

Introduction

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Kirsten: You're listening to the NCDPS Safety Scoop, a podcast that dives into the stories of the people, programs and resources within the North Carolina Department of Public Safety. Each episode, we'll give you the scoop from department personnel on how NCDPS enhances the safety of the people of North Carolina.

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Season 2 Episode 9

Kirsten: Recognizing the significant role our jobs play in our lives leads many of us to strive for career paths that align with our passions and values. Week to week, a large portion of our time is dedicated to our place of business. Because of this, it is important that professionals find an employer that fits their needs, encourages growth and values work-life balance. Depending on a myriad of circumstances, at any time we may find ourselves looking for a new career. Whether you are early in career, making a life change, looking to move to North Carolina, or just need something different, the North Carolina Department of Public Safety offers a stable environment for job seekers with opportunities for career advancement, to learn new skills and the chance to positively impact the lives of those in our communities. With dozens of career paths spanning from working with justice-involved youth, emergency management, law enforcement, telecommunications, administration, project management and more, there's an opportunity for everyone to pursue what they're passionate about.

In this episode, employment specialist Faith Rigsby provides us with her insider tips on how candidates can stand out from the application through the interview process. Searching for career opportunities in today's rapidly evolving market can be daunting, so we are excited for Faith to offer her tips, almost a cheat sheet, to help applicants navigate DPS's hiring process with confidence. All information discussed on this podcast can be found under the career section of the DPS website. If you have questions, you can always reach out to the recruitment team by sending an email to recruiters@ncdps.gov. That's recruiters plural, r-e-c-r-u-i-t-e-r-s, at ncdps.gov. There are career opportunities in every county for the department and dozens of openings for qualified candidates. So, thank you for joining me, Faith.

Faith Rigsby: Thank you so much! I'm excited to talk about this with you! I've been looking forward to this.

Kirsten: Since we're having the conversation about state government jobs, can you just tell us what led you down the road to your current role within DPS Human Resources?

Faith:

That's a really important question with kind of a heavy topic, I have to say, for me. When I first started looking for positions, it was right in the first year of the pandemic. So, breaching on the beginning of 2021, I was working in a job that was really draining for me, and so I started looking for positions outside of my current work that had an emphasis on work-life balance, that we're still in my field of work, so in human resources, and that I felt would put value on me as a person. It's always been really important to me to feel seen as an individual. So, for me, I was getting to a point where I felt like my current work just wasn't sustainable for me as a person, and I started looking for new work and found positions with the Department of Public Safety and read about what the mission of the department was.

I interviewed with my team. I felt really seen by them. I was able to ask questions during my interview that felt like the team just really understood me, and I just really felt like it was a good match for me. I really tell applicants that I talk to all the time that a position or a job has to be a good fit for both you and for the company, and if it's not, it's not going to be a good relationship. You're going to want to leave or something's not going to want to work out. Right? And so, it felt like it was just a really good space for me, and I really loved the people that I was interviewing with, which would be my supervisory staff, and the people I would work day-to-day with. So, I started working in the position, and I've been here since May of 2021, and I love what I do. I get to work with a lot of incredible people. I get to recruit with a lot of amazing teams and get to help find jobs for people who work in North Carolina which has been amazing.

Kirsten:

I also came from the private sector. Same type of thing: just wasn't feeling fulfilled. And—and we see that from people, you know, coming in on various teams. I feel like the government base provides a lot of opportunities for people who either want to grow in their skill set or just want a career shift, looking for something a little new so glad you found that here.

Faith:

Yeah. I really am too. I hadn't really thought about working in government, but government felt like a good kind of, like, personality fit for me, and it feels like the right spot. And like I said, mental health is really important for me and just learning about the emphasis that the department has on wellness, on mental health, it's been such an encouraging thing to show me that I've made the right decision to be here. And honestly, I wouldn't be here telling other people they should make the same decision if I didn't feel just as bought in. So. [Laughs] It definitely feels like it was the right choice, and I would encourage other people to consider government work too.

