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# Report on Experimental Selection Projects

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Submitted to  
Joint Subcommittee on Employee  
Relations  
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DOER Department  
of Employee  
Relations 



## **REPORT ON EXPERIMENTAL SELECTION PROJECTS**

### **M.S. 43A.04, Subdivision 9. Experimental or research projects.**

The commissioner of employee relations may conduct experimental or research projects designed to improve recruitment, selection, referral, or appointment processes for the filling of state classified positions.

The commissioner shall meet and confer with the affected exclusive bargaining representative of state employees concerning the design and implementation of experimental and research projects under this subdivision.

Any provision in sections 43A.09 to 43A.15, associated personnel rules adopted under subdivision 3, or administrative procedures established under subdivision 4, is waived for the purposes of these projects. The number of appointments under this subdivision may not exceed five percent of the total number of appointments in the preceding fiscal year.

The commissioner shall report by September 1 to the legislative commission on employee relations the results of the experimental research projects conducted in the preceding fiscal year.

### **Experiments conducted during fiscal year 2002**

The Department of Employee Relations, in cooperation with state agencies, conducted five selection experiments during fiscal year 2002.

- Waiver of eligible list or exam scoring
  - Agency Affirmative Action Manager (page 3)
  - Director Statewide Assessment (page 4)
- Multiple methods of filling vacancies in a single class, along with alternate public notice
  - Revenue Tax Specialist Senior (page 5)
- Use of an unscored written test and position-specific search criteria
  - Minnesota Office Specialist Test (MOST) (page 7)
- Qualifying for transfer/demotion through on-the-job training and experience
  - Supervisory positions in the Middle Management Association (page 10)

### **Summary:**

The use of the experimental examination process was greatly reduced as more classes were filled using the pilot Multi-source Recruitment and Selection process. That pilot incorporated many of the processes that had been explored in past years using the

statutory experimental examination language. The Department of Employee Relations also ceased administering written examinations in February, 2002. It upgraded its applicant tracking and resume-scanning, skill-matching software to Resumix 6.0, and added new web-based tools which allowed managers and Human Resources professionals to submit requisitions, advertise vacancies, track applicants, and review resumes on-line in March, 2002. These additional changes reduced the need for additional experiments under the statute. The MMA experiment continued in concept in their bargaining agreement, but still had no appointments.

**Costs of producing this report:**

As required by Laws of 1994, Chapter 559, the estimated cost of preparing this report is \$500.

**Experiments 1-2** Waiver of eligible list or exam scoring

**Description:** A “private sector” process was utilized to screen applicants, omitting formal scoring, notices, eligible list and certification

**Experiment 1:** Agency Affirmative Action Manager

**Date begun:** May 4, 2001

**Participating Agency:** Health

**Appointments:** 1

**Explanation:** The purpose of this experiment was to allow the agency greater flexibility in recruiting due to concerns about the current availability of applicants. The experiment consisted of announcing the vacancy by identifying only preferred qualifications without defining minimum qualifications. Only the applicants with the most directly-related training, experience, knowledge and skills would be considered. No score would be assigned, and no eligible list would be established.

**Results/Analysis:** The agency received 82 applications which were reviewed based on the applicants’ knowledge, skills and abilities. The top ten applicants were offered interviews. Eight interviews were conducted, and two applicants were invited back for a second interview. An appointment was made on October 8, 2001.

**Assessment:** At the time the exam was conducted, the agency was very pleased with the process and the applicant pool. They received a large number of qualified applicants to consider and did not have to spend hours scoring applications. The process allowed them greater flexibility in recruitment, as well as considering a variety of knowledge, skills and abilities of applicants without applying a minimum requirement. It allowed the agency to hire the best qualified applicant for their position.

**Experiment 2:** Director of Statewide Assessment  
**Date begun:** September, 2000  
**Participating Agency:** Children, Families & Learning (now Education)  
**Appointments:** 1

**Explanation:** The Department of Children, Families and Learning requested experimental exam status to fill the Director of Statewide Assessment. The exam was opened in September, 2000. The purpose was to advertise and recruit unconstrained by eligible list, rules of certification and announcement deadlines associated with publishing in the *Minnesota Career Opportunities Bulletin*. The agency was to advertise nationally, using methods such as web site posting, e-mail distribution of a vacancy notice, and print advertisement. They would then review resumes and responses, and select finalists for an interview. The agency anticipated that the pool of qualified applicants would be small.

