

The State of Recruitment: A Crisis for Law Enforcement

Results of a recruitment survey performed by the IACP (www.theiacp.org) and new and hopeful efforts by Pennsylvania Police Agencies

THE STUDY

The policing profession has always been challenging. 2020 has propelled this challenge into the stratosphere. It should be no surprise that the number of candidates for this job in Pennsylvania and throughout the country is falling. A recent survey by the International Association of Chiefs of Police has provided some insight as to the problems and what some agencies are doing about it. Our Pennsylvania agencies are also changing the way they do business in order to supplement our ranks. Some examples of how we are changing will be discussed.

First, the results of the survey.

By the numbers:

- 78% of police agencies are having difficulty recruiting. The recent headlines are not helping and we need to do something to combat our current trends.
- 50% of police agencies are amending their current policies in an effort to increase their chances of getting qualified applicants
- 25% of agencies are reducing services due to staffing difficulties. Overwork of current officers has its own concerns

Reasons for the Hiring Crisis

- Millennials and Generation Z – (High school to late 30's)
More difficult to attract this age group due to:
 - Time-off is more important than previous workers
 - Leaving or changing jobs is more common with this segment of employees
- Negative Public Perception
Studies show that many young people view the police profession differently than their parents did.
- Hiring Process Challenges
Background checks have been a huge barrier

If we don't do something soon...

Less officers on the streets means:

- Longer wait times for calls
- Fewer crimes solved
- Overworked and stressed officers will threaten quality of policing

What areas show promise?

- Innovative Hiring Processes
- New Approach for Recruitment
- Incentive for Employees – where it matters

Police Agencies across the U.S. have begun new strategies

- Ride-along and civilian police academies for college students and other potential candidates can grow interest and attract valuable candidates. This also helps avoid turnover of new candidates as it provides meaningful experiences which helps candidates understand the profession better.
- Enhance the Process and Relax Candidate Disqualifiers.
Some agencies have taken to evaluating current policies that could be creating an initial barrier to applicants, such as a no-tattoo policy.

Other policies, like strictly disqualifying anyone with past use of controlled substances, are also starting to be reconsidered. As states begin to decriminalize marijuana, some executives realize that years-old drug use is less indicative of what can make a good police officer.

Changing policies to lower certain standards does come with risks. Agencies should assess where their largest barriers to recruitment lie and see if they can be revised.

Recruiting processes that last 4- 12 months often lose the candidate before conclusion. Stay in contact with the candidate during the process to bolster their interest.

- Changes in work hours will allow some to join your PD.
Some agencies have offered *part-time officer* positions to entice female recruits who are balancing motherhood with work. In 2019, the Metropolitan Police Service in London allowed constables to choose between P/T or F/T service.

Longer shifts allow employees more days off.

Agencies are offering more flexible full-time schedules when possible and easier ways to get time off. These initiatives are all attractive to the today's recruits.

- Web site dedicated just for recruiting.
Agencies can clearly list employment criteria, testing dates, and let the community know when recruiting events are taking place. The sites often include a list of "frequently asked questions" for potential applicants. Having a recruiting website not only improves transparency and communication within the hiring process, but it may even take some of the daily burden off HR or the officer in charge of the process.

- It's the little things that can retain good Officers.
Increasing salaries may be a tough but...
 - expanded clothing allowances
 - Casual uniform options (E.G. polo shirts where appropriate)
 - Take home vehicle program

- UPDATED Recruitment Programs.
Agencies are rethinking trying to sell our profession as only involved with tactical type calls. More real day-to-day aspects of the job may be helpful. Showing calls such as assisting with mental health scenarios, substance abuse, homelessness, and even changing a tire, can provide a clearer picture of what we do.

Talk to your officers. Find out where they suggest that you can find qualified recruits. Ensure that each of your officers is a recruiter.

What PENNSYLVANIA is doing

In our State, a growing number of agencies have begun to hire recruits prior to obtaining their Act 120 certification. Three (3) departments in the last 90 days who have advertised with PCPA, have changed their policies. This will require the agency to pay for the academy (often reimbursed by the State) and their salary for the six-month period. The results seem worthwhile as agencies are reporting a larger pool of applicants and a more racially diverse talent pool.

Chief Ron Camacho and his staff at the Chambersburg Police Department in Franklin County, realized two years ago that they wanted to be more aggressive in hiring quality

and diverse candidates. Their new and fresh approach at a time of COVID -19 and anti-law enforcement sentiment, has made a big difference.

A recent article written by Sgt. John Greenawalt, outlined their efforts. Their application period ended in the beginning of November and their efforts have paid off so far. The PCPA received their order for 308 entry-level written tests. 124 of their applicants met diversity targets for women and minorities. These diversity numbers alone exceeded the normal amount of applications received by Chambersburg PD.

Their efforts included:

- 1) A Recruitment Team – (3) volunteer officers pieced together their ideas. After the applications were received, this team then developed relationships with the candidates throughout the hiring process. The officers were not reassigned for this detail but instead found time to send emails and make phone calls during their regular shifts.
- 2) Advertising and Social Media – The department’s website was used to get the word out along with social media platforms (Indeed and PoliceApp). Ads were placed in newspapers and affiliated websites, billboards were used throughout Pennsylvania, Maryland, and West Virginia. Support from the advertising entities allowed for free or very little expense for these advertising methods.
- 3) Seeking Diverse Candidates was Important – The CPD advertisements made it clear that the department was encouraging women and minorities to apply. Ads in “Diversity Magazine” were used, college campuses were targeted, and relationships with diverse churches in the Chambersburg area became more important than ever.
- 4) Community Policing Concepts were Integral in their Efforts – Relationships and partnerships in their community helped build a solid pool of applicants.

The entire article on the Chambersburg Police recruiting efforts is available at the following link:

www.pachiefs.org/recruitingqualitycandidatescpd

In next month’s Bulletin, we will publish the results of the second half of the Chambersburg PD’s efforts at recruiting; background and hiring. If you have some ideas or thoughts regarding ways to improve recruitment, things that have worked, or not, please share and send to:

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