Why We Did This Audit

We undertook this audit due to City Council concerns regarding Police hiring. Recent civic unrest has highlighted what media articles term a crisis in police hiring and retention across the country. We reviewed best practices for law enforcement agencies, recruitment, background, training, and hiring procedures for recruits and sworn officers. Lastly, we assessed how the Atlanta Police Department's hiring practices address community concerns.

What We Recommended

To improve the hiring process, Police should:

- partner with Human Resources to assess the feasibility of automating the waiver packets in Taleo, or other application system, develop a video tutorial to assist in waiver packets completion, allow applicants to upload supporting documents to the system, and update applicant status in the system
- develop a procedure to track applicants who withdraw from the hiring process
- ensure consistent record retention and organization of background files
- work with Human Resources to make the updates in Taleo, or other application system, for applicant and personnel consistency
- work with ACRB to develop procedures to comply with the new legislation and incorporate ACRB into the hiring process for officers
- work with ACRB to consider requiring ACRB staff to prepare after-action reports of officer termination or disciplinary actions

For more information regarding this report, please use the "contact" link on our website at www.atlaudit.org

Performance Audit:

Police Hiring

What We Found

While Police works with the city's Human Resources Department on portions of the hiring process, Police employees handle much of the applicant processing independently of Human Resources. From 2017 through September 2020, 12,129 individuals entered applications for police officer positions in the city's Taleo system. Of those applications, Police hired 171(1.4%) officers. Police's recruitment process is rigorous and is designed to disqualify candidates who fail to meet the department's hiring standards, which are structured to comply with POST's (Peace Officer Standards Training Council) standards and other best practices. As a result of these stringent standards, Police need a large pool of applicants to fill vacancies.

Police generally have a three-part recruitment process: 1) initial application, 2) waiver packet completion, and 3) background investigations. We found that 92% of applicants who began completing the waiver packet failed to finish it. Even a small improvement in waiver packet completion would have a beneficial impact—a 5% increase in waiver packet completion would yield an almost 50% increase in hiring, assuming the same rate of applicants passed the background checks. Police do not consistently use Taleo, the city's recruiting system, that is integrated with Oracle. From January 2019 to November 2020, Police hired 88 officers who never had records entered into Taleo.

We reviewed a sample of personnel files for 34 police officers hired between January 2017 and September 2020 and found that overall, the files indicated that the Police Department is following its hiring process and most of the files contained most applicable records.

Furthermore, Police partners with other agencies to offer several community-focused activities throughout the city, aimed at strengthening the department's relationship with residents and promote hiring of officers from the community. The officers hired by the Police Department are demographically consistent with the makeup of the city's residents. City Council recently expanded ACRB's (Atlanta Citizen Review Board) authority to include making hiring recommendations of police recruits, and observing applicant hiring interviews; Police and ACRB have not yet implemented this expanded role. Participating in the police officer hiring process is not unique to Atlanta; we identified five other cities whose citizen oversight entities have similar roles.

Management Responses to Audit Recommendations

Summary of Management Responses		
Recommendation #1:	We recommend that the Chief of Police partner with Human Resources to assess the feasibility of automating the waiver packets in Taleo, or other application system, develop a video tutorial to assist in waiver packets completion, allow applicants to upload supporting documents to the system, and update applicant status in the system.	
Response & Proposed Action:	A video tutorial will be created to assist applicants in completing their waiver packets.	**Agree**
Timeframe:	April 2021	
Recommendation #2:	We recommend the Chief of Police develop a procedure to track applicants who withdraw from the hiring process and survey the applicants to obtain their reason for withdrawing.	
Response & Proposed Action:	Currently APD is tracking applicants who withdraw from the hiring process. A formalized survey will be developed.	**Agree**
Timeframe:	April 2021	
Recommendation #3:	We recommend that the Chief of Police continue to ensure consistent record retention and organization of background files. Furthermore, we recommend the Chief of Police ensure that officers note when background files are removed for any reason.	
Response & Proposed Action:	A file tracking log has been maintained and will continue to be maintained.	**Agree**
Timeframe:	March 2021	

Recommendation #4:	We recommend the Chief of Police work with Human Resources to make the following updates in Taleo, or other application system: identify the appropriate step and status tool within the system to track and communicate with all applicants, thus managing the applicant's expectations during the hiring process, contact AIM (Atlanta Information Management) to configure the Police website home screen and revise application content as needed, meet with Human Resources Talent Acquisition staff to review the requisition to determine the correct "rolling" position I.D. , Police should indicate if the candidate "passed or failed" within Taleo when the background investigation is completed, complete the employment verification and upload supporting documentation into Taleo, and schedule a Taleo training session with Human Resources regarding downloading and printing the online applications from the Taleo system.	
Response & Proposed Action:	APD will provide AIM with the necessary input to revise application content to meet our needs. APD will provide HR with the necessary input to develop future application processing systems to meet our needs, as Taleo does not meet our applicant/background investigation needs.	**Partially Agree**
Timeframe:	TBD by HR and AIM	
Recommendation #5:	We recommend the Chief of Police work with ACRB to develop procedures to comply with the new legislation and incorporate ACRB into the hiring process for officers.	
Response & Proposed Action:	The Background and Recruiting Unit will post job fairs on the departments facebook page and the Background and Recruiting Facebook page, so that ACRB members can participate in the initial interview process.	**Agree**
Timeframe:	June 2020	
Recommendation #6:	We recommend that the Atlanta Citizen Review Board consider requiring staff to prepare after-action reports of officer termination or disciplinary action to identify potentially missed flags in the hiring process that could have indicated an unsuitable candidate.	
Response & Proposed Action:	The ACRB commits to the development and implementation of an after-action process and reporting of officer termination or disciplinary actions to include an audit process of the hiring and disciplinary protocols and requirements on specific actions.	**Agree**
Timeframe:	June 2021	