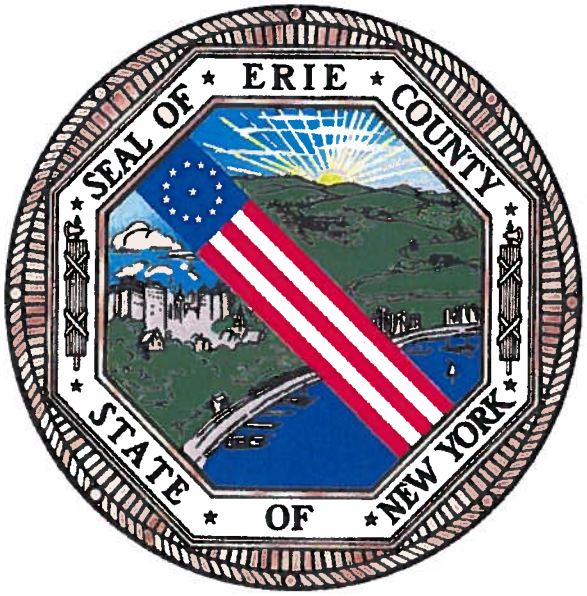
SEPTEMBER 2013

MEMORANDUM

DISSEMINATION OF EMPLOYMENT AND CAREER OPPORTUNITIES WITH ERIE COUNTY AND AFFILIATED ENTITIES



STEFAN I. MYCHAJLIW
ERIE COUNTY COMPTROLLER

COUNTY OF ERIE

STEFAN I. MYCHAJLIW
COMPTROLLER

September 19, 2013

Honorable Mark C. Poloncarz
Erie County Executive
92 Franklin Street
Buffalo, NY 14202

Dear County Executive Poloncarz:

We have gathered information pertaining to the manner in which employment and career opportunities with Erie County (and affiliated agencies and entities) are shared with the public. Our goal is to strengthen and streamline the job application process in order to ensure every person in Erie County, regardless of political connections, has a fair chance to apply for open positions in county government.

OBJECTIVE:

In an effort to serve our community as best we can, we want to help the County identify any shortcomings of the current process, maximize an effective means of communicating to job seekers pursuing employment in Western New York, and offer constructive recommendations on how to make the job application process open, honest, and transparent.

OVERVIEW:

The traditional bulletin board at a Human Resources department or other departmental office provides extremely limited viewing opportunities to those who are not (yet) employees. Factors limiting such viewing by prospective employees include:

1) They must physically travel to the office
2) They must inquire and search for the location of the Personnel office
3) They may need to search for other departments for their postings
4) Some of these destinations may have limited hours of accessibility
5) The viewed information is subject to change at any moment

For these reasons, the Erie County Personnel Department implemented a new policy on January 1, 2011, whereby ALL civil service examination announcements would be available exclusively online at:

www.erie.gov/employment/index.asp

ERIE COUNTY OFFICE BUILDING • 95 FRANKLIN STREET • ROOM 1100 • BUFFALO, NEW YORK • 14202-3972
TELEPHONE: (716) 858-8400 • FAX: (716) 858-6195 • INTERNET: www.erie.gov

This policy, however, does not apply to part-time, seasonal, and other non-civil service job openings. Therefore, such postings continue to be managed on a department by department basis.

FINDING #1: Continued use of physical bulletin boards:

Whereas each Department of Erie County maintains a bulletin board informing current employees of their rights with respect to unemployment and workers' compensation benefits; and information regarding job safety and anti-discrimination rules; there are only a handful of Departments that physically post job opportunities:

1) Personnel Department – hallway of 6th floor, Rath Building
2) Department of Health – hallway of 9th floor, Rath Building
3) Sheriff's Office – 10 Delaware Avenue
4) Dept. of Public Works – Room 1414, Rath Building
5) Probation Office – 1 Niagara Plaza (Courthouse)
6) Dept. of Senior Services – 13th floor, Rath Building
7) Downtown Public Library – Washington St, 2nd floor

Erie County's Personnel Department maintains more than one bulletin board on the 6th floor of the Rath Building. These are updated often. As of June 27, 2013, these boards included 12 postings, including several for ECC and several for ECMC.