Kirsten:

Well, let's try and give people who may be thinking about applying or are in the process right now just a little tips, maybe a cheat sheet, on what they can expect and the things that they need to do to really stand out in the job market. Knowing how to apply and how to interview may differ between sectors, so we're just going to share some tips for DPS. So, first off, how can those interested in state government jobs get started with their job search?

Faith:

Yeah. So, I would definitely say—talking from personal experience here—I know that it is really time consuming to look for jobs. I mean, you could be doing so many types of work that you are putting in 40 hours or more, or maybe even part time and going to school, and by the end of the day you're tired. You're exhausted. You don't have time to spend hours on a job board looking for work. And it's a decision that's really important, right? Like, you're spending such a huge majority of your week at your job, and you want to be able to make the right decision for you. So, the first thing that I would say is...Let's say three tips.

The first thing that I would say is, when you're beginning to start the job search process, if you have any educational transcripts, I would say, go ahead and request those if you don't already have them. If you have unofficial transcripts, great thing to request. They'll be needed at some part in the job search process, and if you have degrees that are in progress or if you have educational experience, those can be applied towards you qualifying for the position, and those can ultimately be applied towards salary offers for a job. So, if you request those early, it can save you time later on in the process because it can take a college or educational institution 10 business days or so to get those to you.

The second thing that I would say to do is to set up job alerts. So, going to the Government Jobs/North Carolina website and starting to look for jobs in the sector that you want to work in is important because lots of times if you go on big sites like Indeed or Monster or LinkedIn, you are going to see a ton of different jobs. And if you know that you're wanting to work in the public sector with government, you're not necessarily going to see those jobs pop up first. So, if you go to the state government website, Government Jobs, and you know that you're wanting to work in, let's say engineering, for example, or accounting, you can specifically filter by those jobs, and you can create a alert so that you get an email every day to see a digest of all the new jobs in those fields that have been posted. It takes a little bit of the proactive searching out of the way. Instead of you having to spend hours online looking for jobs working in government every day, you just get an email that shows you these are the new jobs that have been posted, and then you can just click those links and apply to those jobs. To me, that's a huge time saver. I did that with finding my job, and it saved a ton of time because I was working full time and did not have time every day to look for jobs.

The third thing I would say is to utilize filters when you're looking for work on either the Government Jobs website or any other website, like Indeed—on the Government Jobs website specifically because I would say that is still the best place to look for work in the government sector. If you are looking for specific types of work, if you are looking for a specific county, say that you're only wanting to work in Beaufort County. If you filter specifically by Beaufort County and you filter specifically by accounting jobs, then you're only going to see jobs that are in that area, instead of also scrolling and scrolling for different types of work or whether or not something is a remote opportunity. You can filter by those options and hopefully save you a little bit of time when you're in the job search so that you're only seeing things that are relevant to you that are within

the salary range you want to work in, in the location that you and your family can feasibly make as far as a commute is concerned, and that are actually positions that you would end up accepting if you are offered the opportunity.

Kirsten:

What if someone is looking to make a career shift and doesn't know what kind of role they qualify for?

Faith:

That is a great question, and it's a more complex response. [Laughs] So, the two things that applicants should be looking at on the job application are the minimum education and experience requirements and the knowledge, skills and abilities/competencies. So, let's tackle those one at a time. The knowledge, skills and abilities/competencies are the minimum skills that are required to qualify for a job. Let's say that you're applying for a job in accounting, and you need to have experience working with accounts payable with Microsoft Excel and with QuickBooks. So, if you have experience working with accounts payable in Microsoft Excel but do not have work with experience with QuickBooks, you would not qualify. So, you have to have experience with all three of those things to be able to qualify. So, if they're listed in the knowledge, skills and abilities, you need to have each of the things that are listed, unless they're listed as management preferences. If they're management preferences, then those are things that the management team and leadership team hiring for that position has said that they're good to have, but they're not required.

