Boulder County
Leveraging NEOGOV to Build a Robust, Inclusive Hiring Program

INCEPTION OF THE INCLUSIVE HIRING PROJECT

The spark for the idea came at NEOGOV's user conference, CONNECT. With a variety of programming about the need for equitable hiring along with the reveals and advancements of features centered on eliminating bias and hiring more diverse candidates, the County was excited to get started on their own equitable hiring process.

"When we went to the conference in 2019, the conversation around diversity was picking up speed and we wanted to be a part of it as soon as possible," Boulder County HR Manager Mili Dawson said. "This is one of the many things we knew we had to do -- shift the organizational mindset and find ways to interrupt unconscious and conscious racist conduct. We had engaged in equity work for some time, and the advancement of features demonstrated at CONNECT meant the time was right for us to take the next steps."

The challenge of implementing a DEI hiring plan was complicated by the demographics of the area. With 90% of the Boulder County population being White and only 1% of the population being Black, the team was challenged to find applicants who would reflect the communities they serve with their programs (US Census). ▶

"Although the population of our county is predominantly White, the population that we serve by department and by program is not. We want our workforce to represent the community we serve with our programs," Dawson said.

The County was eager to roll out an inclusive hiring program, but they wanted to make sure the right people and perspectives were at the table. So, the HR team sought the expertise of their Cultural Responsiveness and Inclusion Advisory Committee, racial equity practitioners, County attorneys, and GARE (Government Alliance on Race and Equity) to gather meaningful insights and build out requirements for the program.

"The heavy lifting was in the communication, negotiating, and compromising," Dawson said. After two years of gathering information, testing, and building a toolkit, the County officially rolled out their program with NEOGOV software playing a key role.

NEW STEPS FOR HIRING MANAGERS & APPLICANTS TO REDUCE BIAS

The County's first step was to make changes to the requisition process. "One of our primary objectives is to interrupt bias from the moment people enter the organization and set the record straight about what our values are with regard to advancing racial equity," Dawson said. "This starts with how we approach our recruitments."

Prior to opening up job requisitions, the County's HR team started asking hiring managers to complete a racial equity impact assessment form and propose a selection matrix with the specifications for the position, along with the questions they plan to ask candidates, benchmarks and targeted knowledge, skills, ability, and experience.

Challenging hiring managers to think more about the requirements and qualifications of their open positions has been important to the success of the initiative.

"As managers go through the requisition process, we ask them to reflect on the needs of the position they are hiring for, what barriers to entry may be in place, and how we can mitigate those requirements to make the position more accessible," said Boulder County HR Manager, Ryan Ankrum. "For example, we removed the degree requirement from 70+ job classifications in 2018."

Besides combating manager bias, the County has also added processes to ensure they don't bring new employees into the organization that harbor potentially harmful biases. During the application and interview, the County asks candidates about their views on DEI to be sure they align with the organization's value of inclusion, racial equity, and social justice.

BUILDING OUT A ROBUST PROGRAM WITH NEOGOV TOOLS

The County sought to use all the features within Insight they could leverage for a program that would support equity throughout the entire recruitment process.

"We tapped into everything we could within NEOGOV to streamline and standardize the new processes that support our strategic priority of advancing racial equity. Specifically, the PII blinding feature, the self-scheduling tool for candidate interviews, and the scoring matrix have played a key role in making this program work," Ankrum said.

"Before we started using technology to cover up applicants' personal information, we literally spent hours printing applications, using white out to redact PII, and then scanning them back into the system so they could be sent to the hiring manager," said Ankrum. "It was not sustainable."

When NEOGOV launched PII blinding, the County was able to rapidly scale their DEI program by automating multiple steps in the process. "Now, all we have to do is check a box and any sensitive ▶

applicant information we want redacted is done so automatically, eliminating influence on a hiring manager's decision based on factors like place of residence, age, race, and gender. Then the selection matrix helps us whittle down who we advance to an interview without bias." Ankrum added.

Similarly, the candidate self-scheduling tool for interviews allows candidates to select an interview slot online without interacting with the hiring manager, allowing for a "blind" process until the interview itself.

"Before this, our utilization of NEOGOV's products was pretty basic. We were not even utilizing hire workflows, background checks, or candidate self-scheduling. We were barely tapping into the advanced capabilities of the applications," said Dawson. "Now, we've realized that we can work much smarter within the system, even beyond our diversity initiatives."

INTERNAL COMMUNICATION & TRAINING FOR NEW PROGRAM

Before officially rolling the program out across the organization, the HR team tested it with a select group of hiring managers.

"By running an informal pilot with a handful of hiring managers over the last year, we learned which questions we would be fielding most often and made sure we were up to speed with the inner-workings of the technology before we launched the program to everyone," said Ankrum

The County's HR team also created an agency-wide communications plan to keep all departments in the loop on the new Inclusive Hiring Plan.

"When we rolled the program out to our staff, the County commissioners sent employees an overview of the program and the HR Director sent an email with specific information about the process itself," Dawson said. The combined touchpoints that came from multiple levels of the organization served to reinforce how serious the County was about the program.

They also provided hiring managers with individual coaching to teach them the new process and ensure they understood it.

"Currently we have a concierge service where we train each hiring manager one-on-one as they go through the process," said Dawson. "Moving forward, we're holding office hours where managers can stop by to request training as needed."

Boulder County's plan for Inclusive Hiring is the product of two years of research, collaboration, beta testing, and training. Besides improving equitable hiring practices within their own organization, they hope the work they've done will provide a framework for other government agencies looking to implement their own Inclusive Hiring Program.

"All of the practices we have put into place with NEOGOV's tools for equitable recruiting have helped to reframe the narrative and drive our goal of racial equity within the employee population," said Ankrum.

> *We tapped into everything we could within NEOGOV to streamline and standardize the new processes that support our DEI initiative.*

RYAN ANKRUM, HR MANAGER
Boulder County