**Results/Analysis:** The agency initially placed ads in October and November, 2000, in the Minneapolis and the St. Paul papers, the *Spokesman*, *Women's Press*, *Native American Press*, *Education Week*, *New York Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, and *Chronicle of Higher Education*. Ads were additionally placed via e-mails or web sites with 42 State Departments of Education, 45 State Universities, the Council of Chief State School Offices, 19 State Assessment Directors, American Psychological Association, National Association of Test Directors, AERA website, America's Job Bank, Monster.com, CFL HR website, MN Jobs website, NCME website. The agency's initial nationwide recruiting effort produced 31 applicants, six telephone interviews, and one on-site interview invitation (not kept), and therefore did not result in an appointment.

In January, 2001 they placed ads in additional publications and increased their advertising through national web sites. In February, they started working with Harry Bruel of Personnel Decisions International. He helped the agency redesign their brochure, design supplementary correspondence and develop a targeted recruitment campaign. They identified numerous organizations in targeted fields, and obtained membership lists from them. They began a letter writing campaign that sent letters and brochures to 18,255 individuals throughout the United States and some foreign countries. As a result, 53 people expressed interest. After a resume review, 38 were referred to the manager. An interview team conducted twelve telephone interviews to narrow the field to three. These applicants were brought to CFL for an interview. Finally, in January 2002, one person was hired.

**Assessment:** In spite of the fact that it took 16 months to fill the position, the agency felt that the experiment allowed them to respond more quickly to individual applicants than if they had used the normal examination process. Other states attempting to hire similar positions were experiencing the same problems in filling their positions because of the unique knowledge, skills, and abilities needed for positions like these.

**Experiment 3:** Multiple methods of filling vacancies in a single class  
Alternate public notice

**Description:** The selection process for out-of-state positions was done differently than that for in-state positions in the same class, utilizing the Multi-source Recruitment and Selection pilot as well as out-of-state newspapers for public notice rather than the state's *Minnesota Career Opportunities Bulletin*.

**Date begun:** June, 2001

**Participating Agency:** Revenue

**Appointments:** 6

**Explanation:** The Department of Revenue has several out-of-state Revenue Tax Specialist Senior positions. Traditional public notice in the *Minnesota Career Opportunities Bulletin* would not reach out-of-state audiences. Additionally, persons in this class are traditionally evaluated by a written examination. Administering a written examination to multiple applicants out-of-state would be cost-prohibitive. The Department of Revenue therefore requested approval to fill the vacancies using newspaper advertising in the specific cities, and to use the pilot Multi-source Recruitment and Selection process for just these positions rather than the traditional written examination for the class. That pilot allowed Revenue to assess whether or not applicants met minimum experience and training requirements without using the written examination. In addition, the positions were posted on the Revenue web site for bidding purposes.

**Results/Analysis:** Positions in Chicago, Denver, New Jersey/New York, and Washington, D.C. were filled by current Revenue employees either through the contractual recall from layoff process or the bidding process. The employee who filled the New Jersey/New York position elected to return to her previous position after two weeks, leaving a vacancy which was subsequently filled by an intergovernmental transfer with a State of Iowa employee.

**Boston:** An advertisement was placed in the *Boston Globe* on June 24, 2001. Nineteen applicants responded, 14 of which met the minimum qualifications for the position. Eleven were interviewed and five withdrew. Two vacancies were filled, one on August 27, 2001 and one on September 9, 2001.

**Dallas:** An advertisement was placed in the *Dallas Morning News* on June 24, 2001. Twenty-four applicants responded, 15 of which met minimum qualifications, and 11 were interviewed. Two vacancies were filled, one on August 26, 2001, and one on September 9, 2001.

Milwaukee: An advertisement was placed in the *Milwaukee Journal* on August 5, 2001. Nine applicants responded, eight met minimum qualifications, and six were interviewed. One vacancy was filled on October 1, 2001.

Seattle: An advertisement was placed in the *Seattle Times/Post Intelligencer* on June 24, 2001. Eleven applicants responded, ten met the minimum qualifications. Nine applicants were interviewed, and one vacancy was filled on October 1, 2001.

**Assessment:** The search process for these positions was part of the Revenue 2001 Initiative Hiring Bill. As a part of this bill, tax specialists who completed field audits were to have their assessments recorded for two years. The initiative period began on July 1, 2001, and because the legislative session ended on June 29, 2001, the department was under very tight timelines to fill the positions so that their work could be documented under this initiative. The supervisors were pleased with the hiring process and the very qualified applicants that were attracted to these vacancies. All applicants felt the process was equitable and fair, and no complaints were received from either applicants or the union.

