



SC DEPARTMENT of
**ENVIRONMENTAL
SERVICES**

Assessment of HR Processes for Potential Improvements

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I. Background/Agency Info

In May of 2023, Governor Henry McMaster signed into law a bill, Act 60, that ordered the restructuring of the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) into two new state agencies: the South Carolina Department of Environmental Services (SCDES) and the South Carolina Department of Public Health (DPH). This change was implemented on July 1, 2024.

The environmental roles and responsibilities of SCDES brought forth the previously established bureaus from Environmental Affairs under DHEC to include Air Quality, Coastal Management, Land and Waste Management, Water, and Regional and Laboratory Services. It also established administrative support services areas such as Finance and Operations, Office of Technology, Office of Human Resources, Office of General Counsel, and Communications and Public Outreach. As part of the restructuring, SCDES also received the hydrology and aquatic nuisance species programs from the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources. In the initial launch of the agency, there are roughly 1,200 employees for SCDES throughout the state of South Carolina.

At SCDES, we are an agency that is driven by science and data. It is used to drive our decisions and our actions. Doing so can help ensure a sustainable South Carolina with the protection and preservation of our state's environment and natural resources. A major focus of our agency's leadership in its infancy will be to focus on efficient and better delivery of services with a commitment to Science, Service and Sustainability.

With that approach in mind, we plan to look inwards within our own program areas and offices as to how we can better serve our customers, which for those of us in the Office of Human Resources, is our agency employees.

II. Problem Statement

The Office of Human Resources at SCDES is committed to reviewing its current processes as we have begun functioning as our own human resources department for the agency. From the article, “*Evaluating HR Function: A Methodical Approach*” by HRbrain¹, conducting periodic assessments of HR functions such as this project can be important for several reasons like identifying strengths and weaknesses of current HR initiatives, allowing for correction of ineffective programs/policies, and help benchmark HR metrics over time.

Previously under DHEC, there were several processes such as reclassification of positions and additional duties that would take time and effort to complete for our agency employees. There is always a need to provide fast, efficient services within the Office of Human Resources as timing is key in recruiting and hiring personnel for the agency. Lengthy turnaround times on actions such as these can often cause delays in the recruitment process, which in turn, delays the hiring and onboarding of key agency personnel who provide essential services to the citizens of South Carolina. In determining the focus of this project, it felt that an assessment of these human resources processes for potential improvements seemed appropriate considering the opportunity for advancements to

¹ <https://hrbrain.ai/blog/evaluating-hr-function-a-methodical-approach/>

determine if the workflow makes sense as well as if there is an opportunity to track metrics for agency consumption.

This idea aligns with agency goals, as well as the Office of Human Resources goals, in that SCDES is committed to “...efficient and better delivery of services...”. As a smaller, more focused agency, the staff within the Office of Human Resources share the same sentiment as the agency and are excited to have a narrower focus within the department now that SCDES is its own standalone agency. There is a want and desire to evaluate how the department functions to see if there is a means to provide more efficient and faster delivery of services.

There has currently been no review of these processes within the Office of Human Resources after the transition to SCDES, so the timing is beneficial to provide a review of how we handle reclassifications of positions and additional duties requests to see if it’s done appropriately and whether there is an opportunity to improve these requests for the betterment of the department and the agency.

III. Data Collection

The initial question of whether the current process for reclassifications and additional duties request is appropriate is to first determine what the workflow of this process is today. The workflow in Appendix A showcases the approach that the Office of Human Resources takes for reclassification and additional duties requests. This workflow is based on current Office of Human Resources practices, which were modeled after the

previous human resource department that supported DHEC before the agency was restructured in 2024.

Another goal for data collection was to determine just how other HR departments in other state agencies perform these types of HR actions. To do this, a survey was determined as the best approach to request input and feedback from other agencies across the state. The resource used to accomplish was Microsoft Forms, which is an online survey tool through Microsoft that allows for individuals to compile various types of information through surveys and quizzes to use in a multitude of ways.

The final approach was to reach out internally with our stakeholders at the agency such as personnel coordinators within the program areas, members of leadership, Office of Human Resources staff, and others to determine if the current process is appropriate, what, if any, changes or updates they would like to see within this process, and if they would like to have metrics more readily available to use in decision-making efforts across the agency. Microsoft Forms was used to develop a survey, like the data collection efforts from other HR departments at state agencies, to collect this information for use.

