced workforce. Layoffs have left the more senior, and therefore usually older, worker in the workforce and the reductions in hiring have left positions vacant. The net result is that as the older workers leave our workforce, there is a lack of well-qualified, well-trained and experienced workers to replace them. There is also an inability to perform a "knowledge transfer" from one generation of workers to another so much of the knowledge, experience and history of the older worker is lost with their departure.

These factors that impact the county workforce will ultimately impact other members of our community, the taxpayers and the programs and services the County provides to them. Our department's "direct" consumers and constituents are the (1) the public that are seeking employment and the (2) the County employees. The goal of our recruitment program is to provide a pool of well-qualified candidates from which to select the employees who staff the programs provided by the County. The goal of our personnel/human resources programs is to provide programs and services to the employees that enhance and improve their job performance, with an expected result of maximum performance in service in our programs. In this scenario, the taxpayers and the public are both the "direct" and "indirect" consumers. Both groups are important to the mission of our department.

As the predicted demographic change will impact both of our consumer groups, our programs and services will need to be reviewed and evaluated to address this change.

***Programs/Services Impacted:***

- Examination Program: Our department utilizes the NYS Department of Civil Service examination service. As this is the case, we do not have the final say over the examination development process but we can and will provide feedback to the state regarding the demographic changes we experience. The state will experience the same changes so it is timely to partner with them in an effort to address this in the recruitment process.
- Employee Benefits: Our department will partner with other county departments to review and evaluate policies relating to attendance, flex time and compressed work schedules, FMLA, EAP, Long Term Disability, health benefits, prescription drug costs, employee wellness in response to changing demographics and an increasing non-traditional work force. While the current economic situation may limit the ability to offer more costly benefits, changes in the structure of health benefit programs may be possible and offer more to the new workforce without economic impact.
- Employee Training: Our department will review the need to recruit/retain the experienced workers to accomplish a knowledge transfer to a new generation of workers to ease the transition of the workforce.
- Retirement /Health Benefit Costs: The costs associated with a growing retired workforce of the baby boomers generation.

- **Non Traditional Employment Programs:** The emergence of a non-traditional workforce with life needs that may impact health benefits, attendance issues, the need for job sharing, work at home, etc.

### ***PRIORITY ISSUE AREAS***

In our Internal Scan, we identified our consumer/constituency groups as 1) the general public, particularly those who participate in our recruitment program, and 2) the employees of the County. We then identified some of the issues that will accompany the demographic changes predicted to occur by 2015 and their impact on our programs and services.

For these “constituency groups,” we have prioritized policy issues, programs and objectives. In determining the prioritization, we considered the factors of importance, broadest impact and the ability to obtain the outcome.

#### ***Clients (General Public)***

1. Continue improvements to our department website – offer more and comprehensive information about our recruitment programs; include employment advertising for difficult to fill positions such as licensed nurses and nurse aides.
2. Broaden our recruitment base by continuing to update and expand our examination announcement mailing list. We have made and continue to make contact with agencies and programs to increase our minority recruitment. We have broadened the residence requirement to take examinations to expand our candidate pool.
3. Review our classification plan to increase the use of broad class titles and, where appropriate to do so, revise our minimum qualification training and experience requirements to expand recruitment possibilities.
4. We will continue to encourage and develop the “Grow Your Own” and trainee concepts in occupational fields that lend themselves to this type of opportunity as a means of encouraging and expanding recruitment opportunities in the community. We will also encourage the mentoring concept.
5. We will continue to work with the NYS Department of Civil Service to expand and revise the existing recruitment process for competitive class positions in an effort to create greater opportunities and flexibility for a non-traditional work force.

#### ***Employees***

1. Through improvements in web communication, provide more information to employees about employee benefits and programs and develop a web based interactive system so employees can ask questions, provide information, make suggestions, request changes in their current benefit structure, etc.
2. Continue to offer and expand participation in employee wellness and screenings; continue to offer seminars and classes in area related to employee wellness.
3. Continue to review the current employee benefit designs and offer benefits that will fit the needs of the non-traditional work force.
4. Continue to review employee benefit programs such as flexible and compressed work schedules, work at home, and cafeteria style employee benefit structures.
5. Increase the use of broad classification titles, which will allow us to use the broader type of minimum training and experience requirement that expands recruitment possibilities and increases transfer opportunities for employees.

