



Fiscal First Aid Quick Reference

Reexamining Job Descriptions

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Introduction

Personnel costs dominate expenditures, and personnel decisions affect service delivery significantly. While duties and responsibilities evolve in response to changing resources and services, job descriptions are often not formally reviewed or updated to reflect the new position design or requirements. Further, job descriptions may not mirror the organizational structure either in service delivery design or relative placement to other positions. A review of job descriptions can identify obsolete tasks, duties that are redundant with those of other positions, or excessive pay for the work being performed. Also, a financial recovery will often necessitate revisions to the organizational structure. In this case, it is essential that job descriptions reflect the new assignments and expectations of transformed structure.

Steps to Take

- I. **Envision what the organizational structure should look like.** Ideally, a review of job descriptions would start with a vision for what the organization will be like in the future. The new organizational structure should be informed by thorough review of organization-wide priorities relating to specific goals and objectives for each function and service area. Without regard for the existing organizational design, personnel implications, or staff qualifications, draft an ideal design of positions and reporting relationships to deliver the desired goals. This is the perfect opportunity to look at industry best practices, other agencies' successful examples, outsourcing options, multi-agency or department partnerships, and other innovations. Determine what is currently in place: Diagram the existing organizational structure; including all temporary and consultant roles.
 - A. Explore all assumptions regarding who does what and what processes exist. Consider writing down information as if you were presenting it to someone completely unfamiliar with the organization, or bringing in an outsider to discussion meetings with departments for more objective observations.
 - B. Use this opportunity to look at existing procedures for duplication, gaps, and miscommunication prospects.
- II. **Evaluate job descriptions for each position.** Collect all existing job descriptions, including those for which there is not an incumbent and those thought to be inactive.
 - A. If a job description is no longer applicable (e.g., dog catcher when the agency does not handle animal control), then that fact needs to be noted in the formal records and on any documents referring to the position, such as in the personnel policies, employee handbook, labor contracts, or ordinances that establish positions.
 - B. Confirm the most current description for any active position. Clearly indicate job descriptions that are out of date. Also clearly define the position to which any given role reports and any positions that it supervises; this will make it easier to view its relative position in the organizational chart.
 - C. Ensure that requirements and duties are still relevant for all positions. For example, "operating a mimeograph" is not a typical function in most modern offices and can be replaced by "operating copier and other office equipment."



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1. If a regulatory agency now requires licenses to perform certain duties (e.g., pesticide application for landscaping), include a reference to such requirements in the job description.
 2. If a pay premium existed for holding licenses or certifications that are no longer needed, evaluate the pay scale to determine if the premium should be eliminated or if the pay scale should be adjusted upward to compensate for a skill that is required, even if the associated formal certification is not.
 3. If industry standards have changed to require greater or lesser education for comparable positions, review the agency's approach to consider families of career-track positions. For example, an engineering degree is not considered a requirement for many firms to conduct preliminary site inspections or create computer-aided design specifications; a journeyman position or technician is often used to supplement licensed engineering staff for greater output
- D. Conduct a job analysis for positions where the formal job description is outmoded. Job analysis is a process of identifying and determining in detail the particular job duties and requirements and the relative importance of these duties for a given job. There are many job analysis techniques to choose from.
- III. **Evaluate classes or families of jobs.** Compare descriptions within classes of positions (e.g., engineering, clerical or administrative support, nursing or medical staff, etc.).
- A. Determine the lowest-level position designated to perform the bulk of duties (i.e., approximately 80% of the duties are unique to that position or require the minimum qualifications to accomplish). This will bracket positions within classes, providing more distinction between positions, and might allow for some positions to be combined or eliminated. It should be reasonably easy to define why a certain role is classified as an individual position, given its duties. This process allows an organization to become flatter through fewer job classifications in the hierarchy and to become more flexible through broader descriptions that allow staff to cover greater scopes in duties.
 - B. Reporting relationships and service provision roles should be clearly defined for the restructured positions.
- IV. **Review compensation policies.** Review the pay classification system to ensure that positions are equitably distributed in the pay ranges and that compensation is competitive. If the governing body has defined specific values associated with the structure of the system – that certain comparable communities be used for evaluation, or that positions be banded into broad groupings for pay classification purposes, or that the pay system be based on market value or on a uniquely defined market – this is a good opportunity to review and update their policy decision.
- A. Determine the pay differential between positions, particularly for those that are natural progressions or are more technical and professional rather than supervisory. This does not necessarily require a market study but rather an ability to place the positions within the pay scale according to the distinctions in duties described in the job description, as well as the positions above and below it on the pay scale.
 - B. Conduct a realistic assessment of market compensation for new positions or changes in qualification requirements. This may not require a full compensation study but rather a quick evaluation of comparable roles in other communities within the labor market.



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- V. **Rationalize position structure.** The organization must take steps to realize the potential monetary gains created by the previous steps/
- A. **Identify redundant or outmoded responsibilities.** Aligning duties and job descriptions should make it possible to identify overlapping responsibilities, which could lead to greater efficiency by eliminating duplicate tasks and even eliminating unnecessary positions. The key is to identify where positions have been created to provide salary growth in order to reward long-tenure individuals, or job descriptions have become overly specific, creating an overabundance of position classifications that makes administration more intensive. An example of this is creating separate administrative assistant job descriptions for every department, even though the majority of the duties in each department are reasonably similar.
 - B. **Create a more flexible staffing structure.** Breaking down the organization into its simplest and most basic components – individual jobs – provides the opportunity to develop a more flexible staffing structure.
 - C. **Form a strategy to monetize gains from eliminating positions.** Gains can be realized through layoffs or attrition. If a layoff strategy is used, the layoffs need to be targeted to eliminate the positions that are no longer needed. If the organization chooses attrition, a more flexible staffing structure with broader job classifications might make it possible to transfer people among positions.
 - D. **Change compensation policies.** This includes evaluating the total compensation package provided to employees. Look at overtime, call-in, and shift preference pay policies to determine if there are changes that can adequately compensate employees but still reduce costs. If premiums have been paid for certain industry positions such as building inspectors during the construction boom, it might be realistic to eliminate those premiums as the market has shifted away from rewarding those fields as lucratively. It is important to be clear and open in explaining changes and the rationale behind them, as gossip and rumors can do untold damage to morale in the absence of open communication. It is also valuable to acknowledge changes that were not made and the reasons why. Many changes might have to be bargained through labor agreements, and a detailed evaluation of all compensation components allows for a comprehensive consideration; often, smaller cuts to a benefit available to only a few people are more palatable than layoffs or cuts to benefits that all enjoy.

Case Study from Flint, Michigan

The City of Flint, Michigan, used revised job descriptions to reduce the number of position classifications for jobs requiring similar work. For example, administrative support positions were consolidated to no more than three levels. Payroll and account transactions were identified as critical tasks, such that every department would require at least one staff person to handle these duties (in addition to others). The majority of staff that handled administrative tasks were placed in the most junior position that included these tasks within the job description. Each department was required to consolidate these tasks across divisions, concentrating the tasks in one position, with a back-up. Consolidating positions and reclassifying employees reduced payroll costs significantly by downgrading at least 10 staff members by more than four pay levels. Positions were eliminated at the senior and junior levels by consolidating duties into the more comprehensive positions.



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Evaluating Success

Success is having current job descriptions for each employee that are consistent with the new organizational structure. Ideally, a number of positions will be reclassified to more appropriate descriptions, and positions might be eliminated. By reexamining job descriptions, the most basic unit of the organization, the government takes charge of its future rather than responding to circumstances.