

Recruitment and Retention in Law Enforcement

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ABSTRACT

In today's law enforcement environment, we have seen a significant decline in recruitment and retention across the United States. The law enforcement profession has experienced many negative impacts, especially in recent years. Staffing shortages have become an ongoing issue throughout the field, which could endanger law enforcement officers and the communities they serve. Many agencies have experienced staffing shortages. Successful recruitment in law enforcement today is possible but requires effort, experimentation, and commitment to continuously improving approaches. How long is the timeline? Is it efficient? Is it effective? Can it be better? Police agencies should leave ineffective recruitment strategies of the past behind. In reality, fewer people are applying to be police officers – regardless of the state of the U.S. job market. Law enforcement agencies are all competing for the same people. The focus and purpose of this research paper are to explore and identify how to recruit and retain qualified personnel effectively and successfully. In the following capstone research project, we will examine external and internal causes of recruitment and retention pitfalls and offer solutions for attracting diverse and qualified candidates.

Introduction

This capstone research paper aims to analyze the current recruitment strategies adopted by law enforcement agencies and evaluate their effectiveness in attracting diverse, qualified candidates. The research will delve into the complexities of recruitment and retention in law enforcement and consider various factors that influence these processes. Current recruitment strategies employed by law enforcement agencies include community outreach and engagement programs. These initiatives seek to build trust and connections with diverse communities through active participation in events, job fairs, and workshops. By portraying the police force as inclusive and understanding, these programs encourage qualified candidates from diverse backgrounds to consider a career in law enforcement (Gabliks, 2018). Law enforcement agencies have also turned to partnerships with educational institutions, offering internship programs, campus recruitment drives, and scholarships to attract young talent and foster long-term diversity within their ranks (Gabliks, 2018). In addition, maintaining a robust online presence through social media platforms and dedicated career websites has become essential in reaching a wider audience and engaging potential candidates transparently (Gabliks, 2018).

Agencies have incorporated cultural competency and diversity training into their recruitment processes, aiming to create an environment that values and respects candidates from different cultural backgrounds and ensures an inclusive evaluation (Gabliks, 2018). We will pursue diverse, engaged, and effective recruitment and retention strategies. By exploring and implementing evidence-based strategies, law enforcement agencies can better attract and retain qualified candidates, strengthen community relations, enhance public safety, and build trust in the justice system.

Attracting Diverse Qualified Candidates

Successful recruitment in law enforcement today is possible but requires effort, experimentation, and commitment to continuous improvement of the recruitment process in law enforcement agencies plays a pivotal role in ensuring the safety and security of our communities. In recent years, there has been a growing emphasis on the need for a more diverse and inclusive police force that can better understand and represent the communities they serve. We will analyze law enforcement agencies' current recruitment strategies and evaluate their effectiveness in attracting diverse, qualified candidates.

Current Recruitment Strategies

One of the recruitment strategies utilized by law enforcement agencies involves community outreach and engagement programs. These initiatives build trust and connections with diverse communities by participating in community events, job fairs, and workshops. The idea is to portray the police force as an inclusive and understanding entity, encouraging qualified candidates from different backgrounds to consider a career in law enforcement. While speaking on Day 3 of Session #019 Residency, Retired Deputy Chief Ken Davis stated, "Our departments need to be made up of members of the community that match our community's diverse different cultures" (Davis, 2023).

Law enforcement agencies have started partnering with educational institutions, including colleges and universities, to promote careers in policing. These partnerships often include internship programs, campus recruitment drives, and scholarships for aspiring candidates. By targeting students from diverse backgrounds, agencies aim to attract young talent and foster long-term diversity within the force.

According to Eriks Gabliks in his *Police One* article titled *3 Winning Recruitment Strategies for Police Agencies*, law enforcement agencies have recognized the importance of maintaining a robust online presence in today's digital age. They use social media platforms, dedicated career websites, and online job portals to reach a wider audience and engage with potential candidates. This approach aims to provide transparent information about the application process, requirements, and benefits of a career in law enforcement, thereby encouraging qualified individuals from diverse backgrounds to apply (Gabliks, 2023).

