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Sent: Monday, September 14, 2009 12:41 PM

To: Dan Claypool; Sharon Brumley

Subject: Application for Citizens Redistricting Commission - comments

My comments concern the "Employment History" section of the "Draft Supplemental Application for Citizens Redistricting Commission".

SUMMARY:

Recommendations:

1. Require each applicant to submit a PDF resume.
2. Drop the employment history fields from the application.
3. State clearly the resume's required content—but do not limit the content.
4. Do not limit text formatting in the resume.
5. If necessary, retain the requirement—now on the draft for the employment history fields—that a resume include the applicant's last ten years of employment, at least.

Reasons:

1. For many applicants, the current employment history fields would not allow adequate description of a more complex career history.
2. A resume would serve as an example of an applicant's ability to communicate.
3. Keeping the current employment history fields AND requiring a PDF resume would needlessly increase the evaluators' work load.
4. Requiring a resume in place of the employment history fields would in no way impair background investigations.

DETAILS:

For many people, the simple recitation of employment history with job dates, longevity, employer, job title or classification, supervisor, and duties, cannot adequately describe work experience. Your purpose in collecting the data is not clear, but in most circumstances, employers use such data to determine a candidate's ability and dependability. The fields on your draft will not fully allow such determination.

Therefore, I recommend that you eliminate the employment history fields and instead require applicants to submit complete PDF resumes along with their applications. You should state that a resume must contain—but need not be limited to—certain elements. You should not dictate text formatting—leave that to the applicant's creativity. You may retain the requirement that the resume include at least the last ten years of employment. (However, I do not understand the reason for that requirement. Do you have a policy of excluding people who have been in the job market for less than ten years?)

Since you are accepting letters of recommendation, I can see no objection to an additional submittal. Furthermore, the quality of a resume, how it presents work history, will inform your evaluators about an applicant's communication skills. (Possibly, an applicant could hire a professional to prepare her/his resume, but I believe that the benefits of a resume would outweigh the risks.)

Regarding specific employment history fields:

"Description of Duties Performed": In the absence of context this term may lack meaning. For instance, if a person worked as a consultant or as a member of a project team, the evaluators need to know the nature of the company, the project, the conditions underlying the project, and the project team, to fully understand what the candidate accomplished on the job. "Duties" alone will not suffice. On a resume, the applicant can describe those other factors. You should require that the resume include a description of the nature of the work.

"Employer Name": This may seem obvious, but can be ambiguous. For a consultant or contract worker, the literal "employer"—the company paying the hourly rate—may be a job agency, while the substantive employer—the employer assigning tasks and reaping benefits—may be another company entirely. Because the applicant must affirm s/he is telling the truth, s/he may be uncertain as to which company name to enter. If s/he enters the agency, the substance is lost; if s/he enters the substantive employer, a background check may make it appear that s/he has lied. On a resume, in describing the nature of the work, the applicant can explain that the company paying her/him differed from the substantive employer.

A consultant or contractor could enter "self" for employer, but doing so would bring two problems. First, a single "duties" entry would then have to cover everything the candidate has done in different positions, for different companies, over many years. Second, for such a worker the distinction between self-employed and payroll work is simply the difference in tax status—1099 for self, W2 for payroll. Again, the applicant would face a dilemma between the need for complete honesty and the need to impart the substance of his/her work. Your draft application leaves no room for explanation, but a resume would.

"From" and "To" dates, and "Total Worked (years/months)": These also can be deceiving in the career of a consultant, who may have worked a long series of short-term jobs. Some employers conclude that such a candidate is an unreliable "job-jumper", when, in most instances, market conditions or project completion, not the worker's preferences, dictated the job changes. Again, on a resume the applicant could fully explain. You could require that the resume state the reason for the worker's departure from each job.

"Title/Job Classification": Again, for a consultant, the meaningful title and the title in the employer's files may vary, not because either party is dishonest, but because the consultant will think of what s/he accomplished, while the employer may record only how the worker was paid. You should leave this to the applicant to decide. (The possibility of an applicant's inflating her/his title would be no greater on a resume than on the application form.)

"Supervisor": I do not know how deeply you will investigate work history, but in many cases supervisors may be impossible to find because they have left the companies in question. In some cases the company itself may be defunct. If you do not need supervisor data for background investigation, I recommend that the resume not require it.

"Address": Again, seemingly simple, but subject to change. Will you require complete address, or only city and state? What if a company has moved? I recommend that the resume require only the city and state of the employer.

CONCLUSION

The employment history fields on your draft application lack the flexibility and freedom many applicants will need to adequately describe their careers. Therefore, I strongly believe you should drop those fields and instead require each applicant to attach a complete PDF resume. You should state requirements—but not limitations—on resume content. You should not restrict resume formatting.

The burden of reading resumes will be no greater than reading the application data. Each candidate will compose and format a resume differently—but then, how the candidate communicates should be one of the selection criteria.

Please feel free to contact me.

Thank you.

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