

# RESPONDING TO THE STAFFING CRISIS: INNOVATIONS IN RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

CRITICAL ISSUES IN  
POLICING SERIES

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POLICE EXECUTIVE  
RESEARCH FORUM

August 2023

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# Responding to the Staffing Crisis: Innovations in Recruitment and Retention

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# A Message From PERF's Executive Director

## Police agencies face no greater challenge

today than recruiting and retaining enough qualified officers to meet rising demands to provide services and address violent crime. So when the easing of the COVID-19 pandemic made it possible for PERF to resume holding large in-person issue forums, the workforce crisis was the logical topic for our first such conference.

“Innovations in Recruitment and Retention to Meet Tomorrow’s Challenges,” held on November 3, 2022 in Washington, DC, drew roughly 275 participants from across the country and was a striking success. Nearly 100 people signed up to attend in just the first 24 hours after registration opened, and before long we reached the venue’s maximum capacity. This swift, sizable response — and the animated discussion we had throughout the day — is a testament to the significance of this issue for law enforcement and the commitment of those stakeholders to addressing it. I hope this report, which builds on PERF’s 2019 report “The Workforce Crisis, and What Police Agencies Are Doing About It,” will help members of the profession address this vital issue.

Participants at the conference agreed that we are at a critical moment in policing. Many younger officers are resigning and older officers are retiring, even as applications plummet. Departments are competing for existing officers, making one department’s solution another department’s problem. Departments also are struggling to attract younger and more diverse candidates. The conference gave representatives from a wide range of departments — small and large, urban and rural — a chance to share their struggles and frustrations, but also to



describe changes they’ve made that have had an impact. As you will read in this report, many of those changes are designed to help officers see the organization as a place where they can grow and thrive, and where they can earn respect and honor.

The harsh public scrutiny of policing in the current climate is a major reason for today’s staffing crisis, of course, and when I asked the conference whether they would want their son or daughter to follow in their footsteps and enter policing, considerable concerns were expressed. Many, though, were still supportive. Detective Sergeant David Hornsby of Dallas/Fort Worth Airport Police said:

“This is still the noblest profession and it’s a calling. And if my two daughters have a calling to do this, then I will support them any and every way I can.”

The conference and PERF’s related information-gathering activities, which together form the basis of this report, reflect the efforts and support of many dedicated stakeholders and professionals.

PERF would like to thank the conference attendees, the more than 250 agencies that took the time to complete our questionnaire on recruitment, retention, and operational issues, and the more than 100 law enforcement officials who participated in one-on-one virtual interviews with PERF staff.

This 47th *Critical Issues in Policing* series report was made possible by the generous support of the Motorola Solutions Foundation. PERF is grateful to Motorola for this long-standing and productive partnership, which has enabled PERF to research the most pressing issues facing law enforcement agencies and provide law enforcement executives with useful guidance and recommendations. Previous reports in this series are listed on the back cover of this publication; individual reports may be accessed at <https://www.policeforum.org/critical-issues-series>.

PERF would like to thank Greg Brown, Motorola Solutions Chairman and CEO; Jack Molloy, Executive Vice President of Products and Sales; Jason Winkler, Executive Vice President and Chief Financial Officer; John Zidar, Senior Vice President, North America Government; Tracy Kimbo, Chief of Staff, Global Enterprise and Channels; Monica Mueller, Vice President of Government Affairs; Shamik Mukherjee, Chief Marketing Officer; Karem Perez, Executive Director of the Motorola Solutions Foundation; Wesley Anne Barden, Manager of Evaluation and Grantmaking at the Foundation; and Matthew Starr, Director of Government Affairs and Privacy Policy.

I also would like to thank Chief Peter Newsham of the Prince William County (VA) Police Department and Chief Jeffrey Mori of the Vancouver (Canada) Police Department for their review and feedback on PERF's questionnaire and Chief Newsham for information on how his department has updated its recruiting and hiring practices (see page 30).

While all PERF projects are a team effort, this first post-pandemic project was so large that almost every member of PERF's staff had a role. Tom Wilson, Director of PERF's Center for Management and Technical Assistance, led the project team's efforts and report-writing together with Senior Principal Dave McClure and Senior Research Associate Rachel Apfelbaum; McClure and Apfelbaum also

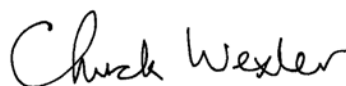
led the project's research and management efforts. Interviews were also conducted by Senior Research Associates Kristen McGeeney and Jason Cheney, Research Associates Dustin Richardson and Danielle Fenimore, Senior Principal Nancy Demme, and Senior Research Assistant Zoe Mack. Research Assistant Rachael Thompson, Senior Research Assistant Kevin Lucey, and Research Associate Ashley Richards assisted with notetaking and transcription.

Communications Principal James McGinty helped organize the topics of discussion for the conference and provided invaluable assistance in making it run smoothly. Executive Editor John Springer edited this report. Communications Associate Dustin Waters photographed the conference. Executive Assistant Soline Simenauer helped keep me organized and on track for the conference.

Dave Williams designed and laid out the report.

Throughout this project, PERF has benefited from the advice and expertise of consultants Ganesha Martin and Dr. Jeremy Wilson. Ms. Martin, the President & CEO of GMM Consulting, LLC and Vice President of Public Policy and Community Affairs at Mark43, is recognized as an expert in legal, public safety, community, and law enforcement relations issues. Dr. Wilson, Professor at Michigan State University's School of Criminal Justice, has written extensively for scholars and practitioners on police staffing and personnel planning as well as other law enforcement issues.

Our 2019 report on the staffing crisis in policing helped raise awareness of the seriousness of the problem, which until then had received relatively little public attention. I hope the strategies described in this new report, which features the voices and ideas of hundreds of law enforcement officials across the country, will help agencies build and maintain the workforce required to respond to the needs of their communities.



Chuck Wexler  
Executive Director  
Police Executive Research Forum  
Washington, D.C.

# Executive Summary

**Not long ago, law enforcement agencies** typically received more than 100 applications for every open position. Sorting through all the applications was a much greater concern than trying to recruit *more* applicants. Even if the hiring process took many months and applied highly exclusionary eligibility criteria, agencies still had more than enough qualified applicants willing and able to stick it out to have a chance to become a cop.

Those who made it entered their rookie years expecting to “pay their dues” through tough assignments in exchange for a well-respected job where they could build a long career. Meanwhile, agency leaders could reasonably expect these new officers to spend those long careers in their department, where they would build valuable experience, reinforce the organization’s culture, and add stability to the agency’s staffing levels.

**Today, most agencies face an increasingly urgent staffing crisis that is very different from “the way things used to be.”**

When PERF began examining this issue in 2018, a clear and worrying trend had already

emerged in police recruitment and retention. That trend continued and the challenges increased over the tumultuous 2020-2022 period, as the findings from PERF member questionnaires show:

- **Officer retirements and resignations have increased.** Sixty-five percent of agencies reported an increase in retirements between 2020 and 2022, and 66 percent reported an increase in resignations.
- **Applications for open officer positions have decreased.** Sixty-nine percent of agencies saw a drop in the number of applications for full-time officer positions between 2020 and 2022.
- **Officer staffing levels are dropping.** Overall officer staffing levels fell by 4.8 percent between January 2020 and January 2023.

Many agencies attribute the bulk of their recruitment and retention challenges to a combination of souring public perceptions of the policing profession, generational shifts in the values and expectations of younger workers, and changes in police roles and responsibilities. Increasing



“““  
Next to violent crime, this is the most important thing that all of us are facing. We’re facing it in our large departments, small departments, mid-sized departments, urban, suburban, and rural. We all are dealing with the same thing, because we’re all competing for a small number of qualified applicants.  
Commissioner Michael Harrison, Baltimore (MD) Police Department and President of PERF

competition among law enforcement agencies to recruit and retain the best officers has contributed to the problem.

Law enforcement agencies are using a variety of tactics to out-compete other agencies for the shrinking pool of applicants who meet the traditional profile of an officer, while also trying to attract a wider range of new recruits to the profession. At the same time, agencies are using a variety of tactics to retain their current officers.

**Financial incentives are a common approach to improving recruitment and retention but are not always effective and carry downsides.**

Financial incentives are by far the most common tactic agencies are using to boost recruitment and retention. However, they have important drawbacks, such as the ever-rising cost of increasing bonuses to remain competitive with other agencies. Also, the agencies most affected by the staffing crisis often have less success with financial incentives, which suggests there is more to the problem than money can solve.

**Favorable local conditions have helped insulate some agencies from the staffing challenges facing most other agencies.**

In a PERF survey, 14 percent of agencies reported that the number of applications for full-time sworn positions stayed the same between 2020 and 2022 and 17 percent say it increased. Agencies less affected by staffing challenges tend to be those in jurisdictions with good community relations or “pro-police” attitudes and favorable operating conditions, such as relatively low crime rates and lower

social service needs or fewer community demands on the police.

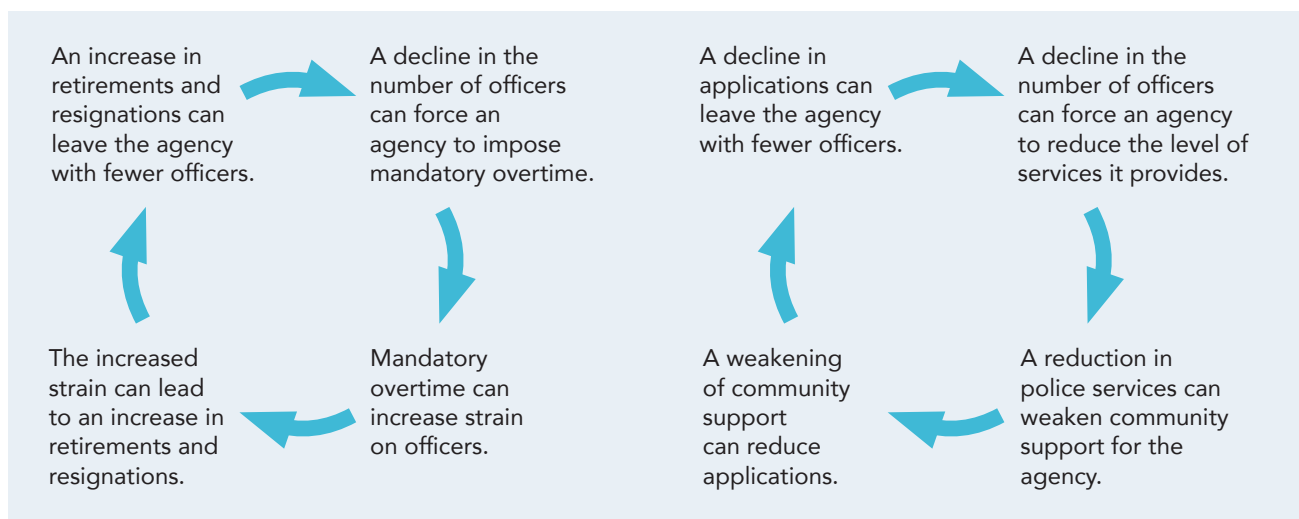
Clearwater, Florida is a prime example of a jurisdiction benefiting from these favorable conditions. Police Chief Dan Slaughter explained how these conditions help his agency:

“Clearwater is a very beautiful city, it’s a very safe city, not a lot of violent crime, and there’s a lot of community support. That certainly works in my favor. From a marketing standpoint, I can put up pretty pictures of the beach and it works very well. . . . [Also,] the benefit of a mid-sized agency is that it’s easier to turn on a dime and to have a personal relationship with every single employee. . . . So fortunately, we’re doing okay.

“Politics plays a part as well. I’m not favoring one party or the other — our job is to be pretty apolitical — but Florida has come out as a law-and-order state, very pro-law enforcement. And whether we agree or disagree with that, it certainly makes it an attractive place to people who may not feel that exists elsewhere.”

**An agency’s operations and community relations affect — and are affected by — its success in recruiting and retaining officers.**

Because of these interactions, agency efforts to improve recruitment or retention can have unintended, negative consequences. The graphic below outlines two examples.







Firestone is a smaller community that did not experience the same civil unrest as larger cities around our country. We are fortunate to have a board of trustees, mayor, and town manager that prioritize public safety along with a community that fully supports us. These factors combined have allowed me to focus on recruiting because we do not have a lot of attrition here at Firestone.

**Chief David Angelo, Firestone (CO) Police Department**

Fortunately, the interactions among these four components (agency operations, recruitment, retention, and community relations) can also benefit agencies, and many agencies are improving policing by committing to strategies that span the four components.

This report describes a number of such strategies. The following overall guidance, which previews some of these approaches, lists ten ways in which agencies can address their staffing challenges and strengthen themselves overall.

**1. Re-examine hiring processes.** The inefficient and exclusionary hiring practices that agencies relied on when they were flooded with applications are no longer viable now that applications have slowed. Further, those processes shut out promising non-traditional applicants and drive away many younger workers — two groups that agencies must make greater efforts to attract. In many areas it can take eight months or more to hire an officer, which is simply too long.

A number of agencies are taking steps to make their application process simpler and faster. For example, the Battle Creek (MI) Police Department adopted an application that allows interested candidates to enter basic information, ensure they meet the requirements, and then connect directly to the agency recruiters via text or call to ask questions. The department received over 95 applications in 90 days after making this change, compared to 9 applications using its traditional recruiting methods.

Other departments are using assessment centers or specialized hiring events to integrate and streamline the recruiting and hiring processes. The Rockville (MD) Police Department,

for example, combined many of the required tests and screenings into a single coordinated event that enabled applicants to go from completing an application to receiving a conditional offer of employment in the same day.

The Prince William County (VA) Police Department completely overhauled its recruitment and hiring practices to improve recruitment and build a department that mirrored the demographics of the community. Among other changes, the department updated and clarified its hiring guidelines and then posted them on its website; reduced the personal history statement from 31 pages to nine; created targeted ads on Instagram and other social media platforms; and strengthened recruiting at women's colleges, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), and Hispanic-Serving Institutions. As a result, while previously about 16 percent of the department's academy classes were female and about 40 percent were from underrepresented groups, those figures have risen to 24 percent and 70 percent, respectively.

Some agencies are also taking steps to move recruits into the academy more quickly rather than having them wait many months for the next academy to begin. For example, the Oklahoma City (OK) Police Department has begun running smaller academies on a regular and more frequent schedule, setting up logistics so two staggered cohorts go through the academy at the same time.

**2. Adopt innovative recruiting strategies.** Some agencies are using social media — including light-hearted and entertaining TikTok videos, Instagram posts, and Facebook pages — to reach a younger, more diverse audience. The



Gilbert (AZ) Police Department, for example, has broadcast live events on Facebook in both English and Spanish.

Also, some agencies are undertaking new kinds of recruitment activities. The Gilbert Police Department holds a “workout with a hero” event at which people can work out with officers and learn how the officers improved their own fitness, for example. Another example is the Cedar Rapids (IA) Police Department, which attends a career fair for student athletes.

Some agencies are being inventive in how they identify the types of people they want to attract and then find them. Recruitment and Training Coordinator Nisse Lee Ramser of the Greenwood Village (CO) Police, for example, has recruited among bartenders and Starbucks baristas “because they can multitask under pressure with a customer service focus. Those skills are incredibly transferable to dispatch and police work.”

### **3. “Go upstream” to identify future officers.**

Programs like police explorers, cadet programs, and internships are becoming more common as agencies seek to nurture the recruits of the future by identifying youth currently interested in policing or even cultivating an interest in youth to move into the field of policing.

In the summer of 2022, for example, PERF and the Baltimore Police Department (BPD) partnered with two HBCUs, Morgan State University and Coppin State University, to pilot a program through which eight students and recent graduates completed ten-week internships at various BPD units. PERF expanded the program in 2023, and placed 30 students with agencies across the country.

Another example is the Metro Nashville (TN) Police Department’s multi-program Law Enforcement Collaborative initiative, which includes camps and other activities for elementary and middle-school students and a Youth Citizens Police Academy for older youth.

In addition, a few agencies, such as the Vermont State Police, are offering internships to individuals transitioning from military service.

### **4. Update hiring standards.** Some candidates who are qualified and good fits for the needs of modern policing might not meet the traditional profile of an officer and might previously have been screened out through agencies’ hiring standards. Successful agencies are carefully considering whether their standards — in areas such as education, physical ability testing, and personal appearance — match the actual capabilities needed for the job.

For example, the Montgomery County (MD) Police Department has eliminated the physical fitness test altogether, replacing it with medical examination to make sure candidates are fit for duty. Also, a number of agencies are reconsidering their standards regarding prior substance use — especially marijuana use, given that more states are either decriminalizing it or legalizing its use. “Prior drug use is no longer an automatic disqualifier given all of the recent changes in law, specifically surrounding marijuana,” according to Lieutenant James Gordon of the Virginia Beach (VA) Police Department.

Agencies stressed to PERF that in changing their eligibility criteria to “widen the net” of potential officers, they are seeking to attract the highest-quality candidates from a larger and more diverse population, rather than weakening their standards to accept a lower-quality version of the traditional officer.

### **5. Offer recruitment incentives.** Benefits such as take-home vehicles, child care support, and education reimbursement can make an agency more attractive to potential candidates. Agencies are offering a range of such benefits.

For example, the Los Angeles Police Department, recognizing that lack of affordable housing was harming its recruiting efforts, launched an innovative program in June 2022 to provide rent subsidies for potential recruits. The “Housing for Hires” program offers recruits \$1,000 a month to go toward rent for up to two years, allowing them to complete their six months of academy training, undergo their one-year probationary period, and settle into their first assignment with the department.

- 6. Be wary of lateral recruitment.** Many agencies are offering cash incentives to attract officers from other agencies. These incentives can be effective, but they are costly and intensify the competition among agencies over the limited number of individuals available.

Lateral recruiting has other downsides as well. An officer leaving one agency for another will bring the previous agency's culture with them, which might clash with the culture of their new agency. And agencies also have only a limited ability to learn about any misconduct an officer may have committed at a prior agency. To protect against problematic lateral officers entering the agency, the Oklahoma City (OK) Police Department requires laterals to attend full-length academies so that all recruits, whether they are new to the profession or have previous experience, learn the department's values and culture.

- 7. Share burdens to help address understaffing.** The choices agencies make about how to operate while understaffed can affect — in positive or negative ways — their ability to recruit and retain officers. Extended periods of mandatory overtime can cause officer burnout, so some agencies have taken steps to lessen overtime burdens. The New Bedford (MA) Police Department has adopted a policy prohibiting overtime two days in a row, for example, while the Dunwoody (GA) Police Department requires all sworn staff to take part in overtime regardless of seniority.

The Santa Monica (CA) Police Department, which traditionally addressed staffing shortages at the division level, chose to break down the silos between divisions and address the patrol staffing shortage at an all-agency level to assure patrol was sufficiently staffed.

- 8. Make greater use of professional staff.** A number of agencies have shifted low-priority work from officers to civilians. For example, the Aurora (CO) Police Department has launched a community service officer program in which

professional staff respond to traffic accidents that involve only property damage. The St. Cloud (MN) Police Department created a program that relies on retailers and community service officers to address shoplifting.

Also, police departments in Baltimore (MD), Mesa (AZ), and Phoenix (AZ) have created civilian investigator roles. These individuals respond to a wide variety of cases other than active crime scenes, and they have many duties that parallel police roles, such as collecting evidence and interviewing witnesses.

While some calls for service can be handled by non-law-enforcement personnel, still others — such as reports of petty theft or vandalism — may not need a human response at all. The Sarasota (FL) Police Department, for example, has created an updated website through which citizens can report minor crimes online.

- 9. To boost retention, help officers improve their well-being.** Most successful agencies have found that retaining officers requires ensuring the department is a place where officers want to work — a place where they spend their careers, where they can grow and thrive, and where they can earn respect and honor. An important way agencies can build a more positive culture is by prioritizing officers' mental health. The events of the past few years, including the pandemic and the public fallout from police-involved shootings, have added to the already high stress levels under which police officers work, which can lead to burnout and cause officers to leave the profession.

Agencies are taking various steps to improve their officers' health and wellness. For example, the Lynchburg (VA) Police Department provides a post-academy training program on emotional survival for law enforcement that staff complete with a family member or significant other. Also, all sworn and professional staff must undergo an annual mental health checkup called "a checkup from the neck up."

