

Special Report

Recruitment and Retention for Commercial Driver and Janitorial Positions

July 2022



In the City of Austin, recruitment and retention strategies for commercial driver and janitorial positions are largely determined by departments. Most department strategies focus on improving pay. Strategies specific to commercial driver positions include adjusting minimum qualifications, having career progression programs, and reimbursing training costs. Similar to the City of Austin, other entities have shown success with career development efforts tied to an apprenticeship or internship program.

Strategies specific to janitorial positions include flexible work schedules to accommodate secondary jobs, adjusting minimum qualifications, and proactive recruiting efforts. Most other entities did not have targeted strategies, but one school district reported success by increasing pay and reducing educational and experience requirements. Also, the City's hiring rules and related processes can create barriers for both departments and potential workers.

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Objective

The objective of this special request was to answer the City Council questions:

1. What strategies are being used to retain or recruit employees for commercial driver and janitorial positions within the City of Austin?
2. What strategies are being used by other entities to attract and/or retain employees in these positions?

Background

Over the past few years, employers including local governments have struggled to attract and retain workers. This has been referred to by many as the “Great Resignation.” Best practices¹ state that times are changing and more than ever before, today’s workforce is willing to move between employers to find an engaging workplace that will help them meet their personal goals.

The City of Austin aims to be an employer that can attract, hire, and retain a skilled workforce across the organization. The City’s Human Resources Department (HRD) provides general recruitment and retention strategies to departments. Individual departments then use these strategies to develop their own approach. This decentralized approach makes it hard to address challenges with attracting and retaining workers. Although departments have strategies to attract and retain workers, they reported receiving fewer applications in the past couple of years and fewer applicants meet minimum qualifications or respond to interview requests.

In the Spring of 2021, we issued an audit that found the City does not proactively manage the process to attract and hire workers. We issued six recommendations, and City management is working to address these issues by the end of 2022.

In the Fall of 2021, HRD hired a consultant to help provide insight related to retention Citywide; as of the date of this report the results of that work are still pending.

¹ We collected best practices from various professional organizations that publish information focused on attracting and keeping workers.

What We Learned

Summary

In the City of Austin, recruitment and retention strategies for commercial driver and janitorial positions are largely determined by departments. Most department strategies focus on improving pay. Strategies specific to commercial driver positions include adjusting minimum qualifications, having career progression programs, and reimbursing training costs. Similar to the City of Austin, other entities have shown success with career development efforts tied to an apprenticeship or internship program.

Strategies specific to janitorial positions include flexible work schedules to accommodate secondary jobs, adjusting minimum qualifications, and proactive recruiting efforts. Most other entities did not have targeted strategies, but one school district reported success by increasing pay and reducing educational and experience requirements. Also, the City does not have a coordinated Citywide recruitment and retention strategy and the City's hiring rules and related processes can create barriers for both departments and potential workers.

Question 1

What strategies are being used to retain or recruit employees for commercial driver and janitorial positions within the City of Austin?

In the City of Austin, recruitment and retention strategies for commercial driver and janitorial positions are largely determined by departments. We did not see much coordination for these activities across the City even though these positions exist in multiple departments. Staff from the City's corporate or central Human Resources Department (HRD) meet with department liaisons monthly to discuss issues and offer general guidance. HRD also reviews department requests to make changes to their current strategies. We identified two requests approved by HRD – one for commercial drivers in the Austin Resource Recovery (ARR) department and one for janitorial staff in the Aviation department. Most departments said it has been hard to attract and retain workers and noted HRD limits their ability to implement strategies in a timely manner. Because there are differences between these two job families, identified strategies and challenges for commercial drivers and janitorial staff are presented separately. In addition, we noted some common challenges reported by departments.

Most departments reported difficulty recruiting and retaining commercial drivers

The most common strategy mentioned across departments was the need to increase compensation. Staff cited the increasing costs of living in Austin as well as higher pay and bonus money for similar jobs in the private sector. Within the past year, HRD approved ARR's strategy to increase compensation for their commercial driver positions. ARR's program includes increased hourly pay, money or time off for referrals, and a retention incentive to be paid out over a number of years.

Other departments with commercial driver positions reported wanting to implement a strategy similar to ARR's and some departments said they submitted their request to HRD for approval. However, departments said they were told that their strategy cannot be implemented until the pay

ARR raised hourly pay by \$1 for a starting range from \$19 to \$21. They also provide \$300 for referrals and up to \$3,000 in retention incentives.

plan for ARR has been reviewed by HRD. HRD said they have received two requests from departments as of the date of this report and they plan to use the ARR program as a framework for other departments. The timing of additional approvals was not clear to department staff.

HRD can approve a department's strategy, but individual departments must determine how to pay for it. Multiple staff noted enterprise departments can more easily pay for incentives than tax-funded departments.