Some agencies have incorporated cultural competency and diversity training into their recruitment processes. By educating recruiters and police officers about the importance of diversity and inclusion, they aim to create an environment that values and respects candidates from different cultural backgrounds. This strategy also helps identify potential biases in the selection process, ensuring a fair and inclusive evaluation of candidates.

Effectiveness in Attracting Diverse Qualified Candidates

Although community outreach and engagement programs, partnering with educational institutes, social media workshops, and cultural competency and diversity training show promise, their effectiveness in attracting diverse, qualified candidates varies based on several factors.

The success of community outreach and engagement efforts relies heavily on the existing perception of law enforcement within communities. If the community perceives the police force as unresponsive or untrustworthy, recruitment efforts may yield limited results. Building trust and credibility with these communities takes time and concerted efforts beyond recruitment campaigns (Gabliks, 2018).

Historical and systemic issues within law enforcement can deter qualified candidates from diverse backgrounds. High-profile cases of police misconduct and brutality can create

negative perceptions that are difficult to overcome through recruitment strategies alone.

Addressing these issues through police reform and cultural changes within agencies is essential for attracting diverse candidates (Gabliks, 2018).

While educational partnerships can increase visibility and attract candidates, there may be disparities in access to quality education across different communities. Addressing this disparity is crucial in creating a level playing field for candidates from various backgrounds.

Despite diversity training, unconscious biases can still influence recruitment decisions. Agencies must continuously evaluate their processes to ensure that they do not inadvertently exclude qualified candidates due to biases related to race, religion, color, creed, gender, or other factors.

Current recruitment strategies adopted by law enforcement agencies show progress in attracting diverse, qualified candidates. Community engagement, educational partnerships, online presence, and diversity training are steps in the right direction. However, the effectiveness of these strategies heavily relies on broader efforts to address systemic issues within law enforcement, improve community perceptions, and combat educational disparities. A more comprehensive and ongoing approach to diversity and inclusion is essential to create a police force that reflects and understands the diverse communities it serves, fostering trust and building stronger relationships between law enforcement and the public (Program Material, 2023).

Factors Influencing Officer Retention Rates, Job Satisfaction, Compensation, Organization Culture, and Career Development Opportunities

Retention Rates

Officer attrition and retention are critical complex issues for most law enforcement departments across the U.S. Some officers leave the profession through early retirement. In contrast, others abandon the profession early on altogether (Davis, 2023). This issue should not

be overlooked and must be addressed internally with departments. Most departments and their leadership personnel have failed senior officers and employees by falling behind in this area. Senior leaders should learn to be more progressive and be willing to listen to employee needs (Davis, 2023). While every department faces unique issues, some are consistent across the profession. Departmental culture and reputation can play a massive factor in internal recruiting. Culture and reputation are often directly linked to the quality of leadership and decision-makers within departments, shifts, or units (Davis, 2023). Politics and trending issues within a state, community, or department can discourage officers and cause them to seek a new career. Some political issues can be addressed internally, but many significant issues need more departmental control or influence. Those more significant issues usually affect everyone across the U.S. in law enforcement (Davis, 2023). To curve this current trend, departments must identify and address this issue as a significant need. Furthermore, develop ongoing long-term strategies that enable flexibility to sustain. Orrick (2007) stated, "Quite simply – when recruiting and retaining personnel, every detail is important and deserves attention (p.13)."

Job Satisfaction

Many human factors, such as fatigue, stress, and officer and agency responsibilities, can affect and influence job satisfaction for law enforcement professionals. One major issue is that shift work is almost standard for most jobs, from dispatch to patrol. Longer hours plus working evenings or nights and holidays can affect officer wellness. Even when a job or assignment has a more traditional work schedule, it often comes with some on-call schedule. These things take employees away from their families and their stress-relieving activities.

Other factors that affect job satisfaction for law enforcement professionals may be external. External factors can include the negative perception of law enforcement that is

currently being highlighted by numerous media sources. That negativity and the appearance of a lack of support from the community can slowly reduce employees' self-drive and motivation. Without community support, our job can appear hopeless or meaningless. Maintaining a positive internal work environment can help reduce some of this stress (Davis, 2023).