The second thing is the minimum education and experience requirements. So, the minimum education and experience requirements is the minimum level of education or experience that is needed to qualify for a position. This varies based on the type of job. Largely, most of the education and experience requirements that you will see will have a statement that says they will accept an equivalent combination of education and experience. This means that if you have work experience in those areas, that might substitute for education. For example, if the job requirement says that it has a bachelor's degree in accounting and it accepts a equivalent combination of education and experience, then you need to have the equal amount of experience equal to that education. If you have an associate's degree, which would be two years of education, plus two years of experience, that would be equal to the years required of the Bachelor's degree. Or you could qualify with four years of work experience because that would be equal to the level that was required in the bachelor's degree. With North Carolinians actually the most recent study that I saw by the University of Chapel Hill in 2017 was that less than 50% of North Carolinians have a secondary degree. So, most North Carolinians have a high school diploma or some college experience but do not have an associate's degree or higher.

The majority of our jobs have the ability to qualify with work experience because we want people to be able to qualify for jobs, and we know that there's a lot of jobs that you will be able to do without having to go to school for degrees for those jobs. There are some exceptions. For example, one of the teams that I recruit for is the Office of General Counsel. So, our legal team, for

example, would need to have a Juris doctorate to be able to qualify for a lawyer's position. But for the most part, a lot of the positions, they have the equivalent combination, so as long as you have what's equal to the years of experience required, you would be able to qualify for the job if you're looking for career changes. And if you have questions about these, you can call an Employment Specialist that's listed on the posting or give a call to the central Human Resources Office.

Kirsten: What are your top tips: the things that people *need* to know for successfully applying for a state government job?

Faith: The main thing that I would say to keep in mind—and this is unfortunate, right, because we do spend a lot of time talking about how to apply for jobs in the private sector as well—is that the public sector, so work with the government, and work with the private sector, hiring are completely different. So, the first thing that I would say, some kind of main points or tips, if you will, is that we cannot look at resumes. The reason why we do not look at resumes is because we try to look at everything on an equity standard. So, say for example, that you have the money to be able to hire someone to build a resume for you, or you took a class on specifically how to build your resume and become the ideal candidate. That is amazing! But you might not be equal to someone who does not have the money, does not have the funding, to be able to hire someone to build a resume for them or was not able to take that kind of class because it wasn't offered. And so, their resume is not comparable to yours. Yours looks better. Yours lists your skills better, and the other one does not. So, we want to be able to judge you on an equal playing field, and so that is through the North Carolina state application. We are only able to review your applications for the majority of positions, and so attaching resumes are not the thing that we would encourage you to do because we cannot review them. The only times we would ever review them is if your degree isn't listed, so I would definitely say make sure your degrees are listed on your application.

Regarding filling out the application, I will definitely say I know the first time that I filled out the state government application, it took me at least an hour.

[Laughs]

It was a really long process. It is really thorough. It's designed to get all of the information that is required to be able to make sure that you qualify for the jobs that you're applying for. It encompasses a lot of different topics. It encompasses your education, your experience, any skills that you might have, any certifications you might have gained. It encompasses a lot of different things, so the tip I would give in relation to filling out the application since you can't use your resume is to make sure that that first time you fill out the application, you are really making sure that you're hammering in every detail in the application and listing all of your skills, all of your experience, all of your job duties, really listing everything that you've done in your education, any certifications you might have. Because the good thing is, once you fill out that application, it saves

for your profile. So, you'll be able to reuse that application if you sign into the same profile and apply to more jobs. The only time that you'll need to change it is if you gain new work experience, so you'll just have to add that additional job or, my next tip is, if you're able to apply to a new job, so, say, you filled out the standard application for one job and you're applying to another job, you can tailor your application to fit that specific job.

So, if you had work that was majority in accounting but also had office duties, then you would want to tailor your application to specifically focus on what you did in accounting. Talk about your job duties in accounting, really hone in on those skills: what softwares you used, what tools you used for those jobs, what your outcomes were, if you would like to focus on those, and really tailor your application to the job that you're applying for. The last thing that I would say is that we really focus on, in private sector recruitment, talking about the outcomes of what you've done on your work. But I know that a lot of times in private sector, especially thinking about jobs that are in sales, we talk about how listing in our job duties we say that, you know, someone has grown sales by 20%, or they were able to reduce expenditures by 6%. So, when we're listing what we did in jobs, we list maybe what we achieved in the job as opposed to how we achieved those things. In completing the state government application, you want to list the how. So, you want to say, you know, it's great to say that you cut expenditures by 6%, but you would like to say that you did that by...