IV. Data Analysis

As part of the data collection efforts for this project, there was a determination made to see just how many actions were tracked for a subset of time that would be equivalent for both DHEC and SCDES. The period used was July 1 through September 30 as it was the first quarter of existence for SCDES and could be used as a comparison to the previous same period at DHEC.

Under DHEC, the Office of Human Resources processed the following reclassification and additional duties requests from July 1, 2023, through September 30, 2023:

Type	Total Number from 7/1/2023-9/30/2023	Number of Requests Returned	Average Number of Days to Approve	Number that Required DSHR involvement
Reclassifications	109	24	6.39	1
Additional Duties	24	11	5.69	2

In comparison, as SCDES, the Office of Human Resources processed the following reclassification and additional duties requests from July 1, 2024, through September 30, 2024, one year later:

Type	Total Number from 7/1/2023-9/30/2023	Number of Requests Returned	Average Number of Days to Approve	Number that Required DSHR involvement
Reclassifications	57	2	2.05	16
Additional Duties	6	3	2.67	1

As you can see, the number of actions was reduced significantly due to the lower volume of actions to process for the Office of Human Resources. This is due in large part to a reduced number of employees that the department currently supports in comparison to how it supported DHEC previously. The main takeaway from this is the column labeled, "Average Number of Days to Approve." In this column, the data seems to support that the process that is currently being used within the Office of Human Resources for reclassifications and additional duties requests is appropriate as it stands today based on the reduced number of days to approve these actions.

The reduction in the average number of days to approve shows a difference of 4.34 days for reclassifications and a difference of 3.02 days for additional duties requests. Having that increased amount of improvement plays a factor through a variety of ways such as staff handling these transactions more efficiently and a lesser volume of these types of transactions.

In reviewing the 57 transactions for reclassifications, there was one outlier that took 20 days to approve. Without that request included, those transactions average a turnaround time of 1.73 days. Quicker turnaround times to be within two days as opposed to within six from last year at this time gives a chance to make sure other related actions occur faster as well. For instance, if the request was to reclassify a vacant position to post for recruitment, SCDES is gaining almost a full working week in comparison to last year to post, recruit, and hopefully hire someone at an expedited fashion.

The next set of data for review is the responses from a Microsoft Forms survey (Appendix B) that was sent to contacts at various HR departments across the state. The response rate was 50%. The following information was gathered on these actions from other HR departments in state agencies:

HR Reclassification and Additional Duties Process Survey Highlights	
Question 3: On average, how long does it take to approve a reclassification request?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 responses = 4-5 days • 2 response = 2-3 days
Question 4: What improvements to the reclassification process would you like to see?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 written responses – all reference “electronic” process
Question 5: What challenges do you face in the reclassification process would you like to see?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 written responses – one response indicates “no challenges at this point” while another states, “losing track of actions because the paperwork is printed, signed and routed internally.”
Question 8: On average, how long does it take to approve an additional duties request?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 responses = 4-5 days • 2 response = 2-3 days
Question 9: What improvements to the additional duties process would you like to see?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 written responses – one response references “electronic workflow process” while another mentions the same as their reclassification process improvements. Another states, “More streamline.”

As you can see, other state agencies have similar turnaround times on their processes as all fluctuate between 2-3 days and 4-5 days for returning their reclassification and additional duties actions. With the average at SCDES hovering around 2 days, these bodes well for the current process followed at our agency. All four responses indicated similar approaches in their approval process for reclassification and additional duties, which is like the current process for SCDES. One other highlighted from the responses was

that none of the four responses indicated an electronic approval process for HR actions such as reclassifications and additional duties.

Finally, and maybe most importantly, was a Microsoft Forms survey (Appendix C) shared amongst internal stakeholders that provided feedback on these HR processes and any suggestions they may have about the processes and the usefulness of readily available metrics to help use data to drive decision-making, which is a key component of the agency’s goals as it begins its infancy as its very own standalone agency.