Social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, and TikTok, is an active topic of concern in recruiting and retention. These types of social media outlets are often responsible for spreading negative or false messages about the law enforcement profession. They often go unchecked, unfiltered, and are not held accountable for false news. This often attracts social movement groups like anti-law enforcement groups to use these social media outlets. Some social movement groups are small and local, while others stir up nationwide conservatory. Groups such as Defund the Police, Black Lives Matter, Antifa, and First Amendments Auditors spread their message and recruit new members through social media. This can directly negatively affect the image of law enforcement. In turn, this hurts the recruitment of new younger officers that commonly use social media. Regarding retention, constant negativity from social media can make senior officers second-guess their careers (Program Material).

Compensation

Compensation is an evolving topic throughout the law enforcement community. In recent years once, competitive salaries have been hindered by nationwide inflation. Law enforcement departments must be aware of this and maintain flexibility to compensate their current employees adequately. The rise in day-to-day necessitates cuts into every employee's budget. Officers seek an opportunity to make fair compensation while maintaining a balanced home life. The current increase in inflation brings high unstable fuel prices. High fuel prices can hurt budgets and affect overtime pay if it is not correctly planned. Inflation affects the cost of

vehicles, technology, and other resources needed to run and maintain effective and efficient departments.

Organizational Culture

Organizational culture can lead to department success or downturn toward a steady decline or future failure. Leadership and career development often set the tone for a department's culture. Solid and authentic leaders are more likely to listen, be open-minded, and be willing to be flexible to an ever-adopting workforce. Those leaders understand themselves and their subordinates and lead by setting a solid example. Authentic leaders are genuine and real and stay true to their values and beliefs. Authentic leaders are confident and strong. These leaders are highly valued and add value to a department's culture. According to Gordon (2019), "When all employees are free to express who they truly are because an authentic leader models the behavior, a truly inclusive culture is achieved." (para. 5). Leadership development is a crucial component in building a strong and sustainable culture. Ultimately hard-working, knowledgeable, satisfied, and optimistic officers and employees make up a strong culture in a department. Strong officers want to be challenged with different work experiences and be able to see a path for growth.

Career Development Opportunities

When a strong culture is in place or established, you have satisfied officers who want training that can increase their worth and lead to their development. Most officers seek out training opportunities, which may not be available in short-staffed departments. According to the International Association of Chiefs of Police, 25 percent of agencies reported reducing or eliminating certain agency services, units, or positions because of staffing difficulties (IACP, n.d.). In those cases, those departments must decide how much training we can provide and how often we can make it available. Departments with solid traditions and firm leaders can give back

to new officers through mentoring and on-the-job training. Strong teams within special units or shifts can also be a training resource if leaders are open to coaching, shadowing, and mentorship. Departments should also create proper succession plans if someone left before they initially planned to. Successful succession planning will allow the agency to continue to operate as it always has and grows (Program Material, 2023).

Recruitment and retention issues impact law enforcement agency performance and public perception.

Recruitment and Agency Performance

The International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) published an article titled The State of Recruitment: A Crisis for Law Enforcement. The International Association of Chiefs of Police stated, "47.5 percent of recruits in the hiring process stated that the hiring process took between four months to over a year (IACP, n.d.)." Having a hiring process that is prolonged can hurt law enforcement agency performance. When it takes many months to a year to get hired, this causes the current employees to have to work more shifts than customarily required and can lead to burnout. Law enforcement agencies also lose employees to other agencies because that agency recruits them, and they will offer them better pay or other incentives. This could cause current employees to become bitter and decline in performance. Many officers will see that people are leaving, and then they figure that there is not much of a reason for them to perform any better, and they will only start doing the minimum. They may also only do the minimum because of burnout.

Retention and Agency Performance

Retention can also have effects on law enforcement agency performance. As vacancies increase, current officers must continue to cover the no longer covered shifts. Just as with taking forever to hire someone, losing employees can also cause burnout. However, if an agency can

retain employees, this will create leadership continuity and cause greater satisfaction within the agency. Retired Deputy Chief Ken Davis stated that his previous employer did not have a problem with retention. Due to all the additional benefits his Sheriff's Office offered, employees wanted to stay and were no longer lost to other agencies or fields of work (Davis, 2023). Some of the benefits offered included having a county doctor that they could see at any time for no additional cost, a county veterinarian that did not cost them, and repayment of student loans after they had been there for a certain amount of time, to name a few.