[Laughs]

...reviewing product and labor costs. You want to say that you did that by interviewing vendors or reviewing, let's say, accounting reports or books and comparing and reconciling reports. So, you definitely want to list the how that you made those accomplishments possible and list all of your job duties to make sure that it gives you the most information that is possible to be able to qualify for that job.

Kirsten: So, the devil's in the details.

Faith: It is!

Kirsten: Essentially.

[Laughs]

Faith: Yes! That is exactly the way to put it! The devil is in the details. You definitely want to make your application as detailed as possible. And it's—one thing I forgot to mention is, I always tell applicants, too, to make sure that they fill out the additional information section. It's a really tiny section. It's really easy to skip, but if you have experience working with software, like, if you have used Microsoft Office software, if you have used something like Adobe Pro, if you're working in emergency management positions and you have worked with something like ARC-GIS because you have done GIS mapping, or you have

completed training with the FEMA system. If you have experience working with specific items, list those in your additional skills, right? If you know that you're applying for a job later, but maybe you didn't list that you're Excel anywhere else in your application, if you've listed that in softwares that you have experience with, great! It is in your application somewhere. You have listed that you have experience with it, and it is always going to be there because you can just recycle that application and continue to use it. Show detail in what you've done in your work and really just maximize your experience to the jobs that you're applying for.

Kirsten: Can you take us through the process of what happens once someone applies? Lay out the timeline: what can people expect?

Faith: Right. Yes. So, I will say it—it depends, depending on where in state government you apply, what divisions you apply to. For example, if you apply for a position with Juvenile Justice or perhaps with State Highway Patrol, you're going to go through additional steps because a lot of their positions are certified. So, you might have to go through additional processing like completing background checks or drug screens or psychological evaluations. So, depending on where you apply, you could have additional steps, but let's say that you're applying for a position that has general steps. So, once you apply to a position, the first thing that I'll note is that another difference from the private sector: once you apply for a position, essentially, it's fair game when you might hear back. So, you could apply for a position, and then two days later, hear back for an interview, and the job could still be posted.

Another thing that the department does to ensure that there is equity in hiring practices is to make sure that all hiring managers receive all of the applications for qualified applicants at the same time. So, if you see that the job closes on March the 10th, but it has been open, let's say, since February 10th, the hiring manager will not see your job application until after March 10th. So, even if you applied on February the 15th, right after the job position was posted, the hiring manager won't see your application, if you have qualified, until after the posting has closed. And the reason for that is, it just helps things to remain equitable so that someone who maybe saw the job posting first doesn't get seen before someone who saw it later. It doesn't make you more qualified than anyone else just because you might have seen the posting first or if you saw it later. All hiring managers get the applications at the same time, so that's a good thing to keep in mind because some of our postings could be posted for a month at a time.

Once hiring managers have reviewed all of the qualified applicants, they will go through the applications and decide who they would like to interview. So, generally this would mean that they have reviewed applications for who they deem to be most qualified. They will review those applications. They will set up interviews with those candidates, interview those candidates and they will decide who are their top candidates. Generally, they will prepare or request to prepare a salary offer for their first-choice candidate. This is the part that can take a little bit: offering a salary to that candidate. It can take a little bit to hear

back from the hiring manager. It is a best practice for hiring managers to contact applicants to let them know they're their first choice, but it isn't a requirement, so you could hear back sooner rather than later. It can take a little bit of time, though, because there are a lot of steps in the process and because there is a huge need to be able to make sure that the people who are filling positions with government jobs that are, of course, funded by taxpayers—we want to make sure that we are filling those positions with the most qualified individuals possible.

We do checks on education. We do checks to make sure that you did meet the education and experience requirements. You did meet all of the knowledge, skills and abilities that were listed. So, kind of double checking or going back and reverifying when we're making the salary offers. So, everything is checked and double-checked to make sure that the people who are listed for the job are qualified for the job. And then once that is finished, salary offers are approved or received, and then those can be extended to candidates. So, if you have questions about your application, you are absolutely welcome to contact either the hiring manager, if you had an interview with the hiring team, or the Employment Specialist if you applied to the job posting. Those names for the Employment Specialist and their phone numbers or emails are generally listed on the job posting.

