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Increasing Diversity in Law Enforcement Agencies

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**By
Grant Golden**

**Round Rock Police Department
Round Rock, Texas
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ABSTRACT

Recent trends in the area of recruiting and hiring quality law enforcement applicants indicate that this issue is becoming a challenge for many agencies across the nation. The struggle with finding quality applicants is challenging; however, literature suggests that this is particularly difficult when seeking to build agency demographics that mirror community demographics. The need for hiring a more diverse work force has been identified as critical for agencies looking to build better relationships and meet the needs of the community that is served by the agency. Therefore, the purpose of this research project was to identify best practices in the area of recruiting and hiring a more diverse law enforcement work force. A review of current literature in this field was conducted in order to provide a foundation for this research project. Specifically, best practices in this area were researched and identified in the literature and a subsequent survey was developed and administered to 20 different law enforcement agencies across the State of Texas. The survey data revealed that there is a perceived need for law enforcement agency demographics to mirror community demographics; however, few agencies put the systems in place to realize this goal. Although this research provides a limited sampling size, it does have implications for law enforcement leaders as they seek to change the demographics of their agencies.

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INTRODUCTION

The United States of America was founded on the belief that if "the government is to be for all the people, it must be by all the people" (Margolis, 1971). This basic belief means that government needs to have representatives in power who share similar cultural characteristics to those they are serving in the community. This belief, however, has been difficult to operationalize in many organizations and businesses across the nation. In fact, it is not uncommon to also find that at the federal, state, and local level, governmental agency demographics do not reflect the demographics of their communities. While this is an issue for all agencies and businesses to consider and address, it is of particular concern for law enforcement agencies whose officers work directly with the community and yet, often, do not share common demographics with their citizen group.

The negative impact of law enforcement agencies not mirroring the demographics of their community has been documented for some time. Issues of mistrusting police in communities that are racially and culturally different from the majority of police officers continue to plague society (Decker & Smith, 1980). This negative perception of police departments, held by many predominately minority communities, has deep roots from past discrimination and abuses that occurred in this country's history. It has also been clearly documented in the literature that there were intentional recruitment and hiring practices and policies, in the past, that were designed to keep minority applicants from gaining access to police agency positions (Felkenes & Unsinger, 1992). Certainly, the 1964 Civil Rights Act assisted in removing the overt discrimination practices that acted as barriers to many minority applicants gaining

access to law enforcement jobs. Legislative action, such as the Law Enforcement Assistance Act, assisted agencies in recruiting and training law enforcement personnel, in order to increase the recruitment of minority police officers (Margolis, 1971). Despite such efforts to aggressively recruit a more diverse work force in law enforcement, the results continue to be meager.

Numerous law enforcement agencies today continue to experience difficulty in recruiting and selecting minority applicants in spite of genuine efforts to ensure that agency demographics mirror community demographics. Tangle (2004) stated, "since September 11, 2001, the problem has become more acute, as military reserve call-ups and an expanding police role strain agency resources across the country" (p. 1). Clearly, if law enforcement agencies are committed to community policing and improving working relationships with the community, then one strategy for moving in this direction is to have a workforce that mirrors the community.

Given that this is a serious issue facing law enforcement, the need for effective strategies and models for recruiting and selecting minority applicants is essential and will be the focus of this research. The question guiding this research process will be: What models or best practice strategies exist for recruiting and selecting a more diverse work force?

Data for this analysis will be drawn from a variety of sources. Specifically, a review of the literature, case laws, and case studies on the topic of recruiting and selecting a more diverse work force in law enforcement will be analyzed in an attempt to identify best practices. Data will also be collected from the development and implementation of a survey that will be administered to law enforcement agencies that

are accredited by the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies, Inc. (CALEA). The data will be analyzed in order to identify best practices of recruitment and selection processes that are currently in place and are yielding a more diverse law enforcement agency. In short, this research process will provide a possible model that, if implemented, could lead to a more diverse police agency in order to work more collaboratively with their community.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

During the late 1980s, the United States began to see a significant increase in crime rates (Koper, 2004). As a result of this growing trend, the U.S. Congress passed legislation that established the Public Safety Partnership and Community Policing Act. This legislation was focused on funding efforts to place approximately 100,000 additional officers across the United States (Koper, 2004). Until early 2000, the United States did see an increase in recruiting and hiring police officers as a result of this legislation. However, the year 2000 brought with it a change in this trend. Agencies from across the nation began to report a decline in the number of potential applicants for law enforcement positions. While several theories exist as explanation for the declining trend, the most cited reasons were the following: a prosperous economy that attracted applicants to better paying jobs, retirement of the Baby Boomers, increased college requirements as a prerequisite for applying, increased media reports on issues such as racial profiling, and September 11, 2001 led possible recruits from law enforcement positions to military positions (Koper, 2004).

