



APPLICATION FORM

All applications must include the following information. Separate applications must be submitted for each eligible program. **Deadline: June 2, 2017.** Please include this application form with electronic entry.

PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: Dinwiddie

Program Title: Dinwiddie County Public Safety Communications "Ready for Hire" Program

Program Category: #3 - Criminal Justice & Public Safety

CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: Marie Grant

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Department: County Administration

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SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

Name: Anne R. Howerton

Title: Deputy County Administrator for Finance and General Services

Signature: *Anne R. Howerton*

**2017 VACo Achievement Award
Dinwiddie County
Public Safety – “Ready for Hire” Program**

Problem:

For several years, Dinwiddie County's Public Safety Emergency Communications department experienced frequent turnover and was rarely fully staffed. In FY '15, there were 12, established, full-time Communications Officers positions. During that year alone, the County hired seven new Communications Officers. Public Safety Administrators worked closely with the County's Human Resources department to identify factors contributing to this issue.

Employee Input Sessions, facilitated by Human Resources and County Administration, were conducted with all full-time Emergency Communications employees. In addition to this feedback, the County requested and participated in a review by the Association of Public Safety Communications Officials (APCO).

During input sessions, burnout was a common theme. Due to turnover and understaffing, existing Communications Officers were carrying an increased workload in order to fill gaps. This, combined with a lack of professional growth opportunities was contributing to an increased level of “burnout”. Once positions were vacated, there was a lag time of several months before a new Communications Officer was fully trained and in place on shift.

The APCO review resulted in several recommendations, which included maintaining an applicant pool of qualified candidates.

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Awards Criteria:

Based on feedback from employees and the APCO review, Dinwiddie County developed an **innovative** plan to address identified needs. The “Ready for Hire” program is one that can serve as a **model** and easily replicated in other localities.

Program Description:

To address the issue of burnout and high rates of turnover among Public Safety Communications Officers, Dinwiddie County transitioned from rotating shifts to a permanent shift system. This provided Communications Officers a more consistent work schedule. Next, an innovative plan was developed that would establish and maintain a pool of qualified candidates for the position of Communications Officer.

The “Ready for Hire” program consists of six stages and completes two cycles per calendar year:

1. Advertisement – recruitment will be advertised for a minimum of two weeks, twice per year. Ads will be placed on the website, and social media outlets. Advertisement will also be done through two local newspapers, The Progress-Index and Dinwiddie Monitor. Other methods of advertisement will be used as appropriate. Applicants will be advised that this is a scheduled recruitment period and that selected applicants will be placed in the “Ready for Hire” pool until a vacancy arises. Applicants remain in the pool for up to six months. At that time, should there be no vacancy, applicants will be contacted and asked if they wish to remain in the pool for another 6 month period.

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2. Screening – The Director of Human Resources will perform a preliminary screening of all applications received, narrowing the applicant pool to those who meet the position’s qualifications. Preference will be given to those applicants who also meet the “preferred” qualifications, which include public safety, medical or military experience. A final review of applicants will be conducted by the Director of Emergency Communications, in order to confirm that invitations to test/interview should be issued.
3. Testing/Interview – *Criticall* or a similar testing software will be administered to all applicants who are invited to test. Each applicant will be afforded an opportunity to interview with a panel consisting of the following:
 - a. Director of Emergency Communications
 - b. Director of Human Resources
 - c. Representative of the Dinwiddie County Sheriff’s Office
 - d. Representative from the Dinwiddie County Communications Center
4. Background Check – All applicants who are recommended for hire, based on stages 1-3 will be requested to authorize a background check. Human Resources will provide applicants with login information that will allow them to submit their information to a third party service provider. Human Resources will review completed background checks and their alignment to the County’s Background Check Policy to determine suitability for hire.
5. Ready for Hire – Applicants who successfully complete stages 1-4 of the selection process will become candidates under the “Ready for Hire” status. These

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applicants will remain in this status until such time as a vacancy is presented or their application review date is reached (six months). Candidates will be advised that their “Ready for Hire” status does not guarantee a position with Dinwiddie County. The Director of Emergency Communications, in consultation with the Director of Human Resources, will review all candidates in the “Ready for Hire” pool as vacancies occur to determine the most suitable candidate for the position at hand. As candidates are selected from the “Ready for Hire” pool, they will be asked to review and update their employment application to reflect any changes, and if more than three months has lapsed since their background check, an updated criminal records check must be completed to ensure eligibility to hire.

