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Homero Tristan  
Commissioner of the Department of  
Human Resources  
City of Chicago

### **City of Chicago Innovates Hiring Process with Automated Prescreening to Rapidly Identify Top Candidates**

With nearly three million people, Chicago is the third most populous city in the United States. It is a center of finance, industry, and culture in the Midwest region with a rich diversity of offerings: multiple teams representing the major sports; a financial district anchored by the Chicago Mercantile Exchange in the Chicago Board of Trade Building; the shopping of Magnificent Mile; and blossoming theatre districts. Additionally, the Chicago Metropolitan area continues to record the greatest number of new or expanded corporate facilities in the United States.

The City is one of the largest employers in Chicago. With over 38,000 employees including 20,000 police and fire employees, its mission is to facilitate the effective delivery of city services by hiring the best possible candidates and maintaining professional human resources practices and programs. The City is also committed to a recruiting system that is transparent, efficient, open and accessible to all qualified applicants.

### **Managing Extremely High Application Volumes**

More than 80 percent of the City’s workforce is unionized. Application volumes are very high, often exceeding 1,000 candidates per opening. In a single year, the City received over 200,000 applications. This high volume of applications, coupled with strict governmental standards, created a very rule-bound staffing process that was entirely manual and compliance driven. The result was a very slow recruiting process that sometimes meant a qualified candidate didn’t get called until long after they had already accepted another job. The City needed an efficient way to balance the critical need for improved effectiveness and responsiveness while balancing stringent compliance requirements.

Before Taleo, the City used a very manual, two step prescreening process to help sort through the massive number of resumes it received. First, every application and resume was manually reviewed to determine whether candidates met or exceeded minimum qualifications, which resulted in their placement on an eligibility list. Then, every application on that list was manually reviewed for a second time against pre-approved screening criteria to create a referral list according to very specific rules. Together, these two steps created an ongoing backlog in the Department of Human Resources that had cycle times measured in months, and often saw the best talent long gone before applications could be processed.

### **Using Technology to Automate Screening and Compliance**

Because this process remained unchanged since the 1980s, the list of requirements and compliance measures necessary to revamp the system were long and exacting. The City needed to use technology to help them build and deliver a model that would allow them to cast wider nets within Chicago and nationwide. Once the candidates were captured, they then needed to recruit them in an efficient, fair, and objective manner.

“Developing a prescreening solution that would balance the critical need for improved recruiting effectiveness with the strict compliance requirements, required the highly innovative and unprecedented use of Taleo technology,” said Homero Tristan, Commissioner of the Department of Human Resources at the City of Chicago.

### **Relying on Objective Standards to Pinpoint Qualified Candidates**

Taleo helped the City develop a process to better work through the massive volume of resumes and introduced objective standards to ensure that only the best qualified candidates are considered for open positions. New process specifications defined for the first round of application prescreening (scoring) included the requirement to immediately reject and notify candidates who do not meet job-specific minimum requirements. They also required completely blocking the ability of recruiters to create, add, edit or delete scoring questions. The decision was made to use Taleo’s Disqualification Question (DQ) functionality with a goal of completely automating the scoring process by allowing candidates to self-evaluate against job-specific scoring questions (DQs) created by a content librarian.

Requirements for the second round of screening included a highly detailed process designed to meet the very strict compliance requirements placed on the City to limit process variance. The screening process was also designed to minimize recruiter discretion to the highest possible degree in selecting candidates for the referral list. The Taleo system typically uses three tools to sort a candidate list—Required, Assets, and Weight. To ensure screening focused on core skills and experience, the decision was made to limit prescreening tools to Required and Assets, which were relabeled to assume the role of Major and Minor screening criteria. By relabeling them Major and Minor, the City created a tool for the recruiter where one set of qualifications could be measured against the other rather than against a fixed scale.

### **Automatically Grouping Candidates by Qualifications**

The Taleo system was configured to automatically group candidates by Major (Required) qualifications, then rank-order candidates within those groups by Minor (Asset) qualifications. Beginning at the top of the candidate list, recruiters manually review candidate records, validate all candidate answers to both scoring and screening questions, and reject any candidates who have misrepresented their qualifications—thereby ensuring the integrity of the rank ordering. This process allows recruiters to simultaneously assess fit—evaluating additional factors such as career path/progression, scope of experience, and skill proficiency—and then reject candidates who do not meet these additional qualifications.

