Law Enforcement Diversity Hiring: Significance, Obstacles and the Way Ahead

Captain Tony Decker, University of Wisconsin Green-Bay
Captain David Goodwin, Washington University Police Department
Lieutenant Brent Olson, Wausau Police Department
Lieutenant Brad Strouf, Green Bay Wisconsin Police Department

National Command and Staff College, Session #011

June 2021

TOP CAPSTONE AWARD

Abstract

Due to the recent civil unrest around the country and the subsequent public-political backlash against police, line officers of all ranks are leaving the law enforcement profession at an unprecedented rate. This exodus of experience and institutional knowledge has created significant operational issues. Staffing vacancies negatively impact an organization's ability to provide basic police services, and place undue stress on an already exhausted workforce. To build diverse teams that mirror their constituencies and break down barriers, transformative law enforcement agencies must hire applicants from marginalized communities. To do this, the law enforcement leader must understand the importance of diversity hiring, create an organizational climate that is accepting of different cultures, develop programs that seek out and groom potential candidates, and develop tools to overcome obstacles that prevent recruiting.

Law Enforcement Diversity Hiring: Significance, Obstacles and the Way Ahead

Law enforcement agencies nationwide are struggling with finding enough applicants to fill open positions within their agencies. In addition to the lack of applicants, agencies are struggling with having enough diverse applicants to allow their agency to mirror the communities which they serve. The current societal views of law enforcement are further exasperating the hiring issues, and the significant exodus of experienced officers is creating operational issues that negatively affect the organization (Laine, 2009).

We have identified four specific goals we will address with this research. As law enforcement leaders we must create a culture that is accepting of all cultures, develop hiring practices and strategies targeting marginalized communities, and work to overcome the obstacles to recruiting diverse applicants. In addition, once diverse applicants are successfully hired, agencies must make sure their cultures also focus on retention of the new officers. To survive, it

is imperative that a change is made in this area to have the human resources necessary to carry out the mission, values, and goals of the organization.

Literature Review

One of the key findings of the President's 21st Century Policing Taskforce in 2016 was "Agencies should strive to be as diverse as possible with respect to race, ethnicity, gender, religion, and sexual orientation" (Lum et al., 2016, p. 5). It is an even more apparent need today, given the changes in societal views towards police since the report was first published. The task force made clear that organizations must focus on having diversity within their ranks to build trust with the communities they serve. The community is more likely to view the organization as fair and approachable if they are diverse in race and gender. Diversity within the ranks will also help overcome other barriers such as inability to communicate due to language differences and negative views of police. Many minority communities have negative views of the police based on interactions with police in their previous country. This carries over to their interactions with officers in the United States (Lum et al., 2016).

In the wake of major social and political changes over the past decades, progressive law enforcement agencies are taking steps to increase diversity, equity, and inclusion. Tragic events over the past several years include officer-involved shootings and attacks on law enforcement officers. The demonstrations and protests these incidents have spawned have captured the public's attention and driven a host of policing issues from the periphery to the center of our public dialogue. This includes a renewed focus on increasing diversity in the nation's law enforcement agencies (Gupta & Yang, 2016). As law enforcement agencies around the United States scramble to diversify their workforces, many of them are struggling with how this should be accomplished. Having a diverse workforce is important, as it may help establish trust between

law enforcement and the communities we serve. When a police department is trusted by its community, they can be more effective.

Many law enforcement agencies have devoted considerable time, energy, and attention in their efforts to recruit and retain a workforce that reflects the diversity within their jurisdictions. The challenge of recruiting, hiring, and retaining a diverse workforce is certainly not limited to law enforcement. Throughout the country, in nearly every sector of society, people and organizations are grappling with this issue. Employers in a variety of industries have engaged in proactive efforts to bolster diversity. This challenge remains at the forefront in the field of law enforcement. Law enforcement agencies fulfill a fundamental role in our society, and in many communities' individual police officers are often the public face of local government. Therefore, it is critical that our nation's law enforcement agencies broadly reflect the diversity of the communities they serve (Gupta & Yang, 2016).

Gupta and Yang suggest that increased diversity can make law enforcement agencies more open to reform, more willing to initiate cultural and systemic changes, and more responsive to the communities they serve. Some have pointed to increased diversity as the catalyst for reform. This empowers officers and law enforcement leaders alike to become more introspective and reflective about problems in their departments. A more reflective and open-minded culture in an agency can help drive reform across a range of areas, including civilian oversight, community policing, and racial bias. In addition, while greater workforce diversity alone cannot ensure fair and effective policing, a significant body of evidence suggests that diversity can have a positive influence on specific activities and practices of law enforcement agencies (Gupta & Yang, 2016).

