



PUBLIC FINANCE WORKFORCE | CASE STUDY

## CITY OF MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE

# Speeding Time to Hire with Better Communication and Collaboration

➔ How the City of Memphis, Tennessee created alignment to address its hiring challenges

When the Great Resignation hit, city staff grappled with record staff turnover and evaporating applicant pools, especially for mechanics, executive-level finance positions, and summer staff. To address this crunch, staff enhanced collaboration between recruiters and departmental hiring managers, as well as compensation and talent management teams. Here is how city staff created an internal culture of efficiency.

### CITY OF MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE

POPULATION: 628,000



Keeping Tennessee's second-largest city running takes a diverse workforce of over 8,000 employees delivering services, including operating the nation's largest three-service public utility, Memphis Light, Gas & Water.

GFOA spoke with Fonda Fouché, Memphis's chief human resources officer (CHRO). A 27-year veteran of the city's team, Fouché was first hired as an employment analyst and has since served in numerous HR Department roles. She became CHRO in June 2023.

### THE SITUATION

#### *Record staff turnover and difficulty recruiting new hires*

In 2016, when Mayor Jim Strickland was first elected, he ran on the promise of providing the City of Memphis with a government that is "brilliant at the basics." In pursuit of that mission, the city's Human Resources Department was tasked with filling all open positions in 90 days or less (excluding public safety roles). This metric was a stretch at the time, but as incremental improvements were made over the next few years, the goal met, then lowered to 75 and eventually 50 days.

In 2020, when the 'Great Resignation' hit Memphis, Fouché and her team confronted record staff turnover and evaporating applicant pools. While the phenomenon affected most city positions, it has hit jobs requiring a



## CITY OF MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE

certification particularly hard. Openings for mechanics, executive-level finance officers, and even summer lifeguards have proven quite challenging to fill.

## THE SOLUTION

### *Strengthening collaboration to improving processes—and outcomes*

Fouché had already played a key role in nearly halving Memphis' time to hire before the Great Resignation, so she knew that the most effective lever in speeding up its hiring process would be collaboration. "One thing I have realized throughout my career in city government is that a lot of people work in silos." To begin breaking down those silos, Fouché strengthened lines of collaboration between her recruiters and departmental hiring managers. She emphasized to recruiters that hiring is one of many responsibilities that hiring managers must split their time between. Because of this, Memphis's HR Department does all that it can to support and even sometimes push hiring managers to expedite their end of the process. New hiring managers are provided with a tool kit of valuable resources and must complete an online training before they can sit on a hiring panel. Additionally, hiring managers send the HR department a draft of their interview questions when the position is posted so



## PROBLEMS TO SOLVE

- ❓ Reduce vacancy rates
- ❓ Expand applicant pools
- ❓ Cut time to hire
- ❓ Adjust recruitment strategy

recruiters can review them to ensure the questions will help them identify the ideal candidates.

Fouché also worked to strengthen collaboration between the compensation and talent management teams within the HR department. She recognized that some of the built-in friction was caused by lack

of familiarity of each team with the processes and incentives of the other. To solve this problem, the two teams went on a retreat together. The compensation team described their approach and the metrics they are accountable for, and the talent management team did the same. This experience created greater mutual understanding between the teams—and two policy changes:

- Assignment of recruiters and compensation coordinators to specific divisions, which helped to facilitate greater familiarity with divisions and hiring processes.
- Creation of a new metric for the compensation team to measure how quickly they reply to requests for an above-entry-level salary.

## THE RESULTS

Fouché leaned on communication to foster greater collaboration. "Communication is important when you are trying to achieve a goal. No one likes to feel blindsided, and no one likes to feel like they are being forced into something." Through Fouché's and her team's efforts, collaboration has become the default, which has not only accelerated Memphis's hiring process but also created an environment where innovation is celebrated. "We wouldn't have achieved the success that we have

## ABOUT THIS PROJECT

### Workforce 2023: Solving Hiring Challenges

GFOA has heard consistently from members about the difficulties of hiring in local government. In search of solutions, we identified eight municipalities across the country that have grown their applicant pools and reduced hiring times through process change. Their solutions are lessons to inspire other local governments to solve their hiring challenges.

Learn more: [gfoa.org/workforce2023](https://gfoa.org/workforce2023)