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### **Enabling Candidates to Objectively Self-Determine Their Ranking**

Manual screening continues until a recruiter reaches a break point, or a point in the list where the candidates below that line have self-determined, by the answers they provide, that they are not as close a match to qualifications as those above the line. Because candidates have self-determined their order on the list, this process provides an entirely objective ranking and allows recruiters to end manual screening when sufficient candidates have been identified to create a referral list. “By using the objective standards in our Taleo system, we can erase any notion that outside influence will enter into the hiring decision. We can ensure that only the best candidates will be considered for the job,” says Tristan.

### **Saving Millions in Process Efficiencies While Achieving Strict Compliance**

With the help of Taleo’s technology, the City of Chicago improved recruiting efficiency, increased recruiter and candidate satisfaction without sacrificing strict compliance requirements. The unique configuration combined with a highly prescriptive prescreening process has resulted in the complete elimination of the time-consuming manual scoring process, and produced a measured reduction in the number of candidates who must be manually screened by an average of over 90 percent, with a corresponding reduction in cycle times. This faster, more-automated process resulted in a cost savings of several million dollars a year.

Because the City does not formally measure quality-of-hire, evidence of improvement here is anecdotal, but numerous reports from operating departments show a significant increase in this important measure. Additionally, the ability to store scoring and screening questions in Taleo has created an opportunity to streamline signature approvals. The City also locks down the functionality by user permissions and only allows certain users to edit the questions libraries meaning the City can satisfy all compliance goals and thereby enable further future productivity gains.

### **Adding Value to the Hiring Process**

Prior to introducing the automated scoring and screening process with the implementation of Taleo, there was little the Department of Human Resources could do to provide real value to the hiring process. The Department was administratively burdened with a highly inefficient, manual process. While there are still significant strides to be made, the implementation of Taleo has provided the catalyst for Department of Human Resources to remake itself into a more strategic, value-added function.

For their innovative use of Taleo, the City of Chicago won the 2008 Taleo Customer Innovation Award which honors and recognizes Taleo Enterprise Edition customers that advance talent management initiatives through innovation, leadership, and best practices. “Working with Taleo technology, we have created an automated process that is transparent and allows us to better screen our applicants. We are confident it will serve as a model for other government agencies,” says Tristan.

## WORLDWIDE OFFICES

### NORTH AMERICA

#### DUBLIN — HEADQUARTERS

4140 Dublin Boulevard  
Suite 400  
Dublin, CA 94568, United States  
Tel.: 925.452.3000  
Fax: 925.452.3001

#### CHICAGO

One Energy Center  
40 Shuman Boulevard  
Naperville, IL 60563, United States  
Tel.: 630.983.9609  
Fax: 630.983.9509

#### JACKSONVILLE

7660 Centurion Parkway, Suite 100  
Jacksonville, FL 32256, United States  
Tel: 877.394.5644  
Tel.: 904.493.8800  
Fax: 904.493.9146

#### QUÉBEC

R&D Facility  
330, rue St-Vallier Est, Bureau 400  
Québec (Québec) G1K 9C5, Canada  
Tel.: 418.524.5665  
Fax: 418.524.8899

### EUROPE

#### EMEA — HEADQUARTERS

10 Barley Mow Passage  
Chiswick  
London W4 4PH  
United Kingdom  
Tel.: +44 (0) 20.8400.6166  
Fax: +44 (0) 20.8400.6167

#### PARIS

19, Boulevard Malesherbes  
75008 Paris  
France  
Tel.: +33(0) 1 55.27.36.62  
Fax: +33(0) 1 55.27.37.00

#### AMSTERDAM

Poortgebouw  
Beech Avenue 54 - 80  
1119 PW Schiphol - Rijk  
The Netherlands  
Tel.: +31 (0)20 658.6699  
Fax: +31 (0)20 658.6111

### ASIA PACIFIC

#### SYDNEY

Suite 601, Level 6  
491 Kent Street  
Sydney, 2000  
Australia  
Tel.: +612.9356.1900  
Fax: +612.9457.1099

#### MELBOURNE

Level 3, IBM Towers  
60 City Road  
Southbank VIC 3006  
Australia  
Tel.: +613.9626.2413  
Fax: +613.9626.2455

#### SINGAPORE

3 Temasek Avenue  
Level 21 Centennial Tower  
Singapore 039190  
Tel.: +65.6549.7006  
Fax: +65.6549.7001



## CONTACT

www.taleo.com – info@taleo.com  
1.888.836.3669 – U.S.  
1.888.922.5665 – International  
1.888.561.5665 – Customer Service

## ABOUT TALEO

Leading organizations worldwide use Taleo on demand talent management solutions to assess, acquire, develop, and align their workforce for improved business performance.

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