When looking at police hiring practices, there are changes that need to be made in the practices themselves to attract and hire diverse candidates. Organizations need to look at their

hiring process to make sure that all steps in the process are fair and attainable by everyone. The written test and physical agility test given by many agencies can be harder for some based on gender or race, due to physical limitations or different opportunities for education throughout their lives. There is also research that shows the importance of potentially giving minority candidates hiring preference when evaluating them against the available candidates for selection. The research generally shows minority groups are in favor of this type of preference being given (Lum et al., 2016).

<div align="center">

Implementation

</div>

Deep change will be required to facilitate a culture change that is necessary to accomplish the organizational goals of diverse hiring and retention. By examining the workplace culture, and understanding the direction it is going, can lead to system alignment if the culture is cognizant of the need for deep change. Culture is rooted in the underlying beliefs and assumptions that people hold of themselves and of the organization. These beliefs and assumptions create mindsets that shape the culture (Long, 2017a).

Culture change is among the most difficult kinds of changes to create within an organizational system. It often involves reshaping and reimagining the core identity of the organization. Deep change breaks from the past and is major in scope. Deep change is often irreversible. Deep change requires us to look deep inside ourselves, at our core, and learn about ourselves. An internally driven leader can facilitate change because they do not require an

outside source for motivation, it comes from within. Deep change involves taking risks and is

not something that is done very often (Long, 2017a).

Police leaders and their recruiters must develop an "outside the box" approach to

recruiting minorities, and not rely on traditional methods like career fairs and job

announcements. Instead, recruiters should develop targeted marketing campaigns that appeal to a

diverse audience. Social media platforms, recruitment videos, local media involvement, and

billboard placement outside of large metropolitan areas are just some of the marketing strategies

being employed by progressive agencies striving to achieve inclusivity and diversity in their

respective agencies (Sussman, 2021).

There are specific steps that should be taken to implement marketing strategies (social

media, recruitment videos, billboard placements, local media involvement, etc.) that will bolster

diverse recruitment and hiring. These include:

- Collaboration with other agencies
- Engaging the community
- Improving relationships with external elected officials
- Streamlining your recruitment process
- Involve everyone in the department in recruitment
- Tell the police story
- Enhance web outreach
- Enlist the support of the media
- Reach out to the young
- Mentor applicants through the process (Laine, 2009, p. 10-14)

We must leave behind the mindset that applicants will seek us out for employment with

our organization. To successfully hire candidates, and especially diverse candidates, we must

use an all-hands-on deck approach. We must utilize everyone within our agency to reach out and

positively promote the culture and working environment. It is essential to use various forms of

media and social media platforms to get out the message of who we are, what we stand for, and

what we do. In short, we must market ourselves in a way that attracts people to work for the

organization. It is imperative to market our organization to minority populations as a great place

to work that is inclusive in all regards. The public needs to know what we stand for, and our

mission, vision, and values. This will show that we not only say what we are, but that we in fact

live it every day.

Challenges

Law enforcement agencies of all sizes have not always been successful in recruiting and

attracting individuals who reflect the communities they serve. A lack of trust exists currently in

underrepresented communities regarding the hiring, screening, and selection criteria (Gupta &

Yang, 2016). This may limit certain qualified candidates from applying and outdated and

antiquated examinations and other screening processes may exclude otherwise qualified

candidates from being considered. Diversifying law enforcement agencies is not without

controversy. For example, some agencies consider changing recruitment strategies and hiring

practices as lowering job standards. While most agencies maintain policies, practices, and

requirements to establish hiring lists, these agencies must realize and recognize that these

barriers may impede their ability to hire diverse candidates.

There are many barriers to implementation of diverse hiring practices and law

enforcement hiring practices in general. They include unfavorable demographic and social

trends, unattractiveness of paramilitary organizations, intense competition for quality candidates,

and bureaucratic and burdensome personnel regulations (Laine, 2009). As organizations, our

own culture, processes and procedures can often be barriers to successfully hiring diverse

candidates.

Role of Leadership

The need to have authentic leaders throughout the organization is critical to effectively facilitating the change needed to become a transformative department representative of the community. These authentic leaders must possess a strong moral compass with unwavering commitment to their values, an ability to establish trust with members of both the agency and community and be motivated by a commitment of justice.   Organizational trust is not a grassroots movement within an organization; it must come from the top-down to be effective.

As stated by Normore (2017), "The overriding goal of an authentic leader is to try to do the right thing, to be honest with themselves and others, and to work for the common good." When organizational leaders exhibit these traits throughout the ranks, their organization is more in tune with both its own needs and those of the community. As leadership is relational between a leader and a follower, the effects that an authentic leader can have on others is profound. It often can result in optimism, a positive work environment, a sense of satisfaction and a willingness to put in a greater effort.

