



OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE

Hiring Custodians in Des Moines Post Offices

Audit Report

Report Number
HR-AR-17-005

March 6, 2017





OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE

Highlights

Our objective was to determine whether the Postal Service complied with its policies and federal laws related to hiring preference-eligible veterans and reasonable accommodation requests for custodian positions in Des Moines.

Background

The Veterans' Preference Act of 1944 mandates that federal government agencies give eligible veterans preference for custodian positions. Consequently, the U.S. Postal Service has designated four custodian positions for eligible veteran applicants: building maintenance custodian, custodian laborer, custodian, and laborer custodian.

The veterans' preference requirement only applies to external hiring. The Postal Service's Human Resources Shared Services Center (HRSSC) and district personnel oversee hiring. The HRSSC creates job postings and publications, verifies entitlement to veterans' preference claims, and conducts background checks and drug tests. District personnel identify hiring needs, conduct interviews, make final selections, and approve requests for reasonable accommodations.

In fiscal year (FY) 2015, 18 percent (113,000 of 625,113) of Postal Service employees were veterans. In December 2016, 1,580 veterans were employed in the Hawkeye District.

This report responds to a request from Congressman David Young of Iowa related to the Postal Service's hiring of veterans for custodian positions in Des Moines. The congressman also expressed concerns about whether the Postal Service was providing disabled veterans with reasonable accommodations to perform custodian duties.

Our objective was to determine whether the Postal Service complied with its policies and federal laws related to hiring preference-eligible veterans and reasonable accommodation requests for custodian positions in Des Moines. We also assessed whether the Postal Service complied with veterans' preference requirements when considering applicants, retained a list of veteran applicants when trying to fill open custodian positions, and eliminated job classifications reserved for disabled veterans. The scope period includes FYs 2015 and 2016.

What the OIG Found

The Postal Service complied with applicable postal policies and federal law in hiring applicants for custodian positions and managing reasonable accommodation requests in Des Moines.

In FYs 2015 and 2016, the Postal Service hired 25 applicants as non-career custodians from 11 external announcements. Of the 25 hires, three were preference-eligible veterans.

Policy states that once all veterans' preference applicants are vetted and either deemed unqualified or extended a job offer, the Postal Service can consider non-veteran applicants.

Of the 11 preference-eligible veterans who applied:

- Three accepted job offers.
- Two declined job offers.



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- Five did not pass the written exam.
- One was deemed non-responsive for not replying to emails from Human Resources.

The Postal Service is not required by law or policy to retain a list of veteran applicants outside the hiring process. However, the Postal Service does maintain an in-service register, which allows career employees to sign up and be considered for open custodian positions. The in-service register is applicable only to internal announcements.

The Postal Service also did not eliminate any job classifications reserved for disabled veterans or inappropriately manage reasonable accommodation requests from disabled veterans in FY 2015 or 2016. The Hawkeye District's Reasonable Accommodation Committee approved 20 requests for reasonable accommodations, including three for veterans. But, no requests came from veterans currently employed as custodians.

Management hired preference-eligible veterans in Des Moines in accordance with applicable laws, policies, and procedures; therefore, we are not making any recommendations at this time.

Transmittal Letter



OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL
UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE

March 6, 2017

MEMORANDUM FOR: SIMON M. STOREY
ACTING VICE PRESIDENT, EMPLOYEE RESOURCE
MANAGEMENT

E-Signed by Charles Turley
VERIFY authenticity with eSign Desktop

FROM: Charles L. Turley
Deputy Assistant Inspector General
for Supply Management and Human Resources

SUBJECT: Audit Report – Hiring Custodians in Des Moines Post Offices
(Report Number HR-AR-17-005)

This report presents the results of our audit of Hiring Custodians in Des Moines Post Offices (Project Number 17SMG005HR000).

We appreciate the cooperation and courtesies provided by your staff. If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact Monique Colter, director, Human Resources & Support, or me at 703-248-2100.