**10. Build community support.** How a community thinks about its local police can make a huge difference in the agency’s ability to recruit and retain officers. For example, as Yasmine Bryant, a participant in PERF’s HBCU internship program (see page 36), explained:

“What we think is preventing young people from wanting to become a police officer is what they see in the media, but that’s not necessarily true. Even before George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and so on . . . those were not the first names that we knew of, and especially not for minorities. They learned from their mothers or their fathers, their grandparents or great grandparents, who lived through the crack epidemic, who lived through the ‘60s, who lived through slavery. They have all been told by their family members not to go into this profession because of their lived experiences.”

Agencies can take steps to overcome these negative perceptions with positive actions. For example, they can reach out to minority communities through activities such as PERF’s HBCU internship program. As noted, above, they can create cadet programs (as many departments have) and “go upstream” to identify future officers. They can develop a community advisory board and seek advice on developing a broad-based approach.

Agencies can also design their recruitment campaigns to showcase the agency’s priorities and values. Campaigns that focus on service-oriented roles and de-escalation send a very different message to the community than those emphasizing SWAT-style operations, and increased public support for the agency could boost recruitment over both the short and long term.

## Information Gathered for This Report

To understand agencies’ challenges with recruiting and retaining officers, as well as the efforts many agencies are undertaking to address them, PERF conducted extensive background research, collected and analyzed responses from more than 250 member questionnaires, conducted one-on-one interviews with over 100 police leaders, and convened 275 stakeholders in Washington, DC on November 3, 2022 for a discussion forum on the issue.

### Member Questionnaire

To develop a questionnaire that would most accurately capture the current challenges of recruiting and retention, PERF conducted a review of the research and considered the data collection conducted for PERF’s 2019 report on the topic.<sup>1</sup> PERF drafted a questionnaire that built upon the questionnaire used in that report. This draft was pilot-tested with two police leaders, Chief Peter Newsham of the Prince William County (VA) Police Department and Chief Jeffrey Mori of the Vancouver (Canada) Police Department; their feedback was used to improve the final questionnaire.

PERF emailed the final questionnaire in October 2022 to police chiefs and other PERF members who are heads of their agencies, for a total of 1,068 potential respondents. This sampling methodology paralleled the methodology used for the 2019 report questionnaire. The October 2022 questionnaire had a response rate of 25 percent, with 266 completed questionnaires.

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1. Police Executive Research Forum, “The Workforce Crisis, and What Police Agencies Are Doing About It,” September 2019, <https://www.policeforum.org/assets/WorkforceCrisis.pdf>.

Respondents represented agencies from 40 states, Washington, DC, and Canada.<sup>2</sup> Small, medium, and large agencies were all represented (see Figure 1), in proportions similar to the agencies that responded to the 2019 report questionnaire. PERF used information from the questionnaire to develop questions for in-depth interviews and content for the Washington, DC conference.

### Interviews With Law Enforcement Officials

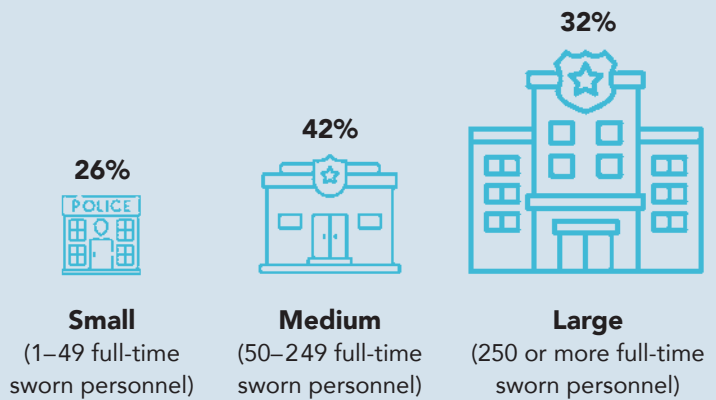
PERF invited its more than 3,000 members to attend the conference. PERF’s membership includes police officials, academics, federal government officials, and others interested in policing and criminal justice. Individuals who registered for the meeting were given the opportunity to participate in an in-depth interview so PERF could learn more about their agency’s recruiting and retention challenges and strategies to overcome them.

PERF conducted more than 100 one-on-one interviews with law enforcement executives, officers responsible for recruiting and retention, and Department of Justice officials. PERF developed an interview protocol based on results of the questionnaire, stakeholder discussions, background research, and PERF’s previous work. PERF revised the protocol as interviews progressed and interviewers gained more knowledge. PERF used information from the interviews to develop themes and topics for the national conference and this report.



Representatives from law enforcement agencies across the country gather in Washington, DC, for PERF’s meeting on recruitment and retention.

**Figure 1: PERF Questionnaire Respondents by Agency Size**



Source: PERF Membership Questionnaire on Recruitment and Retention, October 2022

### National Conference

On November 3, 2022 PERF held a conference titled, “Innovations in Recruitment and Retention to Meet Tomorrow’s Challenges,” in Washington, DC. Approximately 275 stakeholders from over 120 agencies attended. Although PERF set the agenda for the meeting, provided preliminary findings from its questionnaire to illustrate national trends, and showed video and media clips to give voice to these trends, PERF relied on conference participants to share their first-hand knowledge about programs and strategies they are using to address the staffing crisis.

PERF used information from the conference, along with the findings from the questionnaires and interviews, to develop this report.

2. The states not represented are Alaska, Hawai’i, Idaho, Mississippi, Montana, New Mexico, North Dakota, South Dakota, West Virginia, and Wyoming.

# Section 1: Understanding the Police Staffing Crisis

**In 2019, PERF published a major report titled “The Workforce Crisis, and What Police Agencies Are Doing About It.”** A PERF member survey on which the report was based revealed a “triple threat” facing police agencies and sheriffs’ offices:

1. Fewer people were applying to become officers.
2. More officers were leaving their departments — and, in many cases, leaving the policing profession — well before they reached retirement age.
3. A growing number of current officers were becoming eligible for retirement.

The report also warned that there were ominous signs that the workforce crisis in policing may get worse.

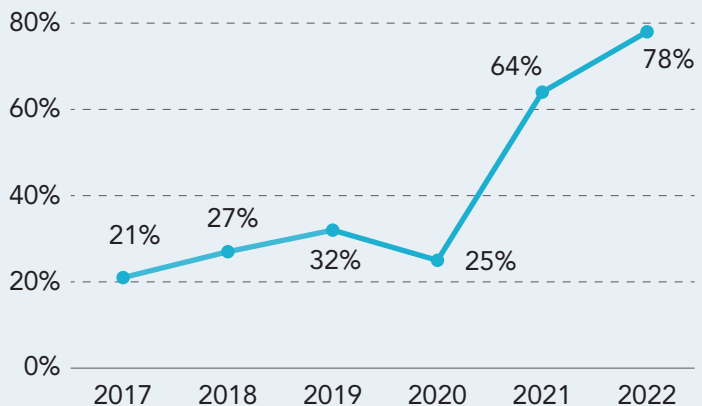
More recent data confirm this trend. An annual survey of state and local government employers by the MissionSquare Research Institute found that the share of police organizations that “had a hard time” filling positions more than doubled in 2021 and rose again in 2022 to 78 percent, three times the 2020 level.<sup>3</sup> (See Figure 2.)

“”

One of our challenges is the shrinking applicant pool. We have far fewer applicants than in years past.

**Chief Billy Cordell, Burleson (TX)  
Police Department**

**Figure 2: The Growing Crisis in Police Staffing**



**Percentages of Police Organizations Indicating They Have a Hard Time Filling Policing Positions**

Source: Center for State and Local Government Excellence Survey, June 2022

3. For the most recent (2022) survey, see MissionSquare Research Institute, “State and Local Workforce 2022,” June 2022, <https://slge.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/2022workforce.pdf>.



Data from recent PERF member surveys tell a similar story:

- **Applications fell for most law enforcement agencies from 2020 to 2022.** A PERF survey in October 2022 found that more than twice as many agencies reported a decrease in applications as those reporting no change or an increase. (See Figure 3.)

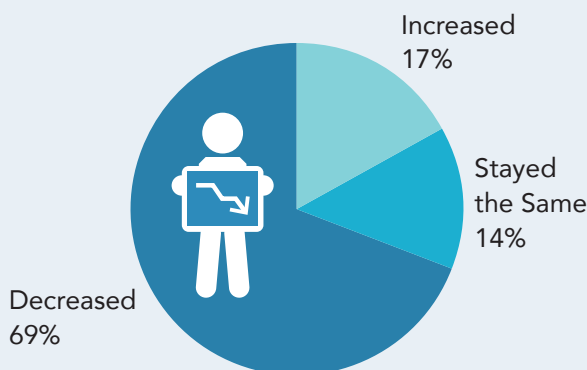
In addition to receiving fewer applications overall, several agencies told PERF that they are finding fewer candidates they consider well qualified to be officers than in the past. “We have had a hard time growing our workforce to fill funded positions, as well as recruiting quality candidates

overall,” Colonel Matt Langer of Minnesota State Patrol reported.

- **Officer retirements and resignations have continued to increase.** Roughly two-thirds of agencies responding to PERF’s October 2022 survey reported an increase in retirements between 2020 and 2022, and two-thirds reported an increase in resignations. (See Figure 4.)

Results from an April 2023 PERF survey give a sense of the size of those increases. Agencies reported a 19 percent increase in retirements between 2019 and 2022 and a 47 percent increase in resignations, with many officers resigning to leave the profession entirely.<sup>4</sup>

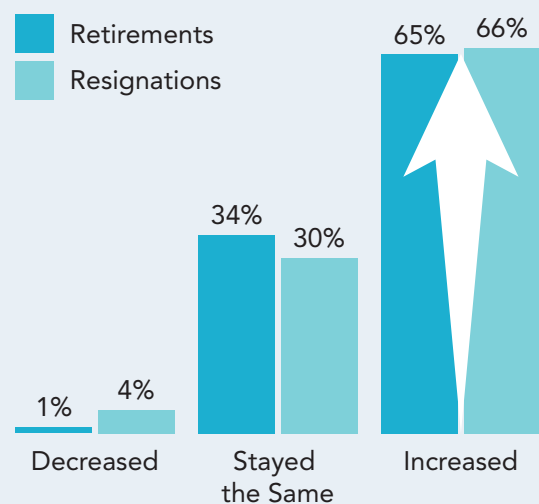
**Figure 3: How did the number of applicants for full-time sworn positions change between 2020 and 2022?**



**Percentage of Agencies Reporting the Number of Applicants for Full-Time Sworn Positions Decreased, Stayed the Same, or Increased**

Note: N=244. This figure is lower than the total 266 agency questionnaires collected because 22 agencies elected not to answer the question or answered “not sure.”  
Source: PERF Member Questionnaire on Recruitment and Retention, October 2022

**Figure 4: How did full-time sworn retirements and resignations change between 2020 and 2022?**



**Percentage of Agencies Reporting Full-Time Sworn Retirements and Resignations Decreased, Stayed the Same, or Increased**

Note: N=254 for retirements, 246 for resignations. These figures are lower than the total 266 agency questionnaires collected because some agencies elected not to answer the question or answered “not sure.”  
Source: PERF Member Questionnaire on Recruitment and Retention, October 2022

4. Police Executive Research Forum, “New PERF survey shows police agencies are losing officers faster than they can hire new ones” April 1, 2023, <https://www.policeforum.org/staffing2023>.



- **Staffing is declining as officers leave faster than they are replaced.** Fifty-five percent of agencies responding to the October 2022 survey indicated their full-time sworn personnel declined between 2020 and 2022.

Overall sworn staffing levels fell by 4.8 percent between January 2020 and January 2023, the April 2023 survey found.<sup>5</sup>

For each new officer joining a department in 2019, an average of 0.86 officers would leave. Just one year later, the flow of officers reversed, with 1.29 officers leaving their agency for each officer who joined in 2020.

## Agencies Assessing Their Staffing Issues

To better understand their staffing barriers and challenges, most agencies reported to PERF that they have reviewed their applicant screening and hiring processes (76 percent of survey respondents), projected the timing and impact of future retirements (69 percent), assessed staffing needs (61 percent), and/or measured employee satisfaction (57 percent).



One of our challenges is that our retirements and resignations outpace our new hires.

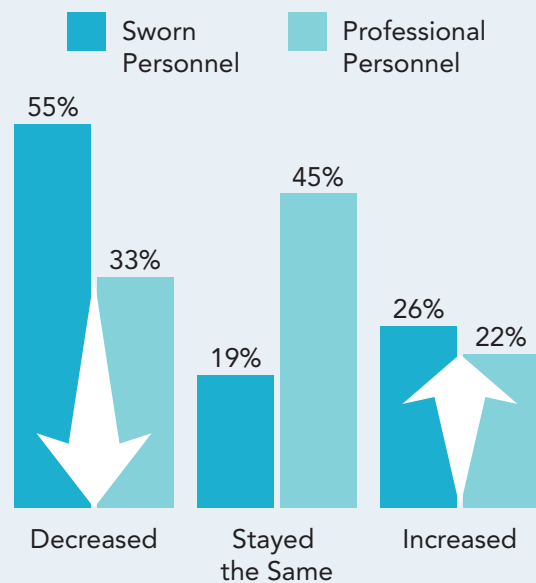
**Major Greg Fried, Fairfax County (VA) Police Department**

The police staffing crisis is affecting professional staff less than sworn officers. Only 33 percent of agencies said the number of their professional personnel declined between 2020 and 2022. Most respondents said their professional staffing levels either stayed the same or increased. (See Figure 5.)

## Staffing Crisis Has Several Causes

Some of the staffing challenges that law enforcement agencies now face are affecting public-sector employers generally, while others are specific to policing.

**Figure 5: How did personnel staffing levels change between 2020 and 2022?**



### Percentage of Agencies Reporting Full-Time Staffing Levels Decreased, Stayed the Same, or Increased

Note: N=263 for sworn personnel, 260 for professional personnel. These figures are lower than the total 266 agency questionnaires collected because some agencies elected not to answer the question or answered "not sure."  
Source: PERF Member Questionnaire on Recruitment and Retention, October 2022

5. *Ibid.*

## Strong Job Market

A growing economy, low unemployment, and increasing options for remote work have made it easier for job seekers and current officers to find attractive employment opportunities outside of policing. These same challenges are affecting hiring in other public-sector organizations as well.

Over the past three years, hiring has become more difficult for many types of public-service roles. The previously mentioned survey that found 78 percent of police organizations had trouble filling positions in 2022 also found similar results for engineering (78 percent) and nursing (83 percent).<sup>6</sup> The armed forces have also struggled to maintain sufficient staffing, with the U.S. Army missing its 2022 recruitment goals by 25 percent (15,000 soldiers). Army Secretary Christine Wormuth explained the reasons for the shortfall:

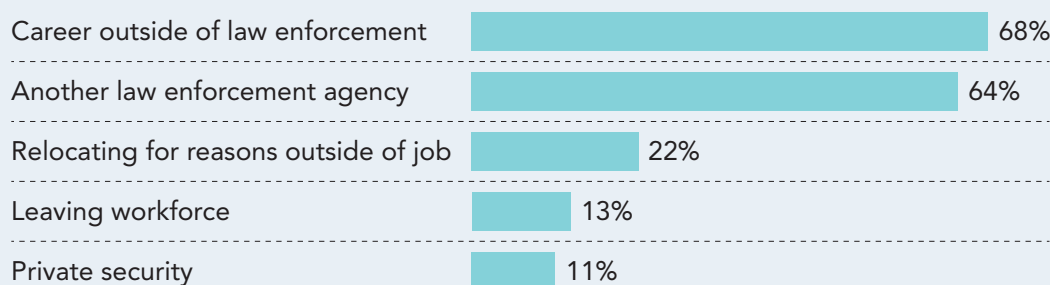
“We’re competing for talent just like all the folks in industry are, and the job market is hot right now. Wages have gone up a lot, and that’s great for Americans, but it’s making it harder for us in the Army to compete.”<sup>7</sup>

Policing is vulnerable to competition from other industries because it provides valuable work experience and because many agencies invest heavily in professional development and education opportunities for their officers. While these are necessary aspects of maintaining a modern police force, they can also make officers attractive candidates for other types of employment. As Chief of Staff Marvin Haiman of the Metropolitan (DC) Police Department explained:

“We have a very well-educated workforce that has a variety of career options. Individuals have found options with greater flexibility, telework options, and more normal schedules. Since we had a large influx of hires between 2017-2019, most serve about 3 years until they decide to leave again.”

In PERF’s survey, two-thirds of agencies reported at least some of their officers left law enforcement altogether after resigning (see Figure 6).

**Figure 6: Resigning Officers Most Commonly Leave Police Departments for the Following**



### Percentage of Agencies That Reported Officers Resigning Starting in 2020 Most Commonly Resign for Specified Positions

Note: N=252. Each agency could pick multiple items from the list and was asked to indicate the most common types of positions that officers take after resigning. Fourteen agencies were removed from the analysis because they reported that their agency does not collect this information.

Source: PERF Member Questionnaire on Recruitment and Retention, October 2022

6. MissionSquare Research Institute, p. 10.

7. Ian Thomas, “The U.S. Army is struggling to find the recruits its needs to win the fight over the future,” CNBC, October 26, 2022, <https://www.cnbc.com/2022/10/26/us-army-struggles-to-find-recruits-its-needs-to-win-fight-of-future.html>.



The problem of recruitment has been building for 20 years, but now it's aggravated by the loss of veteran officers and lower retention rates. It has been aggravated by the negative narrative from big media and misleading portrayals of officers.

**Chief Robert Bage, Fort Walton Beach (FL) Police Department**

Overall, PERF's most recent survey showed that while hiring has nudged up slightly, retirements and resignations are continuing at a worrisome pace. The bottom line is that departments cannot hire enough officers to offset the number that are retiring or resigning. And this is happening all across the country.

### **Competition From Other Law Enforcement Agencies**

Many respondents to PERF's survey reported that some of their officers were going to other law enforcement agencies. More and more, agencies are competing with one another for well-qualified candidates and experienced officers. As discussed below (see page 50), many departments are offering ever-increasing financial incentives to try to attract the best qualified candidates, including experienced officers from other agencies. Though not unique to policing, the use of financial incentives to compete for talent with other organizations in the same industry seems to be approaching unprecedented levels within the profession.

### **Negative Public Image**

Negative public perceptions and media portrayals of police have made the job far more difficult and less fulfilling for many officers, contributing to the recent increase in retirements and resignations.

In the first half of 2020, the police killings of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd sparked civil unrest in many parts of the country and generated harsh, widespread criticism of law enforcement generally. Shortly afterward, a Gallup poll showed confidence in the police fell to 48 percent, the lowest level in the survey's 27-year history. Calls to "defund the police" became common. ABC news reported that an "analysis of broadcast transcripts shows that [political] candidates, law enforcement leaders and television hosts discussed the impact of 'defunding the police' more than 10,000 times" between mid-2020 and mid-2022.<sup>8</sup>

### **Health Risks From COVID-19**

The COVID-19 pandemic made policing even more uncertain and dangerous. During the height of the pandemic, officers were often the only non-medical responders available. The risk of exposure to the virus threatened both officers and their families; in fact, COVID was the leading cause of officer deaths in 2020 and 2021.<sup>9</sup> Other officers resigned rather

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8. Grace Manthey, Frank Esposito, and Amanda Hernandez, "Despite 'defunding' claims, police funding has increased in many US cities," ABC News, October 16, 2022, <https://abcnews.go.com/US/defunding-claims-police-funding-increased-us-cities/story?id=91511971>.

9. Rachel Treisman, "COVID was again the leading cause of death among active-duty law enforcement in 2021," WAMU, January 12, 2022, <https://www.npr.org/2022/01/12/1072411820/law-enforcement-deaths-2021-covid>. For more information and data on officer deaths due to COVID, see the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund (NLEOMF), <https://nleomf.org/>. NLEOMF data show that COVID remained the leading cause of officer deaths in 2022; see <https://nleomf.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/2022-EOY-Fatality-Rept-FINAL-opt.pdf>.



It is very difficult to do this work because of stress and work schedules, especially when you have small children and insufficient childcare.