Optimism, a positive work environment, and a sense of satisfaction are vital to attracting diverse applicants, who may serve as a trailblazer within the organization and for the retention of employees. All followers who are led by authentic leaders are likely to feel secure in their positions, which will inherently lead to less stress and turmoil. The importance of mitigating internal stressors is amplified for diverse employees, who may unfairly receive higher levels of negative interactions from external sources (Wells, 2020).

The ability to serve as an authentic leader can also be directly tied to serving as a credible leader. As noted by Long (2017c), "Credible leaders take care of their people, while at the same

time they recognize the importance of protecting the integrity and reputation of the

organization." To attract and retain a department that represents its community, leaders must be

proactive in adapting past practices to conform to the agencies new vision, anticipating these

non-traditional stressors and the removing the barriers to applicants.

The development of an inclusive agency is paramount internally, in community

interaction and creating reciprocal engagement. Building the authenticity and credibility of the

departments messengers themselves is often overlooked, but of substantial importance. As stated

by Posner (2015), "People will not believe the message, if they don't believe the messenger."

Having diverse credible members who can communicate, influence employees and applicants is

key. Often, credibility of an organization is called into question when they do not represent what

they are saying. An example of this is an agency which boasts of its progressive and inclusive

nature but is unable to attract or retain employees with those characteristics.

The under representation of traditionally marginalized communities within modern police

departments is something that communities are more in tune to, and often cite as a disconnect. It

is both a barrier to effective communication and often used as a tool of division for those with

malicious agendas. The lack of representation is, in our opinion, not intentional but can be

attributed to agencies which have failed to adapt and are still employing outdated hiring

practices. As Harrington (2017) said, the "Internal forces include a resistance to change as well a

failure to understand why change is needed." Many agencies have failed to change their

organizational battle plan to better benefit the agency and the community it serves, which has

greatly diminished its function. Therefore, it is vitally important for agencies to seek out and

develop credible individuals who are willing to act as agents of change.

These are the individuals who can look past the observed behavior manifestations and truly search for the root issues. Additionally, they will excel at the application of what is commonly referred to as versatility skills. Agencies must not continue with historical practices of people adapting to them and convert to a mindset where our approach to problem solving matches the needs and preferences of others. This will increase our problem-solving abilities not only with individuals, but teams who have different style preferences and needs. This style shifting is fluid in nature because it allows you to adapt to others, not wait for them to adapt to you and greatly increases communication and effectiveness.

Law enforcement professionals must create an inclusive agency climate that promotes both diverse perspectives and individuals (Anderson et al., 2017). Law enforcement agencies that deliberately exclude marginalized group members or fail to create a climate that promotes diversity are considered exclusive. While able to provide basic law enforcement functions, these traditional agencies and leaders are not deemed proactive or progressive. Traditional leaders and organizations that fail to acknowledge the importance of diversity are not considered legitimate, trusted or fair (Anderson et al., 2017).

It is the leader's responsibility to create this inclusive organizational climate. Creating cultural change can take a considerable amount of time (Anderson et al., 2017). Therwanger (2020) defines culture as how employees behave, think and act in an organization. Organizational culture is driven primarily by its leadership. Thus, it falls upon the leaders to implement cultural change. Change of this magnitude is called "deep change." Deep change is something heartfelt, intense, and done in earnest.

Long (2017a) infers that deep change is proactive and requires considerable leader investment to be successful. As a result, this type of change requires "out of the box" thinking and requires leaders to be "change agents." Change agents develop the path for success and mitigate organizational obstacles to change. This level of change in an organization sends a strong message to the community. It shows a level of commitment to inclusiveness, equity, and an authentic desire to reflect the community itself (Laine, 2009).

To truly improve organizational diversity, department change agents must demonstrate both intentional and community leadership. According to Long (2017b), intentional leadership aligns a law enforcement agency's vision with the organization's strategic goals. A department vision that focuses on collaboration and the merits of diversity, can be powerful catalysts for change. Community leadership focuses both on the officer and the people they serve. Ellis (2017) stresses that cynicism, tunnel vision, suspicion, and lack of empathy can negatively impact an officer's personal life and the quality of their citizen engagements. This lack of community leadership is a primary reason departments are experiencing the public and political backlash they are today. Departments that have an authentic understanding of diversity develop culturally sensitive responses to community issues and inspires members of formerly underrepresented groups to become police officers (Laine, 2009).