Attachment

cc: Postmaster General
Chief Human Resources Officer and Executive VP
Human Resources Manager
Acting Manager, Hawkeye District
Corporate Audit and Response Management

Table of Contents

Cover	
Highlights.....	1
Background.....	1
What the OIG Found.....	1
Transmittal Letter.....	3
Findings.....	5
Introduction.....	5
Summary.....	5
Hiring Process.....	6
Veterans' Preference Requirement.....	6
Restricted Positions for Preference-Eligible Applicants.....	7
Reasonable Accommodations.....	7
Recommendations.....	8
Appendix: Additional Information.....	9
Background.....	9
Objective, Scope, and Methodology.....	10
Prior Audit Coverage.....	11
Contact Information.....	12

Findings

Under the Veterans' Preference Act of 1944, Congress mandated that the Postal Service give eligible veterans preference for custodian positions.

Introduction

This report presents the results of our audit of the U.S. Postal Service's hiring of custodians in Des Moines, IA, post offices (Project Number 17SMG005HR000). This report responds to a request from Congressman David Young of Iowa related to the Postal Service's hiring of veterans for custodian positions in Des Moines. He also expressed concerns related to the Postal Service providing disabled veterans with accommodations to perform duties associated with custodian jobs.

Under the Veterans' Preference Act of 1944, Congress mandated that the Postal Service give eligible veterans preference for custodian positions. The Postal Service has designated four custodian positions for preference-eligible applicants:

- Building maintenance custodians
- Custodian laborers
- Custodians
- Laborer custodial

To fill these positions, the Postal Service may hire externally or internally through reassignment or promotion. The veterans' preference requirement only applies to external hiring.

The Postal Service's Human Resources Shared Services Center (HRSSC) and district personnel oversee hiring. The HRSSC creates job postings and publications, verifies entitlement to veterans' preference claims, and conducts background checks and drug tests. District personnel identify hiring needs, conduct interviews, make final selections, and approve requests for reasonable accommodations.

In fiscal year (FY) 2015, 18 percent of Postal Service employees were veterans (113,000 of 625,113). In December 2016, 1,580 veterans were employed in the Hawkeye District.

Summary

The Postal Service complied with postal policies¹ and federal laws² in hiring for custodian positions in Des Moines. We determined that the Postal Service:

- Complied with veterans' preference requirements when considering applicants;
- Is not required to retain a list of veteran applicants outside of the hiring process;
- Did not eliminate any job classifications reserved for disabled veterans;
- Did not inappropriately manage reasonable accommodation requests; and
- Has reasonable accommodation policies and practices that align with federal requirements.

Management hired preference-eligible veterans in Des Moines in accordance with applicable laws, policies, and procedures; therefore, we are not making any recommendations at this time.

¹ Postal Service Handbook EL-312, *Employment and Placement*, and Postal Service Handbook EL-307, *Reasonable Accommodation, An Interactive Process*.

² Primarily the Veterans' Preference Act of 1944.

Hiring Process

External applicants applying for custodian positions must apply online through the Postal Service website. Applicants use the Postal Service's automated systems — eCareer³ and ePostal Assessment System (ePAS)⁴ — to set up profiles, submit applications, and schedule a time to take the required Postal Service Custodial Maintenance Examination 916. Applicants must receive a passing score of 70 or greater in order to move forward in the hiring process.

The Postal Service's HRSSC and district personnel oversee hiring. The HRSSC creates job postings and publications, verifies entitlement to veterans' preference claims, and conducts background checks and drug tests. District personnel identify hiring needs, conduct interviews, make final selections, and approve requests for reasonable accommodations.

In FYs 2015 and 2016, the Postal Service hired 25 applicants from external announcements for non-career custodian positions, including three veterans. Subsequently, in accordance with the American Postal Workers Union (APWU) contract,⁵ 20 of the custodians hired, including the three veterans, were converted from non-career to career status. Of the remaining five custodian hires, three were terminated and two resigned.

