

Civil Service Commission passes title consolidation milestone

By Robert M. Czech, Chair/CEO, NJ Civil Service Commission

The New Jersey Civil Service Commission (CSC) celebrated the New Year by marking a major milestone in streamlining government.

As of December 31, 2011, the Commission passed 2,000 job titles eliminated or consolidated at the state and local levels. The figure represents more than 80% of the goal of a net reduction of one-third set at the outset of the effort in early 2010.

“When he took office, Governor Chris Christie made it clear that we were to do everything in our power to reduce red tape and give government managers at all levels more flexibility in hiring and deploying their workforces,” Robert M. Czech, Chair/CEO of the Civil Service Commission, explained. “Cutting through the thicket of redundant titles and hyper-specific job descriptions was the logical place to start.”

The Title Consolidation Initiative took shape in early 2010, when Czech assembled a task force of state, county, and municipal human resources professionals and managers, headed by CSC Director of State and Local Operations Kenneth Connolly, to undertake a comprehensive review of the nearly 7,500 job titles on the books at all three levels. Previous attempts to tackle the issue relied on outside consultants, but Czech felt it was essential that the effort be guided by those closest to the situation, and carried out by career Civil Service professionals who best know the system.

The committee comprised officials from all regions of the state and from communities of diverse sizes and demographics. It met regularly through the spring and summer of 2010, gathering data and exchanging insights into the hiring and promotion process at various levels of government. Some early decisions were fairly easy – titles that were obsolete or had not been filled for several years.

“After we identified the most obvious targets, our attention turned to taming the myriad variations that had grown up around simple job descriptions,” Czech continued. “Our guiding purpose was to focus on the similarities among jobs, not the minute differences.”

Initial efforts focused on abolishing over 650 state and local titles that were not being used, were obsolete and had zero incumbents. Next, workgroups were assigned to review two representative occupational groups (Stenography, Typing, Filing and Related Fields, and Infrastructure and Structural Repair and Maintenance) and identify titles with similar job-related competencies, i.e. type and class of service, compensation structure, educational and experience requirements, etc.

The review resulted in the recommendation of over 200 local titles to be considered for consolidation. For example, prior to the start of the project, there were over 60 titles on the books that pertained to clerical work. Under title consolidation, those clerical titles are to be reduced to four.

In addition to vertical variations in titles (that is, variations reflecting increasing skills, experience, and responsibility), there was a tremendous number of variations across departments and disciplines.

“Previous titles made it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to move someone who had been, say, a police department clerk into a clerical position in a finance department,” Czech noted. “While there are some things specific to the new post that a candidate would have to learn, those are far outweighed by the similarities between clerk positions across departments.”

The initiative comes at an opportune time for government human resources managers, who are increasingly asked to do more with fewer resources. By simplifying the welter of title variations, the changes give managers greater flexibility in employee placement.

Employees also benefit. By removing arbitrary distinctions between similar positions, workers are no longer confined to a particular job “silo,” but have greater opportunity to move into agencies or departments offering better chances for advancement, or which are more in line with their interests.

“The number of Civil Service professionals who are contributing to this effort is tremendous – too many to list here,” Mr. Czech said. “Suffice to say, the employees of the Division of State and Local Operations, joined by colleagues from MSPLR, Selection Services, and Administration, are making a lasting impact on state, county, and municipal administration in New Jersey.

“The Title Consolidation Initiative is not the flashiest or most high-profile reform, but in terms of putting real tools in the hands of managers, it is exceptionally effective,” Mr. Czech concluded. “We continue to advocate for Civil Service reform in the Legislature, but in the meantime, there’s a lot we can do directly, like Title Consolidation, that can make a real difference to taxpayers.”

(The following state and county officials served on the Title Consolidation Committee: Steve O’Connor, Cape May County Administrator; John Pulomena, Middlesex County Business Administrator; Teri O’Connor, Monmouth County Administrator; Edward Trawinski, Bergen County Administrator; Matthew Watkins, Manager of Clifton City; Gregory Fehrenbach, Perth Amboy Business Administrator; Kevin Yecco, Wildwood Crest Borough Administrator and Municipal Clerk; Tim Gordon, Millburn Township Administrator; Gary LaVenia, Mapleshade Manager; and Anthony Mercantante, Middletown Township Administrator.)