Also, multiple staff cited increased competition from other City departments due to differences in pay or working conditions. In addition to pay issues, departments reported partnering with local schools and organizations to identify and attract potential workers. They also noted having or exploring career progression options once workers are hired. Some departments reported revising minimum qualifications and other requirements, such as the time needed to get a commercial driver license² (CDL).

Staff noted CDL training needs to address more requirements due to a February 2022 federal regulation related to baseline training for entry-level drivers.

Another common department strategy involves paying for CDL license fees and training costs. ARR staff previously trained workers from other departments but stopped due to resource issues. As a result, departments are using a variety of external training firms to provide staff with a CDL. Department staff reported spending more for external training and noted that some workers leave City employment after getting their CDL. Requiring former employees to reimburse these City costs appears to be legally permissible, but the City does not require or practice this as a strategy. Most departments expressed a desire to establish a Citywide CDL training option to lower costs. Our understanding is this option is being explored but is not currently in place.

Not all departments reported having the same challenges. Some departments noted the lack of CDL drivers has affected their operations. Others, like Austin Energy, reported fewer issues. This is because the CDL is a secondary requirement for most of their jobs. The primary duty is based on a specific skill related to the electric utility industry. Staff noted competition for Austin Energy workers comes mainly from other electric utilities.

Most departments reported difficulty recruiting and retaining janitorial staff

Departments cited compensation as a key issue in recruiting and retaining janitorial staff. Multiple departments noted a large percentage of City janitorial staff have a second job to help make ends meet. HRD said the only department to request and justify the need for increased pay was the Aviation department. The janitorial staff in this department are responsible for cleaning the entire airport campus, interacting with the public, and looking for potential dangers to the public such as explosives. Due to the increase in job duties, the Aviation janitorial staff was reclassified from a janitorial title to an airport-specific title and their pay was increased. HRD said they have not received similar requests from other departments. However, some departments said they have submitted requests and are using temporary workers to fill the gaps.

² A commercial driver license (CDL) is a professional license permitting the license holder to drive large commercial vehicles and buses on public roadways in Texas and in the United States.

Despite these challenges, some departments reported not having specific strategies. Other departments reported flexible work schedules have been effective. This allows workers to schedule around their secondary jobs. Other identified strategies include:

- Attending career fairs and engaging potential applicants on social media
- Revising minimum qualifications and simplifying questions on the job application
- Paying an annual allowance for safety equipment
- Instituting a strong reward and recognition program
- Proactively tracking and recruiting based on need
- Using temporary workers, as needed

Commonly cited challenges to recruiting and retaining staff include access to actionable information, limited Citywide coordination, and the City's hiring rules and related processes

First, the City does not have easy access to information needed to identify the scale of issues across departments. When we started this work, we requested data on the number of positions that require a CDL and the number of janitorial positions by department. HRD staff said this information could be compiled but doing so would require significant time and effort to pull and match data from multiple systems. For example, while multiple departments require workers with a CDL, HRD could not easily identify how many positions there are or what departments require them. Also, the City does not have clear criteria or a shared definition for what a “hard to fill” position means. HRD said they provide guidance on “hard to fill” positions, but they do not determine this and it is up to departments. Best practices state taking a data-driven, strategic approach to human capital management is critical. The City's current approach limits its ability to proactively identify or quickly react to issues that arise.

We also sought information about why workers were leaving the City. Best practices state departments should offer exit surveys to see why their workers are leaving. HRD said they provide an exit survey link to departments to send to workers that are leaving, and they monitor this information. However, we did not hear about this from department staff. Some departments reported conducting their own exit surveys, but this was not done consistently. The information gained was not always written down, retained, or used for decision-making purposes. Also, this information seemed to be kept within departments and not shared. This limits the City's ability to identify Citywide issues or trends for job families that span departments.

Second, departments reported there is not a Citywide strategy to address or coordinate challenges in recruiting and retaining workers. HRD provides guidance such as checklists or templates to department human resources liaisons. HRD said they only get involved when more pay is requested by departments. However, department staff expressed a desire for a more proactive and Citywide approach where it makes sense. This includes

addressing common issues affecting job families such as recruitment, development, and training. As noted, the City's current approach is determined by each department. HRD is responsible for reviewing department strategies to ensure they comply with requirements and are applied consistently across the City.

Another common issue cited by most departments was compensation. To change employee pay, departments must submit a request to HRD. Again, for commercial driver and janitorial positions, HRD approved two department requests that increased pay. However, other departments with similar positions cited the same need but noted they were not able to act without approval. A recent development in this area is the City Council's June 2022 approval of a resolution directing the City Manager to develop a plan and timeline to adopt a living wage of \$22 per hour for City employees. When implemented, this would result in raising the starting pay for most of the positions subject to this report.