Recruitment and Public Perception

The IACP stated that. "Scrutiny of police, cell phone recordings of interactions between the police and public, media coverage, and popular entertainment portrayals of police have led many young people to view police differently than their parents (IACP, n.d.)." When the public no longer values the police, the people who want to be the police will see this. This will cause them to no longer want to pursue this profession, hurting recruitment.

When the media hears agencies struggling to retain employees, they sometimes post stories or news articles about it. The public will see retention is down and wonder why that agency is losing so many employees. The public could see this, assume something is wrong with that agency, and share their thoughts with others. This, in return, can cause both recruitment and retention problems.

Retention and Public Perception

Retired Deputy Chief Ken Davis provided a story on Residency Day 3 of MAGNUS National Command and Staff College. This story is used with his permission. Chief Davis stated that in his county in South Carolina, the highway patrol was in a high-speed pursuit with a young male for not having a tag light. The chase ended with the highway patrol shooting and killing the

young male. The pursuit initially started in a neighborhood where a young deputy lived. The deputy's neighbors were unaware of all the shooting details and hounded the deputy about police killing a young male for not having a tag light – even though that was not the reason. The deputy received so much grief about the shooting and was harassed so much that he got out of law enforcement after only being on the job for nine months (Davis, 2023). This story shows that if the public perceives an event to be a certain way, their actions alone can affect retention within an agency. The young officer could have notified his chain of command about the grief that he was receiving from his neighbors. In return, the Chief of Police could have issued a press release or social media post stating that none of his officers were involved in the pursuit or shooting of the young male and referred any additional questions to the investigating agency, which would have been the South Carolina Highway Patrol.

Innovative Approaches and Best Practices

Recruitment and retention of law enforcement personnel is critical for maintaining effective and efficient agencies. Several innovative approaches and best practices have emerged from successful initiatives in law enforcement agencies nationwide. Some examples of those initiatives are as follows. Community outreach programs, targeted recruitment, technology, social media, mentorship, training programs, flexible work arrangements, wellness, and employee assistance programs, internal and promotional leadership development, collaboration with educational institutions, and a transparent hiring process.

Community Outreach Programs

Many agencies have developed community outreach programs to engage with the local communities, build trust, and generate interest in law enforcement careers. Citizens will thank organizations for their interaction with officers in the field and see it as a personal connection

(Ellis, 2017a). These programs include events, workshops, ride-along, and partnerships with schools and community organizations.

Targeted Recruitment

Targeted recruitment efforts, successful agencies recognize the importance of diversifying their workforce and actively target underrepresented communities. Lt. Ellis (2017b) states, “When we are looking out for the welfare of our neighbors, we are depositing trust and confidence back into our profession.” They collaborate with community leaders, attend job fairs and career events catering to diverse populations, and develop partnerships with minority organizations.

Technology and Social Media

Technology and social media agencies leverage technology and social media platforms to reach a broader audience. Commercial and social media outlets have reported unparalleled difficulties in both hiring new police officers and retaining those already on the job (Mintzer, 2021). They utilize digital recruitment campaigns, video testimonials, virtual job fairs, and online application systems to attract potential candidates.

Mentorship and Training

Implementing mentorship and training programs help create a supportive environment for recruits. Leaders who best understand how to inspire, create, and communicate a clear vision and serve as role models will imbibe organizational change (Normore, 2017). Seasoned officers can provide guidance and support new hires, helping them navigate the challenges of the job and fostering a sense of belonging.

Flexible Work Schedule

Flexible work arrangements include recognizing the need for work-life balance. Agencies have implemented flexible work arrangements, such as compressed workweeks, job-sharing, and telecommuting options, which were feasible. These arrangements can enhance job satisfaction and retention.

Wellness Programs

Wellness and employee assistance programs are essential for any agency. Agencies prioritize the well-being of their personnel by offering comprehensive wellness programs. This includes mental health support, access to counseling services, stress management resources, and physical fitness initiatives (Rhodes, 2023).

