



New Report: Amtrak's Human Resources department faces challenges supporting workforce growth plans

For Immediate Release

December 9, 2021

WASHINGTON – Amtrak's Human Resources department does not have sufficient leadership or staff to effectively recruit, screen, hire, and onboard new employees, which will likely hinder the company's plans to add 2,500 to 3,500 employees this fiscal year, an Amtrak Office of Inspector General report released Thursday found.

After reducing service and downsizing its workforce due to the pandemic, Amtrak now expects to build its current workforce by as much as 21 percent from June 2021 through October 2022 as pandemic restrictions are lifted and travel demand returns. The recently enacted Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act will further increase the company's need to add managers and workers with highly specialized skills in the company's Engineering, Mechanical, and Transportation departments to oversee and execute high-priority capital projects, the report said.

As of October 2021, however, 28 of 64 positions in the HR department's talent acquisition group—the team dedicated to planning, recruiting, hiring, and onboarding all the company's management and agreement workers—were vacant. As a result, HR staff are taking on workloads double the industry standard, leading to burnout, causing hiring delays, and diverting managers' attention from more strategic priorities, the report said. Additionally, several managers in the HR department told OIG auditors that they or one of their colleagues are considering leaving if workload conditions do not improve.

Amtrak also faces difficulty competing for highly qualified talent acquisition candidates with other companies that offer more opportunities for remote work and greater schedule flexibility, the report said. In October 2021, three of five leadership positions in the talent acquisition group were vacant.

The company is reviewing options that could help address compensation disparities and make recruiting for HR executive positions easier. It has not, however, explored and developed meaningful solutions to address other competitive barriers, which could risk prolonged gaps in several key HR leadership functions, the report said.

The HR department has a plan to fill its vacant positions by taking a staggered approach over the next six months. During this time, Amtrak's chief human resources officer said the talent acquisition group will prioritize filling company positions needed to restore and sustain train

operations, and that it will likely take several months before the HR department can support hiring for infrastructure projects.

The OIG identified other issues that could negatively impact Amtrak's ability to complete its hiring plan to include the HR department's reliance on a "time-consuming and error-prone" manual process to handle requests for new positions. HR officials estimate that by the time position requests reach the talent acquisition group, 60 to 70 percent have errors ranging from incorrect pay grades to missing information such as position descriptions. The company recently restarted a project to streamline the position approval process, and HR officials told OIG auditors that they expect to deploy the new technology tool within a few months.

Additionally, recruiters in the talent acquisition group manually review hundreds of resumes the company receives for each position. Since 2019, the HR department has requested a candidate screening tool, which can automate some aspects of this process, but company leadership has not prioritized it, the report said. During the OIG's audit, the HR department developed a plan to have a candidate screening tool in place for use by February 2022.

The OIG made two recommendations that, once implemented, would better position Amtrak to find and hire qualified candidates in time to meet its staffing needs. More information is included in the full report which can be downloaded on the OIG's website:

<https://direc.to/h5a2>.

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