Kirsten:

If contacted for an interview, how can an applicant prepare?

Faith:

I think that one of the first things that people can do to prepare for interviews for jobs is to read up on the organization that they're applying for. When you're looking for work, I think it is realistic to assume that you're probably looking at a lot of different opportunities. So, you could be looking for opportunities with the Department of Public Safety. You could be looking for opportunities with the Department of Information Technology. Even within the Department of Public Safety, you could be looking at different teams. So, the one of the first things I would say is read up on the team or division or office that you're looking to work with. If you want to see that you will really be in a place that you can contribute to their organization and their mission and it feels like a comfortable place for you, you need to read up on them and make sure that that's true.

The second thing that I would say is that you can review the job posting: the knowledge, skills and abilities and the minimum education and experience requirements. The questions you'll be asked your interviewer will be related to those items because they'll be related to the job duties of the position: the knowledge, skills and abilities that you had to qualify to have. So, they'll be related to work experience you've had before, educational experience you've had before, job duties that are required of the job. They'll be related to a lot of things that you already know. Right? Or maybe how you would act in situations that could be presented before you if you took this position. So, I would say, review your previous experience, think about what you would bring to the table coming into this position, and think about questions that would help you decide if this is the right opportunity for you. And again, study up on the organization,

study up on the team, make sure that it's a good place for you, or you're going to feel like you bring your best self. Read up on the job duties, review your previous experience and then review some questions you might want to ask the team.

Kirsten:

I think those are all really good points, and as someone who has interviewed multiple times with the state, having been on an interview panel and then been hiring manager, those all really check the boxes that are important. You know, it—some people don't really like the interview process. It can be intimidating. I'm not the type of person that really loves to go in and talk about myself, but it is really important with these panels, or if you're just doing a one-on-one interview. I know not, like you said, not all jobs are—are the same in this application process, but just making sure that you are as specific as possible. We talked about earlier in the application, when you are filling out all those sections, to really go into detail.

The same thing goes of when you're answering interview questions. To, again, receive credit for your experience, the more detail that you can provide about your roles—just give all the details. Really lay it out. Giving longer answers, as long as you're answering the question, is not a bad thing. These questions, you are scored on your answers. and the most qualified candidate in the end, is the person that is able to provide detailed job experience, give examples of situations or maybe provide an example of what they would do in a specific scenario, if that is posed to them. That is the candidate that, in the end, could be selected, so make sure you are prepared with examples, with the details. Put your best foot forward and really rock that interview.

Faith:

Yeah. I would absolutely agree, and I think that I would say that—and maybe this is, maybe this is just my personality—as much as you can, try to prepare in advance. That's just, those are just my thoughts. If you are the person that wings it, then more power to you, 'cause I am not that person. [Laughs] But I think if you can prepare, if you can review, you know, even if you know, if you feel the back of your hand your previous work experience, think about what you did at your last jobs, think about the value that you could add to a new organization. Review those job duties that are listed in the posting and think, “What have I done that's been like this experience?” So, if it's talking about working with juveniles as a juvenile court counselor, what has your previous experience been with case management with juveniles? How can you use your previous experience to refer back to those questions? How can you provide examples of what you've done before to relate to how you would meet exactly what this team is looking for in that role that you're applying for and interviewing for? Prepare. It's definitely going to serve you well because it is a overwhelming process. We want you to feel like you're coming in and that you're confident, as much as you can be in a stressful situation.

Kirsten:

Definitely. And just be assured that whomever is being interviewed for the same role as you will be asked the same questions.

Faith: Right.

Kirsten: Just for that equity piece again.

Faith: Yes, absolutely.

Kirsten: What benefits would make state government intriguing to someone, and how does DPS stand out in the job market?

