

On-Call Utilization



Objective

The objective of this audit was to determine whether the City is managing on-call and call-back assignments effectively and efficiently. This audit was included in our FY 2017 Audit Plan due to risks identified in prior work and Council interest.

Background

Some City employees are placed in an on-call status to be called back to work to address a variety of business needs that arise outside normally scheduled work hours. Some employees are paid a stipend to be in an on-call status and others are not.

The Human Resources Department issued the On-Call and Call-Back Pay procedure in February 1999 to guide the establishment, payment, and administration for on-call and call-back assignments for City departments. Guidance for public safety departments comes from labor agreement provisions and department procedures. Department management is responsible for managing on-call and call-back assignments to meet their operational needs.

For fiscal year 2016, on-call and call-back costs were approximately \$6.4 million and affected over 2,200 employees. The top five departments, as well as the fire department, accounted for 88% of total dollars spent and 84% of affected employees.

What We Found

While there is a Citywide procedure governing on-call and call-back pay, it has not been updated since 2001 and appears to differ from practices in other Texas cities. Additionally, City management has provided inconsistent oversight and lacks complete information to know whether the City's practices are appropriate or whether they expend more resources than necessary to achieve operational needs.

The Citywide Procedure Has Not Kept Pace with Technological Advances



SOURCE: OCA analysis of the evolution of cell phone technology as compared to Citywide procedure updates, December 2017

Texas Peer City Practices for On-Call and Call-Back Pay Differ From Austin

Texas Cities*	Civilian Employees		Sworn Police, Fire, EMS	
	On-Call	Call-Back	On-Call	Call-Back
Austin	✓	✓	✓	✓
Dallas	no	✓	no	✓
Fort Worth	no	✓	no	✓
Houston	no	✓	no	no
San Antonio	no	no	police only	police only

SOURCE: OCA survey results of other government entities, June 2017

* Austin operates its electric utility. We did not compare practices at public electric utilities.

What We Recommend

We issued three recommendations to the Human Resources Director to coordinate with the affected departments to review current processes, revise the Citywide on-call and call-back procedure accordingly, and take actions to improve oversight of this process.

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What We Found, Continued

For fiscal year 2016, we identified 2,234 on-call and call-back employees in all City departments:

- 59% received an on-call stipend while 41% did not
- 93% were called back to work at some point during the year
- 7%, or 153 employees, were paid an on-call stipend, but were not called back to work

		On-Call With Stipend	On-Call (No Stipend)
On-Call		Period of time during which an employee must remain fit for duty and available to return to work, outside their normally scheduled working hours, holiday work time, or scheduled overtime	
	Pay	\$2.00 per hour	N/A
Call-Back		Unscheduled or emergency assignment to return to work outside scheduled working hours occurring after leaving the job site, on a holiday, or on a regular day off	
	Pay	1.5 times regular rate with a guaranteed minimum of 2 hours	1.5 times regular rate with a guaranteed minimum of 3 hours

SOURCE: OCA analysis of the On-Call and Call-Back Pay procedure, December 2017

Related to establishing on-call and call-back assignments, the selected departments did not consistently:

- assess the business need,
- identify eligible employees,
- receive approval for on-call stipend pay,
- complete an annual review to determine whether efforts were effective,
- develop or follow internal procedures consistent with Citywide guidance,
- provide notice to employees about on-call and call-back job duties, or
- document on-call and call-back assignments with dedicated time codes.

Co-mingling on-call and call-back time with more generic time codes results in inaccurate and understated reporting of the resources dedicated to on-call and call-back assignments, which limits the ability of management to fully analyze the efficiency or effectiveness of those assignments.

FY 2016 On-Call and Call-Back Costs and Usage for Selected Departments

Department	On-Call Pay	Call-Back Worked*	Total Dollar Amount	Total Employees
Austin Energy	\$ 355,982	\$ 2,175,245	\$ 2,531,227	413
Austin Water	\$ 477,145	\$ 873,876	\$ 1,351,021	400
Emergency Medical Services	\$ 108,340	\$ 784,934	\$ 893,274	398
Austin Police	\$ -	\$ 609,984	\$ 609,984	480
Watershed Protection	\$ 81,242	\$ 169,228	\$ 250,470	123
Austin Fire	\$ 48,776	\$ 21,937	\$ 70,713	60
Total	\$ 1,071,484	\$ 4,635,204	\$ 5,706,688	1,874

SOURCE: OCA analysis of on-call and call-back earning codes from the City's payroll system, March 2017

* Includes pay for guaranteed minimum hours totaling \$34,155.

NOTE: During FY 2016, Austin Police officers received compensatory time for being in an on-call status per their labor agreement.