6. Application Review Date – In the event applicants do not receive a job offer prior to their six month application review date, they will be contacted by Human Resources to determine if they would like to remain in the “Ready for Hire” pool. If they opt to stay in the pool, they will remain in this status until a vacancy arises and they are offered a position *or* the next application review date is reached. In the event candidates are not offered a position within 12 months (two program cycles), they will need to reapply during an open recruitment period to receive future consideration.

Financing and Staffing:

The financial implications of this program were nominal as implementation was merely a change in policy and practice. Dinwiddie County bore the cost of hotel accommodations for APCO reviewers, while they were in the County for the review. The County has

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realized savings in overtime that was being paid to Communications Officers covering vacant positions on shifts.

Results:

Implementation of this “Ready for Hire”, proactive recruitment process, has effectively decreased the time required to fill vacant Communication Officers positions. This allows the Communications Center to recover from vacancies and return to normal staffing levels at a much quicker rate than prior practices. The decrease in this lag time has resulted in reduced overtime costs, decreased burnout and has contributed to the improvement of the overall morale of the department. In FY '15 Dinwiddie County hired seven new Communications Officers; the “Ready for Hire” program was implemented in January 2016. As of the submission of this VACo Achievement Award application, in FY '17 we have not hired any new Communication Officers. Our most recent Communications Officer was hired April 15, 2016. We consider this SUCCESS!

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Short Overview of the Program:

Dinwiddie County was experiencing an unusually high rate of turnover in its Emergency Communications Center. In FY '15, seven new officers were hired (out of twelve, total). In an effort to identify factors contributing to this turnover, Dinwiddie County's Director of Public Safety worked closely with the Director of Human Resources to coordinate an Association of Public Safety Officials (APCO) review, and obtain input from all full-time Emergency Communications employees.

This process revealed that the lag time between a vacancy in our Communications Center and the filling of this vacancy with a fully trained Communications Officer, was resulting in increased overtime and burnout of employees.

To address this problem, the “Ready for Hire” program was developed. This innovative, proactive approach to recruitment establishes a pool of qualified candidates who are “Ready for Hire” as soon as vacancies occur. This program was implemented in January 2016 and our most recently hired Communications Officer came on board on April 15, 2016. There has been zero turnover since that time and zero Communications Officers have been hired in FY '17.

The “Ready for Hire” program did not present financial implications for Dinwiddie County beyond the cost of hotel accommodations for APCO representatives conducting the review.

This is an innovative program that could be easily replicated in other localities.

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Brief Summary:

Dinwiddie County’s “Ready for Hire” program is an innovative response to high turnover among local Communications Officers. Public Safety and Human Resources directors worked collaboratively to identify contributing factors to the issue and then got creative with how to address them.

After meeting face-to-face with all full-time public safety employees to obtain input, the County participated in an APCO (Association of Public Safety Communications Officials) review. The result was the realization that communications officers were becoming burned out, regularly working overtime to fill gaps left by vacancies. By nature, Public Safety Communications is a high-stress environment. This stress is compounded by increased workload during the time it was taking to fill vacancies.

The “Ready for Hire” program creates a pool of qualified applicants, who have already been screened, tested and undergone background checks. When a vacancy occurs, it is from this pool that candidates are selected and offered employment. The program has shaved months off of the lag time between vacancy and hiring and has also resulted in significant savings in overtime that was being paid to Communications Officers prior to the program.