HR Process Improvement Survey Highlights	
Question 1: On a scale of 1-5, how do you rate the current HR process for reclassification and additional duties requests?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 11 responses – average score of “4”
Question 5: Would you be interested in having HR-related metrics readily available for review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 11 responses: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Yes = 9 ○ No = 2
Question 7: Where would you like to view HR-related metrics, if available?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 11 responses: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Internal SharePoint Page = 7 ○ Reports = 1 ○ Other = 1
Question 8: Are you interested in an electronic document/workflow process for salary action requests?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 11 responses: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Yes = 11 ○ No = 0

Stakeholders within the agency provided valuable information and feedback on these HR processes. They were able to validate that the current process is appropriate based on their responses given. They gave the Office of Human Resources a score of “4” on a scale of 1 to 5 rating the current HR process for reclassification and additional duties. They indicate in written responses on the survey thoughts about what they like about the current process for reclassifications and additional duties such as:

- “The processing time is shorter than before with more communication as to what the status is in real time”
- “I like how effective and efficiently the current HR staff is handling these requests. They ensure speedy responses and provide excellent customer service.”

They also indicated some dislikes about this process along with some suggestions for the current process. A few key takeaways were:

Survey Question: *What do you dislike about the current HR process for reclassification and additional duties requests?*

- “It oftentimes appears to be paperwork driven”
- “I wish you could do everything in one App for everything.”

Survey Question: *Do you have any suggestions for the current HR process for reclassification and additional duties requests:*

- “It would be nice to be able to have a more online version that could help track where the action is in the process.”
- “I suggest sending requests for reclassing vacant positions directly to Class and Comp instead of through the HR Coordinator or copying the bureau HR Coordinator on the email to Class and Comp so they know that the process has started.”

Another requested question of the survey was to determine if the agency stakeholders were interested in having HR-related metrics readily available for review. As seen in the table above, nearly 82-percent of the response was “Yes” with those responses

giving some metrics for review such as Time to Hire information, number of different types of transactions processed, internal average salary information, number of separations and turnover rates.

Finally, the last main question of the survey was interest in an electronic document/workflow process for salary action requests. The response was 100-percent “Yes” with some suggestions such as timestamp approvals for staff to see, notifications through email/Teams/other option to let you know when things have been approved, and the idea of having automated process, flows and tasks, that show who is responsible for which part.

V. IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

The current HR process for reclassification requests and additional duties request were found to be appropriate based on feedback received from internal stakeholders at the agency, along with how other HR departments at state agencies perform these actions. While there were some variations between the different HR departments at state agencies, the approach was very similar across the contacts that responded to the survey.

After determining that the current process flow for reclassification and additional duties request is appropriate, it was suggested from other HR departments from state agencies and internal agency stakeholders that having a modern means of tracking the workflow of actions would be beneficial for themselves, and others, while also having easy-to-gather data available publicly for agency use. The ability to know when a request is in the queue to be reviewed and processed by the Office of Human Resources without having to

call, email, or message a staff member gives real-time data that is readily available for those who need it. This can help managers and supervisors track processes that could speed up the ability to perform other related tasks such as scheduling interviews if it's a reclassification request related to a position that needs to be posted for recruitment.

Implementation of a modern workflow for these processes will involve several action steps:

1. Communicate with agency stakeholders upcoming updates to HR processes
2. Establish electronic document for action requests to be submitted
3. Utilize automation workflow to allow for electronic approvals of electronic documents
4. Collect data from electronic documentation and workflows to promote data points on internal agency dashboards
5. Follow-up with agency stakeholders after set period to analyze process

There can be obstacles and methods to overcome when looking at this implementation of modern workflow. One such obstacle would be resources needed to establish electronic document and automation workflow. Limited time and resources within the Office of Human Resources may require reliance on other areas within the agency that may be limited in their own availability to help. Another obstacle to overcome would be the new way to request these types of HR processes to be performed. In a general sense, if there are usually a change in a process, there is often resistance from others who

utilize it that won't be up to the task. Ensuring engagement and involvement from these types of stakeholders could help alleviate those issues.

A timeframe for updates to this HR process with electronic documentation and automation workflow could vary based on availability of resources, testing, and buy-in from stakeholders. Realistically, this method of approach should take up to six months from inception to completion to be able to implement this process. This would include development of both the electronic documentation and automation workflow, creation of instructions to promote ease of use for the process, communication to agency stakeholders about process, testing of the process with a pilot group, and final implementation of the process.

Costs for this process would be minimal as SCDES can utilize Microsoft Office 365 products. There are various Microsoft applications that can be used to establish this process. The electronic documentation could be done through applications such as Microsoft Forms or Microsoft Lists. The method chosen could then be connected to Microsoft Power Automate to allow for electronic approvals based on an established workflow of information that is connected to the original source of information. This approach provides notifications through email and Teams to give appropriate approvals. Once the data has been entered and approved, you would then be able to pull that information into Microsoft PowerBI for an analytic approach to actions for data decision making such as number of a certain set of actions performed, length of time to complete, and so forth.