Prior to the creation of the World Wide Web, posting open employment opportunities on bulletin boards may have been the only option in which Erie County communicated. In our modern age where social media can be used as a timely communications tool, posting jobs on bulletin boards is about as efficient as drawing on a cave wall. It's the dark ages. Erie County should enter the modern technological age and maximize the Internet and social media to share job opportunities.

We recommend it should also be done on-line with a "one-stop shopping" ability for consumers to learn about civil service exams and employment opportunities. We should not force consumers to navigate on their own through countless department websites. Finding this important information should be quick, easy, and efficient for the people we serve. People should not have to go on an on-line "fishing expedition" with the hope of learning information. This could frustrate the customers we are supposed to help.

FINDING #2: Lack of ease in finding online postings for Erie County jobs:

At Erie County's website, there are at least three different locations where job opportunities are presented, unbeknown to the first time viewer:

1) On the right-hand side of the home page, under the heading "News", positions are sometimes listed here (four were listed during June).

2) On the left-hand side of the home page, if someone were to, perchance, click on certain "Elected Officials" sites, in some cases a button labeled "Employment" or "Employment Opportunities" leads to a limited number of departmental opportunities (i.e. Offices of the District Attorney, the County Clerk, and the Comptroller).

3) On the right-hand side of the home page, under "News" the button "New Civil Service Exams" will get you to the Personnel Department's page. Alternatively, at the very top of the erie.gov home page, the button for "Living in Erie County" leads you to a list that includes "Civil Service Job Opportunities"; which, in turn, leads you to the Personnel Department's page; which, in turn, leads you to "Jobs"; which, in turn, allows you select from various subgroupings.

Clearly, no one searching the web can easily locate ALL of the job opportunities available with Erie County.

FINDING #3: Outdated information of online postings for Erie County:

It is often the case that information that is no longer relevant is left on the website for several months. This can frustrate the viewer, and cause them to wonder whether or not the website is maintained on a regular basis. For example:

1) Under the heading Erie County News on the home page, a posting for Assistant Architect for DPW that was to end June 7, 2013, was still present well into July.

2) The Personnel Department's "Jobs" page shows information under "Pending Exams" that is merely whether or not certain February 9, 2013, exams have been cancelled. This information is six months old, and entirely irrelevant.

3) Prior to the Personnel Department updating "Civil Service Announcement Updates" on July 26, 2013, this page simply listed postings that had application deadlines of May 15, 2013. Again, old information irrelevant to the viewer.

It should be noted that the right-hand side of the "Jobs" page has a section where people can sign-up to be notified by e-mail when new exams are added to the website.

FINDING #4: Online postings for Erie County are NOT contemporaneous:

It is often the case that vacancies posted on the bulletin boards located outside the Personnel Department office don't get added to the Personnel Department's online page.

Specifically:

1) Seven Erie County departmental job postings that we observed on the physical bulletins board on June 27, 2013, were not posted online. These postings were comprised of two promotional positions and five open/competitive positions.

2) Sixteen positions newly posted on the bulletin boards on June 28, and July 1, 2013, were not added to the Personnel Department's web page.

The Personnel Department's web page "Jobs for the Public – Open Ended", continues to list 20 job titles for a variety of entities (including Boces#1, ECMC, Public Library, Town of Tonawanda, Terrace View Long-term Care Center, and the Department of Health). This list has gone unchanged for at least five weeks subsequent to our first viewing on June 26, 2013.

FINDING #5: Online postings by other affiliated Entities:

1) **Erie County Water Authority**
Their website (www.ecwa.org) has a page for employment opportunities. Although the "Current Vacancies" page is empty, two listings were recently posted under "Jobs Pending Civil Service Examination." Resumes can be easily submitted online.

2) **Erie Community College**
Their website (www.ECC.edu) has a professional look to it. It does not mention employment on the home page. If you click on "About ECC" you are given the option of selecting "Jobs at ECC". Each User must create a log-in account in order to access the listings. The majority of the postings (57 of 65) are simply "Applications are being accepted for future vacancies" (i.e. for adjunct professors). There were just six part-time and two full-time vacancies listed as of June 27, 2013.