Veterans' Preference Requirement

The Postal Service complied with the veterans' preference requirement to qualify veterans who externally applied for custodian positions. Preference-eligible veterans are veterans who are disabled or who served on active duty in the U.S. armed forces during certain specified time periods. These veterans are entitled to preference over others when management is selecting potential hires from competitive lists. Once all veterans' preference applicants are vetted and either deemed unqualified or extended a job offer, non-veterans applicants can be considered. The Postal Service is not required to retain a list of veteran applicants for consideration when trying to fill open positions. Applicants must apply for a specific external announcement to be considered for that position. In FYs 2015 and 2016, 11 preference-eligible veterans applied to external job postings for custodian positions in Des Moines.

OF THE ELEVEN WHO APPLIED:



³ The online selection system the Postal Service uses for hiring and promotional activities.

⁴ The web-based assessment system used to schedule, administer, and score all assessments required for hiring and promotions.

⁵ The current APWU contract signed July 8, 2016, requires the Postal Service to convert all non-career custodians in the maintenance craft to career status.

Restricted Positions for Preference-Eligible Applicants

The Postal Service did not eliminate any positions reserved for disabled veterans in FY 2015 or 2016. The Postal Service currently has restricted the following six positions for preference-eligible applicants:

- Building Maintenance Custodian
- Custodian Laborer
- Custodian
- Elevator Operator
- Laborer Custodial
- Window Cleaner

Reasonable Accommodations

The Postal Service appropriately administered reasonable accommodation requests and its policies and procedures align with federal requirements. The Hawkeye District Reasonable Accommodation Committee (DRAC) examines whether an individual applicant or employee qualifies for accommodation under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. The DRAC also coordinates with the individual applicant and office managers to examine potential accommodations, including transfer or reassignment. For FYs 2015 and 2016, the DRAC processed 20 requests for reasonable accommodations, including three from veterans (postmaster, city carrier assistant, and tractor trailer operator). None of the requests came from veterans currently employed as custodians.

Recommendations

The Postal Service complied with federal laws and Postal Service policies in hiring for custodian positions and managing requests for reasonable accommodations; therefore, we are not making any recommendations at this time.

Appendix: Additional Information

Background

An August 22, 2016 request from Congressman Young stated that his office received a complaint from a disabled veteran in Des Moines regarding the Postal Service's hiring practices related to veterans. His constituent shared concerns that postal officials in Des Moines hired 10 new custodians, including three veterans. The constituent also expressed concern that more disabled veterans had applied for other open positions but were not considered.

Congressman Young requested that the U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General (OIG) evaluate the Postal Service's hiring practices related to veterans and disabled veterans to determine if it is complying with federal law and Postal Service policy. Specifically, he requested the OIG evaluate whether the Postal Service has complied with veterans' preference requirements, retained a list of disabled veteran applicants to consider when trying to fill open custodian positions, sought to eliminate job classifications previously reserved for disabled veterans, and provided disabled veterans with the accommodations needed to perform these custodian jobs.

There are eight post offices, one network distribution center, and one processing and distribution center in Des Moines. As of November 8, 2016, the Postal Service employed 58 custodians in Des Moines, 30 of whom (52 percent) were veterans.

In FY 2015, the Postal Service centralized its external hiring process. Vacancy announcements advise applicants to have a valid email address since all communications concerning their applications and the next steps in the hiring process will be sent by system-generated emails. In order for applicants to move through the hiring process, they must follow instructions outlined in the emails or their applications may be rejected or marked "incomplete."

The HRSSC oversees the external hiring process, with the exception of interviewing and making final selections. The HRSSC currently has five teams composed of 134 employees who are assigned to external bargaining unit hiring.

Each team performs a different hiring function:

- Team 1 creates the requisition and job posting and publishes the announcement on the Postal Service's website.
- Team 2 adjudicates veterans' preference claims, creates the pre-hire list, requests motor vehicle screening, and sends the applicant to the interviewer.
- Team 3 processes interview results by creating the hiring and selection lists and sends the conditional offer (which triggers the system to order drug and criminal screening).
- Team 4 reviews screening results daily and takes action as appropriate for criminal hits and failure to respond to emails.
- Team 5 creates the offer acceptance letter and processes personnel forms.