Third, departments cited the City's hiring rules and related processes as a barrier to attract, hire, and retain staff. The City's hiring rules³ state that no position may be filled except after posting and no one can be considered for a position if they have not submitted an application. Departments noted the process can keep qualified candidates from applying and remove applicants who can do the job. For example, applicants for a City job are required to fill out a lengthy online application. However, this can be hard for people not familiar with a computer. Also, departments noted a position's minimum qualifications could exceed what is needed to do the job. The result of these issues can be a smaller pool of candidates for City jobs.

HRD staff reported the City has three job centers to help people apply.

In addition, departments noted the overall hiring process takes too long. Staff reported the process to hire a full-time employee takes months to complete, and hiring a temporary worker takes weeks. Staff contrasted these timeframes with on-the-spot hiring in the private sector. Others reported losing applicants for City jobs after a candidate got a faster offer from another employer.

To address these issues with the City's hiring process, departments reported:

- Removing supplemental questions to shorten the City's job application
- Changing minimum qualifications related to education and experience
- Using temporary or contract workers for positions that are "hard to fill"
- Exploring apprenticeship or internship programs

³ The City of Austin has seven Municipal Civil Service rules that govern the process for employee hiring, promotions, lateral transfers, reduction-in-force, disciplinary actions, and appeals. These rules do not apply to sworn staff or cadets as they are covered by other protections in labor agreements.

Question 2

What strategies are being used by other entities to attract and/or retain employees in these positions?

We surveyed other entities⁴ to determine what type of strategies they use to attract and retain workers in commercial driver and janitorial positions. For CDL drivers, other entities use similar strategies as the City of Austin. These include adjusting minimum qualifications, having career progression programs, and offering higher pay, bonuses, stipends, or referrals. In other entities, career progression programs include an apprenticeship or internship component to get workers in the door.

Specifically, staff in San Antonio and Phoenix reported success with an apprenticeship program. This was specific to one department that trained staff interested in moving into a full-time position after receiving a CDL. Staff noted that most participants stayed employed with the city after they finished the program.

The City of Austin does have a Citywide internship program. However, the hiring rules do not allow interns to move into a full-time position and they must submit an application similar to others interested in applying for any job that is posted on the City's career website.

Most entities we reviewed did not have targeted strategies to attract or retain janitorial staff. We noted one school district that reported success by increasing their starting wage and reducing the educational and experience requirements.

We also noted a final strategy related to retaining current staff. Multiple entities noted a focus on culture or morale can be key in retaining workers. One entity noted bad managers can drive away workers who would otherwise stay. In short, they noted one of the easiest strategies to implement is to ensure that your managers are not the reason your workers decide to leave.

⁴ The other entities contacted were the cities of Dallas, San Antonio, and Phoenix. The other entities researched were Austin Independent School District, Leander Independent School District, Round Rock Independent School District, University of Texas - Austin, Capital Metropolitan, Texas Disposal Systems, FedEx Corporation, United Parcel Service, Amazon, and Instacart.

Why We Did This Report

This report responds to a request from Mayor Pro Tem Alison Alter as a sponsor and Council Member Kathie Tovo as a co-sponsor. The request focused on strategies being used to recruit or retain staff in commercial driver and janitorial positions within the City of Austin and other entities.

Scope

The project scope included the City's commercial driver and janitorial positions from fiscal year 2018 to the first quarter of fiscal year 2022.

Methodology

To complete this special request, we performed the following steps:

- Researched best practices on recruitment and retention strategies
- Interviewed staff in relevant departments including Austin Convention Center, Austin Energy, Austin Public Library, Austin Resource Recovery, Austin Transportation, Austin Water, Aviation, Building Services, Human Resources, Law, Parks and Recreation, and Public Works
- Reviewed policies and procedures related to the City's recruitment and retention efforts
- Reviewed department memos and other documentation on planned or used recruitment and retention strategies
- Surveyed selected other entities regarding their recruitment and retention strategies including the City of Dallas, City of San Antonio, and City of Phoenix
- Researched selected other entities regarding their recruitment and retention strategies including Austin Independent School District, Leander Independent School District, Round Rock Independent School District, University of Texas - Austin, Capital Metropolitan, Texas Disposal Systems, FedEx Corporation, United Parcel Service, Amazon, and Instacart

Project Type

Special request projects conducted by the Office of the City Auditor are considered non-audit projects under Government Auditing Standards and are conducted in accordance with the ethics and general standards (Chapters 1-3).

The Office of the City Auditor was created by the Austin City Charter as an independent office reporting to City Council to help establish accountability and improve City services. Special requests are designed to answer specific questions to assist Council in decision-making. We do not draw conclusions or make recommendations in these reports.

Team

Patrick Johnson, Audit Manager
Kathie Harrison, Auditor-in-Charge
Jasmine Triplett
Kendall Byers

City Auditor

Corrie Stokes

Deputy City Auditor

Jason Hadavi

Office of the City Auditor

phone: (512) 974-2805

email: AustinAuditor@austintexas.gov

website: <http://www.austintexas.gov/auditor>



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