Internal Development

Agencies focus on internal promotion and leadership development programs to foster career growth and advancement within the organization. These initiatives offer professional development opportunities, mentorship, and specialized training to help officers progress (Program Material, 2023).

Collaboration with Educational Institutes

Collaboration with educational institutes, law enforcement agencies partner with high schools, colleges, and universities to create recruitment pipelines and offer educational opportunities. They may establish internship programs, provide scholarships, or sponsor criminal justice programs to attract and retain qualified candidates.

Transparent Hiring

Agencies with transparent and streamlined hiring processes attract a larger pool of qualified applicants. They ensure clear communication throughout the recruitment process, provide timely updates to candidates, and offer feedback on application status (Davis, 2023).

All of these innovative approaches and best practices demonstrate the commitment of law enforcement agencies to recruit and retain quality personnel while fostering positive relationships with the communities they serve. Hoina (2017) states, "Never forget we are a republic. Together, we struggle for the dignity and honor of each other regardless of the packaging we are wrapped in." Each agency should tailor its strategies based on its unique needs and circumstances while continually evaluating and adapting its recruitment and retention efforts to remain innovative and effective.

Evidence-Based Recommendations and Strategies

Developing evidence-based recommendations and strategies to address recruitment and retention challenges within law enforcement is crucial for promoting a more diverse, engaged, and effective workforce. Law enforcement agencies are crucial in maintaining public safety while building community trust. However, law enforcement agencies often need help attracting and retaining a diverse pool of qualified officers, which can hinder their ability to serve the community effectively. This study explores evidence-based approaches to tackle these challenges and create a more robust and inclusive law enforcement workforce.

Targeted Outreach and Recruitment

Law enforcement agencies should engage in targeted outreach to connect with underrepresented communities. Wiseman (2021) states, "Trying to recruit and hire only candidates with the same life experiences and outlooks as those currently in the profession is a recipe for failure." (p. 3). Collaborating with community organizations and attending local events can help build relationships and demonstrate a diversity commitment. Additionally, agencies can partner with educational institutions to promote law enforcement among students from diverse backgrounds.

Inclusive Recruitment Policies

Revising recruitment policies to ensure they are inclusive and not inadvertently exclude qualified applicants is essential. Removing unnecessary educational requirements or restrictions disproportionately affecting specific demographics can help attract a more diverse candidate pool.

Cultural Sensitivity Training

Mike Robinson stated, “Citizens expect us to have a high emotional intelligence because 80 to 85 percent of complaints about officers have to do with how they made a person feel (2023).” Mandatory annual cultural sensitivity training for all law enforcement personnel is essential for promoting understanding, empathy, and effective communication with diverse communities. This training should address biases and misconceptions that may hinder community relations.

Growth and Development Opportunities

Career growth and development opportunities can increase job satisfaction and encourage officers to stay with the agency. Training and mentorship programs can help officers grow professionally and feel supported.

Transparent Promotion Process

Establishing a transparent and merit-based promotion process helps ensure that officers from all backgrounds have equal opportunities for career advancement. Objective criteria should be used, and promotions should be based on performance, skills, and experience.

Mental Health and Wellness

Law enforcement is demanding, and officers often experience significant stress and trauma. Providing mental health and wellness support is crucial for the well-being of officers and can reduce burnout and turnover.

Internal Diversity Initiatives

Implementing internal diversity initiatives can help create an inclusive culture within law enforcement agencies. This could include forming diversity task forces, establishing employee resource groups, and encouraging open discussion on diversity-related topics.

By implementing targeted outreach, inclusive policies, and cultural sensitivity training, agencies can promote diversity, increase employee engagement, and create a more effective law enforcement workforce. These efforts improve community relations, enhance public safety, and build trust in the justice system. Law enforcement leaders and community stakeholders must collaborate to implement these evidence-based strategies successfully.

Conclusion

In conclusion, by exploring and implementing evidence-based strategies, law enforcement agencies can better attract and retain qualified candidates, strengthen community relations, enhance public safety, and build trust in the justice system by continuously revisiting and reevaluating their recruitment and retention strategies. By leading with authentic leadership and listening to all team members that have a stake within the agency, we can create the buy-in needed from all members from the top to the bottom to work together and implement more inclusive, diverse, and appealing recruitment and retention strategies.

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