Along with an overall decline in the number of police officers for reasons cited above, the decline was most pronounced in the recruitment and hiring of minority and

female officers (Tangel, 2004). This is particularly alarming when the need for law enforcement agencies to mirror the demographics of the communities in which they serve has grown over the past years as the minority population increased across the nation and is expected to continue to rise in the future (Arthur, 2005). According to Arthur (2005), the minority population in the United States was predicted to increase between 1996-2015.

Table I. Percentage of minorities in 1996, percentage of predicted increase by 2015, and the difference between the 1996 and 2015 percentages.

Group	Current Population	Predicted Increase in population	+/-
African – American	12%	13%	1%
Hispanic	10%	15%	5%
Asian	3.5%	6%	2.5%

(Arthur, 2005)

With the changing demographics of most communities in the United States, the need for recruiting and hiring a law enforcement agency that mirrors the community in which it serves has become more evident (Arthur, 2005; Taylor, 2006). As a result of this need, the remainder of this review will focus on best practices for recruiting and hiring minority and female officers that have been identified through a review of the literature.

According to a review of the literature on best practices in the area of recruiting and hiring minority candidates, the following categories of positive strategies were among the most prevalent: outreach programs, partnership programs, media strategies, and incentives. Outreach programs that actively seek to gain the perspective, input,

and feedback from the community that will be served by the law enforcement agency were identified as critical step in the process of creating a more diverse law enforcement work force (Tangel, 2004). According to Tangel (2004), the deliberate collaboration with the community can enhance the community's willingness to act as a recruitment agent for the law enforcement agency. Specifically, the community's perception of police fairness, trust, and commitment to the citizens can act as both a barrier and a support for attracting a more diverse applicant pool.   The perception of the community can be enhanced, according to the literature, by outreach programs such as Citizens Academies, Explorer/Youth Academy programs, School Resource Officer (SRO) programs, partnerships with agencies such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and law enforcement officers acting as mentors and sponsors for athletic/other community events ("Peace Officer Recruitment," 2001; Tangel, 2004; Taylor, 2006). All of these activities can demonstrate a commitment to the community, can serve as an avenue for building partnerships, and can facilitate a better understanding of the needs of the community served by the law enforcement agency (Taylor, 2006).

Along with outreach programs, partnership programs were also identified as a best practice in recruiting and hiring a more diverse law enforcement work force ("Peace Officer Recruitment," 2001). Partnerships with military institutions and universities within the local area, around the state, and across the nation can also serve as a vehicle for reaching a diverse applicant pool (Ayres, 2001; "Peace Officer Recruitment," 2001).   Universities that serve large populations of minority students can be excellent locations for establishing recruitment relationships. This recruitment strategy can be

enhanced, according to Ayres (2001), by including members of the agency who represent cultures other than the dominant culture of the agency on the actual recruitment team. The diversity represented on the recruitment team can have positive effects on the overall outcome of recruitment efforts.

Along with a diverse recruitment team, the strategic creation of a media platform was also identified as a best practice strategy for recruiting and hiring a more diverse law enforcement work force (Arthur, 2005; Martinez, 2006). The media platform needs to take on many forms. For example, a recruitment link to the agencies website, printed materials, and radio and television advertisements need to be created with the faces and voices of officers who represent the minority populations that the agency is seeking to attract ("Peace Officer Recruitment," 2001). Faces and voices alone, however, will not recruit a diverse applicant pool. The following media best practices were also identified as tools for the recruitment process: the media used should capture the applicant's attention through the location of the advertisement, the graphics, and the placement of logos, and the media used should establish a connection with the intended audience and should articulate the needed skills. The media should attempt to connect to the individual's desire to positively contribute to their community in meaningful ways and highlight aspects of law enforcement that go beyond the traditional duties of an officer. Youth outreach programs, mentoring programs, and community-policing activities are examples of such duties. In short, the make-up of the recruitment team and the strategic creation of the media products can support an agency's effort to recruit a more diverse work force.

