

Criminal Background Investigations



Objective

The objective of this audit was to determine if the City's criminal background investigation (CBI) process operates effectively and efficiently.

Background

City of Austin (City) employees have a wide variety of duties and responsibilities. Some have financial responsibilities, such as collecting payments from the public or paying vendors. Other times, employees interact with vulnerable populations. It creates risk for the City if employees in these positions have a criminal history. To address this risk, the Human Resources Department (HRD) has developed procedures for conducting CBIs as part of the hiring process. HRD's CBI procedures establish a process for identifying positions for which criminal histories create a risk for the City, identify specific criminal offenses that would disqualify someone from CBI-sensitive positions, and establish a process to ensure these positions are not filled by individuals who have committed those crimes.

The City's CBI process involves coordination between City departments, the individual being considered for the CBI-sensitive position, and HRD staff.

What We Found

Finding - Although recent changes appear to have improved the City's CBI process, issues remain that result in limited effectiveness.

1. HRD implemented an electronic system to manage CBI process which appears to have made the CBI process more efficient and effective.
2. HRD does not ensure departments correctly identify positions that require a CBI.
 - The limitations with HRD's CBI procedures increase the likelihood that departments will not correctly and consistently identify CBI-sensitive positions.
 - HRD does not regularly review positions to determine if the departments correctly determined CBI sensitive positions. For a sample of 10 City employees with access to credit card systems, we noted 6 did not have a CBI before gaining access to the system.
3. HRD does not ensure departments fill CBI-Sensitive positions with those who pass a CBI.
 - Current HR systems are not connected. This means that the departments can fill positions without conducting a CBI or can fill positions with those who do not pass a CBI.
 - HRD management has not established a process to verify CBI process outcomes are correct.
 - HRD current practices require individual to self-certify where they have lived which increases risk that CBI sensitive position could be filled by candidate with criminal records.

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What We Recommend

1. To ensure CBI positions are clearly identified, the Human Resources Department Director should:
 - Develop and provide guidance for departments, including what is considered a “vulnerable population” to ensure departments consistently and correctly identify CBI-sensitive positions.
 - Implement a process to periodically review positions to confirm departments have correctly identified CBI-sensitive positions.
2. To ensure CBI positions are filled by individuals who have successfully completed a CBI, the Human Resources Director should implement a process such as periodic verification of a sample, to verify outcomes are correctly recorded.
3. To ensure CBI positions are filled by individuals who have successfully completed a CBI, the Human Resources Director should:
 - Implement a process to search for criminal records based on the individual’s previous addresses.
 - Implement a process to ensure personnel actions cannot be completed for CBI-sensitive positions until the candidate has a successful CBI.