**Chief David Squires, Wrightsville Beach (NC) Police Department**

than get the COVID vaccine. In 2020 and early 2021, PERF's "Daily COVID-19 Reports" identified many issues that the pandemic posed for law enforcement, such as addressing potential COVID exposure of officers, responding to protests and civil disturbances in the COVID environment, and keeping the virus out of jails.<sup>10</sup>

### **Less Appeal to Younger Workers**

The benefits and some of the most traditionally attractive aspects of a career in policing do not seem to resonate with many younger workers. Policing offers a number of the job attributes that young workers say they most value, including the opportunity to help people and do meaningful work, day-to-day variety in work experiences, and autonomy and the opportunity to work outdoors. Yet the negative media portrayals and souring public perceptions of policing have obscured these selling points. And other benefits of a career in policing, such as a traditional pension, are not as strong selling points as in the past.

Younger generations are also highly attuned to the importance of personal health and work-life

balance. Policing historically has faced significant health and wellness issues — including officer suicide, substance use disorders, divorce, and post-traumatic stress disorder — that may concern or deter potential recruits, though a growing number of agencies are working to address these issues. (See page 43.) More commonplace issues affecting work-life balance, such as challenges with scheduling, childcare options, and housing costs, can also make policing less attractive to potential applicants.

On top of the above challenges, many agencies have large cohorts of senior officers eligible to retire. These agencies face the potential of suddenly losing many experienced officers due to planned retirements or frustration with the changing nature of police work, such as negative public perceptions of the police or the threat of COVID-19 exposure (which is especially dangerous for older officers).

At the same time, however, the presence of many senior officers in some agencies leaves few advanced positions that early- and mid-career officers can move into. This lack of opportunity can make it harder for these agencies to retain those younger officers.



We are authorized 221 positions for a department that was operating at 233 before 2019. We currently have 201 on the books. Out of the 201, 52 are within two years of retirement age. (Our retirement age is 50.) Out of those 52, 37 are already retirement eligible.

**Lieutenant Roberto Villegas, Santa Monica (CA) Police Department**

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10. The Daily Reports are available at <https://www.policeforum.org/covid-19-response#daily>.



## Understanding Younger Workers' Values, Priorities, and Expectations

As members of each new generation enter the workforce, police departments need to consider their values, expectations, and priorities in order to successfully recruit and retain them. Millennials (people born between 1981 and 1996) now make up 35 percent of workers, more than any other generation, and Generation Z (born 1997-2012) is set to constitute more than 25 percent of the workforce in coming years.<sup>11</sup> While statements about such large groups can only be rough generalizations, Millennials and Generation Z overall do appear to view the world differently than the generations that have historically dominated the workforce.

Both Millennials and Generation Z prioritize work-life balance, flexibility, and use of technology in choosing a career.<sup>12</sup> Millennials are especially likely to question authority, and they care more about an employer's reputation than its size or longevity.<sup>13</sup> Seventy-six percent of Generation Z workers would consider looking for a new job if their company lacked diversity and inclusion policies.<sup>14</sup>

These priorities may clash with those of the Baby Boomers (born 1946-64) and Generation X (born 1965-80), who are the current leaders in most police agencies. They also set the prevailing culture in the agency, which prioritizes long-term careers, as well as more traditional and conservative views.<sup>15</sup>

According to Senior Police Officer Terry Cherry of the Charleston (SC) Police Department, "Millennials are disruptors, they're innovators, and they want to have a social impact and improve policing. And you have to let them if you want them to work for you." Joining a profession or company that supports tangible action on social justice is extremely important to both Millennials and Generation Z.<sup>16</sup>



Senior Police Officer Terry Cherry

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11. TeamStage, "Millennials in the Workplace Statistics: Generational Disparities in 2022," <https://teamstage.io/millennials-in-the-workplace-statistics/#>.

12. Shelly Kramer, "Millennials in the workforce: what really matters to them," Dell Technologies Blog, January 22, 2015, <https://www.dell.com/en-us/blog/millennials-in-the-workforce-what-really-matters-to-them/>.

13. BBC, "Millennials, baby boomers or Gen Z: Which one are you and what does it mean?" <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/articles/zf8j92p>; Nikoletta Bika, "Millennials in the workplace: How to manage and engage them," Resources for Employers, <https://resources.workable.com/stories-and-insights/millennials-in-the-workplace>.

14. Nela Richardson and Marie Antonello, "People at Work 2022: A Global Workforce View," ADP Research Institute, [https://www.adpri.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/PaW\\_Global\\_2022\\_GLB\\_US-310322\\_MA.pdf](https://www.adpri.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/PaW_Global_2022_GLB_US-310322_MA.pdf).

15. Jasmine Gordon, "Understanding Baby Boomers At Work: Fast Facts For CHROs," *Forbes*, April 11, 2016, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/adp/2016/04/11/understanding-baby-boomers-at-work-fast-facts-for-chros/?sh=4b4ec270238bl>; Boston College Global Workforce Roundtable, "Engaging Baby Boomers in the Workplace," October 2013, <https://www.bc.edu/content/dam/files/centers/cwf/global/membersonly/pdf/Info%20Req%20Engaging%20Boomers.pdf>.

16. Porter Novelli, "2021 Porter Novelli Focus: Gen Z and Justice," <https://www.porternovelli.com/findings/2021-porter-novelli-focus-gen-z-justice/>.



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Generational differences like these can lead to misunderstanding and negative stereotypes, such as the belief among some older workers that younger workers “don’t want to work.” But police departments can successfully recruit and retain younger workers if they show how the profession can address their generational values.

For example, departments should clearly state the organization’s expectations and values as well as its diversity polices; they should be as flexible as possible on issues related to staff schedules; and they should take concrete steps to ensure mental health and promote a healthy work-life balance. They should also stress that policing can be an exceptional way for a younger worker to give back to their community and assist in positive social change throughout their career.<sup>17</sup>



Members of the Charleston Police Department Recruitment Team meet with attendees of the 2023 Charleston Black Expo.

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17. For more on agencies’ efforts to recruit more younger officers, as well as law enforcement staffing challenges generally, see PERF’s 2019 report, “The Workforce Crisis, and What Police Agencies Are Doing About It,” <https://www.policeforum.org/assets/WorkforceCrisis.pdf>.

# Section 2: Candidate Recruitment and Hiring

**Until recent years, agencies typically received** many applications for every opening. Recruiting candidates to increase the number of applications was not much of a priority. Rather, the challenge was to filter through applications to identify the very best candidates from among the many well-qualified applicants.

Under such conditions, agencies were not penalized if they used application and hiring systems that today seem cumbersome, slow, and inefficient. In fact, some officials have explained that the difficulty of the application and hiring process was almost considered a *feature* because it effectively thinned out all but the most dedicated applicants.

Clearly, today's hiring conditions are very different, and many of the older approaches to applications and hiring are no longer viable. Further, some agencies have realized that the filtering "feature" of their earlier application and hiring processes, as well as their relatively limited recruiting efforts, excluded or discouraged many qualified applicants.

Many agencies are making specific improvements to their recruitment and hiring practices; others are going one step further and streamlining their application and hiring systems as a whole. Agencies also are enhancing their recruitment efforts to reach potential applicants who may not have considered a career in law enforcement as a realistic possibility for themselves or people like them.

## Recruitment Activities Broadcast an Agency's Priorities and Values

The way in which a department recruits and hires officers signals to the local community what kinds of individuals the department wants and what skills it considers valuable. Things such as job postings and community engagement give the community direct insights into how the department sees its officers and what it expects of them. Everything from the application experience to the organization of academy cohorts and even mentoring is a transparent indication of a department's values.

“““

Before, we had an abundance of applicants and were able to be very, very selective. . . . A lot of applicants met the standards, but we were able to pick the top of the top. We're still picking and choosing the best we have, but the numbers from which we choose have dwindled.

**Sergeant Robby Jones, Mesa (AZ) Police Department**

## Countering Negative Portrayals of Police

Shaping community perceptions of the department is critical to attracting and retaining qualified staff. On a daily basis, these perceptions are already being formed by others. Given the negative framing of many national stories regarding police in the past several years, it is important for a department to distinguish its culture, activities, and officers from that national narrative. Recruiting can be a powerful tool to accomplish this.

Yasmine Bryant, a participant in PERF's HBCU internship program (see sidebar, "PERF and Police Departments Partner With HBCUs for Internships") discussed the challenge of overcoming preexisting local perceptions of police:

"What we think is preventing young people from wanting to become a police officer is what they see in the media, but that's not necessarily true. Even before George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and so on . . . those were not the first names that we knew of, and especially not for minorities. They learned from their mothers or their fathers, their grandparents or great grandparents, who lived through the crack epidemic, who lived through the '60s, who lived through slavery. They have all been told by their family members not to go into this profession because of their lived experiences. When people have trauma that has been passed down, they're already being told not to go into this profession. . . .

"You have to convince them to transition from 'Why would I ever be a police officer?' to 'Why *wouldn't* I be a police officer?' For people who truly love their community and truly want to serve, this is one of the highest ways to do so. That is probably the biggest challenge: transitioning from *why* to *why not*."

Recruitment campaigns that present the agency as carrying out SWAT-style operations could reinforce negative perceptions of police. But campaigns that focus on service-oriented roles and de-escalation could have a positive impact on community perceptions of the agency. They also send an important message to officers in the department by demonstrating the department's commitment to those values.

## Attracting a Broader Range of Candidates

Rather than simply trying to update their existing recruitment processes to attract a greater number of traditional recruits, the agencies reporting the most promising results are focusing on attracting a wider variety of potential new officers. Senior Officer Terry Cherry of the Charleston (SC) Police Department explained the issue this way:

"We can't keep fighting over the same pools of people and trying to fit people who are different into the same old policing models."

>> continued on page 24



“””

[When] you reach the point where you have market saturation, you find a new market. So we've got to expand the types of people who are interested in policing, who have previously not been necessarily interested in policing.

Bureau of Justice Assistance Director Karhlton Moore

## Improving Racial and Gender Diversity Can Benefit Officers, Agencies, and Communities

Police departments with greater diversity in areas such as race/ethnicity and gender have more ways to connect with the community they serve.<sup>18</sup> This can improve local perceptions of the agency and its officers and build public trust, which can help the agency improve its operations.<sup>19</sup>

### How can agencies recruit more officers of color?

Research shows that a strong predictor of whether an agency can recruit applicants of color is the share of its *current* officers who are people of color.<sup>20</sup> An agency that is racially diverse projects an image that it values diversity and is open to receiving more applicants of color in the future. Thus, an agency's initial successes in improving diversity would likely benefit subsequent recruitment efforts.

It is important to note that Millennials and Generation Z, regardless of race, are attracted to working at racially diverse organizations. (See sidebar, "Understanding Younger Workers' Values, Priorities, and Expectations.")

Also, survey data show that minority officers' reasons for joining policing often include fulfilling a childhood dream, transitioning out of military service, and making a difference in the community.<sup>21</sup> Agencies can incorporate these messages in their recruitment and promotional materials to better attract Black and Hispanic applicants.

In addition, research shows that candidates of color are more likely to be disqualified during the initial examination stage.<sup>22</sup> As discussed in this report, agencies can thoughtfully remove barriers to entry and thereby keep a more racially diverse group of candidates in the process.

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Members of the Newport News (VA) Police Department Recruitment Division and several officers who served in the armed forces hold a resource fair for veterans.

18. Brianna Flavin, "Police Officers Explain Why Diversity in Law Enforcement Matters," Rasmussen University Justice Studies Blog, December 10, 2018, <https://www.rasmussen.edu/degrees/justice-studies/blog/diversity-in-law-enforcement/>.

19. Richard H. Donohue, Jr., "Shades of blue: A review of the hiring, recruitment, and selection of female and minority police officers," *Social Science Journal*, Vol. 58, No. 4, 2021, pp. 484-498.

20. Jeffrey Nowacki, Joseph A. Schafer, and Julie Hibdon, "Workforce diversity in police hiring: The influence of organizational characteristics," *Justice Evaluation Journal*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 2021, pp. 48-67.

21. Jennifer C. Gibbs, "Diversifying the police applicant pool: Motivations of women and minority candidates seeking police employment," *Criminal Justice Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 3, 2019, pp. 207-221.

22. Richard H. Donohue, Jr.

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### How can agencies retain more officers of color?

It is crucial to address agency culture to ensure that the environment is inclusive and welcoming. Among other steps, agencies can conduct internal climate assessments and ensure that leadership and officers are properly trained on diversity, equity, and inclusion.<sup>23</sup>

In a 2017 survey asking officers of color why they stay on the job, a key factor they cited is the presence of a *mentorship program* within the agency.<sup>24</sup> These programs give newer officers a valuable window into potential advancement opportunities in the agency; officers of color often cite a lack of those opportunities as a reason they leave an agency. They also noted that mentorship programs help engender a sense of belonging within the agency. Officers of color want to feel heard as well as seen.

Community support is also important.<sup>25</sup> Black officers note that animosity within their own community toward policing can make being an officer difficult. Some community members see Black individuals who become police officers as having gone to “the other side” and no longer belonging to the Black community. Conversely, Hispanic officers often find that they are encouraged by their community. Just as improving agency diversity can strengthen community support, improved community support can help an agency remain diverse.



Baltimore Police Commissioner Michael Harrison and Mayor Brandon M. Scott welcome the trainees of academy class 23-01 to the Baltimore Police Department.

### How can agencies recruit and retain more women officers?

Women are seriously underrepresented in policing, making up only around 13 percent of full-time sworn officers in local police agencies and 7 percent of sworn state troopers.<sup>26</sup> Agencies can take a number of steps to improve their gender diversity, including in their senior ranks, as discussed in PERF’s 2023 report “Women in Police Leadership: 10 Action Items for Advancing Women and Strengthening Policing.”<sup>27</sup>

23. Charles Russo and Thomas Rzemeyk, “Finding Equity, Inclusion, and Diversity in Policing,” *Police Chief Online*, August 4, 2021, <https://www.policechiefmagazine.org/finding-equity-inclusion-and-diversity-in-policing/>.

24. Gabriele Suboch, Colleen Harrington, and John House. “Why Do Female and Minority Police Officers Remain in Law Enforcement?” *Race, Gender & Class*, Vol. 24, No. 3-4, 2017, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26529225>.

25. *Ibid.*

26. Federal Bureau of Investigation, “2019 Crime in the United States,” Table 74, <https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2019/crime-in-the-u.s.-2019/topic-pages/tables/table-74>; Lindsey Van Ness, “Percentage of Women in State Policing Has Stalled Since 2000,” *Pew Charitable Trusts*, October 20, 2021, <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/blogs/stateline/2021/10/20/percentage-of-women-in-state-policing-has-stalled-since-2000>.

27. The report is available at <https://www.policeforum.org/assets/WomenPoliceLeadership.pdf>.



Research suggests that agencies with greater gender diversity have increased engagement with the community, less use of force, and fewer citizen complaints. A 2017 study, for example, found that increased gender diversity is a strong predictor of community policing activities.<sup>28</sup>

Research also shows that community members served by a police force with greater gender diversity are more likely to report cases dealing with sexual violence, and those cases are more likely to be cleared by the police agency.<sup>29</sup> Female officers are less likely to use force than their male counterparts.<sup>30</sup> They also receive fewer citizen complaints. If they do receive a complaint, they are less likely to receive another complaint than their male colleagues.<sup>31</sup>

A number of barriers prevent more women from joining policing, according to PERF's report, which was based on the results of a national survey, focus groups, and a literature review. For example, many agencies still rely on outdated recruitment videos designed to sell excitement (such as officers breaking down doors) rather than the service activities that more realistically portray the daily reality of the job, such as conducting welfare checks.

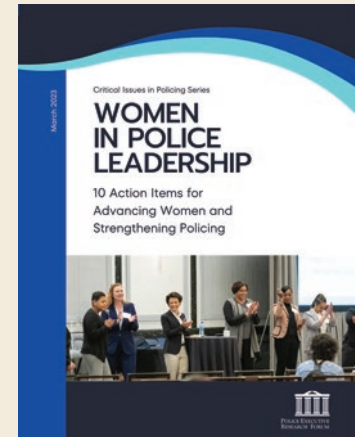
Also, many women drop out of the hiring process during initial screening and training. Some psychological examinations have not been substantially updated since the 1950s. Additionally, many women cannot meet existing state- or agency-mandated physical standards, which are not always validated as work-related and in compliance with Equal Employment Opportunity Commission requirements.

PERF's report also identified several factors that prevent women from advancing in their careers once hired. These include agency cultural issues, such as a "good ol' boys club" mentality favoring men in assignments and promotions. A lack of women mentors also prevents many women from advancing, as does a lack of family-friendly policies in areas such as childcare, pregnancy, and parental leave.

The PERF report lists ten action items for agencies to encourage more women to enter policing and enable them to rise to leadership positions.

1. Agencies should foster a culture in which all women feel included, valued, respected, and equal.
2. Agencies should make it a priority to hire more women at the recruit level. Among other things, they can sign the 30x30 Pledge, in which they commit to take steps to increase the representation of women in all ranks.

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28. Amie M. Schuck, "Female Officers and Community Policing: Examining the Connection between Gender Diversity and Organizational Change," *Women & Criminal Justice*, Vol. 27, No. 5, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08974454.2017.1303659>.

29. Amie M. Schuck, "Women in Policing and the Response to Rape: Representative Bureaucracy and Organizational Change," *Feminist Criminology*, Vol. 13, No. 3, July 2018, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1557085117753668>.

30. Kimberly A. Lonsway, Michelle Wood, and Katherine Spillar, "Men, Women, and Police Excessive Force: A Tale of Two Genders," National Center for Women and Policing, April 2002, <https://docplayer.net/21382159-Men-women-and-police-excessiveforce-a-tale-of-two-genders.html>.

31. Kim Michelle Lersch and Tom Mieczkowski, "Who are the problem-prone officers? An analysis of citizen complaints," *American Journal of Police*, Vol. XV, No. 3, 1996, <https://doi.org/10.1108/07358549610129613>.



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3. Agencies should ensure that women are not being unfairly excluded from the hiring and training process, especially with respect to physical fitness standards.
4. Agencies should create or expand family-friendly policies and resources that support women (and men) in balancing the demands of the job and the needs of their families.
5. Agencies should provide women members with equal opportunities to the full range of assignments, including in specialized units.
6. Agencies should ensure their promotional processes are transparent, equitable, and free of any biases that may have an adverse impact on women.
7. Agencies should provide women members with equal opportunities to attend training and other development activities throughout their careers.
8. Agencies should create or expand mentoring and career development programs geared toward women.
9. Efforts to develop and promote women should not be restricted to the sworn ranks only. Agencies need to make a concerted effort to hire, promote, and provide opportunities to women members of their professional staffs.
10. Agencies should collect and analyze data on women members in their department to identify possible disparities, obstacles to advancement, and strategies for improvement.

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### **Seeking a Diversity of People and Views**

Expanding the pool of potential officers not only aids an agency's recruitment efforts, but also serves the larger goal of staffing the agency with a more diverse group of officers. A consistent theme throughout PERF's data collection for this report has been that successful recruiting and retention both demand that agencies embrace a diversity of people and views. Agencies recognize the value of officers who are community-service oriented, empathetic, and strong communicators. Agencies also recognize the value of having a diversity of races, ethnicities, and genders that mirrors the community they serve.

This is a shift for many police agencies, to attract and retain officers who may be different from themselves and possibly from the agency's current culture. But it aligns with changing public expectations for policing, which increasingly focus on collaboration and community problem-solving.

Recruitment and Training Coordinator Nisse Lee Ramser of the Greenwood Village (CO) Police Department explained:

"Police work was very different in the '90s than it needs to be today. So number one, I'm looking for people who approach the job from a standpoint of compassion . . . [and] kindness. The kind of person that's always looking to learn the next thing and improve and hone their craft. The job is constantly changing because we serve people, and people are constantly changing, culture is constantly changing."

This shift also aligns with the change in values as new generations of young people — Millennials and Generation Z — constitute a growing part of the workforce and look for a profession with a purpose, an organization with a good reputation, and diversity among their peers. (See sidebar, "Understanding Younger Workers' Values, Priorities, and Expectations.") These new generations also

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We have been incorporating, to a greater degree, people in our recruiting efforts who look like the people we are trying to attract.