6. Rehire retired employees for part time positions, on a short-term basis to complete knowledge transfers.
7. Work with the NYS Department of Civil Service to increase flexibility in the recruitment process that will offer employees increased opportunities for movement between positions, utilize on-line examinations, etc.

### ***ACTIONS AND RESULTS***

Our department has already begun the process of reviewing existing policies and programs to determine where changes need to be made and to identify areas where policies and programs need to be developed. Although these review processes existed prior to the County's current fiscal situation, the need to review and make changes is critical. In some areas we have initiated changes that will assist us in responding to some of the areas affected by the changes in our population.

Our department website has been an invaluable tool in the recruitment program and providing information to County employees. As people become more computer literate, the website is an important resource in our recruitment program. Our examination announcements are on-line, we broadened the residence requirement to take an examination to provide a larger candidate pool, and the increase in on-line examinations will increase recruitment outside our community, which is a necessity in the increasingly mobile workforce. Our website is a source of information to employees and we hope it will become interactive so employees can self-report information to us, make changes in program information, etc. Employee programs to enhance work place flexibility and increase employee productivity are in place. The Employee Wellness program is now part of department and continues to offer workshops, fitness programs, educational information and resources to employees.

With respect to the gap resulting from retirement of the older, baby boomer workforce, to replace the organizational knowledge that will be lost, we have the following action plan:

- Broaden Transfer Opportunities – expand transfer opportunities across program lines. As members of the NYSAC Personnel Officers, we have joined their efforts to introduce and support legislative changes to the NYS Civil Service Law to provide increased mobility within the workforce through internal transfer.
- Title Consolidation Efforts – consolidate professional/analytical titles in several broad titles to provide greater promotional opportunities.
- Develop Traineeships – from high school through college graduate, traineeships could be developed to bring in minorities and young professionals.
- Rehire the Retiree – rehire retired employees on a part time basis and/or on a short-term basis to complete knowledge transfer.
- Market Careers to Interns and Student Assistants – we have established unpaid internships with local colleges; we could establish paid Student Assistant positions for a potential match with employers.
- Grow Your Own – explore creation of an on-site college program in cooperation with local colleges to offer tailor made training programs to County employees.
- Workforce Training and College Vouchers – utilize grant funds or negotiated monies for training programs tailored to our work place needs.

- Shadowing – establish “shadow” positions to enable successors to learn the job from the incumbent.

***With respect to our recruitment program:***

- Continue to make improvements to our website that will market jobs to a broader, more diversified candidate pool, including the older worker.
- Participate in the NYS Department of Civil Service initiatives to address recruitment issues by participating in their on-line recruitment and testing initiatives, modeling their “grow-your-own” programs, work toward systems integration and creating self service systems that facilitate faster processing of transactions.
- Continue to review our classification plan and identify potential barriers to recruitment of the “non-traditional” worker.
- Utilize broad classification structures that encourage upward mobility from entry-level positions.

***With respect to our employee benefit and training programs:***

- Continue to partner with other county departments and labor/management groups to review and evaluate policies related to employment, health benefits, employee wellness.
- Continue to suggest changes in current employee benefit plans are beneficial to the current work force and are attractive to the “non-traditional” worker.
- Continue to offer employee’s training and wellness opportunities to increase their knowledge about wellness lifestyles, assist them in balancing family and work commitments and to enhance their personal well being, resulting in a healthier, more productive workforce and a cost saving in health benefits.

***With respect to all programs and services:***

- Revise forms, regulations, and examination announcements to address needs of the diversified population. For example, use larger font size on forms, regulations, and examination announcements so they are easier to read and understand. Revise the gender/ethnic sections on forms to reflect diversification/cultural changes such as adding a domestic partner option to spousal information sections, providing flexibility in a data field to allow entry of a name from other than a western culture.
- Review our website on an ongoing basis to ensure the information is sensitive to, reflective of and user friendly to the population utilizing it.
- Implement signage, symbols and graphics where possible to provide information to non-English speaking populations. Increase the use of internationally recognizable symbols throughout the County.