



John Barrientos, Director of Compliance (DOC), for the Cook County Assessor's Office (AO), respectfully submits this Semi-Annual Report pursuant to Section V(B) of the [Employment Plan](#). As required, this Semi-Annual Report will also be posted and made publicly available on the AO's [website](#).

I. Introduction

This Semi-Annual Report covers compliance activities at the AO from March 1, 2026, through August 31, 2026. The DOC's role is to ensure compliance with the Employment Plan and Employee Handbook and to prevent unlawful political discrimination in employment actions and practices, except where such actions are permitted for exempt positions.¹

During the reporting period, activity occurred in 20 general hiring sequences, 2 actively recruited hiring sequences, and 2 Shakman exempt positions. Under the current administration, there have been no findings of unlawful political discrimination. Additionally, the OIG reported no matters involving AO staff related to allegations of Shakman compliance during this reporting period.

II. Reporting and Collaboration

A. Periodic Reports and Standing Meetings

The DOC submits periodic reports to the Assessor and key AO personnel, outlining compliance activities, recommendations, and corrective actions based on monitoring. The reports also highlight staff efforts to work collaboratively with the DOC. The concerns raised in these reports involve technical, rather than substantive, violations and do not pose a risk of unlawful political considerations.

The DOC, Assessor, Deputy Assessor, and the Deputies of Human Resources (HR) and Legal hold various standing meetings to address compliance concerns or initiatives related to the Employment Plan and Handbook. Final revisions to the Handbook are underway, and an approved final version is expected in September 2026. The DOC meets regularly with Supervisors to collaborate on compliance topics that may warrant attention, respond to questions, and provide an opportunity for HR to offer guidance.

B. Hiring Status

Human Resources ("HR") consists of six Senior HR Generalists, a Deputy, a Director of Human Resources, and a Director of Recruitment. HR also includes a Director of Learning and Development who supports the hiring process by developing training programs and maintaining training compliance. Collectively, the HR team manages hiring processes, onboarding, discipline-related investigations, training, and other human resources functions.

Adding Senior HR Generalists gives HR greater capacity to run multiple hiring sequences concurrently, as reflected in the number of active hiring sequences during the reporting period. Intake Meetings have also become more streamlined, providing an opportunity to discuss the minimum and preferred qualifications

¹ Monitoring activities were completed by the DOC during this reporting period.



identified in position descriptions, as well as interview questions and scheduling considerations. Increased familiarity with the hiring process among HR and hiring department staff has further contributed to efficient discussions of key issues during the final review between HR and the hiring department. This collaborative process clarifies expectations, addresses potential issues proactively, and improves efficiency throughout the hiring process.

C. Performance Management

The 2026 annual performance evaluation cycle will begin on September 1, 2026, and conclude in December 2026. In the 2025 performance evaluation cycle, the DOC monitored and found no violations of the employment plan or employee handbook. The app developed by the AO remains a valuable tool for completing this process and the 90- and 180-day evaluations; updates to the program continue to provide operational benefits. Best-practice and refresher training is scheduled before the start of the 2026 cycle and is mandatory for all AO employees responsible for performance evaluations. Continuing refresher and adding best-practice training for evaluations benefits AO management when completing PEs to support a robust evaluation of employee performance. Each annual cycle includes new staff members who are new to the supervisory role. This creates an opportunity for discussion and feedback, helping ensure a smooth process, timely completion, and minimal technical errors. HR's responsibility for front-line procedural performance, as well as departmental performance, continues to demonstrate the benefits of office-wide preparation.

III. Role of the DOC

The DOC's primary responsibilities are outlined in Article V of the Employment Plan and are fulfilled by meeting with the Assessor and key staff to discuss each duty as appropriate. The high-level responsibilities include, but are not limited to, the following categories:

- A. *Understanding the Assessor's Office's organization, its business, operational objectives, and needs, and its staffing needs.*
- B. *Overseeing Compliance with Employee Handbook Policies, with main topics including:*
 - 1. Handbook Revisions – Final Review.
 - 2. Time and Attendance – This is included in the revised Handbook.
 - 3. Discipline—enhanced processes outlined in the Handbook are designed to facilitate more



efficient operations. No compliance concerns were raised regarding disciplinary matters.