Deputy Chief Michael Caprez, City of Akron (OH) Police Department

place a high value on wellness and work-life balance, so the strategies in these areas that agencies adopt to improve officer *retention* (see Section 3 below) will also help them *recruit* younger workers.

### Adopting New Recruiters and Recruiting Techniques

To reach and incorporate these new pools of potential candidates, agencies are changing both their recruiters and their recruiting techniques. For example, Captain Terrence Dunbar explained that the Newport News (VA) Police Department is increasing its diversity in part by seeking bilingual officers:

“Our initiatives are to increase the number of minorities within the department. We are recruiting bilingual officers, and we’re doing a great job at that; we’re averaging about 25 percent Spanish-speaking in each of our academy classes and a recent class had almost 50 percent. Because we are recruiting for minorities, our classes are diverse. Our ultimate goal is for the agency to resemble what the city looks like.”

His department is also one of many that have joined the national 30x30 Initiative, which is working to increase the share of women in the ranks to 30 percent by 2030.<sup>32</sup>

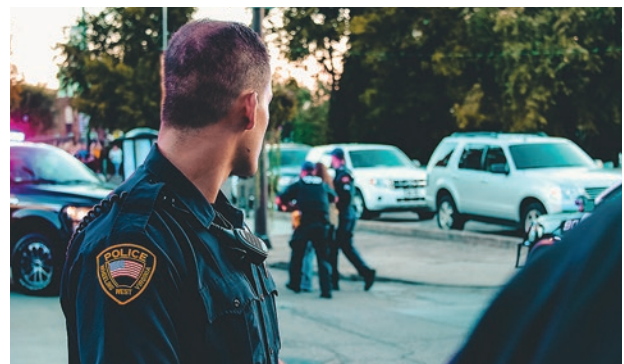
Agencies also are being inventive in how they look for the types of people they want to attract. Greenwood Village’s Nisse Lee Ramser gave one example:

“I go to bartenders and Starbucks baristas . . . because they can multitask under

pressure with a customer service focus. Those skills are incredibly transferable to dispatch and police work. I tell them, if you’re looking for a career change, here’s what we have to offer. . . . So a lot of what we do as far as getting our message out about who we are is literally me talking to people about who we are.”

### Revisiting Hiring Standards

Since agencies traditionally had many more applicants than openings, they were free to make their hiring standards more and more restrictive over time, further narrowing the profiles of candidates making it through the process. The current staffing crisis has led many agencies to revisit those standards. Some candidates who are qualified and good fits for the needs of modern policing might not meet the traditional profile of an officer and might previously have been screened out through agencies’ hiring standards. Successful agencies are carefully considering whether their standards match the actual capabilities needed for the job.



32. 30x30 Initiative, <https://30x30initiative.org/>.



We place a strong emphasis on personalizing our recruitment and hiring program to meet the needs of the agency and the applicant. We often connect directly with applicants via email and phone, and we frequently invite them to the station for a personal meeting to explain our agency and the community we serve. Interested applicants can even participate in a ride-along with one of our officers.

**Chief Joseph Hoebeke, Hollis (NH) Police Department**

### Helping Disadvantaged Candidates Meet Agency Standards

Agencies also are helping candidates meet their modernized standards through fitness training, mentoring programs, and academy preparation programs. Most attendees at PERF’s national conference agreed that this assistance doesn’t constitute “coddling.” Rather, it recognizes that not all candidates have had the same opportunities for mentorship to know what is expected of them in the recruitment process or to meet these standards at the start of the process.

Recruitment and Training Coordinator Nisse Lee Ramser of the Greenwood Village (CO) Police Department detailed her agency’s approach:

“I’m trying to make our hiring process more accessible to the populations that historically have not been well represented, mentored, or coached in law enforcement. . . .

“If we have someone and maybe their answers aren’t as clear and polished as this other person, maybe they just haven’t had a mentor to coach them on what they need to answer. But we look at the meat of their answers. Are they coming at this from a place of compassion? Do they seem like they want to get the job for the right reasons? . . .

“Since we’re able to cast a much, much wider net, we’re able to get a much more diverse hiring pool. And then from that pool we hire the most qualified people.”

Strategically and thoughtfully removing barriers in the eligibility criteria and hiring process to better identify the types of officers that agencies need today can help address staffing needs while also improving diversity.

Agencies stressed to PERF that in changing their eligibility criteria to “widen the net” of potential officers, they are seeking to attract the highest-quality candidates from a larger and more diverse population, rather than weakening their standards to accept a lower-quality version of the traditional officer.

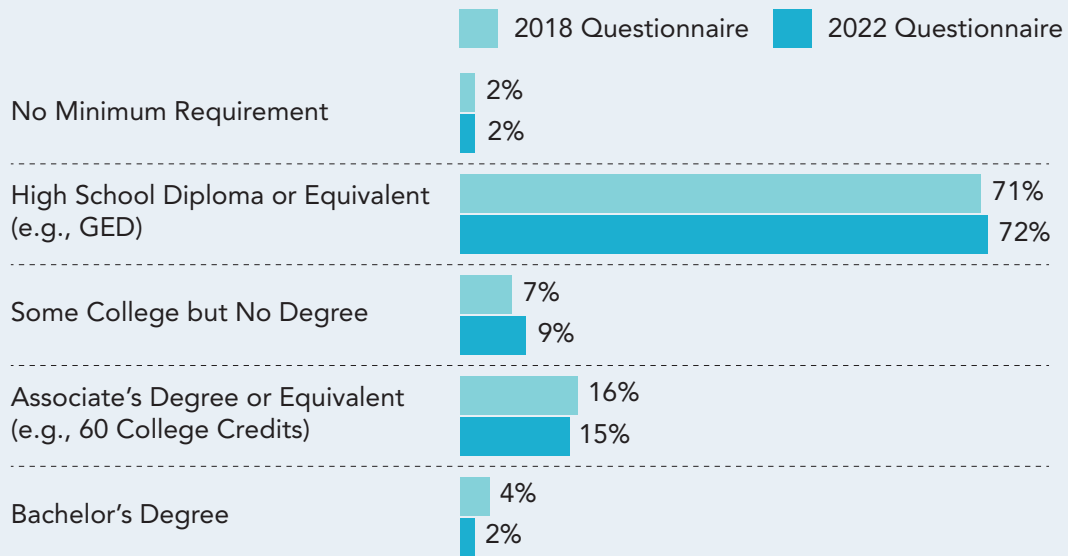
As discussed above, agencies are increasingly seeking individuals who come from a variety of backgrounds, represent a range of ethnicities, races, and languages, have empathy and communication skills, and value a job with purpose. To reach this wider range of potential candidates, agencies have reevaluated standards in areas such as education, physical ability, and personal appearance.



We historically preferred BAs or higher, but over the past four years we have hired a greater number of [people with] associate’s degrees and military [service] in lieu of a degree.

**Chief Jon Murad, Burlington (VT) Police Department**

**Figure 7: Agencies' Educational Requirements**



**Percentage of Agencies with Minimum Educational Requirements**

Note: N=230 for 2022 questionnaire (nine agencies were not included in this analysis because they responded "Other") and 386 for the 2018 questionnaire (26 agencies were not included because they responded "Other").  
 Source: PERF Member Questionnaire on Recruitment and Retention

*Education, Life Experience, and Age*

Agencies are reconsidering how they view formal education, life experience, and age as predictors of a candidate's success.

Roughly 7 in 10 agencies require recruits to have at least a high school diploma and 1 in 4 agencies require at least some college, according to a 2022 PERF questionnaire — findings comparable to PERF's 2018 survey. (See Figure 7.) However, participants in PERF's national conference shared that life experience and other qualities are just as important as education in making a quality officer. Sergeant Anthony Gibson of the Charleston (SC) Police Department, for example, spoke of the need to "define diversity beyond mere optics, including but not limited to diversity of thought, education, background, life experience, job history, socio-economic status, and trade skillsets."

Some of that discussion focused on the importance of age as an indicator of the maturity and decision-making skills required of an officer. As

Senior Deputy Mayor Monisha Harrell of Seattle (WA) noted, a college degree is not a replacement for age in developing maturity.

"The human brain doesn't stop developing until you're 25 years old. So . . . there might be people who are 21, 22, 23 years old, . . . [and] we say, go back and get more education, but there could be other ways to reach those people . . . because brain science is a reason that some of these people might not be as ready as others."

Agencies can have the best of both worlds by selecting applicants who are mature and helping them further their education by offering a college tuition reimbursement. Seventy-one percent of agencies offer a college tuition reimbursement as part of a recruiting bonus, but only 39 percent of agencies provide a pay increase or bonus to current officers for a college degree. Chief Yolanda Talley of the Chicago (IL) Police Department shared:

## 6699

We used to require a mile-and-a-half run to test for cardio endurance. We now do a half-mile run. One of the biggest reasons is that if you ask any cop when they last had a mile-and-a-half foot chase, they're going to have a hard time thinking of one. It just doesn't happen. But we didn't change the pace of the run so it's technically the same standard, just shortened.

**Sergeant Michael Cheek, Dunwoody (GA) Police Department**

“This is an issue that we've discussed for a very long time. I have 28 years in the Chicago Police Department. When I first came to the department, only a high school diploma was required. I had a college education at the time, but I must say the best police officers that I knew then and I know today came to the job with a high school diploma.

“The Chicago Police Department has a tuition reimbursement program that covers 100 percent. I'm a big advocate of having people that are age 25 to 27, with high school diplomas, coming to this job, because once you come on this job we're going to pay for your education. And you cannot be promoted to a sergeant until you have a four-year degree. . . .

“We all know that everyone's path is not the same. Some people graduate high school and they have to go to work—for family reasons, for all types of reasons. . . . Let's take a look at these people with high school diplomas that have been in the workforce and are 25 to 27 years of age. . . . Just because you have an education doesn't mean you're going to be a better candidate for the police department.”

### *Physical Ability Testing*

One of the biggest changes that many agencies have made in their applicant screening and eligibility criteria has been to revise their physical ability testing to better match the actual physical fitness requirements of the job. Agencies have reduced the difficulty of certain required feats, changed the types



of physical abilities that must be demonstrated, or in some cases begun relying on a medical examination to provide an indication of health instead of conducting a physical abilities test.

“Our physical assessment for new hires has moved away from a traditional obstacle course and towards a rowing test that is more equitable in determining a prospective applicant's job readiness,” according to Sergeant John Ramirez of the Abilene (TX) Police Department. “Further, these testing standards can be shared with applicants in advance and prepared for at their local gym.”

Chief Deputy Mike Lee of the Harris County (TX) Sheriff's Office reported that they “changed the PT [physical training] test to an obstacle course and moved away from the standard PT test consisting of push-ups, sit-ups, and 1.5-mile run, which we found was resulting in very high failure rates among female applicants. Historically, over 70 percent of our female applicants did not pass our PT test.”

Many agencies concluded that their prior approaches to assessing physical abilities were not a reliable indicator of a candidate's potential to be a good police officer. Imposing these antiquated requirements also eliminated many highly qualified



and promising candidates — women in particular. PERF’s recent report on expanding women in police leadership found that many female applicants do not last beyond the screening process, in part because tests and screening have been based on male norms. (See sidebar, “Improving Racial and Gender Diversity Can Benefit Officers, Agencies, and Communities.”)

Chief Marcus Jones explained that the Montgomery County (MD) Police Department has eliminated the physical fitness test altogether:

“[We] got rid of the physical fitness test for candidates. What we do with great success is engage our applicants during the background process, which can be a bit lengthy. We invite them to our academy, we have weekly Zoom meetings with those folks, and we have workout sessions on the weekend. We invite them to work out so they get to experience the rigors of the police academy well before they’re even hired. Then we have a medical examination to make sure they’re fit for duty.

“The last academy class we put in had a 1:1 ratio of women to men. That was the first academy class [where] we fully suspended the physical [fitness test], and I’ll be interested moving forward to see what our data looks like to see the impact, but it certainly appears promising.”

By changing or eliminating the physical abilities test as an eligibility requirement, an agency can increase both the number of candidates who qualify and the organization’s female representation.

### *Substance Use History and Other Eligibility Criteria*

Departments have evaluated and modified many other longstanding eligibility criteria and screening tools, such as standards for personal appearance and tattoos, substance use, and screening tools that capture other factors, such as psychological factors. The specific changes vary widely across agencies; the following are a few of the highlights PERF learned in our work. In many cases, the agencies suggested that the changes they have made reflect changes in society in general.



Prior substance use, especially regarding marijuana, has been an increasing area of reconsideration as more states either decriminalize it or legalize its use. “Prior drug use is no longer an automatic disqualifier given all of the recent changes in law, specifically surrounding marijuana,” according to Lieutenant James Gordon of the Virginia Beach (VA) Police Department. And Commander Ron Leonard of the Jefferson County (CO) Sheriff’s Office reported, “With the legalization of marijuana in 2014, many applicants have no idea about the concerns of marijuana use. Marijuana use (prior to hiring) is framed like alcohol use.”

Major Greg Fried explained how the Fairfax County (VA) Police Department revisited its hiring rules regarding past marijuana use:

“We ensured that our process and selection criteria were modernized. Previous drug use is about duration and frequency, as well as the amount of time that has elapsed since prior use. We look at that individually and take a holistic view of each applicant. What else is in their background? What if any crimes were committed? . . . Again, time that has elapsed and that it was not something they’ve continuously repeated is important.

“People do make mistakes in life, and we need to realize that, and they can grow and mature from experience. Frankly, we have found that people with a little bit of

>> continued on page 32



## Prince William County Improved Diversity by Updating Recruiting and Hiring Practices

In 2020 the Prince William County (VA) Police Department contracted PERF to review its recruiting and hiring practices and identify potential improvements, particularly changes that could help the department diversify its applicant pool. PERF's report, published in 2021, recommended changes to the personnel bureau staffing and manual, the hiring process, and recruitment efforts.<sup>33</sup> Chief Peter Newsham and Captain Dave Smith discussed the study at PERF's November 2022 national conference on police recruitment and retention. Chief Newsham said:

"When I started in Prince William [in February 2021], we were not a diverse police department. We're the tenth most diverse county in the country. So one of my mandates as the new chief of police was to improve diversity. Of course, we're suffering from the same challenges that everyone else is — getting people to apply and getting people hired."



Prince William County Police Chief Peter Newsham (FAR LEFT) and Prince William County Police Captain Dave Smith (LEFT)

Captain Smith, who led the implementation of PERF's recommendations, gave an overview of those changes: "We contracted PERF in 2020, and they spent a year taking a close look at our recruiting and hiring practices, to figure out what was keeping us from hiring officers who mirrored the demographics of our community.

### Eligibility and Hiring Guidelines

We looked at our eligibility guidelines, and we identified a couple things that had an effect. One was applicants' financial histories. Prior to the study, when an applicant had a lot of debt, we told them to take care of it and come back later, regardless of what that debt was or whether there was a payment plan in place. Now, if we see student loans or medical bills and they have a payment plan in place and are showing financial responsibility by chipping away at that debt, then they can move forward in the hiring process.

There was also some ambiguity in some of the hiring guidelines, so background investigators had varied interpretations of what those guidelines meant. The guidelines included "crimes that would degrade public confidence" but didn't define that any further. So we've clarified that it means DUIs, sex crimes, and things of that nature. We brought our drug standards in line with best practices. A lot of agencies require three years of no drug use, and we previously required seven years of no drug use, which was impacting the number of people eligible to apply.

33. Police Executive Research Forum, "Review of the Prince William County, VA Police Department's Recruitment and Hiring Practices," May 2021, <https://www.pwcva.gov/assets/2021-07/PWC%20Report%20Final.pdf>.

When PERF reached out to applicants who had dropped out of the hiring process, many said they didn't really know what the standards were, but they figured they didn't meet the standards based on the questions we were asking. Once we updated our guidelines, we posted them on our website so people will know what we're looking for.

Our personal history statement was 31 pages, and we were able to pare that down to nine pages. Many questions asked for information that we would be getting anyway, like their credit history, driving history, and criminal history. And we removed questions that weren't relevant to the hiring process, such as "Have you ever traveled out of the country?" and "Who makes your car payment?" We also removed questions about whether their family and friends use drugs or have been charged with a crime, because those aren't relevant to the applicant.

### **Applicant Tracking**

When PERF came in, we were looking for an online applicant tracking system, because we were still stuck in 1970. We had paper hiring files and were tracking our data in Excel and Word documents. It was difficult to sift through all that to find trends and identify disparate impacts. Since we've gone to the eSOPH applicant tracking system, we've had an accurate look at where we're losing people throughout the hiring process, any trends, and can identify ways we may be able to improve.

### **Marketing**

We didn't really have a robust marketing and advertising plan. We started utilizing targeted ads on Instagram and other social media platforms. We're geofencing around colleges and universities, as well as military bases across the country. Our police department was only about 15 percent female, so we've developed some hiring events, videos, and online outreach specifically about women in law enforcement. And we're being more intentional about our job fairs to make sure we reach women's colleges, Historically Black Colleges and Universities, and Hispanic-Serving Institutions.

### **Implementation**

Some of those changes went into effect on a rolling basis as we worked with PERF, but the bulk of them were put in place by Chief Newsham in March and April of 2021. We've seen a 45 percent decrease in applications in fiscal year 2022, compared to fiscal years 2020 and 2021. But we're getting many applicants who told us they never even considered this profession.

In the last fiscal year, 34 percent of our applicants were white, while 66 percent were from underrepresented groups. Prior to last year, more than half our applicants were white. In the years leading up to the PERF study, about 16 percent of the trainees in our academy were female, and about 40 percent were from underrepresented groups. Since then, our academy classes have been 24 percent female and 70 percent from under-represented groups. We're trending in the right direction and have seen positive results from the changes we've made, but there's still a lot of work to be done.



The Prince William County Criminal Justice Academy Basic Law Enforcement 52nd Session graduating class on March 13, 2023

life experience can be more successful in getting through our process, the academy, and becoming successful police officers than people who haven't had much life experience.”

Agencies are also reevaluating certain screening tools they use to measure other capabilities, such as the written exam. Major Casey Cooper of the Lawrence (KS) Police Department shared:

“We have become more subjective with some of our process. For example, if we see a failure on the written test, we don't automatically [disqualify] the candidate; we look at their packet as a whole and determine if the candidate should move on or be moved out of the process.”

Some departments have added new assessments to gather better information on a candidate's potential to be a successful modern officer. For example, Director of Modernization Harry Meek of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police explained that his agency now screens for unconscious biases as part of its new three-day assessment centers and up front during its unsupervised online assessment. The unconscious bias assessment is already achieving results. It not only ensures a more rigorous assessment of candidates' behavior and attitudes across three days,

but also helps educate applicants on why officers need to understand the concept of unconscious bias.

## Adopting Innovative Recruiting Strategies

Community outreach through social media and community events can interest local residents in the field of policing by educating youth on the role of police and helping the community see officers as approachable and part of the community. Some people are driven to enter policing, and recruitment seeks to pull those driven officers to your agency. But recruitment also seeks to attract individuals who may not have considered policing as a career.

## Social Media Campaigns to Reach a Younger, More Diverse Audience

Many police agencies now use social media to communicate with younger workers (and potential recruits). Generation Z, in particular, access news mainly from social media platforms rather than newspapers or television, which can affect the way the incoming workforce views recent events on policing, protests, violence, and crime.<sup>34</sup> Additionally, roughly one-third of Generation Z use social media as a valuable job-search tool.<sup>35</sup>

Several agencies PERF spoke with said they use light-hearted and entertaining TikTok videos, Instagram posts, and Facebook pages to attract a younger



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On Facebook, you can . . . pick locations that you want to hit heavily with recruiting information. You can also choose demographics — people's background, hobbies, education, etc. — so your dollar goes further. We advertised in areas in which police officers did not feel appreciated. We're looking at education, at people with two-year degrees. And we're looking for people that like to lift weights, anything that we know police officers like to do, with healthy hobbies to ensure they possess outlets to assist with stress.

**Chief Rex Troche, Sarasota (FL) Police Department**

34. Rishika Dugyala and Kamran Rahman, “6 things to know about Gen Z, politics and 2020,” *Politico*, October 11, 2020, <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/10/11/gen-z-politics-2020-poll-takeaways-426767>.