**Experiment 4:** Use of an unscored written test and position-specific search criteria [Minnesota Office Specialist Test (MOST)]

**Description:** Applicants take an unscored written test to qualify for a single applicant pool used for vacancies in four clerical classes. Hiring agencies designate position-specific search criteria for referrals from the pool. All applicants meeting the criteria are referred in random order.

**Date Begun:** December 18, 1998

**Job Classes:** Office Specialist, Central Services Administrative Specialist, Customer Services Specialist, Office and Administrative Specialist

**Participating Agencies:** Statewide

**Explanation:** The State and AFSCME, Council 6 (the exclusive representative for the State's clerical employees) cooperatively developed a plan to consolidate clerical jobs into fewer job classes, each encompassing a broad range of duties and qualifications. In July 1998, several thousand clerical employees moved from some 50 clerical job classes into 13 new consolidated classes.

On December 18, 1998, a single application and selection process was announced for the four classes at the first two levels of the new consolidated clerical series. While this was an open competitive announcement (the public, as well as current employees, could apply), information was maintained on whether applicants are state employees and, if so, where they are employed. This allowed agencies to receive referrals limited to state employees or only employees of their own agency, as well as open competitive referrals.

**Process:** Applicants submitted one application and took one test to be eligible for referral to all four classes. Several sections of the written test assessing skills determined to be essential for all types of clerical work (speed and accuracy, math, filing) were required. Depending on time and interests, applicants took additional sections assessing more specialized skills such as proofreading and coding. Finally, all applicants responded to a set of Skill/Interest Inventory questions to indicate their interest in and qualifications for particular types of work. Examples include "I have at least six months of full-time training and/or experience with one or more word processing packages and I would accept jobs that involve word processing as a major activity," and "I would accept jobs that involve dealing with customers/clients in person as a major activity (e.g., receptionist)."

While the written test was unscored, applicants were required to correctly answer a certain number of questions in the required sections. This was intended only as a

minimal screen for qualifications common to all jobs so the cutoff was intentionally low (59 correct out of 110 items) to eliminate just those applicants with little likelihood of success in clerical work. In lieu of scores, applicants received a customized notice stating their number of items correct in each section of the test and explaining the referral process and other special procedures. Those who did not qualify received information about their number of items correct in comparison to the cutoff. Under the standard retesting policy, individuals could retake the written test every six months to try to improve the number correct or to take additional sections. Test instructions and sample questions were available on the DOER web page and in hard copy to help applicants prepare. Applicants in the pool were able to update Skill/Interest Inventory responses at any time without reapplying or retesting.

As vacancies occurred, agencies searched the pool for applicants whose qualifications, interests and availability (e.g., employment condition and location) matched the position. Agencies used the number of items correct on one or more sections of the written test, skill/interest responses or a combination of both. For example, an agency with a word processing vacancy might look for applicants who had high numbers of items correct in the proofreading and spelling sections and selected word processing on the Skill/Interest Inventory. Agencies could also administer additional testing to screen for essential qualifications and verify Skill/Interest Inventory responses.

Everyone in the referral pool who met the search criteria was referred to the agency. Names appeared in random order. In addition to the usual information such as name and address, agencies received a report showing each referral's number of items correct on sections of the test. At first agencies did not receive applications in an effort to move the process along more quickly. Eventually, the Department of Employee Relations completed an imaging project that allowed agencies to view applications of all certified eligibles on the Internet as soon as the certification process was completed.

In addition to detailed instructions on requesting referrals and a form to document search criteria, agencies received a variety of information to assist in developing criteria. This included a description of the written test content areas and Skill/Interest Inventory items; the content areas and relevant skill/interest items for former class titles that became part of the new classes; the mean, median and range of items correct that applicants had achieved on each section of the written test; and the number of applicants who selected each Skill/Interest Inventory item.

**Results/Analysis:** Through March 4, 2002, all clerical positions in AFSCME, Unit 6 were filled using this process. Effective March 4, 2002, we converted the selection process for clerical positions to the Multi-Source Recruitment and Selection Pilot and all positions were then filled under the pilot. This allowed agencies to fill all clerical positions based on position qualifications utilizing our resume-scanning, skill-based selection system. The written Minnesota Office Specialist Test was discontinued and agencies were allowed to use any appropriate assessments to determine if applicants had the required minimum qualifications for the position.