Integrating this process electronically seemingly would be a benefit to all but ensuring that there is an approach that allows for it to be referenced in our standard operating procedures. We would need to follow the steps listed above but also giving it an appropriate assessment, documentation of the steps and responsibilities, varied training to staff, putting the new procedures into practice and finally, reviewing and updating the effectiveness of the process and adjusting as necessary. These key steps would help integrate this new process into the workflows and processes of the agency.

VI. Evaluation Method

In evaluating the effectiveness of the new HR processes, we would need to do several various ways to assess the effectiveness of the workflow:

1. Identify measurables
2. Collect Data
3. Analyze Results
4. Establish Benchmarking
5. Regular check-in with key stakeholders
6. Continuous Improvement

Looking back, the reason for this project was to determine whether the current HR process makes sense and see if there are means to improve it with data tracking capabilities. This would be why, starting out, we'd want to make sure to identify the key measurables such as the average time it takes to complete the request and number of errors or issues in the process. Once that information is readily available, you can begin to

collect that data and start to analyze the results. Reviewing what has been collected can help establish trends, successes, and potential areas of improvement.

Next, we would like to take those findings and see if there are means to establish benchmarking with other agencies, other states, or industry standards. If we know how others may operate, it can help us determine if our methods are on track with others who do similar work. After that, we would make sure to follow up with our key stakeholders to determine whether they have any areas for enhancement, improvement, challenges or suggestions. Regular feedback can bridge the gap in hesitancy towards the new process while engaging others in the process. Understanding how others feel and think about this process can help both parties.

Finally, after feedback and information gathering, we want to review and see if there is a need for continuous improvement to the processes. If a stakeholder has a suggestion on the workflow or a key metric they think would be relevant, then making an adjustment to the process would help show flexibility by the Office of Human Resources with this process and allows for others to be a part of improving how we operate. We are a product of the agency employees that we serve, therefore their involvement ultimately creates synergy for our department in all areas.

VII. Summary and Recommendation

As a new agency, there is an opportunity to take from our predecessor agency and see what may work and not work for us. The Office of Human Resources has been given the ability by the agency leadership to determine the best approach to every process that we

have. Being able to review these HR processes during this time has afforded us the ability to make sure that how we operate functions appropriately.

We were able to determine that the HR processes for reclassification and additional duties requests are appropriate for SCDES. Other agencies have a similar approach but for our agency, what we do makes the most sense. After determining these processes work, recommendations to improve it is warranted based on the feedback gathered from others. It was found from survey respondents that having key metrics available on an agency dashboard was unanimous across the board. This not only would help drive decision making but also showcase the volume of work that the Office of Human Resources performs. It is often overlooked by employees as to what all may occur in support services areas such as the Office of Human Resources. Allowing the agency to see a small part of what we do can help build more of an appreciation for our department in the long run.

Ultimately, though, we want to ensure that customer service remains our focus and top approach. The ability to adapt, expand, and improve our processes is one that gives me excitement for the future for the Office of Human Resources as I believe we have a team that can manage process improvements such as this while continuing with its excellent customer service focus that has been there since the beginning. SCDES is focused on effective delivery of services across the entire agency. The Office of Human Resources has the same mentality and approach and leveraging these resources can go a long way in establishing the future for many years to come.