35. Yello, “Introducing the First Graduating Class of Generation Z.”



If we can build community investment or trust, people can realize, “This person is just like me. They just happen to have this job. Hey, I can have that job too.” So we do coffee with a cop, fro-yo with the 5-0 — community things that are fun and low stress. Most contacts happen roadside on a traffic ticket or that kind of thing, so we want to show that hey, we’re just like you.

**Sergeant Jacques Tregre, Gilbert (AZ) Police Department**

audience to the department. For example, Sergeant Jacques Tregre of the Gilbert (AZ) Police Department reported:

“I want us to be poking fun at ourselves. Just have a good time with it instead of being so serious because so much of our job is so serious. The perception of the career is so serious. If [you were] a fly on the wall of a patrol briefing or saw us goofing around the office earlier today, people could see we have a good time while we’re here working. It’s not all serious police officer stuff.”

Social media also provides a means to reach a more diverse group of residents, Sergeant Tregre explained:

“We do live events so we can be really transparent: put me on the spot, ask me a question live on Facebook and we come up with an answer. Just trying to be a bit self-deprecating. We’re in Arizona, so we have a large Hispanic population locally. We did an entire Facebook Live in Spanish . . . to show that you shouldn’t set up walls for yourself [between you and joining the police] that aren’t there; if English isn’t your first language, think about this skill that you bring to the table.”

Specialized features in social media platforms allow agencies to strategically target potential recruits who live in particular areas of the country, have particular backgrounds, or have hobbies that align with typical law enforcement activities and interests.

Several agencies also reported adopting an application that allows interested candidates to enter basic information, ensure they meet the

requirements, and then connect directly to the agency recruiters via text or call to ask questions. Chief Jim Blocker of the Battle Creek (MI) Police Department explained:

“I thought this was so Millennial, and a waste. Who really takes apps and social media seriously when looking for work and importantly a career change? Turns out, many people do!

“In less than 90 days, we had over 95 applicants in the pool, compared to the 9 applications using our traditional recruiting methods. Eighteen were hired after backgrounds and medical and [psychological evaluations] were completed: 11 white males, 4 white females, 2 Black females, and 1 Hispanic male. [They included] 70 percent with a B.A., one a master’s degree, a mechanical engineer, and multiple veterans, and all lived within 50 miles of the city.”

### **Community Events to Build Trust and Aid Recruiting**

Agencies PERF spoke to are sending officers to a myriad of community events and are organizing their own — career fairs, community fairs, church functions, cultural heritage events, pizza with police, workout-with-a-hero sessions, citizens’ academies — to make their officers more visible and approachable. This community-oriented approach is part of a long-term strategy to improve the agency’s identity, which ultimately will benefit recruiting. Captain James Hunt of the King City (CA) Police Department explained:

“We do a lot of community outreach and community-related events: coffee with the





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We are encouraging candidates to tour our new police headquarters and do a ride-along. While they are here, we do a recruiting pitch to them about why this is the department they should join.

**Chief Richard Hickey, Brentwood (TN) Police Department**

cops, pizza with the police, ice cream with the cops. So we’re trying on all levels, with all facets of the community to reach out. And we’re increasing our presence in schools. Let kids get to know us in a different light — kids who might be interested in a career in law enforcement.”

Agencies commonly attend traditional recruiting events like career fairs, information booths at high schools and colleges, and military recruitment events. “The job fairs and stuff like that, that’s been consistent; I don’t think we ever stopped doing that,” said Captain Nicholas Picerno of the Montgomery County (MD) Police Department. “I got hired as a police officer 20 years ago because of a job fair.”

These events continue to be moderately successful in recruiting traditional applicants as well as some from underrepresented populations, but other agencies have found them less successful. According to Chief Billy Grogan of the Dunwoody (GA) Police Department:

“We’ve gone to tons of recruitment fairs and things like that and we just don’t gain a lot of traction. We went to one last year, ... there were probably eight or nine police departments there and only about six people came. So it’s just not as effective.”

Agencies have had more success by combining traditional, broad-based approaches with newer, more targeted approaches, especially when working to attract candidates from underserved communities. According to Lieutenant Ted Lopez of the Anaheim (CA) Police Department:

“We always strive to recruit quality candidates by recruiting in an unbiased, diverse method.

We have increased our social media content, which targets a broad range of the public. In addition, we have diversified our recruitment efforts to include local community events, high school, community college, and four-year school career fairs. We also conduct informational meetings for school clubs and table-top events on campus. We routinely attend military recruitment events at our local Marine bases.

“These efforts have resulted in the highest year of overall hiring and number of female candidates in the process.”

One unique take on the career fair approach comes from the Cedar Rapids (IA) Police Department, which attends a career fair for student athletes. Several agencies said they target student athletes for recruitment — particularly female athletes, since they would be especially likely to meet the agency’s physical standards.





Another unique approach is the Gilbert (AZ) Police Department's "workout with a hero" event, which features a workout that is scalable based on fitness level to encourage people who are concerned about the physical nature of the job or about the physical fitness test (including many women) to work out with the officers and learn how the officers improved their own fitness.

### **"Going Upstream" by Creating Candidate Pipelines**

Programs like police explorers, cadet programs, and internships are becoming more common as agencies seek to nurture the recruits of the future by identifying youth currently interested in policing or even cultivating an interest in youth to move into the field of policing. Some of these programs focus on youth as young as middle school; others are aimed at college students right before they are recruit-eligible.

These programs not only increase the number of recruits and improve relationships between youth and the police, but can help guide at-risk youth into a stable career path. Deputy Chief Michelle Richter of the Metro Nashville (TN) Police Department (MNPd) described the department's multi-program Law Enforcement Collaborative initiative:

"MNPd participates in a Youth Citizens Police Academy and is in the development stages of a Cadet program. Middle school students may participate in the Police Activities League, summer camps, carnivals, and DARE. For elementary school students, the program highlights Read Me Days, youth camps, and other outreach events. The Law Enforcement Collaborative helps students

achieve their career goals, highlights positive engagement opportunities for youth, and helps MNPd meet its needs for more trained professionals.

"The initiative encompasses a broad range of opportunities for students to explore civilian and commissioned officer careers at MNPd and to pursue the education and training they will need to achieve their career choices. We also have internship programs with several colleges."

Several promising programs also target underserved populations. One example is the pilot program PERF sponsored in conjunction with the Baltimore City Police Department and Morgan State University (see sidebar, "PERF and Police Departments Partner With HBCUs for Internships").



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I'm a big proponent of our cadet program. Participants are 18-21, they don't make much and it doesn't count toward their pension or years of service, but once they're 21 they can become recruits and by that time we know if they're a good fit. Some don't become officers, but the ones that do become the best in the academy.

**Lieutenant Mike Cox, Anne Arundel County (MD) Police Department**

Assistant Chief Nicholas Augustine of the Montgomery County (MD) Police Department provided another example:

“[We offer a] two-year program for college students paid as part-time employees. They work 20 hours a week, assigned to a unit or division. It’s kind of like an internship but they’re more involved, to prepare them for a career in law enforcement. They have to remain in college and maintain a 2.0 GPA. We have many diverse applicants in our cadet program who then go into the academy. We are pretty much growing our future officers.

“The good thing about the program is they’re paid employees, which supplements the cost of college and motivates the cadets to succeed academically. We are now able to mentor potential at-risk cadets away from behaviors that disqualify officer applicants, such as youth drug involvement or criminal activity. We get to see their work ethic, and if they are a good fit for our department, we hire them as an officer. Over 50 percent of them are from diverse communities. Over 75 percent actually become LEOs in Montgomery County.”

## PERF and Police Departments Partner With HBCUs for Internships

In the summer of 2022, PERF and the Baltimore Police Department (BPD) partnered with Morgan State University and Coppin State University — two historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) — to pilot an innovative new program. Under the coordination of the BPD Equity Office, eight students and recent graduates were selected as interns and assigned to various BPD units, including victim services, evidence management, and recruitment. Participants in the ten-week program were compensated by the MacKenzie Scott Foundation.



Members of the intern group.

The program’s objectives were to explore the historical and current relationships between police officers and community members, study the complex operational and managerial components of a law enforcement agency, integrate criminal justice theory and practice, allow students to work alongside a BPD mentor to support the internship experience, and provide insight on and explore potential career paths in law enforcement. Through its design, the program examined problems related to crime in Baltimore while engaging young Black students in a potential career with a law enforcement agency.

At the end of their internship, each participant presented detailed recommendations for improving BPD operations to an audience that included their colleagues, PERF executives, PERF Board President and BPD Commissioner Michael Harrison, and the

presidents of both universities. Thus, the interns’ experiences in BPD helped shape not only their understanding of policing but also BPD’s understanding of itself.

PERF expanded the program in 2023, placing 30 students from 13 HBCUs with 29 law enforcement agencies across 15 states. Once again the program was a success; several interns indicated their desire to change career paths and enter the policing profession as a result of their internship experience.



We went to an electronic statement of personal history for background investigations. . . . When I first came up here three years ago, we were still working with big old thick files and having to get signatures. Now everything is online. That has reduced the time it takes to complete a background significantly; it's much more efficient for our investigators and just much more efficient all the way around.

**Robby Jones, Mesa (AZ) Police Department**

A few agencies offer internships to individuals transitioning from military service. For example, Captain Michael Manley of the Vermont State Police shared:

“We’re setting up an intern program where soldiers cycling out are told about the Vermont State Police. They can do some ride-alongs and do an internship for 2-3 weeks, so they can get exposed to the agency and still be getting paid by the military. We set up housing and hook them up with our special teams, our investigators, and expose them to everything that we have to offer.”

## Streamlining the Hiring Process

Once an individual is interested in policing, an agency has to help them get through the hiring process, which can be arduous. Many agencies lose potential candidates due to lengthy application, selection, and training processes.

Ease and speed are essential in securing the best recruits. An application and hiring process that takes six to 12 months sends a very different signal about the organization’s abilities and priorities than one that only takes a few weeks. As Chief Karl Oakman of the Kansas City (KS) Police Department lamented, “It takes us longer to investigate a recruit than a triple homicide. Why is that? Because we have these set steps, we have to have so many people in this pool before we move to the next pool, and then the next pool, and you look up and three months have passed.”

## Making the Application Process Faster and Simpler

Many agencies are examining and revamping every stage of their hiring process for timeliness and effectiveness. Major Greg Fried of the Fairfax County (VA) Police Department shared:

“A lot of our people didn’t realize the urgency of modernizing our selection criteria. We had self-created barriers throughout our hiring process. So we did a complete evaluation, overhaul, and transformation, from the moment somebody applies to their ‘signing day’ when they’re hired. We modified our automatic denials, drug use, and driving infractions, taking a holistic look at each applicant.”

**Accessible application forms.** The application itself needs to be easy to access and to complete, agencies stressed. It should be available online and mobile-friendly. Nearly half of Generation Z have applied for a job on a mobile device; over half say they will not complete a job application if the application methods are outdated; and one-fourth would be deterred from accepting a job if technology wasn’t effectively incorporated into the hiring process.<sup>36</sup>

Providing forms in multiple languages makes them more accessible and signals that an agency values diversity. Also, agencies noted they had success with streamlined application systems that included only essential questions, omitting any questions that would be collected at a later stage of

36. *Ibid.*

hiring. And it is important at the application stage to provide applicants with information about each stage of the process and its approximate time so they have realistic expectations.

**Third-party vendors.** To speed up the application process, some agencies have found success with specialized software and third-party vendors. Captain Rocco Domenico of the Colorado State Police Academy shared one example:

“A third-party vendor does our testing for us. All of our testing is done electronically. That has helped quite a bit because we used to have to bring people to centralized locations and host tests here, which caused some difficulty for people. I’d bet that difficulty has been working against our diversity and inclusion goals of trying to get people to come here.”

Agencies are also saving time for themselves and candidates by working virtually, which gives candidates more flexibility in meeting the needs of the hiring process, especially for interviews.

Agencies have learned that lengthy delays between hiring and the academy can cost them candidates. Thus, many agencies have created pre-hire programs or internships so their recruits are engaged (and paid) while waiting to begin the academy. According to Division Chief Chris Juul, for example, the Aurora (CO) Police Department has launched a pre-hire program that pays individuals on a contract basis to help the department prior to the academy so they aren’t hired away.

It is also important to move recruits into the academy quickly. For example, a department that begins accepting applications nine months before its next training academy is automatically creating a long timeline for applicants to move through the hiring process. To mitigate this challenge, the Oklahoma City (OK) Police Department has begun running smaller academies on a regular and more frequent schedule (cohorts of 30-60 people run every four months), setting up logistics so two staggered cohorts go through the academy at the same time. Some smaller agencies have accelerated the training phase by arranging to send their recruits to a larger department’s academy.



Cadets at the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Academy receive paid training from their first day.

### Creating One-Stop Assessments

A few agencies have adopted the promising practice of integrating and streamlining the recruiting and hiring processes through assessment centers or specialized hiring events. An assessment center arranges many of the required tests and screenings into a single coordinated event. By enabling candidates to complete all their assessments more quickly, this reduces the potential for long delays or logistical challenges, which can frustrate candidates to the point where they drop out of the process.

**RCMP assessment center.** For example, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police consolidated its assessment process into a three-day retreat. As Director of Modernization Harry Meek explained:

“We’ve developed three-day assessment centers. We run them on military bases or a police academy so that it mirrors our academy. Folks sleep in dorms together and get used to doing fitness every single day that they’re there. . . .

“We give them a lot of interaction with our members because at the end of the day, our applicants want to speak to police officers, they want to be cops, they see our cops as rock stars, and they don’t get a lot of opportunity to interact with cops. We make sure that our membership there reflects the diversity of Canada. And it’s important



that our applicants see themselves in the organization.

“We also have a one-on-one interview with them. We’re not going over old ground; what we’re really asking them is, why do you want to be a cop? What do you bring to the table? What are your strengths? What do you need to work on and how are you going to work on it? What are some of your unconscious biases and how are you going to address those? We just give them an opportunity to tell their story.

“That sort of process is in its early days, but it’s really showing great dividends. We have psychological assessments and security checks afterwards, and from the folks that have gone through that so far, we’re seeing a really high pass rate.”

#### **From application to employment offer.**

The Rockville (MD) Police Department and Baltimore County (MD) Police Department combined the assessment center model with their recruitment events to create opportunities for community members to go from completing an application to receiving a conditional offer of employment in the same day. Chief Victor Brito of the Rockville Police Department described the event:

“We had a hiring event where we did a written exam, fitness exam, and background interviews all at the same event. It was wildly successful. We accelerated the process without cutting any corners. At the end of the day, I made 17 conditional offers. We did a lot of pre-screening; we did a lot of background work; we interviewed all of our candidates; we did our written test; we did our physical fitness test. We did it all at one time. We made conditional offers to ten lateral officers and seven entry-level officers.”

Some agencies have organized these events as festivals to engage with the community about

the importance of recruiting and provide a venue for current officers to feel part of the recruiting process, while also raising interest among potential applicants.

## **Keeping Recruits Engaged and Supported**

In some ways, a law enforcement agency’s recruitment of a potential officer resembles a college coach’s recruitment of a promising high school athlete. For example, regular and transparent communication is key. Many agencies are working to improve in this area, which roughly two-thirds of Generation Z and Millennials rank as one of the most important components of the candidate experience. As Chief Billy Grogan of the Dunwoody (GA) Police Department shared:

“We put a lot of emphasis on expediting the process. When people are interested in coming to your agency, the last thing they need is for this to take forever. The other thing is to make sure that we’re communicating with them, so we text people, letting them know where we are in the process. It’s a lot more work . . . but it pays off. I’ve had multiple times where somebody applied at our department and another department and [then chose] Dunwoody. I asked [one person], what made you pick Dunwoody? He said, ‘Because you guys made me feel like you wanted me.’”

**In the academy.** Encouraging people to feel that they are a valued team member is also important to retaining potential officers while they are in the academy and as they transition into being an officer, agencies reported.

For instance, the Oklahoma City (OK) Police Department emphasizes teamwork and group cohesion to help candidates learn from one another, as well as a tactic for getting more candidates to successfully complete the academy. Giving the entire cohort the responsibility for each candidate completing the academy has significantly increased the graduation rate.



**Upon graduation.** An agency also should demonstrate to newly graduating recruits that it honors and values their commitment, as Baltimore Police Department intern Yasmine Bryant explained at PERF’s national conference:

“Someone said earlier that when you swear in officers, you treat it like it’s a signing day [for athletes]. It is very important to welcome them with a very high honor. There is no higher love and higher service than to be willing to lay down your life for another person and for your community. . . . It’s very important to treat it as such for people [becoming] a police officer.”

**After graduation.** Field training and the initial probationary employment period is another critical checkpoint for making certain a candidate shows the aptitude, ability, and personality to succeed in the profession and in the agency. Mentorship is essential during this period, especially for officers whose family or community might not support their decision to join policing.

The Houston (TX) Police Department, for example, has a mentorship program through which current officers recruit and mentor cadets through their academy and probationary time; participating cadets are eligible for cash incentives. And the Staunton (VA) Police Department has started a mentorship program that pairs veterans with new officers starting from their date of hire.

## Mentoring and Providing Pathways for Success

Deputy Commissioner Sheree Briscoe of the Baltimore (MD) Police Department emphasized the need for cultural changes within departments to enable officers from underrepresented groups to succeed:

“If we’re being honest, for people who look like me [a Black woman], gender and race were never officially welcomed. Now we’re having conversations about how to open the doors and welcome everyone, but that won’t happen if we don’t change internally, . . . if we



Baltimore Police Department intern Yasmine Bryant

don’t create a culture and a climate and an ethos that welcomes and sustains the presence of everyone.”

## Adopting a Holistic Approach to Recruiting and Hiring

While a great many agencies have revamped individual recruiting and hiring processes or adopted new strategies (such as those discussed above) to accompany traditional strategies from the past, a few agencies have gone further, taking a holistic approach that addresses their overall process. Major Greg Fried of the Fairfax County (VA) Police Department shared:

“Instead of saying, ‘Just get people hired,’ we . . . involved the entire division in the conversation, which created greater understanding, agreement, and buy-in to support our vision of transforming our recruiting and retention efforts. It was an investment, but having the entire team moving in the same direction, with many ideas coming from them, significantly lowered any unnecessary roadblocks or barriers. Everyone has a shared vision and understanding, which is critical to our success.

“We increased our focus on lateral (experienced) officer transfers. . . . We now accept out-of-state and federal lateral transfers to attend a modified training academy, . . .

without having to complete the full basic six-month officer training for new officers. We signed the 30x30 pledge to increase the representation of women in police recruit classes to 30 percent by 2030 and ensure policies and culture support women officers throughout their career. . . .

“To increase military recruiting, we participate in the Department of Defense SkillBridge internship program, which allows military service members to use the last 180 days of their service to train in a new field while still retaining military compensation and benefits. We enhanced the Recruitment Incentive Program, which provides hiring incentives up to \$15,000 to new officers. . . .

“We submitted a budget request to turn the Cadet Program (which is part-time) for 18- to 20-year-old employees into the Police Apprenticeship Program (which is full-time), developing each apprentice through increasing responsibilities until they are eligible for the training academy.

“We launched a new digital media campaign, including an updated recruiting

website, a new advertising strategy (to include social media), and other marketing materials. We implemented an Applicant Tracking System for improved accountability between recruiters and candidates, from initial interest through the successful submission of an applicant questionnaire.

“To increase applications and applicant interest, we began offering conditional offers of employment to qualified candidates at recruiting events. (Applicants are still required to complete all stages of the hiring process successfully.) We also began hosting hiring expos — opportunities for applicants to practice the physical abilities test and get a sneak peek into the training academy.

“We have created a pre-academy hiring program that builds camaraderie, resilience, and confidence through a structured program and team building. The recruits know each other when they begin that journey together. We dedicated personnel to an intentional focus on retention. It’s so important that once we get new officers in the door, we must invest in them throughout their career.”



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As many folks have said, the process is intimidating. It wasn’t intimidating for me; I was fourth generation and I got hired in three days because my dad was a cop. But not everyone has that luxury. So, to have an official mentor that stays with you not only during your application process but during your time in the police academy and then beyond is a good thing for our profession. And it’s a good way to keep folks.