**Assessment:** The number of persons who failed to report when scheduled to take the MOST test was over 50%. This reflected the competitive labor market for clerical employees. Many applicants were able to obtain positions in the private sector before they were actually scheduled to take the examination. As we moved into our pilot program, we were able to reduce the time lags that caused us to lose good applicants. Overall, the results of the MOST were positive, but were greatly improved upon by moving to the Multi-Source Recruitment and Selection pilot.

**Experiment 5:** Qualifying for transfer/demotion through on-the-job training and experience (Supervisory positions in the Middle Management Association)

**Description:** Instead of passing the standard selection process for the class, supervisors on notice of permanent layoff may demonstrate their qualifications to transfer or demote to a new job class through a trial period of up to 18 months in the job.

**Date Begun:** November 5, 1993

**Participating Organizations:** Middle Management Association and all state agencies

**Number of Appointments:** 1 since November 1993

**Explanation:** During negotiations for the 1993-1995 contract, the Middle Management Association, representing state supervisors, raised concerns about the ability of its members to locate other state employment when displaced by layoff. As agencies reorganize to flatten organizations, one group particularly affected is supervisors. The Association expressed concern about what it sees as a trend toward a smaller number of supervisors. At the same time supervisors are being impacted by downsizing and restructuring, the lack of new supervisory positions and the low turnover among supervisors mean those facing layoff have less opportunity for placement in another state position.

In order to address those concerns, the Department of Employee Relations and the Middle Management Association jointly developed this experiment to allow additional flexibility in placing supervisors who might otherwise be laid off. This was the first experiment designed cooperatively by the department and an exclusive representative. The experiment was subsequently extended for the 1995-1997, 1997-1999, and 1999-2001 contracts.

Under several of the agreements between the State and its exclusive representatives, employees notified of layoff are eligible to claim vacancies in other job classes and agencies. However, to be considered for the position, the employee must receive a passing score on the existing examination for the job class. Under this experiment, supervisors notified of permanent layoff may express interest in transfer/demotion to a vacancy for which they do not qualify through the normal selection process. (If the supervisor is able to qualify, the normal provisions of the contract apply instead.)

The agency with the vacancy compares the supervisor's qualifications to their needs and the requirements of the position. Based on this review, the agency determines whether the supervisor might reasonably demonstrate the necessary knowledge, skills and abilities

for the vacancy through a period of experience and training in the position. If so, the agency may place the supervisor in the position for a period of up to 18 months. During that time, the hiring agency is expected to provide experience and training to allow the supervisor to develop and demonstrate qualifications for the job. The agency is also responsible for evaluating and documenting the supervisor's possession of the knowledge, skills and abilities essential for the position. If the agency determines that the supervisor has demonstrated these during the trial period, the supervisor may be appointed to the vacancy on an unlimited basis. If, during the 18 months, the agency finds that the supervisor is not successfully demonstrating qualifications for the position, the supervisor is placed on layoff from the original agency and job class.

**Results/Analysis:** Information about the experiment was included in the 1993-1995, 1995-1997, 1997-1999, 1999-2001, and 2001-2003 MMA agreements to make supervisors aware of this new alternative. Materials explaining the experiment and encouraging agency participation were distributed to all state agencies.

In the first fiscal year of the experiment (FY 94), no appointments were made. One appointment occurred at the end of FY 95. The supervisor, on notice of layoff from an accounting job, accepted an experimental appointment to a supervisory vacancy in the information technology field. After just over two months on the job, the supervisor decided he preferred to remain in his previous field and subsequently accepted demotion to a supervisory accounting position in another agency. There have been no further appointments under this experiment.

**Assessment:** The experiment has produced only one appointment since November of 1993. However, the number of permanent layoffs among supervisors has limited opportunities for its use. From the time of the distribution of the procedures through the end of the first fiscal year, there were no permanent layoffs in the MMA bargaining unit. Any supervisors notified of layoff were able to locate other positions within state government. During FY 95, there were four layoffs among supervisors where the individual was unsuccessful in locating another state position. In FY 96, agencies laid off 17 employees in MMA, 18 in FY 97, nine in FY 98, three in FY 99, six in FY 00, one in FY 01 and 18 in FY 02.

While initial use of this experiment by state agencies had been disappointing, we continued it for yet another biennium, especially in view of continuing layoffs. The approach represents a win/win situation for both the State and the employee and offers the opportunity for significant savings to the State if we can avert a layoff. When permanent layoffs occur, we will continue to encourage agencies and supervisors to explore the use of this alternative.