4. Notices of Employment Action – timely receipt of documentation of employment actions.
 5. Grievances – monitored by DOC as appropriate and raised no compliance concerns.
- C. *Actively working with the Deputy of HR in developing strategies for the Employment Plan, as well as necessary Policies and Procedures to ensure compliance with the Plan.*
1. In collaboration with Learning and Development, the DOC has updated its interviewer training to replace the previous, lengthy module with a more streamlined version. This new training is currently in its final review stages and should be implemented soon, enabling both new and current employees to receive consistent training. This updated module will ensure interviewers are familiar with the Employment Plan guidelines, supporting compliance throughout the hiring process.
 2. The DOC is also actively collaborating with IT to streamline the documents used in the interview process. This initiative will make it easier for interviewers to complete Interviewer Evaluation Forms (IEF) electronically, reducing the likelihood of technical errors that can occur when completing the forms manually, such as missing comments, scores, dates, or signatures. IT is working with the DOC to develop an electronic format that will require all fields to be completed before the form can be submitted. This enhancement will help ensure forms are complete and accurate while reducing time spent correcting errors and resubmitting forms.
- D. *Accepting, Investigating, and reporting on complaints related to the Employment Plan.*
- During this reporting period, the DOC received one investigation referred by HR involving an HR employee and an alleged violation of the AO Employment Plan. This investigation is ongoing. Additionally, the DOC received two other allegations: one involving potential UPD violations and the other a direct UPD allegation. Both allegations have been referred to the OIG, as required under the Employment Plan.
- E. *Reviewing Position Descriptions and Notices of Job Opportunities and taking appropriate steps to ensure their accuracy.*
1. Position Descriptions reflect greater consistency across the AO related to salary and minimum/preferred qualifications.
 2. HR can provide additional guidance to Deputies, particularly those new to their role, to ensure this process brings about hiring efficiencies, improved validation, and office-wide consistency before presenting them for review by the DOC.
- F. *Working with HR to implement training programs, prepare training materials, and conduct training for all employees on the Employment Plan and other policies.*
1. Updated Plan training occurred during this reporting period, and no substantial compliance concerns were noted.
 2. Reporting on training activities remains timely.



G. *Making recommendations to the Assessor and Department heads to eliminate and remedy instances of noncompliance with the Employment Plan and to prevent Unlawful Political Discrimination or Unlawful Political Contact.*

During this reporting period, none of the issues that came to the DOC's attention or that were reported by the DOC rose to the level of unlawful political discrimination or unlawful political contact. The compliance standard is not perfect but is constitutionally adequate, and the AO continues to meet it. The DOC provides guidance to AO staff on improving compliance with the Plan and Handbook in various employment actions.

H. *Monitoring activities pertaining to the employment of Shakman covered positions, including but not limited to participating in validation, interviews, and candidate selection meetings.*

1. General Hiring Process

The DOC monitored activity in 20 General Hiring processes, some of which began during the last reporting period or involved selecting additional Candidates from the Ranking List or the Validated Eligibility List for interviews. In addition, the DOC monitored two actively recruited hiring processes and reviewed one Shakman-exempt position as directed by the Plan. The DOC also reviewed one interim Shakman position and found no compliance issues. In support of this activity, the DOC monitored several interviews, reviewed the tabulation score sheets, and attended Ranking Meetings. Other hiring sequences involved offers to Candidates from the Ranking List. On average, hiring sequences were completed around 90 days from the job posting to the Candidate's onboarding date. None of the comments in this report raise Shakman-level concerns; instead, they reflect technical issues that staff need to watch for, most notably applying information from the Intake Meeting regarding the Minimum Qualifications (MQs) to the validation process. Improvements in this regard have been noted during the validation meetings between HR and the DOC, as evidenced by fewer instances where they reach different conclusions regarding candidate MQs and PQs when reviewing submittals separately.

a. Data Collection Coordinator

- i. Posting Closing Date: February 24, 2026
- ii. Hiring Date: May 18, 2026
- iii. Compliance Notes: No notable employment plan issues were noted.

b. Division Analyst II

- i. Posting Closing Date: February 24, 2026
- ii. Hiring Date: June 15, 2026
- i. Compliance Notes: No notable employment plan issues were noted.

c. Residential Sr. Field Inspector III



- i. Posting Closing Date: March 3, 2026
 - ii. Hiring Date: (3) vacancies filled on May 18, 2026
 - iii. Compliance Notes: No notable employment plan issues were noted.²
- d. Residential Sr. Field Inspector III
 - i. Posting Closing Date: August 12, 2026
 - ii. Hiring Date: Hiring Sequence in Progress
 - iii. Compliance Notes: Hiring Sequence in Progress.
- e. Industrial Commercial Valuations Jr. Analyst III
 - i. Posting Closing Date: April 5, 2026
 - ii. Hiring Date: (5) vacancies filled: (1) on June 15, 2026, (3) on June 29, 2026, and (1) on August 24, 2026.
 - iii. Compliance Notes: During the hiring sequence, HR notified the DOC of potential improper contact by an interview panelist and another AO employee. Based on the information provided, the DOC requested that the panelist be replaced to avoid potential disruption to the interview process and preserve the integrity of the hiring sequence. The other AO employee was not part of this hiring sequence. The panelist was replaced, and the interviews proceeded without incident. Subsequently, based on the information provided by HR, the DOC referred the matter to the OIIG for further review (see Referrals).
- f. Data Collection Coordinator
 - i. Posting Closing Date: February 24, 2026
 - ii. Hiring Date: May 18, 2026
 - iii. Compliance Notes: No notable employment plan issues were noted.
- g. Taxpayer Information Group Leader
 - i. Posting Closing Date: April 5, 2026