**Chief Kevin Davis, Fairfax County (VA) Police Department**

# Section 3: Officer Retention

**While each agency has its own set of issues** affecting officers' decisions about remaining in the department, Captain Colin King's explanation of the retention challenges facing the Tucson (AZ) Police Department covers many commonly cited issues:

“Planned retirements have been a factor. Other reasons for the reduction in staffing include resignations for other careers outside of public safety. Some reasons given include compensation, perceived lack of support from the community and from elected officials, and the perceived increase in danger while policing. Some feedback identifies the loss of nobility and respect in policing, especially as it is presented in media and other similar sources. Finally, pension changes make it harder for our younger employees to envision staying with the agency until retirement when that can be 30-plus years into the future.”

Most successful agencies have found that retaining officers requires ensuring the department

is a place where officers want to work — a place where they spend their careers, where they can grow and thrive, and where they can earn respect and honor. As Chief Joseph Hoebeke of the Hollis (NH) Police Department explained, the combination of a positive work environment and positive community relations has made the department more successful at retaining officers and more competitive for recruiting candidates:

“We have been successful in retaining employees as we place an emphasis on organizational culture, wellness, and work-life balance. In Hollis, we enjoy a strong relationship with the community and high level of support. On a number of occasions, we have found that applicants have only applied to our agency, which is an indication that we are doing something right. I think we offer stability, in terms of community support, a solid work-life balance, a strong culture, comparable wages, and a progressive policing mindset.”

“““

We are a smaller agency, 46 sworn, which affords us a family environment. I know every officer by name and generally know what's going on of significance at home with each. I have worked at a much larger agency and constantly tout the wonderful family feel that we share. We also get a ton of support from our local community. We are the recipient of food and treats on a weekly basis. Our local community certainly adores their officers.

**Chief Sean Dunn, Williamsburg (VA) Police Department**

## “Taking the Temperature” of Officers

To understand why their officers are leaving, most agencies already conduct exit interviews. As Sheriff Timothy Leslie from the Dakota County (MN) Sheriff’s Office explained:

“Our exit interview process is our gauge as they walk out the door. Were we successful in creating that culture for you, or are you leaving because we weren’t successful? Those are good opportunities for us to look in the mirror, have administrative meetings, and discuss where we failed with this human being. Did they not feel a part of the organization? Did they not feel valued? Did they not have input?”

But, as Sergeant Anthony Gibson of the Charleston (SC) Police Department pointed out, exit interviews are not enough to understand what officers are experiencing, why some officers are leaving, and the needs of those officers still in the agency.

“Exit interviews are too late. They are good to gauge attitudes of departing employees and/or to identify immediate problems to be addressed but they do not lend to sustained organizational change. Officer check-ins are essential to assessing the trends and temperature, if you will, of your officers.”

Most agencies (59 percent of respondents to PERF’s survey) reported that they measure employee satisfaction, but many agencies also have adopted further strategies to better understand their specific retention issues. For example, the Hyattsville (MD) Police Department conducts an agency-wide anonymous survey of sworn and professional staff. Similarly, the Charleston (SC) Police Department conducts a “stay engaged” survey.

By creating or strengthening programs and policies that address officers’ stake in the department, their values and expectations for the job, their health and wellness, and the department’s commitment to its values, agencies can help build a more positive culture within the organization.

### Addressing Long-Standing Issues With Officer Well-Being

The policing profession has long struggled with significant wellness issues, including higher rates of suicide, depression, social isolation, substance use disorder, divorce, and post-traumatic stress disorder. The events of the past few years, including the pandemic and the public fallout from

police-involved shootings, have added to the already high stress levels under which police officers work. This stress can lead to burnout and cause officers to leave the profession; it also can result in physical and mental health problems and even suicide.<sup>37</sup>

The staffing crisis has increased the pressure on agencies to prioritize mental health — both to help their current officers and to make the agency more attractive to new recruits who do not want to experience these same struggles. As Sheriff Tim Leslie of the Dakota County (MN) Sheriff’s Office shared:

“I think [the stress of policing] has gotten worse. . . . [I]n my day, we had another cocktail or you talked about it a little bit, but you really kind of were encouraged to

37. Bureau of Justice Assistance, “Officer Suicide: Understanding the Challenges and Developing a Plan of Action,” July 2020, <https://bja.ojp.gov/library/publications/officer-suicide-understanding-challenges-and-developing-plan-action>.



““““

Many officers don't like the traditional employee assistance program because they deal with a lot of folks that don't truly understand what our officers deal with. Our department psychologist was an officer for over 20 years and understands what our officers do.

**Chief Ryan Zuidema, Lynchburg (VA) Police Department**

suppress it. I think we've moved past that; we are much more open now to understanding that we are like anyone else. We can't just slough it off. . . . When an officer goes through a traumatic event, we've got to reach out and make sure this human being is okay and is going to get through this, and wrap our arms around them as best we can.”

### **Encouraging Time Off and Time With Family**

Agency efforts to improve officers' work-life balance by changing “old school” attitudes about policing can improve both retention and recruitment. Chief Steve Mylett of the Akron (OH) Police Department described the importance of time off and time with family:

“I came on in 1989. I loved this job so much that I probably wore my uniform to bed. I couldn't wait to go to work, and I was so pumped to be a police officer. Many of my classmates, and people who came on before me, didn't worry about taking time off and didn't focus on spending time with our families because work came first. What a mistake that was. Unfortunately, we witnessed a lot of divorces, alcoholism, and other destructive outcomes.

“So, I think this generation is actually smarter than we were in valuing their time off.”

An important related strategy for many departments is supporting the families of staff. For

example, Chief Paul Liquorie of the Holly Springs (NC) Police Department reported:

We increased our wellness programs, including the areas of mental health, physical fitness, and training. As a midsized agency (75 sworn) we also try to promote a family atmosphere — holding family days, holiday parties, and other events that build personal relationships and the feeling of belonging at our department.

Commander Ron Leonard of the Jefferson County (CO) Sheriff's Office explained that his department hosts a catered employee appreciation event each year for employees to celebrate success and honor their work. It also holds a summer employee picnic focused on family engagement, with command staff manning the booths and a food truck providing dinner to employees and their families.

### **Creating Options for Officers to Get Help and Improve Their Well-Being**

Agencies are using various holistic approaches to improve their officers' health and wellness. For example, Chief Ryan Zuidema explained that the Lynchburg (VA) Police Department's holistic approach includes a post-academy training program on emotional survival for law enforcement that staff complete with a family member or significant other. Additionally, all sworn and professional staff must undergo an annual mental health checkup called “a checkup from the neck up,” and they have access to a department psychologist as needed at no cost.





The Anne Arundel County (MD) Police Department has a robust peer-to-peer support network with 70 officers trained. The Naugatuck (CT) Police Department has expanded on this concept by developing a regional peer support network so that officers can seek help outside the department. The Leon County (FL) Sheriff's Office has a behavioral health and wellness coordinator, orientations for officers and their families, and a financial wellness program.

Financial wellness is part of officer wellness. The Leon County (FL) Sheriff's Office's Executive Director of Human Relations, Mary Nicholson, shared:

“Success for us is in the data. It's telling us who's using our holistic wellness programs and the outcomes that we are hoping to achieve. We have surpassed expectations. For instance, with the SmartDollar financial program provided to our employees, we have staff who have paid off \$40,000 and \$50,000 in debt using that program. . . . We take care of our employees so that they don't feel the need to leave us.”

““““

We established constant communication and an open-door policy with the sheriff and command staff to understand the needs of the agency and its employees.

**Director of Human Resources Molly Hudson, Volusia (FL) Sheriff's Office**

## Giving Officers a Larger Voice in the Agency

Ensuring that officers are heard within the agency is an important way to improve retention, especially at a time when understaffing in many agencies has placed added burdens on the remaining officers. As Senior Officer Terry Cherry of the Charleston (SC) Police Department shared:

“Police officers don't have the same power and agency that police chiefs and command staff have. They don't get to tell you, ‘Hey, I'm unhappy. I'm miserable, this guy's picking on me.’ They come and they work. . . . And when you take away their agency and the ability to communicate internally, and you give them mandatory overtime, . . . all they have left is to jump from agency to agency . . . because you've taken away the stakeholding aspect of being a police officer.”

## Improving Two-Way Communication

Many agencies described different forms of two-way communication as a strategy that helped agency leadership hear from their officers. For example, Chief Jarod Towers of the Hyattsville (MD) Police Department conducted an agency-wide anonymous survey of sworn and professional staff and found that agency culture and commitment to its officers (“family-type” relationships), as well as transparency, were important to them. The agency responded by increasing two-way communication — conducting employee surveys and publishing a biweekly agency newsletter — and started recognizing staff anniversaries and birthdays.

Commander Kimberly Covelli of the Village of Lincolnshire (IL) Police Department shared:

“We offer department members the ability to participate in advisory committees focusing on training, uniform and equipment, policies and procedures, and recruitment. The purpose of these groups is to enhance officers’ personal investment in the department by affording them the chance to bring forth ideas and collaborate on current and future policing recommendations to the Chief of Police.”

### Acting on Officers’ Input

Larger agencies have made similar efforts to enhance two-way communication to ensure that they not only hear officers and consider their perspectives, but also act on the officers’ input. The Fairfax County (VA) Police Department, for example, took a number of steps, including:

- Formalizing officer retention as a dedicated responsibility in the newly named Recruiting and Retention Section, with personnel specially assigned to focus on retention.
- Creating a retention action plan that includes confidential “pulse check” interviews to gather feedback from current officers and mandatory exit interviews for separating employees.
- Creating an electronic, anonymous suggestion box for personnel to submit ideas directly to the retention team.



- Creating a monthly internal newsletter to provide direct, consistent information to officers and staff.
- Designating Administrative Support Bureau commanders as advocates to quickly disseminate accurate information to staff.
- Designating “retention ambassadors” at each work location to facilitate the accurate flow of information, conduct stay interviews, and be champions for the agency.

### Creating Opportunities for Officers to Grow Within the Agency

Even if officers feel they have a voice in their department, their time at an agency may be limited by their ability to advance in their career. Attendees at PERF’s November 2022 conference stressed the importance of providing staff with opportunities for growth. Nearly three-fourths of PERF survey respondents report that they provide officers with professional development opportunities as a retention strategy.

### Investing in Officer Education

Many agencies incentivize advanced education (39 percent of survey respondents), such as through pay increases, or even help fund further education. For officers who stay, for example, the Gaithersburg (MD) Police Department will pay for their college degree regardless of the major or field chosen.

The Chicago Police Department has made significant investments in higher education benefits. In fact, it has sent so many officers to law school that “Right now, we have more attorneys as patrol officers than the Cook County State’s Attorney’s Office,” according to Chief Yolanda Talley. She added, “We are a very educated department and have paid for a lot of undergraduate and graduate degrees, law degrees, and doctorates.”

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We are providing more leadership training for our first-line leadership, specifically in team-building, coaching, and mentoring.

**Captain Terrence Dunbar, Newport News (VA) Police Department**

### Creating Career Pathways

Reducing time-in-grade requirements for promotions and offering promotion examinations on a more regular basis can enable officers to move up in a more timely manner. However, only 18 percent and 21 percent of survey respondents, respectively, have implemented these changes.

Some agencies shared they have conducted buyouts or adjusted their maximum retirement age so that they can move some people *out* in order to move other people *up*. The Columbus (OH) Police Department, for example, conducted an unprecedented buyout in the summer of 2022, offering 100 veteran officers \$200,000 apiece to leave.

The Chicago Police Department instituted a mandatory retirement age to open up positions for younger officers. “We hadn’t had a promotional exam in 10 years because we didn’t have a mandatory retirement age; people could stay forever,” explained Chief Talley. “So, we ran into those problems where you have people in a detective division for 40 years, and those vacancies just weren’t there to promote. Once we went to 63 years of age as a mandatory requirement, people started leaving.”

### Varying Officers’ Assignments

Some agencies are offering new and special assignments to enable officers to challenge themselves and grow, which also makes them more valuable to the agency.

Director of Policy and Communications David Karas of the Wilmington (DE) Police Department, for example, said, “Wilmington police officers are offered a range of opportunities for advancement, training, and professional development. This begins with our intensive, in-house police academy, and continues throughout their careers through regular in-service training and a wide variety of specialized training offerings.” And Captain Eric Versteeg of the Lodi (CA) Police Department said, “Our agency has numerous collateral duty assignments to help provide variety and additional training for every officer off probation.”

### Showing Support From Agency Leadership

When staff think that their department does not support them, they do not want to stay around. Police leaders are demonstrating commitment to their officers by praising them when they do well, supporting them when doing the right thing still leads to a bad outcome, and holding



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I think we retain officers as a result of the growth opportunities we offer. Last year, the command staff gave the entire department two development days, and we worked their patrol shifts. On those two days, they just had to do something related to personal or professional development. It just gave them a little breather.

**Chief John Clair, Town of Marion (VA) Police Department**



LEFT: Representatives from the Bucktrout Funeral Home drop off donuts for the Williamsburg (VA) Police Department to enjoy on Valentine's Day, 2023. RIGHT: Senior Deputy Mayor Monisha Harrell of Seattle (WA).

them accountable when they violate policies or expectations.

According to Captain Chad Kauffman of the Staunton (VA) Police Department, for example:

“We revamped our awards and recognition program to better recognize officers for exceptional performance. And we are utilizing the PowerEngage survey platform, which provides near-real-time positive feedback to officers from citizens they interact with.”

According to Chief Sean Dunn of the Williamsburg (VA) Police Department, “We have made a conscious effort to recognize employees’ efforts more than at any other time in my career. We might do it by email, a conversation in a hallway or lineup, or through a formal award recognition. We also opened up command meetings virtually to all personnel to be sure all staff are aware of department happenings, as well as priorities.” The department also provides lunch or dinner for staff at times such as training events or following difficult

incidents, and the command team grills food for staff on occasion to show support and engage with them.

### Gaining Support From the Local Community

A running theme through PERF’s interviews and the national conference was the importance of the local community’s attitudes toward and interactions with the department and its officers. Community attitudes can have a major impact on whether officers feel valued, respected, and rewarded by the work they do, which in turn affects their decisions about continuing to do that work.

“People want to feel valued, from both the agency and the community,” said Chief Shanon Anderson of the Oregon State University Police Department. “They can leave at a moment’s notice, so you can’t wait to see something happening with them to make changes or fix issues.”

Given the negative framing of many national stories regarding police in the past several years, it is important for a department to distinguish its culture, activities, and officers from that national narrative. It can do so by improving the local community’s understanding of their local police department.

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The Mayor and Council support our department and regularly attend ceremonies and recognition events.

**Chief Jarod Towers, Hyattsville (MD) Police Department**



## 6699

The [Jefferson County Sheriff's Office] hosts citizen academies, and graduates can join the alumni association. This group of volunteers work to show appreciation for the employees' dedication to community safety. They provide breakfast burritos and other items of appreciation to employees.

**Commander Ron Leonard, Jefferson County (CO) Sheriff's Office**

Government leaders are a reflection of the community, so their support — such as showing up at events sponsored by law enforcement — also represents community support. Senior Deputy Mayor Monisha Harrell of Seattle (WA) shared:

“The mayor’s office has gone to every single roll call for all of our precincts, all shifts. We talked to every officer, letting them know that they have a direct voice in how we move

forward. And we let them know how we were working to solve some of the problems around having to work, additional shifts and all that. [W]e’re hoping that helps turn the tide in some of the loss [of staff].”

Some agencies indicated that strong community support helped them maintain or even increase their staffing levels.





# Section 4: Financial Incentives as a Recruitment and Retention Strategy

## Many agencies are offering financial

incentives to attract new officers or retain their current officers. These incentives can be effective, but they intensify the competition among agencies over the limited number of individuals available. According to Watch Commander Larry Church of the Georgetown University Police Department, for example:

“We were so desperate and the pool of selection was so weak. We had to go to laterals, which means you don’t have to go through the Academy. . . . But the hard problem is still the selection pool because it’s so competitive. [E]verybody’s fighting for the same people and at the end of the day it’s still about the money.”

## Agencies Offering Variety of Recruitment Incentives

PERF’s survey found that the most common financial incentives for recruitment are providing a salary while in the training academy, free academy training, and college tuition reimbursement. (See Figure 8.) Less common strategies include employment sign-on bonuses and housing assistance; the Los Angeles Police Department’s Housing for Hires program is a good example of the latter. (See “LAPD Launches ‘Housing for Hires’ to Boost Recruiting.”)

## Strategies to Attract Lateral Hires

Just over half (52 percent) of survey respondents shared that their agency is specifically trying to hire officers from other agencies. Agencies with staffing shortages have paid lateral transfers sign-on bonuses of up to \$30,000. Some agencies said they adopted this strategy out of desperation to address the current staffing crisis.

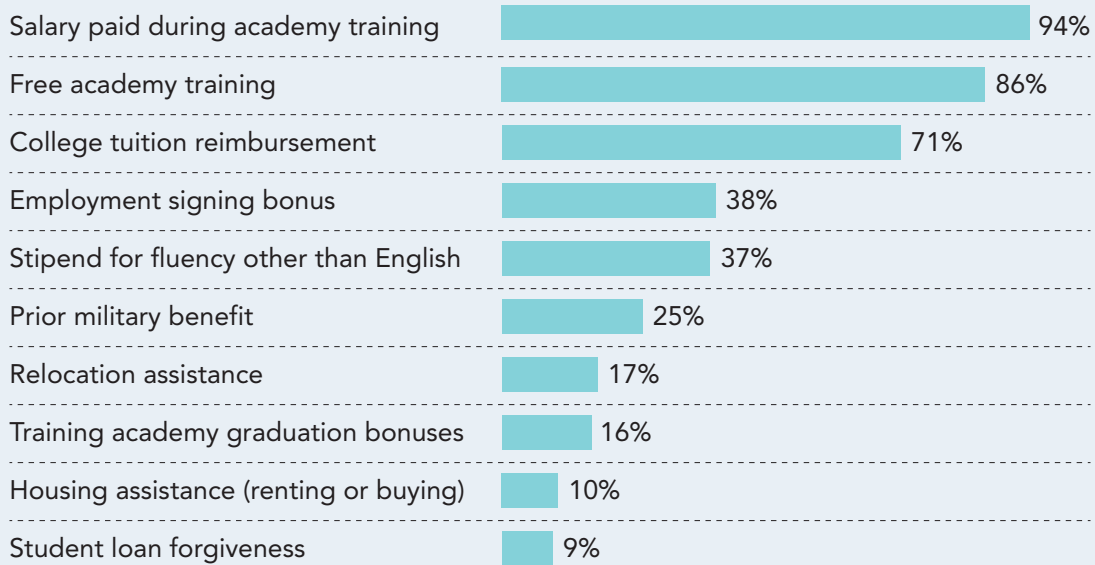
Strategies to “swipe” officers from other agencies have become blatant. Some agencies have targeted officers from specific jurisdictions by geofencing around locations they frequent, such as gyms. As Chief Marcus Jones of the Montgomery County (MD) Police Department noted:

“We found an agency that was geofencing around our district police stations, highlighting folks’ cellphones and social media outlets to advertise for hiring existing officers from our department.”

Other agencies have sent recruiters to job fairs located in neighboring agencies’ jurisdictions. Most concerning is the swiping of new officers directly from the academy, after another agency has trained them. Director Erik Bourgerie of the Colorado Peace Officer Standards & Training shared that:

“It really does seem like the norms we would use for recruiting have gone off the rails. One of the big complaints I’m getting from agency heads from across the state is agencies poaching recruits out of the academy.”

**Figure 8: Departments Offering Variety of Financial Incentives for Officer Recruitment**



### Percentage of Agencies Offering Different Types of Incentives to Recruit Officers

Note: N=238. Each agency could pick multiple items from the list and was asked to choose any of the specified incentives employed for retention of officers/deputies. Twenty-eight agencies were removed from this analysis because they elected not to answer the question.