A final strategy that was consistently identified in the literature as a best practice in the recruiting and hiring of a more diverse law enforcement workforce is that of creating a clear and appealing incentive program ("Peace Officer Recruitment," 2001). Incentive programs vary across the literature; however, a few strategies consistently emerged as best practices in the area of recruitment in law enforcement. For example, reciprocity of retirement systems, which allows officers to transfer pensions, was mentioned several times. Another best practice incentive was the implementation of alternative work schedules. Alternative work schedules and hours can allow a department to accommodate the various needs of officers and their families as well as meet the needs of the department. Other incentives such as educational loan forgiveness programs, take home cars, and additional pay for being bilingual were also mentioned as promising practices in the area of recruitment incentives for law enforcement. In short, incentives are a critical part of any organization's recruitment and hiring strategies. However, they are particularly significant in the area of law enforcement and in the recruitment of a diverse work force. Incentives, such as those identified above, can assist in countering the trends associated with a strong economy and its impact on the hiring of law enforcement officers in general (Koper, 2004).

Although there appeared to be a good deal of consensus in the literature around quality best practices for the recruitment of a more diverse work force in law enforcement, there were a few strategies that warrant attention because of their unique approach to this issue. Mentoring programs, while common in many organizations, did not appear to be a common strategy utilized by law enforcement agencies. Many agencies do have a job-embedded, Field Training Officer (FTO) program, but this differs

from the pure professional mentoring role. Mentoring programs that carefully matched new officers with mentors who can assist the new officers with understanding the culture of the department and encourage and support the new officers as they move through the organization were cited as a possible up-and-coming strategy for agencies to consider ("Police Officer Recruitment," 2001). Although the mentoring process officially begins once the officer is hired, it is a recruitment strategy in that applicants see this as a safety net that will provide support to new officers as members of the organization. While mentoring programs can act as a recruitment/advertisement strategy, they can also serve as a best practice strategy for addressing attrition rates in law enforcement agencies by supporting and encouraging officers once they are hired.

Clearly, the need for recruiting and hiring a more diverse work force is evident. While this continues to be a challenge for all law enforcement agencies, the review of the literature in this area clearly identified best practices that, when applied, could potentially increase the recruitment and hiring of minority applicants.

METHODOLGY

The review of the literature clearly identified some best practices in the area of minority recruitment in law enforcement. Specifically, practices of reaching out to the community, building partnerships with other organizations and institutions of higher education, marketing strategies, and incentives were cited as best practices in the field of recruitment and hiring of a more diverse work environment. This information provided a strong foundation for the continuation of this study, which is driven by the following research question: What models or best practice strategies exist for recruiting and selecting a more diverse work force?

The hypothesis that will drive the rest of this research process is that although most law enforcement agencies will identify the need for recruiting and hiring a more diverse work force, few actually implement best practices identified in the literature. In order to address the research question and hypothesis identified above, a survey will be created and administered to law enforcement agencies representing a variety of sizes and types of agencies. The sample size of this research project was determined to be 20 different agencies. The survey data will be disaggregated and compared across agencies to identify the most common best practices used by the agencies, as well as to identify additional strategies used by these agencies to recruit and hire a more diverse work force. The data will also be analyzed in order to determine if the hypothesis stated above is correct and if other trends can be identified that could influence or warrant additional research.

FINDINGS

A ten-question survey was created in order to address the question and hypothesis guiding this research (Appendix A). The survey was administered to 20 different law enforcement agencies. Of the 20 agencies surveyed, 19 completed and returned the surveys. The surveys were completed by executive level law enforcement members who were knowledgeable about the recruiting and hiring practices within his/her agency. Of the surveys returned, 84% identified his/her agency as a municipal agency, 16% identified his/her agency as county, and the average agency size was identified as 82 members. The data was then analyzed in order to identify emerging patterns.

Perceptions of the need for a diverse work force versus the reality of the organization and the implementation of best practices were analyzed. According to this analysis, 63% of those surveyed in this research indicated that their agency demographics did not mirror the demographics of the community in which he/she served. Of particular interest was how this data compared to the participant's perception that this was even necessary. The analysis determined that of the 63% of the participants who did not have agency demographics that mirrored the community demographics, only 25% viewed this as even being a necessary characteristic. Of those who reported that this was not a necessary characteristic, 50% reported that the agency they worked for did, however, have a vision, mission, or goals that communicated the importance of hiring a diverse work force. Also noted in this analysis was the fact that only 42% of the total agencies surveyed indicated that the agency had addressed the hiring of a diverse work force in the vision, mission, or goals of the organization.

Along with analyzing agency commitment to hiring a diverse work force through aligning agency vision, mission, and goals, this survey also sought to identify if agencies collected, analyzed, and used data associated with the recruitment and hiring of minority candidates. According to the data analyzed, only 25% of those participating in this survey reported collecting or analyzing this type of data. Of those who indicated that they did collect and analyze the data, only one participant (5%) actually reported changing practices based on the data analysis.

In analyzing the use of identified best practices in the area of recruiting and hiring minority candidates, six strategies were included in this survey.

