

10-1-2010

Analysis of the Administration of Human Resources: Prepared for the Ipswich Town-School Coordination Committee

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Recommended Citation

Edward J. Collins, Jr. Center for Public Management, University of Massachusetts Boston, "Analysis of the Administration of Human Resources: Prepared for the Ipswich Town-School Coordination Committee" (2010). *Edward J. Collins Center for Public Management Publications*. Paper 3.

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ANALYSIS OF THE ADMINISTRATION OF HUMAN RESOURCES

Prepared for the Ipswich Town-School Coordination Committee

October 2010

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INTRODUCTION

The Town of Ipswich, acting for its Town-School Coordination Committee, contracted with the Edward J. Collins, Jr. Center for Public Management at the University of Massachusetts Boston to undertake a review of the Human Resources (HR) management, Recreation Department programming, and the Information Technology needs of the Town and School Department. The review was undertaken to assess how collaborative approaches might enhance the effectiveness of each of these municipal functions. The Collins Center has published a report on each of these topics. The overall Project Manager was Senior Associate Richard Kobayashi. The HR report was prepared by Collins Center Associate Mary Aicardi. On site work was carried out in May and June 2010.

The review determined that basic HR administrative needs are being met in both the Town and the School Department. Included in this assessment are the core functions of employee recruitment, selection, orientation, payroll, benefits, leave entitlements, tracking and administration; collective bargaining, policy administration, development of job descriptions and classification, maintenance of personnel files; administration of workers compensation and injured on duty programs; employee relations; union relations, including grievances and discipline; budgeting and salary projections; Civil Service administration; performance appraisal; retirement eligibility and benefits; and unemployment compensation.

HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT IN IPSWICH – WHO DOES WHAT?

Town Government

Within the Town government, the core HR functions are the responsibility of four employees: the Town Manager; the Administrative Assistant to the Board of Selectmen; the Purchasing Agent/Special Assistant to the Town Manager and the Payroll and Benefits Clerk.

The following table lists the Town employees responsible for the core HR administrative responsibilities and the specific functions performed by those employees. In many functional categories, the single term used in the table encompasses many different tasks. For example, “Benefits” includes enrollment, tracking, verifying and coordinating all aspects of an employee’s benefits.

Table 1: Human Resource Responsibilities in Town Government

Town Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appointing Authority • Union Negotiations & Collective Bargaining Agreements • Grievance Administration • Employee Discipline
Administrative Assistant to the Board of Selectmen and Town Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruitment & Hiring Processes • Job postings, advertisements • Interview scheduling & compliance • Reference Checks, including CORI • Pre-employment requirements (physicals, drug tests) • Civil Service • Maintain central Personnel Records • Employee orientation • Policy distribution, training, and sign-offs • Job Descriptions • Performance Appraisal tracking
Purchasing Agent/Special Assistant to the Town Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workers Compensation Program • Injured on Duty Program • Review/update of Personnel Policies and Guidelines
Payroll & Benefits Clerk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Payroll (receiving, entering, verifying) • Leave & Attendance Administration • Health Benefits • Life & Dental Insurance • Deferred Compensation • Orientation of new employees regarding benefits • MUNIS System (employee records for pay and leave) • Unemployment • Retirement • Retiree Benefits • State & Federally mandated reporting

During interviews with the Town employees responsible for the administration of HR, it became clear that the Town of Ipswich has a good handle on HR. Personnel records are centralized. Too often, in towns of Ipswich’s size, records are not kept in compliance with the various laws governing record retention. *This is not the case in Ipswich.* While some policies and handbooks are being reviewed and updated, Ipswich is diligent about adhering to employment policy and following regulatory requirements.

Ipswich utilizes MUNIS, an integrated software system, to manage many of its HR functions, which enables the efficient flow, submission and tracking of information. For example, through the MUNIS System, leave, payroll and attendance are streamlined and duplicate records do not need to be generated or maintained.

The Administrative Assistant to the Board of Selectmen and the Town Manager reported that she spends, on average, 25% of her time on specifically HR-related functions. However, this varies widely over time. For example, if there is a Civil Service hiring process underway, 100% of her day could be spent on that process. The Payroll and Benefit Clerk's entire job is spent performing the HR functions of payroll and benefits administration. She may on occasion assist in other areas of accounting, but her primary responsibilities are HR-related. The Purchasing Agent/Assistant to the Town Manager deals with all the insurance representatives and third party administrators relating to injury administration. The amount of time spent on HR-related functions varies with the number of injuries being managed, but is estimated by the incumbent to be 50% of his time.