Source: PERF Member Questionnaire on Recruitment and Retention

“Historically there have been rules of etiquette regarding recruiting each other’s officers but now those rules have been blurred,” explained Chief Michael Harrison of the Baltimore (MD) Police Department. Agencies stated that they do not like taking officers from other agencies (or having their own officers taken), but that the current staffing crisis often leaves them with few other options. Chief Russ Hamill of the Laurel (MD) Police Department shared:

“When I first came in, a number of officers from another local agency came over to us and I struggled with that because I knew that agency was having issues with keeping people as well. . . . [W]e got a bunch of great cops there, and maybe they would have gone someplace else [if not to our agency], but those are tough decisions for us. If we keep taking people from each other in that manner, we’ll create larger issues; we’ve got to be careful.”

### Downsides of Lateral Recruiting

While lateral recruiting is widespread and often effective, agencies stressed to PERF that it can have significant drawbacks.

**Cost.** Representatives of agencies that have pursued officers from other agencies surmised that this strategy is unsustainable, since agencies will have to continuously raise bonuses to out-compete each other. At some point the bubble will burst.

**Possible culture mismatch.** Many agencies expressed hesitancy with accepting laterals, and even agencies that feel driven to recruit laterals have concerns. For example, an officer leaving one agency for another will bring the previous agency’s culture with them, which might clash with the culture of their new agency. And Chief Danny Barton of the Coppell (TX) Police Department warned, “A culture of mercenaries . . . is toxic. Money and incentives do not instill belief in what you are doing.”

## 6699

This year we have also implemented hiring bonuses for sworn officers, military personnel, and an internal employee referral incentive.

### Lieutenant Ted Lopez, Anaheim (CA) Police Department

**Potential for problematic officers.** Adding to these concerns are the limitations in preventing officers with a history of misconduct from moving from agency to agency. Chief Jason Armstrong of the Apex (NC) Police Department shared an alarming case in which an officer whom he had fired for criminal use of force while at the Ferguson (MO) Police Department was hired at another agency before that case was concluded.

While thorough background checks could help prevent such occurrences, several participants in PERF's conference said they had challenges in obtaining information about officers from their prior or current agency. State laws requiring law enforcement agencies to share information about their officers with other agencies during background checks can help, according to Commander Ronald Leonard of the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office in Colorado, one state with such a law.

Director of Training Juan Balderrama of the Oklahoma City (OK) Police Department shared that his agency seeks to protect against problematic lateral officers entering the agency by requiring laterals to attend full-length academies,

not abbreviated academies. The purpose is for all recruits, whether they are new to the profession or have previous experience, to learn the department's values and culture and to build a team mentality.

### Recruitment Incentives Have Only Limited Benefits

Agencies shared that while financial incentives are well intentioned and overwhelmingly appreciated by incoming officers, overcoming their staffing issues will take deeper, longer-term departmental changes. According to Chief John Clair of the Town of Marion (VA) Police Department:

"I challenge someone to produce objective data, that any of the financial incentives are truly working. The money we throw around just keeps on adding up. I think if we offered a 20k bonus, we'd immediately get lateral transfers, who'd quit a year later. I won't say I don't believe in a certain level of financial incentives. . . . I just don't think we need large bonuses."



Oklahoma City Police Department Director of Training Juan "Beto" Balderrama (FAR LEFT) and Apex (NC) Police Chief Jason Armstrong (LEFT)

## Agencies Also Offering Retention Incentives

Various agencies shared with us in interviews and the conference that they are offering large sums to retain current officers. For instance, the Hyattsville (MD) Police Department employed a one-time \$7,000 retention bonus for all officers; the Aurora (CO) Police Department paid two bonuses totaling \$10,000; and the Memphis (TN) Police Department gave a 9 percent bonus to officers who committed to staying. Many agencies providing retention bonuses are offering them as a one-time occurrence to meet current staffing needs, using surplus funds that were available due to staffing shortages.

### Several Types of Financial Incentives

In some cases, financial incentives can help tip the balance in ways that help with retention, as well as encourage officers to develop and grow in ways that are valuable for the department.

For example, Police Lieutenant James Gordon of the Virginia Beach (VA) Police Department noted, “Our department recently implemented a new step-pay plan, which seems to be helping curb early retirements by allowing our officers to see the projection of pay increases they will receive. In addition, our City Council and Senior Executive City Leadership have publicly supported our officers and have approved pay increases for our police staff over the past two years, when other cities and states were cutting police funding.”

**Retention bonuses.** Agencies shared that retaining seasoned, trained officers is paramount in their efforts to maintain organizational stability. Chief LeRonne Armstrong of the Oakland (CA) Police Department explained his preference for retaining over recruiting. The Oakland City Council had pushed an initiative to pay a sign-on bonus of \$50,000 to new recruits, but Chief Armstrong believed that using those funds instead to create a retention program would result in higher dividends for the department: “We were competing against 20 other local law enforcement agencies that were providing bonuses and . . . I thought we had to figure out a way to retain our officers as opposed to competing with the other agencies’ recruiting.”

Chief Armstrong convinced the council to redirect the funds into a bonus structure (\$3,000 for three years, \$5,000 for five years, and \$7,500 for 10-plus years) and it has proven successful. “Our attrition rate has plummeted,” according to Chief Armstrong. “We have seen zero officers leave, and 12 officers have returned.” (Returning officers were eligible for the bonus if they had left in the last two years.)

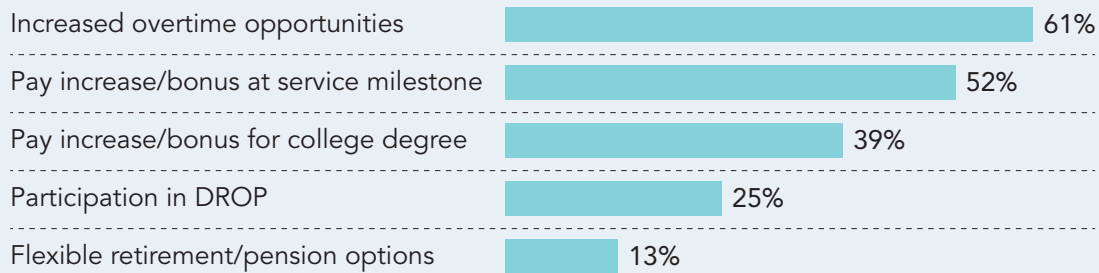
**Increased overtime opportunities.** Agencies have also adopted various other financial incentives to retain officers. (See Figure 9.) Sixty-one percent of agencies answering PERF’s questionnaire offer increased overtime opportunities as an incentive. Traditionally, overtime offers an effective means for officers to quickly increase their take-home pay, though some agencies caution that mandatory or excessive overtime may push officers away. (See Section 5.) Many agencies are also providing pay increases or bonuses to officers who meet specified service milestones or receive a college degree.



Recently we significantly raised our starting pay and made our lateral step-plan go all the way up to 20 years of service. We have received a lot of lateral applicants from other departments. While we have hired several laterals, we have also disqualified many more due to employment related issues at their current departments. Despite this, the strategy overall is working for us. But other departments may follow suit once they see what we’re doing.

**Manager Janie Gonzalez, Dallas (TX) Area Rapid Transit Police Department**

**Figure 9: Departments Offering Variety of Financial Incentives for Officer Retention**



### Percentage of Agencies Conducting Specified Activities to Retain Officers

Note: N=254. Each agency could pick multiple items from the list and was asked to choose any of the specified activities employed for retention of officers/deputies. Twelve agencies were removed from this analysis because they elected not to answer the question.

Source: PERF Member Questionnaire on Recruitment and Retention, October 2022

**Improved retirement options.** In addition, many agencies are seeking to boost retention by offering deferred retirement option plan (DROP) programs or other flexible retirement/pension options. For instance, the Prince George’s County (MD) Police Department restructured its DROP program because, as Chief Malik Aziz explained, “We’re at a critical juncture: this year was bad, next year it’ll get worse, and the year after that is going to be terrible if we don’t actually keep some of our veterans here.” Under Prince George’s program, once an officer has 22 years of service they can begin accruing, in addition to their salary, retirement pay that they receive after they retire. The program has probably led several hundred officers to stay on longer, department staff estimate.

### Retention Incentives Also Carry Potential Risks

Chief Aziz cautioned that if a department improves its retirement benefits, “you may wind up holding on to those senior officers who will not retire so that we can bring up new leaders.” Financial incentives might lead some officers to remain in the department even if they no longer had a genuine interest in the profession or a drive to meet the department’s high expectations.

If officers stay on the job purely for financial reasons even as their commitment to the profession and their department’s culture weakens, their actions and attitudes could damage all aspects of the department: its culture, retention and recruitment efforts, and operational objectives regarding public safety. In these circumstances, a department may be better served by adopting policies and procedures to let officers go more easily if they do not reach expectations.

Also, as Lieutenant Bill Walsh of the Voorhees Township (NJ) Police Department noted, a strategy of changing retirement options to try to boost retention may be less effective with younger workers, who may instead focus on the experience they can gain now.

### Money Alone Isn’t Enough to Keep Good Officers

Commander Kristine Anthony-Miller of the Houston (TX) Police Department described the mix of financial and non-financial factors that encourage officers to stay:

“Many officers still have a passion for service and regardless of the challenges, they chose this profession for a reason and they’re going to see it through. The Houston Police



Department does offer a competitive salary (after the first year), as well as a variety of incentive pay. As a large agency, we obviously offer more benefits, such as the ability to move around to various divisions and specialized units, and the ability to more easily promote than some smaller agencies.

“For those eligible to retire, the cost of retiree health insurance has been prohibitive for some employees and their families, so they stay. For those officers who have DROP, seeing that account grow has encouraged some to stay.”

As an immediate solution to a current workforce shortage, financial incentives can be extremely effective and warranted in a crisis. Nevertheless, because the incentives are generally short term, agencies may see a downturn in morale once they end. And other retention strategies discussed in this report may be more sustainable and even more effective.

## LAPD Launches “Housing for Hires” to Boost Recruiting

The Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD), facing a deficit of more than 200 sworn personnel<sup>38</sup> and recognizing that lack of affordable housing was harming its recruiting efforts, launched an innovative program in June 2022 to provide rent subsidies for potential recruits.

Rising housing costs pose a challenge in many areas of the country, but the problem is especially acute in the Los Angeles area, where housing costs account for 38 percent of households’ annual expenditures — outpacing the national average of 34 percent.<sup>39</sup> An LAPD analysis determined that new recruits earning LAPD’s starting salary of \$70,804 could reasonably afford a monthly rent of \$1,500. Unfortunately, the average rent for a one-bedroom apartment in LA is closer to \$2,500 a month.<sup>40</sup>

To address this discrepancy, LAPD’s Housing for Hires program offers recruits \$1,000 a month to go toward rent for up to two years, allowing them to complete their six months of academy training, undergo their one-year probationary period, and settle into their first assignment with the department. While the program has a straightforward design, LAPD has rolled it out gradually to ensure smooth implementation. Captain Aaron McCraney with LAPD’s Employment and Recruitment Division explained:

“It has intentionally been a slow build, and to date we have 38 officers enrolled in the housing

>> *continued on page 56*



Captain Aaron McCraney

38. Los Angeles Police Department, “Sworn and Civilian Personnel Statistics Information for the Pay Period Ending November 19, 2022,” [http://www.lapdpolicecom.lacity.org/120622/PS\\_120622.pdf](http://www.lapdpolicecom.lacity.org/120622/PS_120622.pdf).

39. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Consumer Expenditures for the Los Angeles Area: 2020-21,” October 13, 2022, [https://www.bls.gov/regions/west/news-release/consumerexpenditures\\_losangeles.htm](https://www.bls.gov/regions/west/news-release/consumerexpenditures_losangeles.htm).

40. Zumper, “Los Angeles, CA Rent Prices,” January 19, 2023, <https://www.zumper.com/rent-research/los-angeles-ca>.

*continued from page 55*

program. With a pool of thousands of candidates advancing through the hiring process, hundreds have inquired about their eligibility and are anxiously waiting for their opportunity to participate.”

To fund the new program, LAPD partnered with the Los Angeles Police Foundation, which reached out to previous donors and others potentially interested in addressing crime in the area. The foundation has raised more than \$2 million since April 2022. In addition to working with developers, the foundation has contacted property owners who understand the benefits of having an officer living on their premises.

One appeal of offering a rent subsidy rather than increased salary for new officers is that the money isn’t taxable and poses no additional burden to the city government or LAPD. The Los Angeles Police Foundation processes all of the reimbursements for the officers.

McCraney hopes that Housing for Hires can eventually expand beyond new recruits and assist officers throughout the department. This would serve as an effective retention strategy as well as a recruitment tool. “We’ve only scratched the surface regarding how many people we’ve reached out to. And the more the word gets out and the more we build this program, the stronger we’ll get, and additional resources will come in this direction.”



Los Angeles Police Foundation Executive Director Dana Katz (FAR LEFT) and new recruits to the Los Angeles Police Department during a March 2023 graduation. (LEFT)

# Section 5: Agency Operations

**The police staffing crisis is having a major impact on how many agencies operate, but the reverse is also true. The choices agencies make about how to operate while understaffed can affect — in positive or negative ways — their ability to recruit and retain officers.**

## Revising Officers' Time on and off the Clock

For agencies with fewer officers available to carry the load of the entire department, a common response has been to maximize the number of work hours for their current staff. However, agencies are using different approaches to do this, not all of which serve their long-term interests. Overusing mandated overtime, taking away officers' time off, and forcing officers to cover undesirable shifts can negatively affect officer wellness, retention, and recruitment.

### Mandatory Overtime

Overtime can be a valuable way for officers to enhance their incomes. Depending on the way assignments are made, it also could enable officers

“““

Many of our deputies take advantage of overtime opportunities as a means to increase their take-home wages.

**Mark Diaz, Wayne County (MI) Recruiter for Law Enforcement and Jails**

“““

We want our cops to be cops. We want them to do what we sent them to the academy to train them to do.

**Chief Paul Oliveira, New Bedford (MA) Police Department**

to gain new experience and provide opportunities for career development and advancement. Sixty-one percent of respondents in PERF's October 2022 questionnaire cited overtime opportunities as a tool they use to retain officers. And, as a temporary policy to assure sufficient staffing, agencies find their officers can handle — and even appreciate — mandatory overtime.

However, extended periods of mandatory overtime can cause officer burnout. As Undersheriff Richard Lucia of the Alameda County (CA) Sheriff's Office explained, “At first, the deputies were okay with the mandatory overtime because they could kind of see the light at the end of the tunnel, but now, it's like there's just no light.”

Overreliance on mandatory overtime can therefore worsen staffing shortages by leading to lower retention rates. Commander Ron Leonard of the Jefferson County (CO) Sheriff's Office, for example, explained that a nearby agency's mandatory overtime practice helped staffing at his agency by enabling it to hire 35 lateral officers.

Significant amounts of overtime also place a large financial burden on agencies. Captain Daniel Gordon of the Alexandria (VA) Sheriff's Office



shared that, “We are in month six of the fiscal year and we’re about 80 percent expended in our overtime budget. And we’ve seen mandatory overtime increases several times a month.”

Undersheriff Richard Lucia explained: “[O]ur entire sworn staff is on mandatory overtime and has been for two years. When I say mandatory, that means over and above the overtime that they’re working at their normal duty stations, but it’s all focused in our jail. We’re under a consent decree that requires us to hire an additional 350 people, 260 of those sworn and we’re not even close. So we have to put the entire agency on mandatory overtime.”

### **Reducing Overtime Burdens by Putting Command Staff on Patrol**

Agencies have taken various steps to lessen the burden of mandatory overtime. The New Bedford (MA) Police Department has adopted a policy prohibiting overtime two days in a row. Other agencies have made more staff available for overtime by putting command staff on patrol for overtime shifts. This has the multiple benefits of demonstrating the agency’s commitment to every officer — patrol officers appreciate that the increased workload is being felt by the entire department, not just patrol — and strengthening contacts between leadership and the rank and file.

Similarly, the Dunwoody (GA) Police Department requires all sworn staff to take part in overtime regardless of seniority; having command staff participate in overtime on patrol can benefit both line-level officers and the community.

### **Rotating or Sharing Patrol Assignments**

Some short-staffed agencies have sought to increase flexibility in staffing across shifts and units/divisions in order to fill the positions most important to cover while still considering officer safety.

Police Lieutenant Roberto Villegas of the Santa Monica (CA) Police Department shared that traditionally, his agency had addressed staffing shortages at the division level. But in patrol, the agency had to maintain minimum staff levels for public safety and other reasons, so it chose to break down the silos between divisions and address the patrol staffing shortage at an all-agency level to assure patrol was sufficiently staffed. The goal, said Villegas, was “to change the mindset to we’re all in this together. It’s not just patrol.”

The agency pulled people from their regular duties — detectives, cross divisions, and special units — as needed for a day or week but worked to keep the burden on staff manageable. For instance, it can be a cultural shock for detectives to move back to patrol, so detectives are rotated to patrol only once every three or four weeks. This strategy allows officers to experience other assignments while helping provide needed coverage; it also promotes a sense of mutual support across the agency.

### **Reconsidering Specialized Units**

Agencies have also met minimum patrol staffing needs by taking staff from specialized units or disbanding these units entirely. In some cases, this may be an opportunity for agencies to evaluate whether they have become over-dependent on specialized units if the units’ activities can easily be incorporated into the agency as a whole.

In other cases, however, eliminating specialized units may leave an agency without needed expertise or focus on specific topics, or may make patrol less efficient by forcing it to deal with the most difficult and highly stressful calls for service (such as mental health calls, homelessness calls, and substance abuse calls) that a specialized unit could handle more effectively. Retaining specialized units might also aid an agency’s retention efforts by reducing the risk that officers will burn out on those tough calls.



Further, the presence or absence of certain specialized units, especially during a staffing crisis, sends a message to the local community about how the agency views its role and how it prioritizes the services it provides. These signals are important ways in which the agency can educate the community, foster respect and appreciation for officers, and seek to inspire community members to consider joining the agency.

### **How a Department Handles Overtime, Shift Assignments Is Important**

Despite a department's best efforts to accommodate its officers' preferences, it will inevitably make assignments and schedules that adversely affect officers' lives outside the department. The challenge is far greater for understaffed departments, which have had to distribute undesirable shifts such as nights, weekends, and holidays among a smaller group of officers. Such assignments can significantly affect officers' well-being, productivity, and commitment to the department, especially if officers already have mandated overtime and feel stretched thin due to low staffing levels.

For some officers with young families and little seniority, an undesirable shift assignment or night shift may have a much greater impact than it could have on a more senior officer. Captain Nicholas Collins of the Prince George's County (MD) Police Department shared, "One of the biggest complaints from our officers is that a lot of younger officers don't understand they have to work midnights and weekends."

Canceling previously approved time off and mandating last-minute overtime assignments are very disruptive to any officer's efforts to maintain a work-life balance. Agencies using overtime to help address staffing shortages should strive to give officers sufficient notice of overtime shifts to avoid creating unnecessary strain for officers and their families.

Also, providing time off through annual leave and thoughtful shift scheduling is important to enable officers to reset and recover from the rigors, stress, and trauma of policing. And agencies should avoid basing assignments primarily on seniority or tenure in the department when possible.



Members of the Santa Monica Police Department talk to a young child about the importance of pedestrian safety.

### **Improving Efficiency**

To take some of the pressure off patrol officers, departments are finding ways to optimize their department's response to the community's calls for service. Not every call for service requires a sworn police response; some may even be handled remotely. And many agencies have looked for ways to "work smarter" by using technology and analyzing where they're most needed.

### **Diverting Calls for Service to Other Responders**

Some agencies are improving their response to calls for service starting with the first stage of the call, by assuring policies and procedures are in place so call-takers diagnose calls accurately, code the call priority correctly, and dispatch the response appropriate for that call.

Assistant Chief LaShanna Potts of the Columbus (OH) Division of Police described how 911 call-takers determine whether police need to go to a call or if a different response is warranted. This is an important consideration in mental health calls, where there could be a threat of violence.



“Luckily for us, we have healthcare professionals that are embedded in our communication service center,” she said. “So when the calls come in, they’re assessing at the same time the call is being dispatched. Officers are readily available if needed, but oftentimes we find that officers are not needed” and another resource is more appropriate. This approach not only preserves needed officer resources but also avoids sending officers to situations that could be exacerbated by a police presence.

### Automated Crime Reporting

While some calls for service can be handled by non-law-enforcement personnel, still others — reports of petty theft or vandalism, for example — may not need a human response at all.