² During this reporting period, the DOC and HR observed a rise in candidates using artificial intelligence ("AI") during interviews. The DOC and HR have also received concerns from interviewers that candidates could be using AI to formulate and provide responses to interview questions in real time. Improper AI use during an interview may give a candidate an unfair advantage and undermine the integrity and consistency of the hiring process. In response, the DOC worked with AO stakeholders to develop language informing candidates that improper AI use during an interview may result in disqualification from the hiring process.



- ii. Hiring Date: June 29, 2026
- iii. Compliance Notes: No notable employment plan issues were noted. However, one panel member notified HR of a potential conflict of interest involving a candidate. To avoid actual or perceived bias, the panel member proactively requested removal from the interview panel. The panel member's decision to identify and disclose the potential conflict demonstrates the effectiveness of continued training regarding conflicts of interest and the importance of recognizing and addressing circumstances that could create an actual or perceived appearance of bias in the hiring process.
- h. Taxpayer Information Specialist II
 - i. Posting Closing Date: March 22, 2026
 - ii. Hiring Date: (6) vacancies, (1) declined offer, (5) started on August 24, 2026
 - iii. Compliance Notes: No notable employment plan issues were noted.
- i. Sr. Network Administrator
 - i. Posting Closing Date: June 5, 2026
 - ii. Hiring Date: August 10, 2026
 - iii. Compliance Notes: No notable employment plan issues were noted.
- j. Assistant Manager of Commercial Data Collection (Re-Post)
 - i. Posting Closing Date: June 25, 2026
 - ii. Hiring Date: Anticipated start date of September 21, 2026
 - iii. Compliance Notes: Hiring Sequence in Process.
- k. Exempt Analyst III
 - i. Posting Closing Date: June 4, 2026
 - ii. Hiring Date: Hiring Sequence in Process.
 - iii. Compliance Notes: Hiring Sequence in Process.
- l. Technical Review Industrial Commercial Analyst III
 - i. Posting Closing Date: June 4, 2026
 - ii. Hiring Date: July 27, 2026



- iii. Compliance Notes: No notable employment plan issues were noted.
- m. Industrial Commercial Valuations Sr. Analyst I
 - i. Posting Closing Date: June 18, 2026
 - ii. Hiring Date: Hiring Sequence in Process.
 - iii. Compliance Notes: Hiring Sequence in Process.
- n. Technical Review Residential Analyst V
 - i. Posting Closing Date: June 24, 2026
 - ii. Hiring Date: Anticipated start date of September 8, 2026
 - iii. Compliance Notes: Hiring Sequence in Process.
- o. Taxpayer Information Specialist II – Skokie
 - i. Posting Closing Date: Current unexpired ranking list used to fill this vacancy.
 - ii. Hiring Date: August 10, 2026
 - iii. Compliance Notes: No notable employment plan issues were noted.
- p. Taxpayer Information Sr. Specialist
 - i. Posting Closing Date: August 12, 2026
 - ii. Hiring Date: Hiring Sequence in Process.
 - iii. Compliance Notes: Hiring Sequence in Process.
- q. Residential Field Inspector III
 - i. Posting Closing Date: August 19, 2026
 - ii. Hiring Date: Hiring Sequence in Process.
 - iii. Compliance Notes: Hiring Sequence in Process.
- r. Omitted Assessment Analyst III
 - i. Posting Closing Date: Hiring Sequence in Process.
 - ii. Hiring Date: Hiring Sequence in Process.
 - iii. Compliance Notes: Hiring Sequence in Process.
- s. Residential Group Leader V



- i. Posting Closing Date: Hiring Sequence in Process.
 - ii. Hiring Date: Hiring Sequence in Process.
 - iii. Compliance Notes: Hiring Sequence in Process.
- t. Manager of Erroneous Exemption Investigations
 - i. Posting Closing Date: Hiring Sequence in Process.
 - ii. Hiring Date: Hiring Sequence in Process.
 - iii. Compliance Notes: Hiring Sequence in Process.