Ipswich School Department

As with the Town Government, the school department has a largely centralized system. The following table reflects a summary of positions involved with HR and the functions they perform.

Table 2: Human Resources Responsibilities in the School Department

Superintendent of Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Union Negotiations & Collective Bargaining Agreements • Grievance Administration • Employee Discipline
Principals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hiring of employees at Schools • Reference Checks • Employee Discipline
Director of Administrative Services (responsible for listed functions, utilizing departmental clerical employees to keep files and provide support)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job postings, advertisements • Teacher Certification & Licensure • Reasonable Assurance Letters & Notifications • Professional Development • Maintain central Personnel Records • New Hire Orientation • Policy distribution, training, and sign-offs • Workers Compensation (coordination w/others) • Performance appraisal tracking • Job Descriptions • State & Federal Reports • Contract Administration & Interpretation
Payroll Associate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Payroll • Leave & Attendance Administration • Benefits • Workers Compensation (coordination w/others) • Maintain employee records in MUNIS system

Because of the laws governing schools, hiring is not completely centralized in the Ipswich School Department. School Principals select and hire employees working at the individual schools. However, the Director of Administrative Services and the Payroll Associate work very closely on the documentation and orientation of new employees. All personnel files are kept centrally.

As indicated in the table above, the Payroll Associate is responsible for payroll and benefits for the School Department. She works closely with the Payroll and Benefits Clerk at Town Hall on any issues that arise. Again, through the integrated, computerized MUNIS System, the School Department is able to efficiently enter its own payroll information electronically for processing by the Town's Finance Department.

All of the Payroll Associate's time is spent performing HR functions. The Director of Administrative Services who has the primary responsibility for many HR functions, spends close to 100% of her time on HR as well. She creates systems and manages the HR functions listed above, utilizing central office clerical staff to maintain those records.

COOPERATIVE EFFORTS

Because the systems in place are parallel, the Town and School Department approach areas of HR in a cooperative way. The administration of Workers Compensation and Unemployment Benefits are prime examples. Technically, the Town has the ultimate responsibility for these programs. By working cooperatively and with good communication, the Schools and the Town each manage their own programs effectively, working with insurance agents and third party administrators.

Benefit and payroll administration are other areas where close collaboration occurs. Town and School staff work closely to coordinate efforts and resolve enrollment and payroll issues.

CLOSER COLLABORATION & POSSIBLE IMPROVEMENTS

MUNIS SYSTEM

Even though the Town and the School Department currently work well together, there are areas where closer collaboration could occur. Training is one example. Both the Town Government and the School Department employees could benefit from formal training in the MUNIS system. Currently, training is done by coworkers on an informal basis or through technical phone support by MUNIS. It would also make sense for the School Department to use the MUNIS system to track leave, rather than using Excel which is currently being utilized. While initially getting all the leave balances entered into the system would be an effort, it would be of great value to use the automated system that is available and alleviate workload by reducing the need to keep separate leave records.

INJURY ADMINISTRATION

Another area where closer collaboration may be possible is injury administration and safety training. Training on injury report processing and administration for staff involved in processing claims, as well as managers, would help in making sure injuries are handled timely and efficiently. It appears that a great deal of time is now spent on injury follow-up, bill paying and tracking. Insurance and/or third party administration claims management and bill paying services should also be evaluated for efficiency.

Safety training for employees in areas such as back injuries and workstation ergonomics is always recommended. Such training could easily be coordinated for both Town and School employees.

NEW HIRE & PERSONNEL ACTION PROCESSING

Currently, within the Town administration, the creation of a new employee or change of status or pay of an existing employee in the MUNIS system is accomplished through the transmittal of the appointment letter or by communication between the staff in the Town Manager's office and the Finance Department. Other than the letter, there is no formal approval or tracking process in place. It may be helpful to create either on paper, or electronically, a processing form indicating personnel actions such as hiring, promotion and termination. The form could include basic employee information and could indicate the action to be taken, the effective date and the rate of pay, if applicable, and could include a check-off or signature system for approval. Such a system could standardize the way in which changes are processed.

In the School Department, the recruitment process is centralized and standardized within the Superintendent's office. However, the actual selection process is not standardized. While it is clear the Principals have the authority to select candidates for positions, it may be useful to have the process of hiring centralized so that standards may be put in place and followed. Items such as standard interview questions and reference check forms and the documentation and retention of these should be considered.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Collins Center would like to thank all the people who took the time to meet with us and give of their time and share their opinions, work records and insights. The work they do and the assistance they gave us is truly appreciated.