References

1. HRBrain. (2024, January 24). Evaluating HR Function: A Methodical Approach.

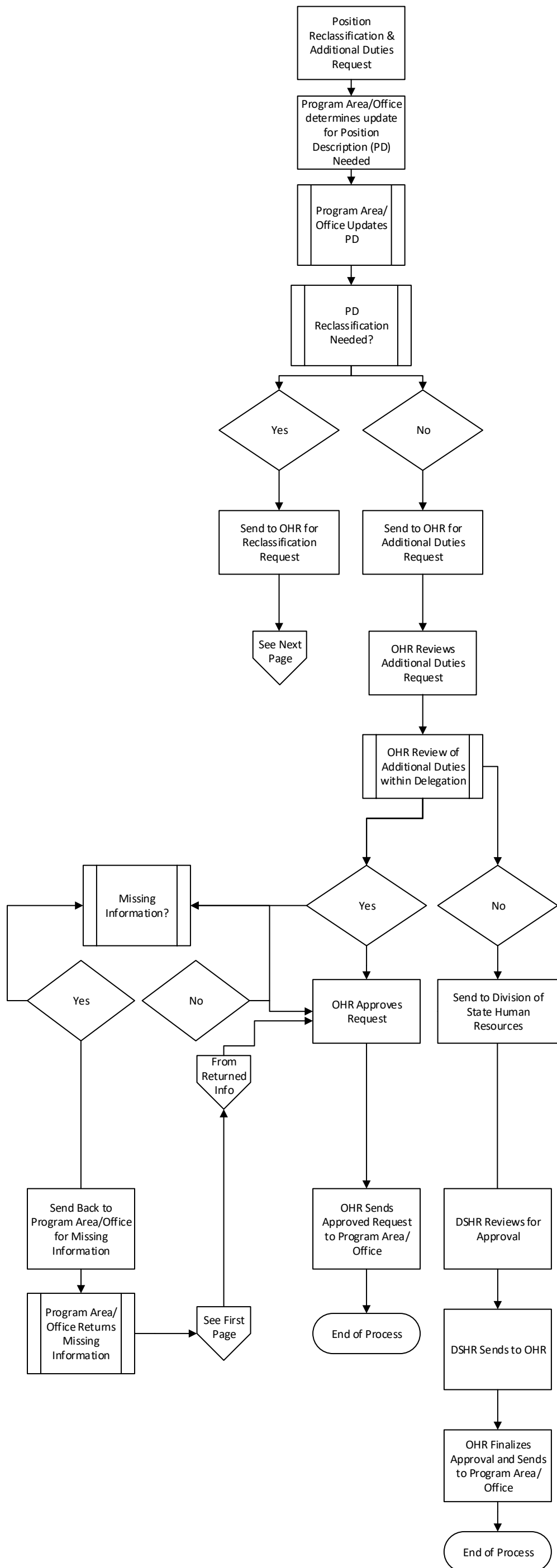
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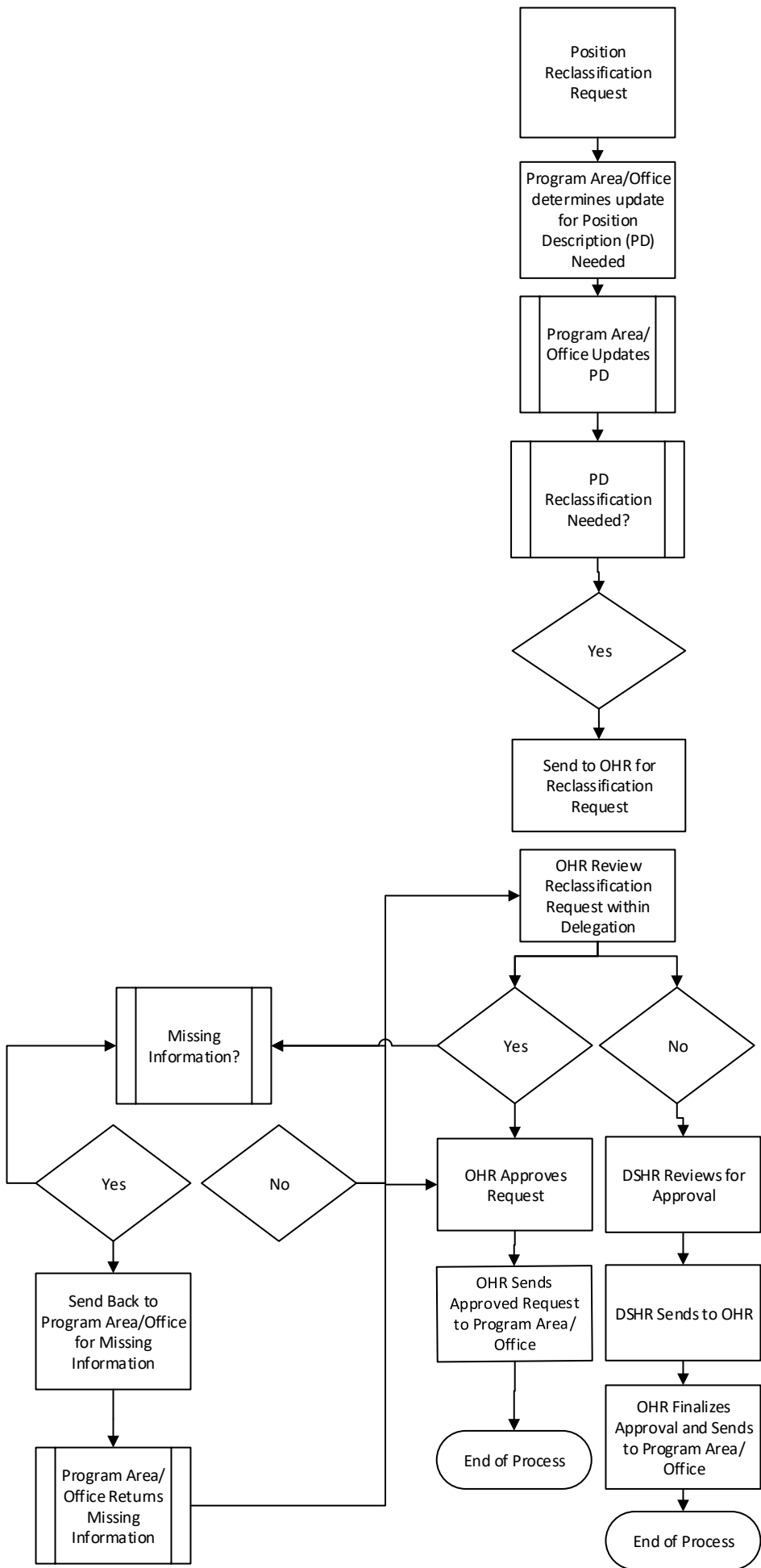
Appendices