It was noted that several of these ECC positions did appear on the physical bulletin board of the Erie County Personnel Department in the Rath Building.

It was also noted that the ECC website does provide a hyperlink to the Erie County Personnel Department's web page.

3) **Erie County Medical Center Corporation**
The ECMC Human Resources department is investing a lot of time and effort into their online employment site. We commend ECMC for being pro-active in maximizing social media to promote open employment positions that is consumer friendly.

Similar to ECC, the ECMC website (www.ECMC.edu) has a home page that does not reference to employment. You must select "About ECMC" to find "Employment Opportunities".

Recently, in June, 2013, ECMC created a Facebook page called "ECMC Careers". This multimedia site fosters viewer interest by:

1) Posting pictures of facilities and employees.
2) Providing workplace tips for classes of employees (i.e. RNs).
3) Announcing upcoming events such as an Open House for prospects.
4) Commenting on the current season (i.e. summer), conveying an upbeat tone and a sense of community.
5) Providing a forum for questions and answers.

This Facebook page lists several brand new openings. These are hyperlinked to detailed job descriptions; which, in turn, are hyperlinked to an online application.

ECMC is clearly on the cutting edge of making the process easy for prospective employees.

A prospective employee must view a host of websites/ pages in order to do a thorough search. This can be a "hit or miss" process. As of June 30, 2013, the number of postings (i.e. number of job titles presented) was as follows:

Erie County Board of Elections	1
Buffalo and EC Public Libraries	2
County Clerk's office	2
District Attorney's office	5
Erie Community College:	
Current openings	8
For future consideration	57
ECMCC & Terrace View:	
Promotional	19
Open/ Competitive	76
Erie County Water Authority	2
Erie County Civil Service (includes some duplication of openings listed above)	20
	192

SUMMARY:

A prospective employee who is attempting to obtain information on job opportunities with Erie County and affiliated entities faces many challenges:

1) "Employment Opportunity" web pages are often buried beneath the respective entity's homepage, and are therefore difficult to locate.

2) There is no "one-stop" centralized online location listing all of these opportunities.

3) Currently, information found online isn't necessarily contemporaneous.

4) Physical bulletin boards, which have limits on their accessibility, continue to be Erie County's best source of information with respect to employment opportunities.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

More effort must be made by the Erie County Personnel Department to keep the content of the online information current. If, at some point, no civil service exams are scheduled, a message could be posted saying "Currently, no new exams are scheduled. Please sign up to be notified by e-mail whenever new announcements are made".

Secondly, perhaps all of the job opportunities listed on page 5 of this report ought to be presented in a centralized (online) location. We recommend utilizing this domain name to create a "one-stop shopping" experience for consumers:

ErieCountyWorks.com.

Here, departments or entities could be listed (i.e. alphabetically), giving the viewer a broad picture of the choices available. Each of these names would be hyperlinked to each entity's respective "jobs" website.

Simplicity and "one-stop shopping" is important for this reform initiative to be successful.

An Erie County Works Facebook page and Twitter account can be managed to communicate directly with job seekers in a timely manner.

Finally, it may be time to follow the lead of ECMC (as well as the Department of Senior Services) and deploy a more modern approach to communication by utilizing social media. A dedicated Facebook page could be established complete with pictures, banner announcements, video or audio clips, and an open forum for questions, comments, and replies. People that choose to "like" such a page will, in essence, be recommending the FB page to hundreds of their FB "friends". This feature could trigger a "spread the word" process that could ripple through the online community.

Minimal effort is needed to maintain an "Erie County Works" website, Facebook account, and Twitter page.

We both are fairly active on our respective personal Facebook profiles and Twitter pages. Maximizing technology and social media is something we are both familiar with. We can set a great example by collaboratively on improving our social media presence to help people find employment opportunities.

I look forward to working with you or the Department of Personnel to help turn this reform initiative into reality.

Sincerely,

Stefan I. Mychajliw
Erie County Comptroller

Cc: Erie County Legislature
Erie County Personnel Commissioner John Greenan
Erie County Fiscal Stability Authority