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Arizona county scores impressive savings with cooperative IT staffing contract

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Maricopa County is now well-staffed with skilled workers without the headaches

Recruiting skilled IT personnel used to be inefficient in Maricopa County, Ariz., (2015 population: 4.16 million). At one point, the county's former staffing firm was unable to fill 40 of 75 open positions, as well as 50 to 60 percent of open job orders. In addition, each county department had to identify, qualify and manage their own staffing vendor, which often was unwieldy. And, to top it off, each of the county's three temporary staffing contracts had dozens of vendors, each with their own requirements and billing systems.

The lack of dedicated vendor recruiting resources was one of the reasons open job slots remained unfilled. The county's lengthy background investigation process, which could take eight to 10 weeks to complete, also drove candidate fallout. Often, by the time candidates were finally approved, more than half of them had found other employment and were no longer available.

Maricopa County's Temporary Staffing Cooperative Agreement, a national cooperative contract through U.S. Communities, has generated first-year savings of $275,000. It has also provided an additional revenue stream of $40,000 per year, says Lisa Nash, the county's Procurement Services Administrator.

The agreement has streamlined hiring by consolidating multiple separate county-used temporary staffing contracts awarded by the state. It has also improved the temporary staffing procurement process by leveraging a single managed temporary staffing services provider.

ACRO Service Corp. won the competitively bid contract, which is titled "Temporary Personnel and Related Services." It is Contract Number: 11143. The contract's three-year initial term ran April 1, 2012 to March 31, 2015. The contract has been extended through March 31, 2018.

The county leverages the ACRO contract to staff IT technical resources. It uses both long-term contractors as well as highly skilled short-term resources available through the cooperative agreement, says Miguel Morales, director of the county's Project Management Office in the Office of Enterprise Technology. The pact, says Morales, "enables the county to ramp up work quickly to react to our ever-changing tasks and demands." He adds that the staffing solution helps the county keep its IT workforce leanand reduce overall operational costs.

"Regarding costs, we have done comparisons with the Vendor Statement of Work and we can be more flexible at a more economical cost using the ACRO contract for a 40-percent savings per resource rates," Morales tells GPN. When the county shifted to the cooperative staffing pact, it was able to convert 30-plus existing contract labor personnel into the ACRO program with no cost increase.

The cooperative pact also helped the county achieve an Immediate 10 percent savings on all new departmental

placements. This translates into $150,000 in annualized savings. The contract yielded another $125,000-plus in savings as original higher-priced
contract labor personnel transition out of the program.

With ACRO, the county has implemented a streamlined timekeeping process and on-boarding system that delivered an average cost reduction that is greater than $2.00 per hour on 40+ new contract labor personnel.

Being able to on-board prospective recruits quickly is key, Morales says. "The last segment of on-boarding a resource for us is a crucial element in our success—and we are successful in on-boarding resources at the right time. So refining that process [with ACRO] was one of the components that allows us to deliver a lot of work in a very short period of time."

Morales says by engaging new recruits early, the county and ACRO can begin the process of coming up with solutions. "We were able to work together and collaborate to come up with a work stream that was most efficient for both organizations."

With ACRO, the county has Implemented a system through which job candidates awaiting lengthy background investigations are placed on other short-term assignments at various county departments. This enables the county and ACRO to keep those candidates out of the employment marketplace. The tactic has cut candidate fallout losses by more than 50 percent. The vendor and the county work to have at least two candidates for each open talent vacancy.

For other governments that are considering using the ACRO-U.S. Communities staffing contract, Morales urges them to move nimbly. "Be prepared to make an offer quickly. Acquire all of the paperwork that you need to process internally before you engage ACRO. Have a good job description and have potential dates for interviews, preset conference calls and schedules with the interviewers. Most resources do not stay unemployed long."

It's important, says Morales, that government-hiring personnel fully understand their organization's on-boarding process and background-check procedures. "We have fully engaged ACRO in our processes so that they can assist from the contractors' perspective," he adds.

And the cooperative staffing pact can help in recruiting non-IT skills. Morales says his department uses it to contract skillsets in other disciplines like logistics, supply chain, accounting, as well as general laborers. He says contracting for the non-IT labor produces the same kinds of benefits that the county has achieved in its IT recruitment.

Morales believes more governments will start using cooperative staffing contracts in 2017 and beyond. "As we are asked as leaders to do the same with less, we face a crucial decision on how to staff critical initiatives. We will be forced to get creative. Contracts like the U.S. Communities-ACRO offering allows Maricopa County's Office of Enterprise Technology to be more proactive and flexible in meeting our customers' demands and requirements."

Go here to view a video, "Managing Your Temporary Staffing Spend." Through the U.S. Communities presentation, viewers can learn how to use a managed staffing program. The program can provide comprehensive reporting and analytics, reduce expenses, help meet diversity goals, improve the processing of staffing requisitions and offer other benefits. At the link, search for the term "staffing." This link takes you to a U.S. Communities-ACRO case study.

Michael Keating is Senior Editor at Government Product News, an American City & County sister brand.

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