Appendix A: Microsoft Visio HR Processes Workflow

Appendix B: Microsoft Forms Survey for HR departments at other state agencies

Appendix C: Microsoft Forms Survey for internal agency stakeholders





HR Reclassification and Additional Duties Process Survey

This survey aims to gather information about how your agency performs reclassification requests and additional duties requests. Your responses will be used for data collection efforts for a CPM project related to assessment of HR processes and room for potential improvements. No agency information will be shared in the project and this survey is being sent anonymously.

* Required

Reclassification Process

1. Does your agency have a formal reclassification process? *

Yes

No

2. Will you briefly describe the steps involved in your reclassification process? *

Information to include: how reclassification is submitted to HR for review; whether its paper/PDF/electronic with signature approvals; what HR does with requests once received and approved

3. On average, how long does it take to approve a reclassification request? *

0-1 day

2-3 days

4-5 days

5 days or more

Unable to answer

4. What improvements to the reclassification process would you like to see? *

5. What challenges do you face in the reclassification process? *

Additional Duties Process

6. Does your agency have a formal Additional Duties process?

Yes

No

7. Will you briefly describe the steps involved in your additional duties process? *

Information to include: how additional duties is submitted to HR for review; whether its paper/PDF/electronic with signature approvals; what HR does with requests once received and approved

8. On average, how long does it take to approve an additional duties request? *

0-1 day

2-3 days

4-5 days

5 days or more

Unable to answer

9. What improvements to the additional duties process would you like to see? *

10. What challenges do you face in the reclassification process? *

Metrics and Electronic Process

11. How do you provide key HR metrics to your agency?

- Internal Website/Dashboard
- Automated Reports
- Ad Hoc Reports (as requested)
- N/A

12. Do you have an electric approval process for HR actions such as reclassifications and additional duties request?

- Yes
- No

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HR Process Improvement Survey

This survey aims to gather information about how you feel about current HR processes and whether you feel improvements should be made and how. This information is being collected for a CPM project and the data will be included in the project. No personal information will be shared and the survey is being sent anonymously.

* Required

Current HR Process

1. On a scale of 1-5, how do you rate the current HR process for reclassification and additional duties requests? *

1	2	3	4	5
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2. What do you like about the current HR process for reclassification and additional duties requests? *

3. What do you dislike about the current HR process for reclassification and additional duties requests? *

4. Do you have any suggestions for the current HR process for reclassification and additional duties requests? *

Metrics and Electronic Process

5. Would you be interested in having HR-related metrics readily available for review? *

Yes

No

6. If you answered yes, what metrics do you feel would be relevant to have? *

7. Where would you like to view HR-related metrics, if available? *

Internal SharePoint Page

Reports

Other

8. Are you interested in an electronic document/workflow process for salary action requests? *

Yes

No

9. If yes, do you have a suggestion or process that you feel would be most beneficial to you? *

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