District personnel identify hiring needs, conduct interviews, make final selections, and approve requests for reasonable accommodations.

The Veterans' Preference Act of 1944 requires federal agencies to favor returning war veterans when hiring new employees in an attempt to recognize their service, sacrifice, and skills. The veterans' preference is a tool to help place veterans in federal government positions by providing a "first consideration." Veterans' preference does not guarantee that a veteran will be selected nor does it apply in internal agency actions such as promotions, transfers, reassignments, and reinstatements. Veterans' preference is only applicable in external hiring.

According to the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, applicants and employees with disabilities are entitled to reasonable accommodations to apply for or perform a job and enjoy equal benefits and privileges of employment. A reasonable accommodation is one that is effective and practicable in removing workplace barriers for individuals with disabilities. An accommodation is not reasonable when it requires elimination of legitimate criteria, lowers standards of performance or production, creates a job where none exists, violates the seniority provisions of a collective bargaining agreement, reallocates or eliminates essential job functions, or otherwise substantially changes the fundamental nature of the job.

The Hawkeye DRAC consists of seven core members:

- Labor Relations Manager (Chairperson)
- Health Resources Management Manager
- Learning Diversity and Development Manager
- Safety Manager
- Occupational Health Nurse Administrator
- Two Labor Relations Specialists

Other members of the committee include the district complement coordinator and attorneys.

Objective, Scope, and Methodology

Our objective was to determine whether the Postal Service complied with its policies and federal laws related to hiring preference-eligible veterans and reasonable accommodation requests for custodian positions in Des Moines. We also assessed whether the Postal Service complied with veterans' preference requirements when considering applicants, retained a list of veteran applicants when trying to fill open custodian positions, and eliminated job classifications reserved for disabled veterans.

The scope of this audit was the review of hiring practices and job postings for custodian positions at postal facilities in Des Moines for FYs 2015 and 2016. To accomplish our objective we:

- Identified and reviewed policies and procedures in Postal Service manuals and other sources relevant to hiring and staffing of custodian positions, including accommodations for disabled veterans in those positions.
- Reviewed and analyzed eCareer, ePAS, WebCoins⁶, and Enterprise Data Warehouse⁷ data for FYs 2015 and 2016.

⁶ A web interface that displays and stores information about employee complement details.

⁷ The repository for all data and the central source for information on operational performance.

- Obtained and reviewed statistics regarding hiring veterans and disabled veterans at the national and district levels.
- Reviewed the memorandum of understanding between the Postal Service and labor unions for policies on hiring and staffing of custodian positions.
- Reviewed the collective bargaining agreement between the Postal Service and the APWU for policies on filling custodian positions.
- Obtained and analyzed complement data for FYs 2015 and 2016 and determined custodial staffing level positions in Des Moines.
- Obtained and reviewed actual job announcements and postings related to custodial hires in Des Moines.
- Interviewed responsible officials at Postal Service Headquarters, Hawkeye District, and HRSSC.

We conducted this performance audit from October 2016 through March 2017, in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards and included such tests of internal controls as we considered necessary under the circumstances. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objective. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objective. We discussed our observations and conclusions with management on February 23, 2017, and included their comments where appropriate.

We assessed the reliability of hiring data from eCareer and ePAS by discussing the data with postal officials knowledgeable about the data and comparing the data to source documents. We determined that the data were sufficiently reliable for the purposes of this report.

Prior Audit Coverage

Report Title	Objective	Report Number	Final Report Date	Monetary Impact
<i>Disabled Veterans Affirmative Action Program (DVAAP) in the [REDACTED]</i>	Assess the [REDACTED] District's compliance with the Disabled Veterans Affirmative Action Program..	HR-MA-15-005	9/9/2015	None
<i>Hiring Practices in the U.S. Virgin Islands</i>	Evaluate hiring practices for Postal Support Employee laborer custodial positions in St. Croix and St. Thomas.	HR-AR-15-003	12/18/2014	None



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1735 North Lynn Street
Arlington, VA 22209-2020
(703) 248-2100