Chief Rex Troche of the Sarasota (FL) Police Department described how citizens can report crimes using the department’s updated webpage. During a recent hurricane, “it allowed us to really take care of business essentially, rather than going to some of these minor complaints. People were directed via a voice prompt, ‘If this is such and such type of crime, you can go online and report it.’ So, we saw a significant drop in calls for service in that regard.”

### Virtual Responses and Telework

Agencies are finding that some types of calls can be effectively handled remotely by sworn or professional staff and have established or enhanced their help desks to better assist community members who do not need an in-person response.

Other agencies have started using virtual private network (VPN) technologies to allow certain staff to work from home. Major Emily McKinley described how the Louisville (KY) Metro Police Department has been using such technology:

“A significant amount of our professional staff, especially in our records department, have the capability to work remotely. Some of those are telephone reporting technicians and records data personnel. This began during COVID, but some of them still prefer to work

remotely for the benefit of their families and their personal lives.

“Additionally, we began to hire civilian investigators this year. We just started two civilian investigators in our recruitment unit, doing background investigations on applicants, and they can also work remotely. They’re retired detectives, so they’re familiar with the department and community.”

Also, by conducting job interviews remotely, agencies can reach out to a much wider geographic area, potentially attracting a larger and more diverse group of applicants. “We do all of our interviews virtually. Because of that, we’ve had a much more diverse hiring pool,” reported Nisse Lee Ramser, Talent Acquisition, Development, and Management Administrator of the City of Greenwood Village (CO).

### Technology

Police agencies have often resisted new technology due to the cost, but the current staffing crisis has opened many minds (and pockets) to new ideas for efficiency. A number of agencies have adopted new technologies to improve their everyday processes.

According to Director Eric Bourgerie of the Colorado Peace Officer Standards & Training, the department has a small staff so it has expanded online training, is working to automate reporting,



Nisse Lee Ramser, Talent Acquisition, Development, and Management Administrator of the City of Greenwood Village (CO)



We are making up for the lack of sworn staffing by hiring more civilian and retired officers back to part-time positions as well as creating some new full-time positions.

**Chief Wade Gourley, Oklahoma City (OK) Police Department**

and is improving its use of the records management system to take reports from the public more easily. Sarasota (FL) Chief Rex Troche mused about ways that handling calls remotely or virtually could make an agency more responsive for the people who feel more comfortable with that medium than interacting face-to-face:

“I have kids that are in their 20s, and they don’t want to talk to anybody face to face. They’d rather text you. [We know] about tele-health, so what about tele-cop? Maybe somebody doesn’t want to meet with a cop and it’s a minor crime, so we FaceTime each other. We really have to be creative as we move forward, because we’re doing more with less.”

## Greater Use of Professional Staff

Some community members, such as business victims of commercial theft, are most concerned that a report be completed; for these types of callers it does not matter whether the responding member of the agency is sworn or professional. Other community members, such as private citizens who are victims of personal property theft, expect a sworn and uniformed officer to respond to their call for service.

### Community Service Officers

The St. Cloud (MN) Police Department has created a unique program to lessen the load of answering calls for shoplifting, relying on retailers and community service officers to take on this response. As Commander Adam Meierding explained, the department “completely redesigned how we take shoplifters from our local businesses. . . . [The department] worked with major retailers and developed a process where . . . the retailer identifies

the shoplifter and submits paperwork to the police department that is processed by clerical staff and later reviewed by an officer, who sends it for charging. The ultimate consequences for [shoplifters] have not changed. And in fact, we’ve seen a lot of success with loss prevention, identifying them and dealing with them without a police response.”

Agencies are also integrating professional staff more fully into police operations, which can improve agency efficiency and response quality over the long term. The models of integrating professional staff into the response protocols vary, with some agencies focusing professional assistance on fulfilling desk duties, others on responding to low-risk calls, and still others giving professional staff larger roles.

One popular strategy is shifting low-priority work (normally work that does not have a safety risk) from officers to civilians. As Deputy Chief Brian LaBarge of the Burlington (VT) Police Department explained, calls are prioritized by public safety: officers focus on “hot calls,” while non-sworn community service officers take on low-priority calls and community support liaisons, who are professional staff, take on other low-priority calls, many of which are mental health calls.

The Aurora (CO) Police Department has launched a community service officer program in which professional staff respond to traffic accidents that involve only property damage. Division Chief Christopher Juul explained that the department hopes these staff also will eventually take on cold cases that don’t necessarily need a uniformed response. Not only do officers appreciate that the program lowers their burden, but many of the community service officers would like to be police officers, so the program is a good way to develop future officers.



Prior to the George Floyd incident we had a co-responder unit where we would pair a mental health professional with an officer, but now it's completely civilianized so the mental health professional responds to mental health or person-in-crisis calls where there's not a known danger to the person or others. They don't have a weapon. If needed, police will respond with them. . . . That's working well. It's relieving the load of mental health or person-in-crisis calls where an officer doesn't need to respond.

**Lieutenant Marjane Khazraeinazmpour, Minneapolis (MN) Police Department**

## Civilian Investigators

Police departments in Baltimore (MD), Mesa (AZ), and Phoenix (AZ) have created civilian investigator roles. These individuals respond to a wide variety of cases other than active crime scenes, and they have many duties that parallel police roles, such as collecting evidence and interviewing witnesses. But they do not carry firearms, engage with suspects, or have arrest powers.

“They can work their case all the way to the end,” retired Sergeant Jason Davis of the Phoenix Police Department explained. “When it comes time to actually arrest someone, they just have to work with a sworn officer to effect that arrest.”<sup>41</sup> Because civilian professional staff fill these investigator roles, detectives have time to focus on more complex cases.

Adopting professional staff into these roles is not always widely supported. For example, Commissioner Michael Harrison of the Baltimore (MD) Police Department explained that there was union concern that officers were losing positions to professional staff but countered that “we're not reducing the number of spots, we're only adding to them.”

Similarly, the New Bedford (MA) Police Department developed a plan to civilianize desk officers at three stations in order to put more manpower on the street, but then removed the positions altogether after union pushback.

## Responding to Mental Health Calls

A promising area for collaboration is responding to calls for service to address mental health issues. Receiving assistance in these types of calls raises fewer concerns among officers and unions: police welcome the expertise offered by mental health professionals, and having these experts assist on calls helps humanize the police.

Agencies employ various co-responder models for mental health calls, but our findings show that agencies are moving to integrate mental health experts to handle these calls more appropriately while also removing the burden from officers. Some agencies rely on mental health experts to respond to some types of calls independently and respond to other calls in conjunction with a co-responder, while other agencies always use a co-response model.

## Investing in Analysts

Several agencies are investing in crime analysts, intelligence analysts, and performance analysts to find ways to improve processes, prevent crime, and respond to and investigate crime more effectively.

Having access to skilled analysts reduces officers' workload while providing more targeted and efficient responses. Major Juan Balderrama of the Oklahoma City (OK) Police Department explained that the department has benefited from the ten

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41. Salma Reyes and Nathan Collins, “National and Valley police departments hire more civilian investigators to fill vacancies,” KTAR News, October 3, 2022, <https://ktar.com/story/5271984/national-and-valley-police-departments-hire-more-civilian-investigators-to-fill-vacancies/>.

senior intelligence analysts it has hired, who are assigned to divisions and can assist in real time, working day and evening shifts; the department plans to hire eight to ten more entry-level analysts next year.

Integrating analysts into regular agency operations provides a role that may be filled by professional staff and gives agencies a tool to analyze how to work more effectively. Data-driven practices, including incorporating data analysis into everyday practices and systems to guide allocating resources, can both reduce crime and save departments money.

A good example is the Seattle (WA) Police Department's approach to understanding the types of calls received and how to better handle them. Based on an analysis of previous calls and dispositions, the department classifies calls by level of risk, which in turn determines the appropriate response from a spectrum of possibilities — from police response only, to a co-response model with police and a social worker, to a social-worker-only response.

## Setting Priorities and Expectations With the Community

Given police departments' difficulty in attracting and retaining officers, they may struggle to meet the needs of the community. The field of policing must do more to understand those needs and align police services to meet them. As Senior Police Officer Terry Cherry of the Charleston (SC) Police

Department pointed out, "We are a capitalistic society and when we don't meet the needs of society, things come in and replace it."

## Determining the Appropriate Response to Calls for Service

Many agencies have engaged with their communities to create a joint understanding of which kinds of calls will receive an in-person response by a sworn officer versus a member of the department's professional staff. During these conversations, agencies can educate the community about their role and priorities and make sure the community shares these values and will accept the change in service.

For some types of crime, such as violent crime, an in-person police response is expected. But agencies need to consider priority levels and which types of crime would not demand an immediate police response and could have a professional staff response or online reporting.

Police staffing shortages have come amidst high levels of homelessness in many jurisdictions, overwhelming opioid addiction and overdoses, and growing public awareness of the mental health crisis across the nation. This challenging set of problems is reframing many of the conversations between police and the community about community priorities and the role of the police. In some places, the dynamic has shifted from calls to "defund the police" to a more constructive discussion over how to best help people in crisis.



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Every city is going to have to figure out how much risk they're going to be able to assess when a 911 call comes in. So that system had to be built at the very front end, for us to really understand what calls we can push out to social services. We have a community service officer program, other alternative programs, and a lot of other different developments. But trying to assess risk on a call is really one of the biggest jobs.

**Chief Adrian Diaz, Seattle (WA) Police Department**





One would think with the climate in Oakland, which tends to be anti-police, they would like to see police less. But we've seen an increase in calls for service and demand to see a uniformed officer. . . . [I]n some ways, it's a barometer of how well the department is doing: if you get more calls for service, it means they want police. . . .

[Also,] some of the alternative responses have not been effective . . . because we went to alternative services before they were prepared to provide the service. So while we wanted to have someone different than police show up, when they showed up they weren't equipped to actually satisfy that community member's call. For instance, we have a non-police response to mental health calls, but some mental health responders don't enter residences, and they don't go to calls where there's potential violence.

**Chief LeRonne Armstrong, Oakland (CA) Police Department**

### **Educating the Community on How Understaffing Affects Police Operations**

Elected officials need to be part of this important discussion and understand how the staffing crisis is affecting police actions. The relationship between police staffing and crime rates is complex, but agencies that are moving from hot call to hot call have no time to conduct proactive police work, perform community policing, or invest in victim-centered approaches — all of which are necessary to improve community relations and reduce crime.

Chief Jason Armstrong of the Apex (NC) Police Department reflected on how he had recently engaged in such conversations and some of the hard questions he needed to be able to answer:

"I recently had this conversation with my [town] council . . . about staffing, and the question came up of how we are factoring-in crime to decide what our staffing needs to be. But it goes beyond just looking at crime.

"For me, it comes down to quality of service and the quality of life for the community that you're serving. You need to look at not just your costs or your crime rate, but what people in the community are talking to you about. . . . You can use that information when talking with elected officials about why you need more staffing. It's not always based on your crime numbers.

"What are people's perceptions of crime and of their safety in your communities? We need to factor that in as well. In fact, people may want [police to deal with] that barking dog who's keeping them up at night more than a stolen car in some respects, so do you just tell the person who calls about the barking dog that you're not going to deal with that any more?"

As agencies make the case with local leaders for added resources to help address their staffing shortages, they also need to effectively communicate their current hiring and retention challenges. Even if the community recognizes the importance of hiring more officers and provides the resources to do so, it may still need to appreciate that resources alone won't necessarily solve the problem.

Further, by describing all the things it can no longer do because of officer shortages, an agency can educate community members about the many important roles it plays in the community. As noted above, this could yield benefits for both retention and recruitment by leading to greater appreciation of local officers and inspiring community members to consider policing as a career.



## Estimating an Agency's Workload Demands

Agencies should base their staffing needs on a true understanding of the organization's workload demands. As Dr. Jeremy Wilson of the Michigan State University School of Criminal Justice explained at PERF's November 2022 conference:

"It's helpful to think about this from a systems perspective and to think not just about the number of staff we need, but what they're doing and how they're doing it. We need to think about what it is that the community needs, what's the service style of the organization, and then assess the workload. By thinking about workload demand, we reframe the problem in terms of getting the community what it needs, and then recruitment and retention become tools for addressing that. And it's not just staffing, it's what things can we do better? How do we create efficiencies? . . .

"A lot of agencies compare themselves to peer organizations and say, here's a community that has a similar size or similar crime rate, so we need to benchmark our staffing based on them. But that's a very dangerous proposition . . . because that doesn't say anything about the nature of policing or the circumstances or even whether [the other agency] has the right number of officers.

"Agencies need to come up with the staffing level based on their own workload, assessment, and performance objectives and not rely so heavily on exterior benchmarks like other agencies."

Dr. Wilson and Dr. Alexander Weiss have developed a six-step approach that agencies can adopt to critically examine their workload demands.<sup>42</sup>

1. **Examine the distribution of calls for service by hour of day, day of week, and month.** This helps agencies determine which parts of the day, and possibly which months of the year, require more resources.
2. **Examine the nature of calls for service.** The data collected by a computer-aided dispatch system (CAD) regarding calls for service may be misleading. (For example, the system could capture an officer's meal time as a call.) Scrutiny of this data is necessary to accurately determine which calls are citizen generated and therefore relevant in estimating staff needs.
3. **Estimate the amount of time consumed by calls for service.** This estimate should encompass both the calls themselves and any related administrative tasks. This metric is also helpful for creating performance standards and apportioning an officer's time among different tasks.
4. **Calculate the agency shift-relief factor.** This is the relationship between the maximum number of days that an officer could work and the number that an officer actually works, considering time off and other types of leave. Calculating this factor is key to estimating the number of officers that should be assigned to each shift.
5. **Establish performance objectives.** Agencies should determine the balance of work during an officer's shift, such as the amount of time dedicated to calls for service, to administrative work,

>> *continued on page 66*

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42. Jeremy M. Wilson and Alexander Weiss, "A Performance-Based Approach to Police Staffing and Allocation," Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, revised 2014, <https://cops.usdoj.gov/ric/Publications/cops-p247-pub.pdf>.

*continued from page 65*

and to proactive policing. Historically, one-third of an officer's time has gone to each of these activities, but agencies should consider how the amount of time dedicated to each task aligns with the agency's priorities and values.

6. **Provide staffing estimates.** Using the data generated through the above steps, agencies can create staffing estimates that balance the true workload at their agency along with the available staff to respond.

# Conclusion: Insights & Recommendations to Help Agency Leaders

## The staffing challenges facing law enforcement

agencies reflect some of the same issues affecting other employers, such as a strong job market and increasing options for remote work. But they also reflect issues specific to policing, including a negative public image, insufficient diversity, significant health and well-being issues, and lack of appeal to younger generations of workers.

These issues were already creating problems for law enforcement agencies in 2019, when PERF published its previous report on this topic. Since 2019, the combination of the COVID-19 pandemic and civil unrest related to police shootings has raised these pre-existing challenges to another level.

Not all agencies are facing severe staffing issues. Many agencies with favorable local conditions, such as good community relations or lower social service needs, have not experienced sharp declines in applications or increases in retirements and resignations. For most agencies, however, these higher-level challenges have pushed them toward a breaking point: officers are leaving faster than they can be replaced and the traditional approaches to officer recruitment and retention no longer work. Often, efforts to maintain operations despite understaffing only make things worse.

Rather than “doing more of what has always worked in the past” or trying to patch up their recruitment/retention efforts with one-time financial incentives or other quick fixes, some agencies have begun overhauling significant parts of the organization. By taking steps to address long-standing issues such as improving officers’ health

and wellness and giving officers a larger voice in the agency, these agencies have discovered ways to modernize and improve, which also helps them recruit and retain officers.

The following ten recommendations, which reflect the insights and experiences of law enforcement officials described throughout this report, provide a solid foundation that other agencies can follow:

1. Re-examine hiring processes.
2. Adopt innovative recruiting strategies.
3. “Go upstream” to identify future officers.
4. Update hiring standards.
5. Offer recruitment incentives.
6. Be wary of lateral recruitment.
7. Share burdens to help address understaffing.
8. Make greater use of professional staff.
9. To boost retention, help officers improve their well-being.
10. Build community support.



# Strengthening Recruitment and Retention: Examples of Strategies Discussed in This Report

## Recruitment

- 1. Update hiring standards**
  - Reevaluate physical ability test
  - Revise standards regarding prior substance use
  - Offer college tuition reimbursement rather than requiring a college degree
- 2. Adopt innovative recruiting strategies**
  - Use targeted ads on social media platforms
  - Emphasize agency's service-oriented role in recruitment campaigns
  - Strengthen recruiting at women's colleges, HBCUs, and Hispanic-Serving Institutions
- 3. Re-examine hiring processes**
  - Make application forms shorter and more accessible
  - Adopt one-stop recruitment assessments
  - Create mentorship programs to keep recruits engaged and supported
- 4. "Go upstream" to identify future officers**
  - Cadet programs
  - Internship programs
  - Hire college students as part-time employees
- 5. Offer recruitment incentives**
  - Salary paid during academy training
  - Free academy training
  - Housing assistance

## Retention

- 1. Strengthen programs to improve officers' health and wellness**
  - Require annual mental health checkup
  - Provide access to department psychologist, peer support network
  - Offer financial wellness program
- 2. Improve two-way communication between agency leaders and officers**
  - Conduct employee surveys
  - Publish agency newsletter
  - Enable department members to participate in advisory committees on agency policies, training, etc.
- 3. Create opportunities for officers to grow with the agency**
  - Provide pay increases or other incentives for furthering education
  - Improve career pathways for younger officers
  - Vary officer assignments
- 4. Show support from agency leadership and the community**
  - Awards program
  - Events for staff
  - Attendance by local officials at agency events
- 5. Offer financial incentives**
  - Retention bonuses
  - Improved retirement options
  - Increased overtime opportunities

# About the Police Executive Research Forum

## **The Police Executive Research Forum**

(PERF) is an independent research organization that focuses on critical issues in policing. Since its founding in 1976, PERF has identified best practices on fundamental issues such as reducing police use of force; developing community policing and problem-oriented policing; using technologies to deliver police services to the community; and developing and assessing crime reduction strategies.

PERF strives to advance professionalism in policing and to improve the delivery of police services through the exercise of strong national leadership; public debate of police and criminal justice issues; and research and policy development.

The nature of PERF's work can be seen in the reports PERF has published over the years. Most of these reports are available without charge online at <http://www.policeforum.org/free-online-documents>. All of the titles in the *Critical Issues in Policing* series can be found on the back cover of this report and on the PERF website at <https://www.policeforum.org/critical-issues-series>.

In addition to conducting research and publishing reports on our findings, PERF conducts management studies of individual law enforcement agencies; educates hundreds of police officials each year in the Senior Management Institute for Police, a three-week executive development program; and provides executive search services to governments that wish to conduct national searches for their next police chief.

All of PERF's work benefits from PERF's status as a membership organization of police officials, who share information and open their agencies to research and study. PERF members also include academics, federal government leaders, and others with an interest in policing and criminal justice.

All PERF members must have a four-year college degree and must subscribe to a set of founding principles, emphasizing the importance of research and public debate in policing, adherence to the Constitution and the highest standards of ethics and integrity, and accountability to the communities that police agencies serve.

PERF is governed by a member-elected President and Board of Directors and a Board-appointed Executive Director.

**To learn more about PERF, visit [www.policeforum.org](http://www.policeforum.org).**



# About the Motorola Solutions Foundation

**As the charitable and philanthropic arm of** Motorola Solutions, the Motorola Solutions Foundation partners with organizations around the globe to create safer cities and equitable, thriving communities. We focus on giving back through strategic grants, employee volunteerism and other community investment initiatives. Our strategic

grants program supports organizations that offer first responder programming and technology and engineering education, and align to our values of accountability, innovation, impact, diversity and inclusion. The Foundation is one of the many ways in which the company lives out its purpose of helping people be their best in the moments that matter.



**For more information on the Foundation, visit: [www.motorolasolutions.com/foundation](http://www.motorolasolutions.com/foundation)**

Building Public Trust Podcast

Women in Police Leadership: 10 Action Items for Advancing Women and Strengthening Policing

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**POLICE EXECUTIVE  
RESEARCH FORUM**

Police Executive Research Forum  
1120 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 930  
Washington, DC 20036  
202-466-7820  
www.PoliceForum.org

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