2. Actively Recruited Positions:

- a. Compliance Analyst
 - i. Posting Closing Date: May 4, 2026
 - ii. Hiring Date: Anticipated start date of September 8, 2026
 - iii. Compliance Notes: No notable employment plan issues were noted.
- b. Manager of Data Collection
 - i. Posting Closing Date: June 4, 2026
 - ii. Hiring Date: August 24, 2026
 - iii. Compliance Notes: No notable employment plan issues were noted.

3. Exempt Hiring

Exempt positions and links to the position descriptions are maintained on the AO's website. The DOC reviews the resume and position descriptions to ensure the individual meets the minimum qualifications. During this reporting period, one exempt position was filled through a promotion with no compliance concerns. Additionally, the exempt Director of Commercial Valuations role is being filled on an interim basis. The DOC has reviewed the qualifications for the interim appointment and verified that they meet the MQs for the position. Also, because a change in administration is scheduled for December 2026, the DOC was consulted about interim filling of exempt positions during the transition period as current exempt employees begin to vacate those positions. Although the Employment Plan establishes specific time limits for serving in an exempt position on an interim basis before the position must be permanently filled, the DOC has indicated that exceptions may be appropriate given the forthcoming change in administration and the absence of specific provisions in the Employment Plan addressing the circumstances currently presented. The DOC has advised that it will permit certain exceptions to the established interim service timeframes when the Employment Plan does not provide clear guidance for a particular situation. However, the DOC will continue



to use the Employment Plan as the primary framework and guide in evaluating such exceptions.

1. Director of Labor and Employment (June 15, 2026)
2. Interim Director of Commercial Valuations (Interim Assignment to conclude September 10, 2026)

IV. Requirements of this Semi-annual Report.

Section V(B) of the Employment Plan requires that this semi-annual report include consideration of the following: (i) auditing activities as required by the Plan; (ii) discovered violations of the Employment Plan or policies in the Employee Handbook referenced in this Plan; (iii) complaints of Unlawful Political Considerations in Employment Actions referred to the OIIG; (iv) remedial actions recommended; and (v) corrective actions taken by the Assessor's Office to address the violations.

A. Auditing activities

The DOC is focused on monitoring real-time activities rather than auditing during this period. Overtime is audited biweekly and is substantially compliant. Additional staffing is expected to reduce overtime needs. Time and attendance are periodically reviewed, and any concerns raised are addressed and resolved. The same real-time monitoring is expected to continue and become even more robust with a new DOC Analyst, who will start in the role in September, replacing the DOC Analyst who left the AO in March 2026.

B. Discovered violations of the Employment Plan

No substantiated complaints of unlawful political discrimination were received during this reporting period. Efficiencies and improvements continue throughout the AO. The DOC remains an active monitor and identifies compliance issues; none of these have amounted to constitutional violations during this reporting period.

The probationary evaluations (90- and 180-day) were largely completed in a timely manner, except in rare circumstances where questions or time off arose and required permission to issue the evaluation early. Continued attention to this area is necessary to maintain an understanding of the importance of timeliness in this process.

The quality of disciplinary processes, investigations, and discipline imposition is generally compliant. While the investigation process has somewhat improved, opportunities remain to further reduce completion times while maintaining compliance. The DOC will continue working with AO stakeholders to identify and recommend process improvements that support timely investigations. A recent improvement has been the expanded involvement of HR Senior Generalists in conducting investigations, which has helped reduce completion times while maintaining their primary HR responsibilities. The DOC also recognizes that factors such as available resources, scheduling constraints, active hiring sequences, and the complexity of allegations may contribute to longer investigation timelines.

C. Complaints of UPD referred to the OIIG.

During this reporting period, the DOC made two separate referrals involving allegations of UPC and UPD to the OIIG. The OIIG has accepted both referred matters.



D. Remedial Actions Recommended

Recommendations continue to be discussed, noted, and implemented as appropriate.

E. Corrective actions taken.

There were no significant remedial recommendations. No specific corrective actions were reported.

Conclusion

The issues identified in this report do not rise to the level of unlawful political discrimination, and they continue to show the Assessor's and office leadership's commitment to Shakman principles. Nevertheless, opportunities for improvement remain, particularly in communication and technical processes. The DOC continues to work collaboratively with staff to streamline procedures and enhance accuracy, consistency, and efficiency. These efforts are further supported through ongoing communication and open dialogue among the DOC and AO staff through regular meetings. This collaborative approach provides an opportunity to identify concerns, discuss potential improvements, and implement mutually agreed-upon recommendations. Collectively, these efforts reflect a professional and effective working relationship within the AO and support continued compliance with the Assessor's Employment Plan and Employee Handbook.

Respectfully submitted,

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