Faith: State government really stood out to me when I started looking for new work experiences, specifically because of benefits. One of the things, I think, that's really cool that DPS is doing right now, and a lot of this is work that's being done by Emergency Management, which is the section that I work with, is that DPS offers through the Responder Assistance Initiative mental health counseling for any employee that works with DPS that is completely confidential. I think that that is amazing! DPS has a focus on wellness, on mental health. We have a lot of individuals that work with us that work with the public, that work in stressful situations. And to me, at least, I think it's really incredible to work with an organization that places such a high value on mental health, that places such a high value on overall wellness and, you know, to kind of say, that sees me as a person instead of just as a number. I do think that that is, as much as I think it *shouldn't* be unique, I do think it *is* unique. And so, the benefits as being seen as a person and having resources that are offered to you to take care of your mental health, your physical wellness. Those, I think, are really incredible resources.

On top of that, DPS offers really great benefits, as do all state agencies. For example, I get to utilize benefits each week to do counseling. We work during typical office hours.

[Laughs]

We work during the day, and it is really hard to try to arrange things around those times, like doctor's appointments. So, I get to use sick time, which is amazing, right? Those benefits are offered. I earn sick time every month. I earn vacation time every month which is amazing. I took my first two-week vacation last year in my life, and it was wonderful. There is a work-life balance that I get with working in my job now that I wasn't getting before. At the most, I maybe work 42 hours a week which is wonderful. There isn't pressure for me to check my office phone or my work email on Saturday and Sunday. We have team members that work within several of the teams that I work with that are out on parental leave. So, we offer parental leave which is amazing for parents if you're looking for work that will support you while you're growing your family. State government offers that, so you earn parental leave when you're a full-time, permanent employee. DPS offers bonus plans.

So, there, I think, definitely is a push within the Department of Public Safety to show individuals that work with the department that they add value to the

organization, and the department really, I think, puts an emphasis on benefits, on value-added, I guess, products. Kind of thinking about something like an EAP that is also a benefit but puts an emphasis on items that employees can actually use that will actually grow themselves, grow their lives. We offer a lot of training plans in Human Resources that can grow your knowledge, skills, certifications, like you can get certified in Six Sigma which is normally something you have to take classes for which is really cool. So, there are a lot of new things that you can learn as well that will help you progress through higher positions within state government.

On the same note of progressing into higher positions, a large number of people who work with the department also retire with—with many years of service. So, a really interesting thing for me to learn, actually: I learned recently that 92% of people who retire with the Department of Public Safety retire with more than 10 years of service. So, to me, I think, as someone who's worked in recruitment for about six years, I think it's really cool to see that people love working in a job so much that they decide to stay for that long. I think tenure speaks really highly of places where people work and even just a statistic like that, it's just really incredible and speaks volumes to how the department takes care of its employees.

Kirsten: And there are cases where people have retired from DPS with 30 years. And so with 30 years, you also receive a recognition called the, um...

Faith: The Long Leaf Pine!

Kirsten: ...the Order of the Long Leaf Pine, where you're kind of inducted into this group of people with this badge of honor for 30 years of state service which is pretty incredible.

Faith: I think that's awesome!

Kirsten: If you want to hear more about careers within the department, you can jump back to season 1, episode 14 as we chat with the DPS recruitment team. This podcast was recorded in 2021, so it's worth noting that the correctional section is no longer under the Department of Public Safety. At the start of 2023, the Department of Adult Correction became the newest state agency, splitting off prisons, probation, parole and other related divisions from DPS. The Department of Public Safety now has around 6,000 sworn and civilian employees, as well as about 10,000 North Carolina National Guard soldiers and airmen. Careers within the department fall under the following divisions: Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, State Highway Patrol, Emergency Management, Alcohol Law Enforcement, Administration, North Carolina Office of Recovery and Resiliency, State Capitol Police, as well as a collection of boards and commissions. Visit ncdps.gov to learn more about the department and the wealth of career opportunities across the state.

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Conclusion

Kirsten:

This is the Safety Scoop, a podcast written, produced and edited by the NCDPS communications team. The mission of the North Carolina Department of Public Safety is to safeguard and preserve the lives and property of the people of North Carolina through preparation, prevention and protection. Follow the department on social media for a closer look on ongoing initiatives and resources. We're on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram at NC Public Safety. If you enjoyed today's episode, be sure to subscribe to the Safety Scoop on your favorite podcast app. I'm your host, Kirsten Barber. Thanks for listening.

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