Intentional leaders build progressive law enforcement agencies. Culturally progressive agencies see diversity as a strength and make a good faith effort to include members from marginalized groups (Anderson et al., 2017). The progressive agency does not use traditional diversity practices to check the box. Instead, progressive agencies and their leaders cultivate a deeper personal understanding of their organization and the communities they serve.

Professional Experience

An example of difficulties in hiring diverse applicants can be found the greater Green Bay Wisconsin area. Only 10 years ago, when a vacancy for a police officer was posted it was common to receive three to four hundred applications. Currently, with a need to replace multiple officers, the applicant pool for agencies are commonly only a few dozen applicants in size. This is for initial applicants and does not reflect qualified applicants which can successfully pass a background check or possess the necessary educational requirements. Additionally, the diversity of these groups is incredibly low with some applicant pools not possessing any diverse candidates. The ability to hire a diverse candidate is directly tied to them applying for employment; you cannot hire what is not available.

To combat this, Green Bay area law enforcement agencies have started to take proactive steps to recruit employees using non-traditional methods. Some of these methods are leveraging social media, creating short recruitment videos, and placing ads in nationwide markets with known high levels of diversity. This outreach includes making the position more desirable by showing how the community is welcoming to a potential candidate's family. Part of this is showing the abundance of employment opportunities for family members, that the Green Bay is ranked high on the list of safest cities, and its many cultural attractions. Even with all this outreach, diverse applicants are scarce (Bouchard, 2020).

Conclusion

We all know that changes must be made for organizations to sustain themselves with personnel, and for organizations to build trust and credibility with the diverse populations that they serve. If an organization effectively markets themselves in the specifically targeted ways we identified, they will likely be more successful in attracting diverse candidates for hire. There has never been a time in history when diversity in hiring has been more at the forefront of

societal demands. Diversity in the ranks is a mandate for any agency that is looking to sustain

itself successfully into the future.

References

Anderson, T., Gisborne, K., & Holliday, P. (2017). *Every officer is a leader: Coaching leadership, learning and performance in justice, public safety, and security organizations.* New York: Troford.

Bouchard, K. (2020). *Green Bay is one of the best places to live in America.* U.S. News & World Report. Retrieved from, https://realestate.usnews.com/places/wisconsin/green-bay.

Ellis, B. (2017). *Leadership in practice: Community leadership.* Week #6. Module 8. National Command and Staff College.

Gupta, V. & Yang, J. (2016). *Advancing diversity in law enforcement.* Retrieved from, https://www.eeoc.gov/advancing-diversity-law-enforcement.

Harrington, R. (2017). *Organizational change battle plan.* Learning Area 4, Module 8. National Command and Staff College.

Laine, R., & International Association of Chiefs of Police. (2009). *Law enforcement recruitment toolkit*. IACP. Retrieved from, https://www.theiacp.org/sites/default/files/2018-08/RecruitmentToolkit.pdf.

Long, L. (2017a). *Deep change and positive emotional intelligence*. Week #6. Module 7. National Command and Staff College.

Long, L (2017b). *Making vision statements intentional.* Week #6. Module 12. National Command and Staff College.

Long, L. (2017c). *Leadership in practice: Effective leadership*. Week #3. Module 6. National Command and Staff College.

Lum, C., Koper, C., Gill, C., Hibdon, J., Telep, C., & Robinson, L. (2016). *An evidence-*

assessment of the recommendations of the president's task force on 21st century policing. Retrieved from, https://www.theiacp.org/sites/default/files/all/ij/IACP%20GMU%20Evidence%20Assess ment%20Report%20FINAL.pdf#:~:text=the%20President%E2%80%99s%20Task%20F orce%20on%2021st%20Century%20Policing,is%20a%20project%20of%20the%20Instit ute%20for%20Community-Police.

Normore, A. (2017). *Leadership in practice: Authentic leadership.* Week #3. Module 3. National Command and Staff College.

Posner, B. (2015) *Why credibility is the foundation of leadership. TED TALK. University of Nevada.* Retrieved from, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QmMcSBQvQLQ

Sussman, R. (2021, May 7). *Green Bay police launch ad in hopes of luring new police officers from outside the area.* Retrieved from, https://wncy.com/2021/05/07/green-bay-police-launch-ad-in-hopes-of-luring-new-police-officers-from-outside-the-area/.

Therwanger, E. (2020). *Think great.* Week #2. Module 6. National Command and Staff College.

Wells, K. (2020, July 5). *Black police officers face unique challenges amid nationwide movement.* Retrieved from, https://spectrumnews1.com/oh/columbus/news/2020/07/02/black-police-officers-face-unique-challenges-amid-nationwide-movement