Table II. Percentages of types of best practices used for minority recruitment.

Best Practice	Partnerships with Universities	Outreach programs with community	Use of minority staff on the recruitment team	Use of recruitment/media materials that include minority representation	Mentoring Programs	Incentives (specifically, incentive pay for bilingual applicants)
% Utilizing this practice	26%	21%	37%	21%	16%	37%

As noted above, the use of minority representation on the recruitment team and providing incentives in the form of pay for bilingual skills were the two most frequently cited best practices used by the agencies surveyed. The analysis of this data also revealed that 21% of the agencies surveyed used zero best practices in the recruitment and hiring of minority candidates. Also of interest was the fact that no participants, when prompted on the survey, provided any additional strategies used by the agency that he/she represented.

DISCUSSIONS/CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this research project was to review current and relevant research and literature on the subject of recruiting and hiring minority applicants. Specifically, the question driving this research was as follows: What models or best practice strategies exist for recruiting and selecting a more diverse work force? In reviewing the literature on this subject, it became evident that there is a need for law enforcement agency demographics to mirror the demographics of the community in which it serves. It also became evident through this research that best practices have been identified through the literature as having a positive impact on increasing the diversity of the work force in law enforcement agencies. Specifically identified in the review of literature, best

practices related to outreach programs, partnerships, appropriate advertisement, and the use of incentives, were among the most frequently cited practices. The implementation, however, of such practices and the value agencies place in those practices appears to impact the hiring of a more diverse work force.

The hypothesis was tested through the administration and analysis of a survey with a sample population of 20 agencies. Although most law enforcement agencies will identify the need for recruiting and hiring a more diverse work force, few actually implement best practices identified in the literature. Through the analysis of the survey data, it was clear that this hypothesis is correct. The majority of participants did report that the agency demographics should mirror the community demographics. However, the majority of the participants (68%) reported actually implementing two or fewer strategies. Another issue that became evident in the analysis of this data was how infrequently agencies align their vision, mission, and goals to support the hiring of a more diverse work force that mirrors their community. Without the leadership or the organization's commitment to this issue, it seems reasonable to expect that few strategies would be used to change the recruiting and hiring practices within the agency.

What must be noted about this research was the sample size used in this project. Only 20 agencies across the State of Texas were surveyed. Overarching conclusions would be difficult to draw from this sample size. However, it does provide indicators that most of the agencies indicating a need to recruit and hire a more diverse work force do not implement the identified best practices or systems to support the achievement of this goal. Therefore, it is vital that leaders of law enforcement agencies seeking to have

organizational demographics, which mirror community demographics, must

communicate this through their vision, mission, and goals. Leaders must also put the

necessary systems in place to ensure the implementation of best practices. By

implementing the best practices identified in this research, law enforcement agencies

could take a giant step forward in working to build stronger relationships with their

community.

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APPENDIX A

Survey of Recruiting and Hiring Practices

The purpose of this survey is to identify common practices and procedures most commonly used by law enforcement agencies in order to increase and sustain a more diverse work force. Your agency name will remain confidential. Please circle or write your response where appropriate. Thank you for participating.

1. What is the size of agency you currently work for?

2. What type of agency do you work for?

    a. Municipal
    b. County
    c. State

3. Do your department's demographics match your community demographics?

    a. Yes
    b. No
    c. Unsure

4. Does your department have mission/vision/or goals that support the practice of hiring a diverse work force?

    a. Yes
    b. No
    c. Unsure

5. Which of the following strategies does your department use in the recruitment and hiring of minority applicants? (You can circle as many strategies that apply)

    a. Recruiting activities at colleges and universities that primarily serve minority students
    b. Actively build partnerships with minority community leaders
    c. Utilize current minority staff in the recruiting and hiring practices
    d. Utilize recruiting documents that display minority department members
    e. Provide mentoring programs
    f. Offer incentive pay for bilingual applicants who are hired
    g. Other:_____

6. Does your department routinely track and analyze recruitment and hiring data to determine equity in hiring practices?

    a. Yes
    b. No
    c. Unsure

7. If you answered "Yes" to item #6, skip this question. Does your department make changes based on recruitment and hiring data in order to address identified issues?

    a. Yes
    b. No
    c. Unsure

8. Do you feel that your department has practices that may interfere with the hiring of a more diverse work force?

    a. Yes
    b. No
    c. Unsure

9. Does your department require college hours or a degree as an eligibility requirement?

    a. Yes
    b. No
    c. Unsure

10. Do you feel that it is necessary for your department's demographics to match the community demographics?

    a. Yes
    b. No